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A Theology of Friendship

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The University of Durham

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2007

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that true friendship is a relationship, which all human beings are called to practise in all contexts – families, marriages, church communities, neighbourhoods and nations. Wherever human beings come face to face with other human beings, friendship is the most godlike relationship they can have with one another.

The study begins with an examination of Greek friendship and challenges this secular model because of its hierarchical, utilitarian and idealised aspects. I then offer a modern Christian understanding of true friendship and seek to establish that friendship is essential for recognising the true worth of another human being and is necessary for offering hope, freedom and transformation.

In the next part of the thesis I examine friendship more closely through the story of Ruth and Naomi, the life of Teresa of Ávila and the correspondence between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his family, friends and fiancée. Each study illustrates some of the tensions between friendship and social relationships.

Finally, I offer studies from developmental psychology and psychotherapy to argue that friendship is the first relationship human beings know. By the end of my thesis I hope to show that the potential for friendship is there in all human beings and that Jesus' motivation for relationships with others was based on friendship.

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Barbara L Kerney

Introduction

The seeds for this dissertation were sown more than twenty-five years ago when I moved with my family to a new job and home over a thousand miles from parents and friends. Until this relocation the greatest distance I had ever been from my birthplace was when I went to university, which was fifty miles away. When I met my new neighbour, I could not have known that a friendship would soon begin that would change my life forever. Now that our friendship is nearly thirty years old and as I have reflected on this topic for my dissertation, I realise that that relationship has made this study possible.

As our friendship grew I understood that my friend was communicating something about God that I had not known until then. Meister Eckhart claimed that if God is 'really God then God is that which is most communicable'.[1] At the time I was struggling with the traditional images of God, which were for me no longer life-giving but were becoming life-inhibiting. I was not communicating with God, the king, lord and father nor was God, the king, lord and father talking back to me. Still I longed for conversation with God. As time went by I began to know God through my friend. Her words and actions were communicating life and were awakening new life in me. She was communicating God and signs of God's Kingdom, which had nothing to do with hierarchy. A new image of God was forming in my consciousness.

When I began theological studies I was receptive to the language of friendship and it began to jump off the pages when I came across it. The model of exclusive friendship inherited from Greek culture and still a strong legacy in Western culture was being broadened by new models that talked about open friendship. The writings

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[1] Quoted in Dorothy Soelle, *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God,* trans. Joyce L. Irwin (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1994), 21.

of the German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, challenged me to think differently about friendship. When Moltmann added the name of friend to the three Christological titles of Jesus as prophet, priest and king, he changed how we understand Jesus' relationships to others.[2] The traditional titles, which come from authoritarian societies, distanced Jesus, but the title of friend brought Jesus closer to human beings. Moltmann wanted to use friendship to reveal God's relationship to all humanity. He knew the church had been guilty of oppression through domination and the title of friend was a way to break down this punitive model. Moltmann reclaimed the titles: Jesus was the prophet-friend of the poor, Jesus was the priest-friend who suffered for others, Jesus was the king-friend who liberated human beings from slavery and death.[3] He became disreputable, according to Jewish law, because he ate and drank with disreputable people. Jesus was offering the friendship of God to all humanity.

Moltmann was not the first twentieth century theologian to write about friendship but his re-examination of the relationship came at a time when theologians were struggling with more traditional understandings of God. Moltmann believed friendship was the relationship left that could bring freedom and new life to theology. At the same time feminist theologians began looking at friendship. Sallie McFague was the first American theologian to declare that friendship was the 'ideal relationship among peoples of all ages, both sexes, and whatever colour and religion'.[4] In *Models of God* she rejected hierarchies and proposed a theological anthropology of inter-relatedness that embraced friendship as the primary relationship that God had with

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[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Lifestyle* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1978), 55.
[3] Moltmann, *The Open Church*, 54.
[4] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1983), 179.

mature human beings.[5] Others began to follow McFague and to expand friendship into all relationships.[6]

Carter Heyward, a lesbian Episcopal priest, former Professor of Theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and now the founder of Free Rein Centre for Therapeutic Riding and Education in Brevard, North Carolina, has no interest in a God who is other-worldly. Heyward affirms a God of 'relation and friendship'.[7] For her friendship is a mutual recognition which had its beginning between Jesus and God:

> In Jesus' relation to God, Jesus grows with God in love. It is a relation in which each gives and receives and stands out as distinct from the other. Jesus is not God's little boy, the offspring of a private – if miraculous – affair between God and Mary. Rather, Jesus is God's child who grows in relation to God and becomes God's friend in a voluntary and mutual relation. God is parent in that God is resource for Jesus' growth in power. But it may be equally appropriate (and I believe it is) to image God as Jesus' child, whose growth in the world Jesus facilitates.[8]

She also knows that Western society and its institutional structures do not encourage friendship nor God's incarnation between human beings. Society is afraid of mutuality and prefers relationships of domination and subordination. Heyward's understanding of friendship encouraged me to do more research. I was intrigued by her insistence that God and Jesus were both growing in the relationship. What was her basis for this statement?

Martin Buber claims that in the beginning is the relation, meaning that human beings are never without the influence of others in their lives and that there is a

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[5] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 167-179.

[6] See Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 183-194, for an excellent summary of feminists who have written about friendship.

[7] Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America Inc., 1982), 10.

[8] Heyward, *The Redemption of God*, 38.

fundamental relationality when life begins. [9] Buber believes that the relation is a 'category of being' and a 'mould for the soul'.[10] Although he could not prove that mutuality existed between God and human beings, he knew human beings instinctively needed friendship with others in order to be fully human.

My research on friendship then led me to the field of developmental psychology. Around the same time that Moltmann was thinking about the implications of friendship for theology, the child-developmental psychologist, Daniel Stern, was doing ground-breaking research on mutuality between the infant and caregiver. Stern discovered strong evidence for Buber's claim that there was a fundamental relationality at the beginning of life. Stern also recognises that the need for friendship is never forgotten and that human beings continually search for friendships throughout their lives in order to enrich them, give them meaning and purpose and even bring redemption to relationships which were not liberating. In chapter six I look more closely at Stern's work and at others who have further developed Stern's thinking.

I believe that we have been made for friendship. In this study I use examples of friendship to demonstrate how that claim does or does not happen. I begin in Chapter One with an examination of secular friendship inherited from the ancient Greeks. In Chapter Two I offer a Christian understanding of friendship. In Chapter Three I look at friendship in the Hebrew Bible with special reference to the friendship between Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. In Chapter Four I study the life of Teresa of Ávila, focusing on the transformation of her life when she discovered true friendship. In Chapter Five I demonstrate the difficulty of friendship between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer. In Chapter Six I present psychological research to

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[9] Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 2nd ed., 1958), 18.
[10] Buber, *I and Thou,* 27.

argue that friendship is the first relationship. I conclude with a reflection from John's gospel on Jesus' friendship with the Samaritan woman.

All human beings have the potential to communicate something about God. Each of us has a vocation of friendship. My life has been transformed because my friend has been obedient to that call. She helps me to discern how God is working in my life as I do in hers. We affirm one another's gifts and help one another to discover the selves God calls us to be. We are friends on the way to fulfilment and maturity.

One

Classical Friendship: A Secular Model

The classical world valued good friendship. Aristotle became the first philosopher to elevate it to an ethical ideal and claimed that only humans of virtue and wisdom could be friends. Friendship held people and society together; it was both political and practical. Even before Aristotle wrote his systematic analysis of it, friendship was the primary relationship outside of marriage that cultivated a sense of security in a hostile environment. In ancient society affection was not necessarily basic to friendship, and friendship frequently extended beyond the interpersonal into interconnecting webs of associations. Friendship could move between affective and non-affective expression. Which came first, the affective or non-affective, still remains a matter of debate.[1]

Philos

The Homeric epic of perhaps the eighth century BC contains the earliest important evidence of a theory and praxis of friendship in the Greek world. Homer's heroic tales were treated as encyclopaedias for technological, political, cultural and moral knowledge. These tales were seen as written for the good of the community, and the epic poem's description of friendship was of a mutually supportive relationship. Odysseus, for example, was under an obligation to love (*philein*) all within his household and any admitted as guests. Recent archaeological findings posit that in the late eighth century BC, Greek society was organised into small, independent

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[1] J.T. Hooker, 'Homeric φιλος', *Glotta* 65 (1987), 45.

communities of fewer than fifty families.[2] Friendships remained within the families and a particular community. *Philos*, one of three Greek words for friend and the most frequently used, was applied to someone who maintained the terms and obligations of friendship within the confines of kinship and its extended group.[3]

Terms and obligations of any relationship are outward manifestations of what the political philosopher, Horst Hutter, identifies as the 'dominant dispositions of the cultural and societal psyche'.[4] In ancient Greek society the dominant disposition was survival, and the will to live was nourished, protected and strictly controlled within the ties of kinship and community. The ancient world had its own rules and regulations for friendship and Sophocles' play, *Electra,* produced *c.* 415 BC, illustrates what happens if a person violates that code of loyalty. When Clytemnestra killed her husband because he had sacrificed their daughter before the start of the Trojan War, her children were required to behave as *philoi* of their father and to act as enemies of their mother.[5] The Greek tendency to classify people in terms of their capacity and function enabled one to decide who was and was not a friend. Duty was first to parents, then to kinsmen, third to friends and benefactors. Wives did not fit easily into this hierarchy.[6]

The opposite of *philos,* 'friend', was *echthros*, 'enemy'. Plato (Republic 332A) sanctioned the idea that one's duty was to help one group of *philoi* and harm the

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[2] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8.
[3] Depending on how *philos* functions in a sentence, as a possessive pronoun or an adjective, problems are created for philologists who are determined to know the exact etymology. If Homer understood the word as possessive, friendship meant belonging to a social group. If Homer meant it to be used as an adjective, friendship implies an emotional tie. Archaeological findings would seem to come down on the side of the argument that sees the origin of the word to be possessive; however, even if friends were necessary for survival and the well being of a social group, what purpose does the continued debate serve for understanding friendship?
[4] Horst Hutter, 'The Virtue of Solitude and the Vicissitudes of Friendship', in Preston King and Heather Devere (eds.), *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 133.
[5] Sophocles, *Electra and Other Plays,* trans. E.F. Watling (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 113, lines 341-368.
[6] K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 273.

other.[7] One could ask without embarrassment for an enemy's misfortunes while asking for one's own blessing, something that is similarly found in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, where there is little hesitation by a petitioner to ask simultaneously for personal favour and an enemy's downfall (Psalm 18). Creon, King of Thebes, makes no attempt in Sophocles' *Antigone* to hide feelings toward an enemy of the rightness of retaliation:

> *Creon:* An enemy can't be a friend, even when dead.

and

> Rightly said. Your father's will should have your heart's first place. Only for this do fathers pray for sons. Obedient, loyal, ready to strike down their fathers' foes and love their fathers' friends. To be the father of unprofitable sons is to be the father of sorrows, a laughing-stock to all one's enemies.[8]

Creon is voicing the acceptable attitude and behaviour of a *philos* towards an *echthros.*

In light of the fact that reciprocity applied to enemies as well as to friends, it is not surprising how much distrust determined behaviour within relationships. To keep distrust under control, friendship and manipulation became common bedfellows. One could be generous with gifts and thereby help to buy off potential enemies. The gift-giver was more likely to be thought of as a friend, and the receiver, by accepting the gift, was expected to show goodwill towards the giver. The poets Hesiod and Theognis, writing *c.* 700 BC and slightly later than Homer, drew attention to the loss of trust between friends.

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[7] Dover, *Greek Popular Morality,* 180.
[8] Sophocles, *The Theban Plays: King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone,* trans. E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1947), 140-3.

Hesiod laments the degeneration of friendship in families. In *Works and Days,* partly an autobiographical account of his involvement in a lawsuit with his brother, Perses, over property, he writes:

> Do not make a friend equal to a brother; but if you do, do not wrong him first, and do not lie to please the tongue. But if he wrong you first, offending either in word or in deed, remember to repay him double; but if he ask you to be his friend again and be ready to give you satisfaction, welcome him. He is a worthless man who makes now one and now another his friend; but as for you, do not let your face put your heart to shame.[9]

Hesiod's pessimism comes from his frustration over unreliable friendships. Theognis complains even more bitterly than Hesiod about his friends who have failed to provide him with material benefits and protection during economic and social uncertainty. In his *Elegies* addressed to his young friend Cyrnus, he curses the failure to obey obligations of group equality and reciprocity:

> Never mingle with bad men; banish them far from your side, staying with good men alone. Always eat and drink in their company: sit with them always; make it your task to please those who have might in the land. You will learn good from the good; but once you mingle with bad men, even the wits that you had speedily vanish away.[10]

Theognis lived in a competitive environment in which dissimilar social systems were developing and traditional practises of friendship were breaking down. Prior to this breakdown, apart from marriage, friendship was the only bond to create lasting obligations between peers. Theognis curses his former friends, those who have been corrupted by new wealth, power and status. For Theognis there are few friends who can be trusted: 'One cannot know the mind of a man or woman until they have been

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[9] Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica,* trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, The Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1967), 703-713.
[10] H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 403.

tested like a beast beneath the yoke'. Theognis' pessimism reflects the loss of the community of kinship, as he had known it.[11]

Xenos

Although Hesiod and Theognis envisioned an ideal of friendship through epic poetry, day-to-day living with kin forced them to confront the vicissitudes of human relationships. Kin were neither immune from physical misfortunes, disease, war and death nor from emotional upheavals and destructive behaviour, often greed and betrayal, toward one another. Sometimes it was necessary to cross the boundary of kinship to social groups outside that unit. Heads of families, tribes and the *polis* decided who the 'guest-friends' would be. *Xenos,* the second Greek word for friend, identifies friendship across boundaries, between insiders and outsiders.

In Book Six of Homer's *Iliad,* an encounter between two heroes preparing to fight one another, Diomedes and Glaucus, illustrates *xenia.* Neither knows the other until Diomedes asks, 'Who are you'? Glaucus begins with his genealogy - son of Bellerophon, son of Glaucus, son of Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, to which Diomedes responds:

> Well then, you are a friend (*xenos)* of my father's house of long standing: for noble Oeneus once entertained incomparable Bellerophon in his halls, and kept him twenty days; and moreover they gave one another fair gifts of friendship (*xenia).* Oeneus gave a belt bright with scarlet, and Bellerophon a two-handled cup of gold which I left in my palace as I came here. Tydeus I remember not, since I was but a little child when he left, at the time the army of the Achaeans perished at Thebes. Therefore now I am a dear guest-friend (*xenos philos)* to you in the centre of Argos, and you to me in Lycia, whenever I come to the land of that people. So let us shun one another's

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[11] John T. Fitzgerald, 'Friendship in the Greek World Prior to Aristotle', in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship,* Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 31.

> spear even among the throng; for there are many for me to slay, both Trojans and famed allies, whomever a god shall grant me and my feet overtake; and many Achaeans in turn for you to slay, whomever you can. And let us make an exchange of armour with each other, so that these men too may know that we declare ourselves to be friends (*xenoi)* from our fathers' days.[12]

A *xenos* belonged to a special category of relationship: more than a friend but not a kin and usually an outsider from a similar or even dissimilar social group, either nearby or abroad. *Xenia* signalled the transition from the friendship of the Homeric age to that of the *polis.* Ritual served to establish and perpetuate the friendship. Gift exchange, the past one between Oeneus and Bellerophon and the exchange proposed by Diomedes and Glaucus would continue the bond of solidarity. Guest-friendships passed through male descendants and allied partners, brought together for mutual protection. Diomedes and Glaucus' exchange of armour cemented their treaty and symbolised the support each would give the other and the other's closest associates in extreme adversity. Reciprocity and trust formed the backbone of guest-friendships; affection was optional. Ultimately these ritualised relationships have determined the 'value system' of Greek cities. Gabriel Herman argues:

> When during the eighth and seventh centuries BC the contours of the city-state were gradually drawn, the ancient world was criss-crossed with an extensive network of personal alliances linking together all sorts of apolitical bodies (households, tribes, bands etc.). The city framework superimposed itself upon this existing network - superimposed itself upon it, yet did not dissolve it. And when the city finally became established as the dominant form of organisation, dense webs of guest-friendship continued to act as a powerful bond between citizens of different cities and between citizens and members of various apolitical bodies. And by this persistence

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[12] Homer, *Iliad, Books 1-12,* trans. A.T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6.215-31.

> in the age of the cities, it became involved in actively shaping the value system of the *polis* and in formulating some of its most basic concepts and patterns of action.[13]

According to Herman guest-friendship lacked the intimacy of true friendship. It promoted the political and material well being of the social elite and guaranteed asylum for those banished from the inner circles of ruling power. Frequently it was the only means before the *polis* was well established for any possible co-operation between villages, tribes and nations, which were at war or hostile towards each other. *Xenoi* also trusted each other to carry through on commitments, but had no way of appealing to external authority if obligations were disregarded until the *polis* created and enforced rules about personal relations. Herman argues 'what mattered most' was getting possession of something which the other needed, ie Aristotle's 'friendship of utility'.[14] In the Greek world *xenoi* helped one to gain an entrance into the world of wealth, power and status. Guest-friendships were a form of work. The status of a man increased in proportion to the number of his *xenoi*, a society of equals but not always friends.[15]

Notably absent from Herman's analysis of guest-friendship is how the lower classes participated in guest-friendship. It is dangerous to assume that this form of friendship was restricted to the social elite. The lower classes would have travelled as well and followed similar guest-host relations. An argument for this is the fact that the Greek people are still noted for their hospitality and the Bedouin continue to extend assistance to travellers following the rules of guest-friendship. A Bedouin host offers hospitality to the stranger and does not ask questions until after the guest has had food and drink. The guest is expected to be respectful of the host's generosity

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[13] Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6.
[14] Herman, *Ritualised Friendship,* 164.
[15] Herman, *Ritualised Friendship,* 34.

and not stay longer than three days. The host gives a gift to the departing guest.[16] In ancient times it would have been a piece of pottery broken off a plate, which the stranger would keep and present to his host if he happened to be travelling again in the region.[17]

Hetairos

Homer combined *philos* with a third Greek word for friend, *hetairos,* (*philos hetairos)* to describe the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus. It was Homer's combination of the two words that came closest to a deeply emotional and intensely important relationship, which existed apart from kinship or marriage. In Greek literature the use of the word usually indicates a relationship between a hero and his follower. Homer's use of superlatives sets apart this relationship from others. Patroclus is Achilles' *philtatos hetairos,* 'dearest comrade' (*Iliad* 17.411, 655). Patroclus and Achilles grow up together and the older Patroclus becomes Achilles' *therapon,* 'squire or henchman'.

In the *Iliad,* Achilles allows Patroclus to borrow his armour and to lead the Myrmidons to aid the Greeks who are retreating from the Trojans. Hector kills Patroclus in battle, and Homer describes with intensity Achilles' grief which war brings:

> A black cloud of grief enfolded Achilles, and with both hands he took the dark dust and poured it over his head and defiled his fair face, and on his fragrant tunic the black ashes fell. And he himself in the dust lay outstretched, mighty in his mightiness, and with his own hands he tore and marred his hair. And the handmaids whom Achilles and Patroclus had taken as booty shrieked aloud in anguish of heart, and ran out from inside around battle-minded Achilles, and all beat their breasts with their hands, and the knees of each

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[16] I experienced this form of guest-friendship when I lived and travelled in the Middle East in 2000.
[17] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 86.

one were loosed beneath her. And facing them Antilochus wailed and shed tears, holding the hands of Achilles, who groaned in his noble heart; for he feared that he might cut his throat with the knife.[18]

Achilles knew he was doomed to die but not until he had avenged utterly Patroclus' death. All that mattered to Achilles after his *hetairos'* death was to punish Hector and the Trojans and to restore the hero's honour due to Patroclus. Much has been read into the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus. The intensity of the feelings with which Homer's characters speak has been characterised as homosexual love. To Greeks of the classical period Achilles' emotional outburst when Patroclus is killed, along with the plea of Patroclus' ghost before Achilles' death that their ashes be interred together, signified homosexual love. Aeschylus's trilogy on the *Iliad,* specifically a fragment from the play, *Myrmidons,* in which Achilles talks of 'kisses' and 'god-fearing converse' with Patroclus' thighs, probably indicated an erotic relationship.[19]

It is possible Homer was describing the triumphs and failures of great war heroes in dramatic speeches, which his audiences expected. The epic language of Homer is meant to 'take place in the foreground of our vision'.[20] Homer described Achilles in such a way as to invite the audience to experience the unrestrained expression of his grief: covering himself with dirt, tearing out his hair, moaning from his solar plexus and even contemplating suicide. This was the heroic age when men expressed their emotion before the rules of culture held them back.

Society had changed by Aeschylus' time in two important ways, which could account for the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus being understood

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[18] Homer, *Iliad,* 18.22-34.

[19] K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 197. Dover has an agenda and fails in his scholarship to indicate that an important characteristic of Greek myth is the lack of consistency in stories.

[20] J.B. Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 32.

differently. Dover suggests that the 'homosexualisation' of myth may have begun with a generation of men from the late sixth and early fifth centuries who witnessed more social acceptance and artistic expression of homosexual behaviours than at any time in the ancient world.[21] Even earlier than Aeschylus' time Greek society valued, for purposes of education, attachments between *erastai,* adult men, and *eromenoi,* boys. These homoerotic-social relations, with socially regulated sexual behaviours, were known as pederasty, 'love for boys' and were ideally intended to nurture boys into becoming cultured men, brave soldiers and responsible citizens. In the Greek world, where political fragmentation and aggression from neighbours were constant worries, pederasty assured a constant supply of capable males to keep society going.

In Athens a boy was educated by his *erastes* in philosophy, music, arts and sport. In Sparta, boys learned the art of war from adult men. Sometimes men and boys, old enough to serve in the military, would fight side by side in battle. The *erastes* would model heroism and encourage similar bravery from his *eromenos.* If Homer had intended the hero's relationship as paederastic, still an issue of debate, then Achilles' sacrifice of his own life to avenge Patroclus' death would have been interpreted, justified, and extolled as the naturally expected response of an *eromenos* trying to live up to the example of his *erastes'* heroism.[22] Regardless of the debate, ancient or modern, Homer was writing about a friendship and needed to offer no explanation for how it was expressed. The question concerning Homer's silence about sexual activity between Achilles and Patroclus is not: what are we to think about his silence? The question that has to be asked is: what is it about Homer's silence that became difficult for later cultures?[23]

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[21] Dover, *Greek Homosexuality,* 196.
[22] W.M. Clark, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love, *Hermes* 106 (1978), 392.
[23] Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic,* 31, believes 'the mind of Homer' eludes his listeners. Unlike later poets whose personal voices can be heard in the words of their heroes, Homer's plain style of story-

A Context for Understanding the Friendship of Achilles and Patroclus

Anthropologist Robert Brain's observations of friendships in non-Western cultures can help to shed light on the story of the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus and parallel friendships in literature. Seeing this friendship in a new way might help change thinking about loving friendships and lessen the focus on sex. According to Brain, in primitive societies 'it is natural to love others, help your friends and elicit emotional responses from individuals outside family groups'.[24] Brain's two-year experience of living among the Bangwa of the Cameroon allowed him the privilege of watching how Bangwa 'best friends' behaved. Friendship in Bangwa society was public knowledge and valued above kinship and marriage. Friends felt comfortable speaking affectionately about their friends, giving gifts to one another regularly, travelling together on trips and making loving gestures, 'almost to the point of petting' towards each other.[25] As far as Brain was capable of ascertaining, prejudices about homosexuality did not exist. Friendship was a life-long commitment, the only relationship able to level out the inequalities of age and socio-economic status found in kinship and to offer emotional stability when the backbiting of family life became too overwhelming.

On the occasion of watching a funeral Brain discovered amazing parallels between Bangwa friendship and that of Achilles and Patroclus:

> I sat nervously beside the corpse inside the hut with all the important men who talked and sipped palm wine. Outside, the women danced and wailed and swayed close to

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telling allows him enough distance from the audience to present the facts without disclosing his emotional involvement in the events he is narrating. It is the listeners who bring their imagination and *emotional life* (my italics) to the poems.

[24] Robert Brain, *Friends and Lovers* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976), 30.

[25] Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, 32.

the ground in an ecstasy of flamboyant grief for their husband or their kinsman or their in-law. I decided to record one of the songs which a particular man every half-hour or so sang outside the door of the hut. He was a youngish man, wearing a loin-cloth, waistcoat, and cap, and he sang a heartrending funeral lament, tears pouring down his already tear-stained face, mud on his brow, the waistcoat torn. He sang his pathetic song while holding out the dead man's cap to the wailing women and as he sang some of them swayed towards him and theatrically wiped away his tears. When I had filled my tape with this song, I was glad enough to blame a splitting headache for wanting to get out of the hut and the nearness of the dead man and went back to the relative quiet of my own house.[26]

At the funeral the deceased's best friend became one of the principal mourners and lamented the death and praised the events in the life of the dead friend. The best friend's place in the grieving ritual was as prominent as that of family members. Brain concluded Bangwa friendship provides a context for understanding the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus.[27] Bangwa friendship moves openly and comfortably back and forth between *philia* and *eros* just as Achilles and Patroclus' friendship does. John Boswell believes that ancient societies did not indulge in the habit of classifying and systematising human emotions and made allowances for human beings to express a wide range of emotional and physical responses in friendship and love.[28] Why such judgments are made about friendship is a problem of modern society not of the ancient world.

Women's Friendships in the Ancient World

Undoubtedly, friendships between women existed in the ancient world, but so far references to them are sparse. Katherine Evans' survey of 18,000 papyri and

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[26] Brain, *Friends and Lovers,* 33.
[27] Brain, *Friends and Lovers,* 42.
[28] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 46.

inscriptions reveals friendship terminology in only 203 texts. There is no example of a man referring to a woman as his friend, three examples where a woman calls a man her friend and two examples where a woman refers to a woman as a friend. In all instances *philos* or *philia* were the words used for friend, which make it difficult to know if the ties were personal or familial, or if the other words for friendship had become archaic or changed their meaning. Evans concludes that the friendships between women were mostly utilitarian.[29]

In classical Athens men and women generally lived separate lives.[30] Most women managed the home. They cared for children, made clothes, trained and managed slaves, nursed the sick and prepared all the food. Some women were employed outside the home as midwives, wet-nurses, seamstresses, hairdressers, shopkeepers, physicians, teachers and even painters.[31] Women of all economic classes appeared in public for weddings, funerals and religious festivals. It is hard to imagine women not making friends with other women on these occasions. But there simply is not enough evidence about how women formed friendships and whether it was possible for them to maintain relationships with other women outside the home.[32] Traditionally women have visited each other in their homes to borrow household items and to help out in childbirth. In these exchanges friendships would develop. But aside from poetry, the

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[29] Katherine Evans, 'Friendship in the Greek Documentary Papyri and Inscriptions: A Survey' in Fitzgerald, (ed.), *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship,* 181.

[30] Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 202, examines the historiographical controversy over the enclosure of women. Although women were more restricted under the democracy, they were not forced into obscurity. When urban living replaced farming, women moved indoors to do their work. Their labour was less visible and less valued. Friendships were more likely to be out of sight and therefore went unrecorded.

[31] Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A source book in translation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982). 161-71.

[32] David Konstan and Sarah Pomeroy disagree about the restrictions on married women. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 91, believes modern Greek women in rural villages have fewer freedoms than ancient ones. Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 72, writes that the holding back of women in some areas has not changed. In ancient times women were not allowed to go to the market for food and still do not do so today. See Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis (eds.), *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991) for a study of restrictions on twentieth-century women in Greek villages.

rare epitaphs and private letters are the only other sources for accounts of women's friendships.[33]

The Greeks did not have a unified cultural ideal of friendship, and a one-sided representation of the relationship needs to be recognised in any study of the subject. The Greek tradition of friendship was reserved for men. Even now this is frequently overlooked in current studies on friendship. According to Ignace Lepp friendship is the 'most universal of all interhuman relations in the emotional order'.[34] If that is the case then it is time for it to be disembedded from its non-institutional but fully institutionalised place in history. Within the Greek tradition we find the conceptual error of the inferiority of female friendships, which has been passed down through the centuries into modern times. In the sixteenth century Montaigne reiterated Greek thinking in his essay 'On Friendship' in which he wrote that 'the normal capacity of women is, in fact, unequal to the demands of that communion and intercourse on which the sacred bond (of friendship) is fed; their souls do not seem firm enough to bear the strain of so hard and lasting a tie'.[35]

The Greeks greatly valued male friendships because they were believed to prompt men to great thoughts and heroic actions. According to male Greek writers women lacked intellect and passion, and therefore could not be friends on the same level as men. Friendship between men was more important than the love between a man and a woman. For Aristotle the male friend is another self; true friendship is based on

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[33] Epitaphs came in two forms - the semi-formulaic where the deceased is 'friend to all' and non-formulaic in which a lost friendship is mourned: 'Because of your true and sweet friendship, your companion Euthylla placed this tablet on your grave, Biote, for she keeps your memory with her tears and weeps for your lost youth', in *Women's Life in Greece and Roman,* 11-12.

[34] Ignace Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship,* trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), 26.

[35] Michel de Montaigne, 'On Friendship', in *Essays,* trans. J.M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 95.

likeness (*N.E.* 9.1166).[36] Aristotle's formation of a consciousness of friendship from the male perspective, illustrated by his entirely normal use of adjectives like *philos* in the masculine case and nouns like *man* where we would today use *person* or *human being*, lingers on in modern conceptions of friendship. Remarkably, however, for his example of supreme friendship Aristotle cites maternal love:

> But *philia* seems to lie in loving rather than in being loved, as is indicated by the delight mothers take in loving; for some mothers hand over their children to be brought up, and so long as they know their fate they love them and do not seek to be loved in return (if they cannot have both), but seem to be satisfied if they see them prospering; and they themselves love their children even if these owing to their ignorance give them nothing of a mother's due (*N.E.* 8.1159).

The sociologist Robert Bellah contends that gender is probably the most significant of all social divisions in shaping friendship[37] Graham Allan noted early on in his studies on friendship that men's friendships reinforce men's ego needs and maintain their masculinity.[38] Robert Connell has argued male friendships have been essential for maintaining the *status quo* in society.[39] An unfortunate legacy of the Greek understanding of friendship has been the continued prejudice towards friendship between men and women.[40]

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[36] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. David Ross, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 228.

[37] Robert N. Bellah, *et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 85-93.

[38] Graham A. Allan, *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain,* Oxford Modern Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 92. See also Alan Booth, 'Sex and Social Participation', *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 2 (1972), 183-193 and P.H. Wright, 'Men's Friendships, Women's Friendships and the Alleged Inferiority of the Latter', *Sex Roles* 8, no. 1 (1982), 4-11.

[39] Robert W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 259-65.

[40] In Rosemary Blieszner and Rebecca G. Adams, *Adult Friendship,* Sage Series on Close Relationship (Newbury Park: California: Sage Publications, 1992), 69, research on gender and friendship revealed continuing prejudice against opposite-sex friendships apart from marriage. Embedded in the norm against cross-sex friendship is the assumption that marriage is the only model for an intimate and trusting relationship. The cultural idealisation of marriage denies the existence of close, lifelong friendship between men and women apart from marriage and exposes the constant need to reduce

Subordination of women's friendships in the ancient world

David Konstan acknowledges in his study of friendship that 'most of the references to friends in classical antiquity concern men'.[41] Greek philosophers developed the history of friendship and investigated its nature. Adolf Harnack believed that the 'history of the Greek schools of philosophy is at the same time the history of friendship'.[42] The rise of clubs called fellowships (*hetaireiai)* offered the opportunity for intellectual and spiritual conversations outside kinship ties. The public nature of Greek life brought men greater social participation than women.[43] In Book Eight of *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle referred to these fellowships in his discussion of friendship.[44]

Athens was the centre for philosophy and men monopolised the written word. In *The Creation of Patriarchy,* Gerda Lerner writes:

> While, as we have seen, women had participated in maintaining the oral tradition and religious and cultic functions in the preliterate period and for almost a millennium thereafter, their educational disadvantaging and their symbolic dethroning had a profound impact on their future development. The gap between the experience of those who could or might (in the case of lower-class males) participate in the creating of the symbol system and those who merely acted but did not interpret became increasingly greater.[45]

Athenian society was thoroughly patriarchal when the Greek theory about friendship was developing. One result has been the acceptance of male friendships as the norm.

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intimacy between opposite-sex friends to the sexual. See also David R. Eyler and Andrea P. Baridon, 'Far More Than Friendship: The New Rules for Reckoning with Sexual Attraction in the Workplace', *Psychology Today* (May/June 1992), 59-67.

[41] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 90. I found only five references to women's friendships in this work; there are few extant records of women's friendships.

[42] Quoted in Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (London: Women's Press, 1986), 223.

[43] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 61.

[44] Aristotle, *N.E.* 8.1161a25-6.

[45] Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy,* 221.

In fact men have written most accounts of female friendships and conceptualised them around masculine parameters.[46] Ancient narratives of women's friendships have yet to be found.

It would seem that Athenian women, unlike their counter-parts in Lesbos, had a less favourable environment for developing and sustaining friendships. According to Pomeroy many Athenian homes were located in 'dark, squalid and unsanitary areas', and within their houses, women lived in the more remote, upstairs rooms while men occupied the downstairs.[47] The restrictions imposed by culture on their personal space largely determined those whom women would meet. Married Athenian women had little or no opportunity to socialise outside the home or to identify with women in roles other than domestic ones. Mothers, sisters and female slaves were friends, and the character of these friendships maintained the social conventions. Pomeroy writes that women in Athens 'did not generally find high esteem in the eyes of other women'.[48]

Friendships were not powerful enough to change women's social standing in Athenian society, but it is arguable that the relationships, when they could occur, afforded additional strength and protective space for women to foster physical and psychological survival just as they have recently been found to do in Western

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[46] In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf observed the rare depictions of female friendship in literature: 'And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends...They are confidantes, of course, in Racine and the Greek tragedies. They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction, until Jane Austen's day, were not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex', 124. Also see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1985) and Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991).

[47] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 79-81.

[48] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 88.

society.[49] Women had limited individual freedom and lived under male guardianship. Sophocles captures the plight of most women under Athenian democracy:

> But now I am nothing on my own. But I have often regarded the nature of women in this way, seeing that we amount to nothing. In childhood in our father's house we live the happiest life, I think, of all mankind.... But when we have understanding and have come to youthful vigour, we are pushed out and sold, away from our paternal gods and from our parents, some to foreign husbands, some to barbarians, some to joyless homes, and some to homes that are opprobrious. And this, once a single night has yoked us, we must approve and consider to be happiness.[50]

The Private World of Women's Friendships

Vase paintings showing women with other women, either inside the home or at public festivals, can be seen as testimonies to female friendships.[51] *The Distaff*, by the fourth-century BC poet, Erinna of Telos also provides a rare example of a friendship between ancient women:

> You leaped from the white horses
>
> And raced madly into the deep wave-
>
> But 'I've got you, dear'! I shouted loudly.
>
> And when you were the Tortoise
>
> You ran skipping through the yard of the great court.
>
> These are the things that I lament and
>
> Sorrow over, my sad Baucis - these are

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[49] Recent findings in a UCLA study on friendships between women show an increased discharge of the calming hormone oxytocin in women when they are with other women. Researchers believe the hormone is a survival aid left over from ancient times. The hormone is thought to buffer the 'fight or flight' reaction and foster the 'tend and befriend' response, which encourages survival. Having unrestricted space for friendship is necessary for the release of the hormone. Gale Berkowitz, 'UCLA Study on Friendship among Women', http://www.anapsid,ord/cnd/gender/tendfriend.html (2 April 2003). More recent research looks at the effects of oxytocin in children's brains derived from their relationships with caregivers. Current research seems to show that oxytocin acts as a social thermostat and prompts friendship behaviour. See http://www.cbd.ucla.edu/lectures/cbd seminar syllabus Spring 2006.doc and http://taylorlab.psych.ucla.edu/pub.htm for publications on the biosocial mechanisms underlying relationships.

[50] Sophocles, *Fragments,* trans. Hugh Lloyd Jones, The Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 293-4.

[51] P.E. Arias and Max Hirmer, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1962), plates xxiii, xxxvii, li, lii.

Little trails through my heart that are
Still warm-my remembrances of you.
For our former delights are ashes now.
When we were young girls we sat in our rooms
Without a care, holding our dolls and pretending
We were young brides. Remember-at dawn
The 'mother', who distributed the wool
To the attendant servants, came and called
You to help with the salting of the meat.
And how afraid we were, when we were small.
Of Mormor - she had huge ears on her head.
Walked about on four feet.
And was always changing faces.
But when you mounted your husband's bed
You forgot all about those things.
All you heard from your mother
When you were still a little child.
Dear Baucis, Aphrodite set forgetfulness
In your heart.
And so I lament you and neglect my duties.
For I am not so irreverent as to set foot out-of-doors
Or to look upon a corpse with my eyes
Or let my hair loose in lamentation -
But a blush of grief tears my cheeks.[52]

Erinna laments the death of her childhood friend, Baucis, who died shortly after marriage. The poem is full of references to training for marriage and motherhood. But their friendship, even in its sadness, provided happiness. Most young women married between the ages of twelve and fifteen and men not before the age of thirty.[53] A high proportion of female deaths occurred between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, most likely during and after childbirth.[54]

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[52] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 137-8.
[53] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 164.
[54] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 194.

Luce Irigaray views women's friendships in patriarchal culture as the only situation where they 'dare' to be themselves, even 'in suffering and laughter'.[55] Recent sociological studies assert that friendships are valuable to women enmeshed within a patriarchal culture.

> In a world where knowledge is filtered through a male lens, it is impossible to know what it is to be a woman since a woman enters into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can appear and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely men… It is only when women are together that a new and different way of being is possible. [56]

Friendships are important for building solidarity between women in a patriarchal context, but at the same time they can reinforce victimisation, as might be suggested by the last lines of *The Distaff*. Lillian Rubin challenges Irigaray's optimism about women's power to transcend patriarchy:

> It is a vicious circle for women, as it is for any devalued group in a society. They internalise the social definition of self as inferior, then turn to those who formulated that definition and who now have a stake in maintaining it, for reassurance that it isn't true. In doing so, they help to increase the power of the powerful.[57]

Sappho and Women's Friendships

The sixth-century BC lyric poet, Sappho, writes about loving relationships between women, women and men, and mother and child. It is Sappho's references to her loving friendships with women, which are of interest here. In her poetry she addresses some women as *philai* and others as *hetairai.* Although in classical Greek *hetaira* had

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[55] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 134.
[56] Pat O'Connor, 'Women's friendships in a post-modern world', in Rebecca G. Adams and Graham Allan (eds.), *Placing Friendship in Context,* Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 119.
[57] Lillian B. Rubin, *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in Our Lives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 167.

the derogatory meaning of courtesan, Sappho's use of the term encouraged other women to call their friends *hetairai.*[58] She is believed to have been in charge of communities of young women (possibly connected with the cult of Aphrodite), where women learned poetry, dance, music and other creative skills. Commentators from Hellenistic and Roman times compared Sappho's role as an educator of young girls to Socrates' relationship with his pupils. She did use *erastai* and *eromena* language in some of her poems when addressing women, but it seems the relationships between women were mutual and not pederastic.[59]

Little attention was given to Sappho's eroticism when she was alive. Ancient writers and intellectuals paid more attention to her poetry. But by the first-century BC a preoccupation with her 'erotic inclinations' was beginning.[60] Her expressions of passionate attachments to young women led to the eventual association of the island Lesbos, where Sappho lived, with female homoeroticism and the word lesbianism.[61]

In his study of Greek homosexuality Dover cautions against using the words 'lesbian' and 'lesbianism' when discussing females, since neither word in antiquity connotes homosexuality. Lesbian literally means 'an inhabitant of Lesbos'. Greek comedies associated the verb to *lesbiazein* with loose sexual behaviours especially fellatio.[62] It was only later that the independent status and uninhibited sexuality of Lesbos women came to be seen as female homoeroticism. Suggestive comments about Sappho began

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[58] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 47.

[59] Martii Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective,* trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1998), 76.

[60] In *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42, Bernadette J. Brooten argues that the negative portrayal of Sappho served a two-fold purpose: it discredited female poets and artists and produced 'properly gendered subjects'. Brooten believes the Roman writers, Ovid, Plautus, Seneca the Elder, Phaedrus, Martial and Juvenal, supported the 'cultural construction of womanhood' in the Roman Empire.

[61] Brooten, *Love Between Women,* 5. The earliest documented evidence of Lesbian being equated with female homoeroticism (lesbianism) came from the second-century Christian writer, Clement of Alexandria.

[62] Dover, *Greek Homosexuality,* 182.

in classical Athens where mutual love between women would not have been discussed openly and where men would have misunderstood or been prejudiced towards it.[63]

Fourth-century dramatists such as Diphilus created 'Sappho' comedies and made her the target of their crude jokes. According to their portrayals, Sappho had male as well as female lovers. Athenians, especially members of the philosophical community who set the moral criteria for society, commented negatively on Sappho's close ties with women, and a similar response to women's friendships continues into modern times. As a result of her research of Sappho's life, Brooten concludes 'similar language and images' were used in Greek and Christian literature 'to discredit women accused of erotic attraction to other women'.[64]

Philosophy and Friendship

The sixth century BC philosophical community of Pythagoras was founded on friendship and, according to Diogenes Laertius, who wrote in the third century AD, Pythagoras promoted friendship in his teaching. It is claimed that he was the first person to say: 'Friends have everything in common', 'Friendship is equality' and 'A friend is another I'.[65] Iamblichus, one of Pythagoras' later biographers, writes that Pythagorean relationships were fundamentally all friendships and declared Pythagoras as the founding father of friendship:

> Pythagoras handed on the clearest teachings on friendship of all for all: friendship of gods for humans, through piety and worship based on knowledge; friendship of one doctrine for another, and in general of soul for body and the reasoning part for the

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[63] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves,* 55-6. For women to have an equal role in a female homoerotic relationship was a violation of acceptable honour and shame boundaries in male homoeroticism. In the ancient world where male homoeroticism was considered acceptable or at least not strange, love between women was abnormal.

[64] Brooten, *Love Between Women,* 70.

[65] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* trans. R.D. Hicks, The Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1925), 8.10.

unreasoning, achieved through philosophy and the contemplation it entails; friendship of people for one another: fellow-citizens through a healthy respect for law, different peoples through a proper understanding of nature, a man with his wife and children and brothers and intimates through unswerving partnership; in short, friendship of all for all, including some of the non-rational animals through justice and natural connection and association; even the moral body's pacification and reconciliation of opposite powers hidden within itself, through health and a lifestyle and practice of temperance which promotes health, imitating the way in which the cosmic elements flourish. All these may be summed up in that one word 'friendship', and Pythagoras is the acknowledged founding father of it all. He handed on to his followers such a remarkable tradition of friendship that even now people say of those who show each other unusual goodwill 'They belong to the Pythagoreans.[66]

Trust, emotional restraint, financial aid and frank speech were the fundamentals of Pythagorean friendship, and adversity was no reason for rejecting a friend. However, because friendship was restricted to members of the community and was extended outside the community only to those who shared similar beliefs, it is doubtful how much of a mark Pythagorean friendship made on the outside world.

Around the same time as the Pythagoreans, two pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus and Empedocles, employed natural law to explain the basis for friendship. Empedocles, from Agrigento in Sicily, maintained friendship existed when like joined to like.[67] For Heraclitus, Empedocles' contemporary, friendship was based on the attraction of opposites - tensions between order and disorder. The energy of the two forces encouraged continual change and renewal: 'It is what opposes that helps', 'from different tones comes the fairest tune' and 'all things are produced through

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[66] John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell, *Iamblichus on the Pythagorean Way of Life,* SBL Texts and Translations, Graeco-Roman Religion Series 29 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 96.
[67] M.R. Wright (ed.), *Empedocles The Extant Fragments,* Bristol Classical Press (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1995), 235.

strife'.[68] They offered different perspectives on friendship: one of like-mindedness and the other a relationship of complementary roles.

Xenophon and Plato composed the earliest, systematic accounts of friendship in the ancient Greek world. In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon's Socrates states that a good friend is 'of all possessions the most precious'.[69] According to Socrates a friend will be self-controlled, hospitable, honest and helpful.[70] Personal integrity, which is exhibited in both words and actions, is essential for finding and keeping a friend.[71] Friendships will last only if each friend takes the time to reflect on how good one is as a friend. And finally there is something within the nature of each human being that longs for friendship. Human beings do not want to be alone and have a need for one another. They are capable of feeling sympathy toward one another, working together for the common good and learning thankfulness for one another.[72] Even though the description of friendship thus far is quite ideal, Xenophon's Socrates does not hesitate to expose the selfish side of human nature and how it can affect friendship:

> And yet there is no transaction most men are so careless about as the acquisition of friends. For I find they are careful about getting houses and lands and slaves and cattle and furniture, and anxious to keep what they have, but though they tell one that a friend is a great blessing, I find that most men take no thought how to get new friends or how to keep their old ones.[73]

Plato's *Lysis* is an early dialogic examination of the nonpossessive nature of friendship. Plato's Socrates establishes for the first time a link between *philia* and

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[68] Aristotle, *N.E.* 8.1155.
[69] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus,* trans. E.C. Marchant, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1965), 2.4.4.
[70] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus,* 2.5.4.
[71] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus,* 2.6.14.
[72] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus,* 2.6.15.
[73] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus,* 2.4.1-3.

eros, in which friendship is the desire for the well-being of the other.[74] The conversation takes place in a wrestling school where two friends, Lysis and Menexenus, are meeting their lovers. It is the friendship between Lysis and Menexenus and not the sexual love between them and their lovers that Socrates wants to question. Socrates first leads Lysis through an illustrative talk about the relationship between affection and usefulness before he defines *philos,* which he characterises as both active and passive, one who loves and one who is loved.[75]

Later on Socrates concludes that no theories of friendship provide sufficient explanation for what it is and rejects all the possible forms of attraction, like to like, unlike to unlike and like to unlike as a basis for friendship. Socrates proposes the only remaining possibility: 'only what is neither good nor bad proves to be friendly to the good'.[76] He uses the example of the sick man and doctor to explain his idea about friendship. Because of his illness the sick man has to be a *philos* to a doctor.[77] The body is neither good nor bad; it only desires good health. Socrates implies that the desire for the good for the other is 'the cause of friendship'.[78]

Next in the conversation Socrates adds the idea of *proton philon,* 'the one original friend for whose sake all the other things can be said to be friends'.[79] Socrates states all friendships are the means to the original friend, whereby the desire for wholeness rests. According to Socrates that which one lacks and desires is *oikeion,* 'one's own', a word related to human wholeness and integrity; 'so it appears one's own belongings (or human wholeness and integrity) are the objects of love, friendship and desire'.[80]

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[74] Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 207D.
[75] Plato, *Lysis,* 212B-213C.
[76] Plato, *Lysis,* 216E.
[77] Plato, *Lysis,* 217A.
[78] A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 7.
[79] Plato, *Lysis,* 219-220D.
[80] Plato, *Lysis,* 221E. See A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship,* 12.

The conversation only appears to fail as Socrates ends the difficulty of finding out what a friend is by saying:

> Today, Lysis and Menexenus, we have made ourselves ridiculous - I, an old man, as well as you. For these others will go away and tell how we believe we are friends of one another - for I count myself in with you - but what a 'friend' is, we have not yet succeeded in discovering.[81]

Plato's pupil, Aristotle, was the first Greek philosopher to compose a systematic theory of friendship, in Books 8 and 9 of his *Nicomachean Ethics.* He gives two reasons for friendship: 'Friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue; and also it is one of the most indispensable requirements of life'.[82] His stress on these two reasons for friendship came from observations of men immersed in the social and political life of Athens, where commitment to the common good was declining. Aristotle believed that no one could be good without being in relationship with another who pursued the same goodness.

Aristotle proposes three kinds of friendship: friendships for pleasure, friendships for usefulness and friendships based on goodness and virtue. The first two friendships are the most common and rarely have anything to do with affection for one another. Useful friends might be business partners who may not even like each other and do not spend time together apart from business when they can be useful to each other. Pleasure friends are relationships based largely on gratifying the emotions. For example, human beings enjoy witty people because of the pleasure they give not for who they are:

> Therefore those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far

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[81] Plato, *Lysis,* 223B.
[82] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 8.1155a.

> as he is useful or pleasant. And thus, these friendship are only incidental....Such friendships, then, are easily dissolved, if the parties do not remain like themselves; for if the one part is no longer pleasant or useful the other ceases to love him.[83]

'Virtuous friendship is the most perfect' because it is the friendship 'of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves'.[84] Virtuous friends love one another because they are good. The friendship is built around the good for which each friend searches and lasts as long as each friend is good. For Aristotle this is the most important kind of friendship characterised by deep and noble affection for the good and how that goodness is embodied in each friend.

In Book 9 Aristotle questions the belief that a virtuous man does not need friends:

> It is said that those who are supremely happy and self-sufficient have no need of friends; for they have the things that are good, and therefore being self-sufficient they need nothing further, while a friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort; whence the saying 'When fortune is kind, what need of friend?[85]

Because friendship is so important to Aristotle, he cannot imagine a life without friends. For life to have meaning, friendship must be part of it. It is the nature of human beings to live with others, so even the happiest man needs friends. Aristotle argues that the one thing human beings cannot provide for themselves is virtue. Virtue does not happen in solitude but only in relationship because virtue requires doing good not being good. Virtue has to be practised with others.[86] It cannot be achieved alone. It comes through the gift of friendship. When the good is sought together, each other becomes good. As Paul Wadell says:

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[83] Aristotle, *N.E.*, 8.1156a.
[84] Aristotle, *N.E.*, 8.1156b.
[85] Aristotle, *N.E.*, 9.1169b.
[86] Aristotle, *N.E.*, 9.1170a

> In a way, it is more correct to say that our friends make us good, for it is in this activity of sharing the good that each of us, in his or her love for that good, becomes a source for the other person's goodness.[87]

Two other important schools of philosophy that mention friendship are the Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics had only a small concern for friendship. Strictly speaking only sages were capable of being friends and 'acted from moral virtue, not because of strong feeling for another'.[88] The Epicureans fostered friendship ties within their communities. There are only a few references to friendship in Epicurus' writings and those which remain are aphorisms: 'All friendship is an intrinsic virtue, but it originates from benefiting'.[89] Friends give security and pleasure: 'It is not our friends' help that we need so much as the confidence of their help'. 'Friendship dances round the world, proclaiming to us all to wake up for happiness'.[90] Because Epicurean principles might be egoistic, the question remains whether this friendship could only be utilitarian. The Epicurean belief that human beings could lead self-sufficient lives also goes against Aristotle's conviction of the human need for friendship.[91]

Cicero and Friendship

Aristotle's pupil and friend, Theophrastus, composed a famous but lost three-volume work *On Friendship* which is thought to be the primary source for Cicero's *De*

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[87] Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 66.
[88] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* trans. R.D. Hicks, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1925), 7.124. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 113.
[89] P. Mitsis, 'Epicurus on Friendship and Altruism', in Julia Annas (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol. V, 130.
[90] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 108-109.
[91] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 110.

Amicitia.[92] Cicero's famous and frequently quoted definition, 'Friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection, and I am inclined to think that, with the exception of wisdom, no better thing has been given to man by the immortal gods', was a sentiment somewhat removed from the reality of political friendships in the late Roman Republic.[93] Cicero wrote his dialogue under stress shortly before his assassination in 44 BC. It was more of a eulogy to idealise friendship in an ideal world.

Gaius Laelius talks about his friend, Scipio Africanus the Younger, who has just died. Laelius says friendship fits perfectly the nature of human being and should be valued above all other human things. However, it is only possible for those who are good, 'who so act and so live as to give proof of loyalty and uprightness, of fairness and generosity; who are free from all passion, caprice and insolence, and have great strength of character'[94] Cicero was well acquainted with negotiating friendships with the Roman elite and their value for political manoeuvring. He reveals in *De Amicitia* his own frustrations over the loss of loyal friends and his inability to control political realities.

Cicero's highest form of friendship parallels Aristotle's in that it rests upon virtue. For Cicero love is the guiding force of friendship, trust is its foundation, and commitment holds it together through absence and even death.[95] And like others before him, he uses the friendship between the second-century statesmen and soldiers, Scipio Africanus the younger and Gaius Laelius, as an ideal model for the relationship. However, the reality of Cicero's shifting public friendships prevented him from being able to write about true friendship in the present. Even he had to

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[92] Frederic M. Schroeder, 'Friendship in Aristotle and Some Peripatetic Philosophers', in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship,* 48.
[93] Cicero, *De Amicitia,* trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1927), 5.20.
[94] Cicero, *De Amicita,* 5.18-19.
[95] Cicero, *De Amicita,* 27.100.

admit how rare a constant friend was in dangerous times.[96] Perhaps Cicero's idealisation of friendship towards the end of his life was a way of hiding his fear and isolation from those he once considered friends and would soon betray him.

Conclusion: An Ambiguous Legacy

The classical understanding of friendship continues to be the starting point for most discussions on the topic. For the ancients friendship is an indispensable requirement for a meaningful and happy life. Aristotle said that no one would choose to live without friends. That is what most of us still hope for.

Friends save one another from hardship and offer the stability which is needed in an unpredictable world. Friendship is between people who share a vision of the good. The goodness in one human being is the grounds for attracting goodness in another, and only good people could be good friends. One would never be a friend to someone who is not good.

Friends do not have to be equal or like-minded. Friendship could occur just as easily between family members, lovers and even casual acquaintances. Plato devotes his dialogue, *Lysis,* entirely to friendship and presents it against the background of human desire. Although the dialogue is aporetic, Plato posits that the desire for companionship arises from the human need for wholeness. He views the interaction between human beings as an opportunity to discover one's soul.

Aristotle elevates friendship to an ethical ideal and understands that friendships are different in important ways. He classifies friendships into pleasure, usefulness and virtue. In virtue friendship the object is the friend himself. In friendships for pleasure and usefulness, the friend is the object because he is useful or pleasant for the other.

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[96] Cicero, *De Amicitia,* 17.62-64.

Also, it is important to keep in mind the social setting that influenced Aristotle's perspective of friendship. He was greatly involved in the social and political life of the *polis,* which had implications for how he viewed friendship. For Aristotle friendship was a primarily a utilitarian relationship. Although he extolled virtue friendship above all other types, he acknowledged the difficulty in finding virtuous friends. Friendship in Greek thought was constructed on a model of self-love. It operated in an intensely competitive atmosphere which could easily destroy the bond between friends. For this reason it can be accused of being self-seeking and lacking a true concern for others.

Although women would have had friendships, most of the references to friends concern men. Women did have friendships outside the home. They were known to have helped friends in childbirth, but it is not possible to known how often women might visit women on other occasions. Based on the love poetry of Sappho, Konstan suggests that the ties of friendship between women were very different from those between men. They would not have been characterised by domination and subordination or concern for social equality.[97] Although Sappho's work originated in a region where social conditions might not have been like those in Athens; her poetry was sung later, possibly in Athens, which indicates how her image of women's friendships was preserved.

Friendships between men and women were another matter. The language of friendship between men and women implied a sexual relationship. Consequently there was great hesitation to use the term *philos* and *philē* between reputable men and women. The sexual overtones have endured into present times whenever men and women are described as friends.

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[97] Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World,* 47.

Classical friendship depended on the security that friends gained from one another. Friendships began with the need for survival, particularly in the political environment. This resulted in a lack of freedom within the relationship. One needed to express carefully one's words and thoughts. Few friendships could endure the misfortunes of the other. The underlying self-interest was a constant threat, and the idealisation of friendships might even mask a fear of them rather than gratitude for them.[98]

To discuss ancient friendship without addressing the social realities is uncritical. Human survival depended upon instrumental friendship. This does not mean there could not be trust, affection, goodwill and pleasure between the friends, but these were limited by the each friend's own needs and drives. Friendship was also kept within the structures of the masculine. It was more a created image and not always grounded in reality.

By contrast a friendship that is non-instrumental is solely for the sake of the friend as a friend. The benefit the relationship brings to both parties is not the primary goal. It is a relationship simply for the sake of the other. We now turn to a model of this friendship.

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[98] See Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1945), 100-110, for the function of idealisation.

Two

A Christian Understanding of Friendship

Why Friendship Matters

In this thesis it is my intention to demonstrate that true friendship is a relationship to which all human beings are called to practice in all contexts – in the family, in the workplace, in faith communities and wherever we come face to face with another human being. Jesus' vocation to the world was friendship. St John describes how he conferred the title of friends upon his disciples (Jn. 15:15). St Matthew shows how he demonstrated friendship for women by challenging the divorce laws (Mt. 5: 31-32) and for children by confronting his disciples who wanted nothing to do with them (Mt. 19:14). St Luke proclaims he was a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Lk. 7:34). And St Mark's record of Jesus' speech to the Pharisees could be seen as an act of frank friendship (Mk. 7:1-13).

Jesus, the incarnation of God in the world, demonstrated how friendship is also the most godlike relationship that human beings can have with one another. He offered friendships to men, women and children, to social outcasts and foreigners. In a world where the phrase 'collateral damage' exposes the lack of value placed upon human life, the survival of humanity depends upon friendships. Without true friendship, human flourishing is at risk, and the abundant life that Jesus spoke about could fade from the collective memory. True friendship is a relationship in which the true worth of another human being is recognised, respected and nourished. Contemporary ideas of friendship - who is useful and valuable and who it is good to be seen with - contradict Jesus' legacy of friendship. Without true friendship racism,

oppression and violence will escalate and might even come to be seen as normal and natural.

It is now recognized that all of life is inextricably connected. Some 17th century Enlightenment thinking that individuals are discrete beings capable of achieving selfhood alone is accepted as incorrect. Humans are drawn to each other if only to affirm that in all the struggles that go with being alive, there is the hope of knowing that life can be purposeful and meaningful. Human beings are also drawn towards others because of the hope and inspiration others are able bring to their life. And it is in and through the pull towards others that a human being has the greatest chance of finding friendship and a relationship that is able to unlock hidden potential and to help discover a purposeful and meaningful existence for another. Friends have the capability of uncovering in one another that which might otherwise remain hidden for any number of reasons.

Friendship gives a fresh perspective to relationships. It can safely be said that many of the ways human beings interact with one another are unhealthy. Family and marriage counsellors have known for years how important healthy ways of relating to one another are for emotional health. Western society is permeated with broken relationships. Divorce is one example. Little is being done to halt the revolving door of marriage, divorce, remarriage, divorce, alienation and isolation. One in three people live alone. The human need for intimacy often propels lonely people into addictive behaviours and even addictive relationships. According to the American Psychiatric Association the latest malady gaining a description in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* (*DSM IV*, to be published in 2010) is the diagnosis of relational disorder.[1] Dr. Michael First, associate professor of psychiatry

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[1] Walter Kirn, I'm O.K. You're O.K. We're Not O.K.', *Time,* 16 September 2002, 92.

at Columbia University and one of the principal figures behind this new classification of mental illness believes there is now sufficient evidence that how people interact in particular relationships can be disordered in a way that is very similar to mental disorders. Perhaps the expression 'friends are the new family' needs to be taken more seriously.

Friendship offers a new understanding of intimacy.[2] The French psychoanalyst, Ignace Lepp, believed that friendship is the most universal of all relationships.[3] The Dutch theologian, Henri Nouwen wrote that loneliness is the most universal human experience.[4] The tragic posture of postmodern men and women is loneliness. Furthermore there is a connection between loneliness and the loss of trust in society. Loneliness erodes the amount of trust that can be maintained between humans in society. The lonelier humans become the less ability they have to trust others. Human beings who are extremely lonely are terrified of others. They cannot trust and have a negative outlook on most of life. Who to trust and how to trust is only learned by being in intimate relationships with others. Although it would not seem a place for it, loneliness is common in families and marriages. Therapists often see clients who

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[2] It would appear friendship and intimacy is threatened. According to Reuters, 'Americans' circle of close friends is shrinking' CNN News, http://www.cnn.com/206/HEALTH/06/23/friends.health.reut/index.html (24 June 2006). A new report by Duke University Professor Smith-Lovin to be published soon in the *American Sociological Review* indicates that people are more socially isolated than they were twenty years ago. Close circles of friends are shrinking and there is an alarming drop in the number of close friends since 1985. Part of the cause might be working more, marrying later, having fewer children and commuting longer distances. The data also shows the social isolation tends to mirror other class divides. Non-whites and people with less education tend to have smaller social networks than white Americans and the highly educated. Social isolation is a real worry and means that in daily life, in personal emergencies and in national disasters there are fewer personal friends to call for advice and assistance.

[3] Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship,* 26.

[4] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975), 14.

live with an illusion of love and intimacy while the reality is that no one is truly open and intimate with anyone else.[5]

Friendship can teach human beings how to care and to learn how to care again. Care is a characteristic of being fully human. That knowledge and ability is being lost. One reason for needing to learn how to care is the devaluation of care by our culture. Caring has been defined as women's work and is seen as something women naturally do. It follows that if care is devalued, women as carers are devalued, too. Another problem with care as it is now understood is the rise of a class of professional carers who earn their living by serving and caring for others. These professional carers frequently convey the attitude to non-professional carers that they lack the knowledge and skills to care. For centuries care came from the community. With the disabling of non-professional carers by the professionals, the service economy destroys communities where people recognize and meet each other's needs.[6]

Friendships are great opportunities for self-awareness. Friendship is often about mutual discovery about what matters most in life. Being in relationships is fundamental to being human. Being human happens through relationship while self-awareness originates within the matrix of mutual recognition that begins in infancy. However over time images can crowd out self-awareness, define reality and become traps that drain life from human beings. Friendships bring the strength and freedom to choose to stop living life as a pantomime and open up life to a new path towards meaning and purpose. Friendships can help those who are addicted to particular images of themselves discover who they really are and who they are truly called to

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[5] Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 2nd ed., 1982), 74-77 and Marion F. Solomon, *Narcissism and Intimacy: Love and Marriage in an Age of Confusion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), 11.

[6] John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 39-43 and Francesca M. Cancian and Stacey J. Oliker, *Caring and Gender,* The Gender Lens (Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press, 2000). 49.

be.[7] Otherwise people who live all their lives with masks over their faces, encounter extreme loneliness and are vulnerable to all sorts of addictive behaviours in order to keep themselves propped up.

True friendship allows for change. Social and cultural roles that focus on families, communities and nation can hide structures which are oppressive, especially for women and other groups defined by their differences. Finding a friend who asks the same questions about those areas of lives where one's identity is defined by particular social attachments is often the beginning of an important transformation. Friends give one the strength to resist the pressures of conforming to communal norms that deny self identity, reducing human beings to property or objects, what Luce Irigaray identifies as 'cultural cannibalism'.[8] From a systemic point of view, true friendships give the strength to break free from the destructive cultural ideologies that regulate human beings but are not necessarily morally legitimate.[9]

Finally friendship matters because it is one of the few relationships left that fosters respect. All friendships imply a certain degree of likeness between friends, a package of common interests, opinions and beliefs. However, that is not enough to account for the development of friendship between two human beings. Human beings can never be rational enough to know all the reasons for wanting to be friends with another.[10] Psychologists know the power of the unconscious and its ability to know something about the other that is already present, as well as its ability to know what the other is

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[7] See Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryl Mahrer Kaplan (eds.), *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Anne Borrowdale, *Distorted Images: Christian Attitudes to Women, Men and Sex* (London: SPCK, 1991) and Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage Books, 1991).

[8] Penelope Deutscher, 'Mourning the Other, Cultural Cannibalism and the Politics of Friendship (Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray)', *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10, no. 3 (1998), 162.

[9] See Ester R. Shapiro, *Grief as a Family Process: A Developmental Approach to Clinical Practice* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994), 126, 134-135, for an understanding of *homeostasis* and the resistance to change in families and communities.

[10] Steve Duck, *Friends for Life: The Psychology of Personal Relationships,* 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 27-40.

capable of becoming.[11] The unconscious is respectful of the other's potential and as a friendship grows the respect manifests itself in a generosity which gives the other the space to assume responsibility for transformation, even if it means the conscious reasons for the friendship change and that there might be fewer interests held in common.[12]

I shall now expand the brief sketches of friendship. To recognise the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship, to understand intimacy, to learn to care, to discover human potential, to expose images and masks, to accept loss, to anticipate new life afterwards while not being afraid of change are reasons why friendship is important for human flourishing. Friendship is a vocation for all of us.

Friendship and the Development of Healthy Relationships

The need for healthy relationships is fundamental for all human beings. Without them human beings cannot grow and develop. It is a longing that emerges very early on in the life of a child and are as important as the impulses that come from feeling hungry and thirsty. Human beings will go to great lengths to find relationships even if it means entering into some that are not life-enhancing.[13] The first relationship between a child and a carer is the one that starts the child on the growth journey. When there is a bond of trust between the carer and the child, there will be a movement towards growth.

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[11] Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship,* 28. See Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1977), 149, who believes friendships flourish when self-identity is fragmented , which tends to occur in times of rapid cultural change or at turning points in individual lives.

[12] Carol S. Becker, *Living and Relating: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1992), 23.

[13] George J. McCall, *et al., Social Relationships* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co, 1970, 116.

In chapter six there will be a more thorough explanation of the importance of the relationship between the infant and carer, but for now it is sufficient to say that there is a scientific basis for understanding infancy as a crucial time for laying the foundation for future relationships.[14] Adult relational health depends on early relationships in which self-esteem is either encouraged or discouraged because of the manner in which human beings reach out to one another. Let it be said now that children are not objects to own and rule over. Neither are friends. However, when children are treated as objects by parents and all adult carers, teachers and others in the helping professions, children cannot develop healthy self-esteem. These relationships affect children at various times throughout their development and influence the confidence they will have to act in the future as a genuine friend to another. Unfortunately it may be easier and more socially acceptable to treat others as objects and allow others to treat them as objects because that is the only kind of relationship they might have known from the beginning of life.

How well children are able to maintain true friendship as adults depends on whether or not they experience friendship in their developmental years.[15] Babies, toddlers, school-age children, and adolescents need to be treated as friends, unique human beings with hidden treasures waiting to be discovered. The attributes of good parenting and good teaching are no different from the attributes of good friendship – knowing when to encourage dependency so healthy independence results, being

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[14] Adrian Furnham, 'Friendship and Personal Development', in Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli (eds.), *The Dialectics of Friendship* (London: Routledge, 1989), 95, and Steve Duck, *Human Relationships* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2nd ed., 1992), 84.

[15] See Edward W. Said and Daniel Barenboim, *Parallels and Paradoxes* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2004), 26, for the story of what society would consider an unlikely friendship between a Palestinian-American and an Argentinian-Israeli. Also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), 99-102.

sensitive to feelings and responding with self-giving love, showing emotions appropriately, especially the constructive use of anger.[16]

Friendships take time, something parents, teachers and others in the caring professions such as ministers, guidance counsellors, social workers and health care workers do not seem to have much of, in the light of all the other demands placed upon their time. But if time is not taken with these formative relationships, healthy relationships will be even more difficult to maintain. Environments will have to be offered where it is acceptable to be dependent so that true independence can be experienced, where it is safe to express feelings, where emotion, especially anger, is not condemned as abuse and where self-esteem is learned and becomes the bedrock for all healthy adult relationships. This kind of environment is especially counter-intuitive to parents and teachers.[17] The Victorian attitude of expecting much and giving little is still a prevalent one in Western societies. The response to that attitude has been an unhealthy self-reliance and pride in being independent in order to hide a lack of self-esteem. Self-esteem acknowledges that independence and dependence are healthy when there is a balance between them.[18]

Healthy relationships like friendship will take into consideration that human beings are not robots, free of feelings and emotions. Certainly the stiff upper lip attitude, self-sufficiency, and avoidant styles that are admired and encouraged in Western society are not helpful for knowing what is really going on inside another human being. These traits should not be thought of as signs of healthy people and healthy ways of relating to others. Healthy relationships allow expression of feelings.[19] Without the

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[16] Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 30-31.
[17] Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on the Family: Growing Up Under Patriarchy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1994), 195.
[18] Bowen, *Family Therapy,* 472-476.
[19] Becker, *Living and Relating,* 156 and Bowen, *Family Therapy,* 250-251.

freedom to tell someone else what is being felt, there is a danger that human beings will not be able to recognise their own feelings.

Healthy relationships are not afraid of negative emotions. Relationships where people are not permitted to express anger or negative feelings can result in an emotional crisis especially when there is a tragic event such as the breakdown of a marriage, a terminal diagnosis or the loss of a loved one.[20] A recent encounter with a father and mother whose only child died suddenly at the age of twenty-five illustrates this claim.[21] The parents' well-meaning friends told them not to feel angry, especially at their daughter. Certainly this couple needed friends at this tragic time of loss but not friends who could not allow them to express the rage and anger they were experiencing and will continue to experience in months to follow because of their loss. To be told they should not feel and express their anger because of their daughter's death is not healthy. Anger is an important part of a healing lament.[22] The response from friends is reminiscent of the Psalmist's cry against his friends:

> My heart is disquieted within me, and the terror of death has fallen upon me… For it was not an open enemy that reviled me, for then I could have borne it; nor was it my adversary that puffed himself up against me, for then I would have hid myself from him. But it was even you, one like myself, my companion and my own familiar friend. (Ps. 55.5, 13-1).

Without the safety net of friends who can tell them that their anger is justified, how will one begin to unburden the weight of grief? Healthy relationships are not to be controlled. The fear of being part of this couple's grief journey compelled their friends to pull away from the risk of being different from what society expected of

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[20] Solomon, *Narcissism and Intimacy,* 77.

[21] In my pastoral counselling I find that the bereaved are relieved of a burden of guilt when I tell them that anger is a natural and healthy response to a loss.

[22] See William Sloane Coffin, 'Alex's Death', in Thomas G. Long and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., (eds.), *A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today's Preacher* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 262-266, for one of the finest sermons on the raw emotions a parent feels when a child dies and the power for healing in them.

them. The misfortune of these kinds of relationships is that mutual affection is destroyed and the additional stress created for the grieving parents compromises their physical and emotional health. Not to be allowed to display their anger within the safe surroundings of friends, who are looked to for comfort, puts them at risk of illness and even using drugs and food to relieve their pain which can lead to addictions.

Friendships, no matter their configuration, are healthy if they honour the developmental needs of human beings, which start at birth and continue until death. Because society is oriented to controlling so many aspects of human life, there is a tendency to control relationships as well.[23] Genuine friendship does not belong in the category of control. Friendship exists to help one another to grow in self-awareness and to affirm that knowledge and acceptance of dependence and independence are two sides of the same coin. Friendship exists to foster mature emotional development, not to avoid it. Friendship exists to build trust between human beings, which is necessary for individuals to live life with integrity.

Friendship and Intimacy

According to Genesis 2.18 God has known from the beginning of creation that it was not good for human beings to be alone. Even though it is one of the greatest human needs, intimacy is difficult to understand and practice.[24] Now there is plenty of scientific evidence available to prove the human need for companionship. Without it human beings walk around slowly starving to death. Intimacy with another nourishes the soul, keeps hope alive, helps bring together the scattered pieces of lives into a

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[23] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 112.
[24] Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 21.

coherent narrative and plumbs with gentleness the mysteries of what it means to be human.

Unfortunately intimacy is difficult in the Western world even though it is compulsively sought.[25] And what human beings are seeking is not necessarily intimacy even if it is thought to be. A major misconception about intimacy is the idea that disclosure of intimate facts constitutes an intimate relationship. Intimacy should not be equated with the disclosure of personal facts.[26] In fact disclosures of this nature may occur between people who will then decide not to become friends for fear of future betrayal.[27] Intimacy is much more than knowledge of another's deep and dark secrets.

According to Elaine Storkey, 'the conditions in which real intimacy can develop and grow seem to be increasingly absent in the world we inhabit.'[28] Because there are so many barriers to intimacy, friendship might be the last relationship where intimacy is possible. Storkey wrote that friendship is the one relationship in which humans can become childlike. Jesus taught that becoming childlike is the only way to know truly God's kingdom (Mt. 18:4; Lk. 18:17). To be childlike is to be free of the myth of self-sufficiency. Being childlike is essential for intimacy. It should not be confused with childishness, which is immature behaviour, something not necessarily confined to children. Being childlike is an act of remembrance that allows for a way of being in a relationship. To be childlike is to be content with being who one is and not allowing all the cultural myths to destroy that state. To be childlike is to know that one has full dignity and worth from the moment of creation. To be childlike is to be able to

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[25] Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel,* trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1950, 326, said that intimacy is impossible for Western man because he has too much to hide. The German sociologist believed that modernity was the destruction of friendship.

[26] Lynn Jamieson, *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Society (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 170.*

[27] Karen J. Prager, *The Psychology of Intimacy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 19.

[28] Elaine Storkey, *The Search for Intimacy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 21.

befriend that dignity and worth in spite of relationships and circumstances that would undermine and try to destroy it. To be childlike means being unafraid of feelings of helplessness and powerlessness because there is a deep sense of confidence in life and hope in the future. Lastly, to be childlike is to be able to love one's self and others without conditions.[29] Intimacy is unlikely to happen in a relationship if these childlike characteristics are not present.

Immature behaviours, on the other hand, are barriers to intimacy because they are only concerned with self-seeking approaches to living and relating. Childish behaviours are understandable and expected from children but they obstruct adult relationships. Immature adult relationships are entered into with the intention of getting as much from the other as possible without giving anything in return. The relationship is based on a myth of entitlement: 'I am the most important person in the relationship and deserve to have it all'. When the relationship fails to meet these selfish expectations, then the relationship is tossed aside and another person will be sought to meet those insatiable needs.[30] It is only when the relationship is at the centre and not the individual that there is any hope for intimacy.

In addition to immature, self-centred demands there are other personality traits that can jeopardize intimacy. Two of these are either over-detachment or over-attachment. The first comes from inner loneliness and creates even more loneliness in a relationship so that there is no chance of intimate interaction with someone who moves away from the other and inhabits a cocoon to maintain privacy. The other problem is over-attachment, which leads to possessiveness which eventually suffocates the relationship. [31] Both these personality traits destroy intimacy, which is

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[29] Storkey, *The Search for Intimacy,* 113-115.
[30] Prager, *The Psychology of Intimacy,* 23.
[31] Solomon, *Narcissism and Intimacy,* 32-33.

only possible when there is enough space between two people to stay connected but still have enough room to move around and be themselves.

Besides personal obstacles to intimacy, there are cultural ones as well. Consumerism urges human beings to believe that owning things is more important than knowing people. According to Paul Wadell the creed of this materialistic culture is that human identity depends on possessions and not on the wealth of loving relationships. Loving things becomes more central in the lives of human beings than relationships. And when there are relationships they tend to be treated as things, as well – 'something to be bought, used and disposed of' as seen fit'.[32] Friendships that last depend on human beings being able to be content and satisfied with one another. Contentment and satisfaction go against the ethos of materialism, which requires just the opposite. Consequently friendship and intimacy conflict with materialism and consumption, which encourage utilitarian relationships that cannot grow deep roots and produce lasting fruits of faithfulness, commitment and trust.[33] Friendships that are intended to fulfil needs will never nurture human fulfilment and maturity. Friendships can and do grow stale; but even when that happens, friends do not abandon each other but wait patiently for new growth in the relationship.[34] Intimacy in friendship has the capacity to enlarge the lives of one another.

Henri Nouwen calls intimacy the holy ground of friendship.[35] Nouwen's description would imply that intimacy creates a sacred space for transcendence in the relationship. In the construction of the Holy of Holies two cherubim were placed above the ark, facing each other (Ex. 25:20). According to the sages the cherubim were childlike, and it was between the two cherubim that God spoke to Moses.

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[32] Wadell, *Becoming Friends,* 47.
[33] Robert B. Bellah, *et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 117.
[34] Becker, *Living and Relating,* 176.
[35] Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 31.

Jonathan Sacks points out that when human beings face one another in intimacy, like the cherubim, God is speaking.[36] Intimacy requires a face to face relationship. When we open our 'I' to another's 'Thou' – that is where God lives. Intimacy is the joining of true selves, where love and care are spontaneous, genuine and honest and where all the masks are put down.

Friendship and Care

Friendship teaches human beings to care for others and to accept care from others. Without friendship as a teacher, people would not know how to step away from self-centeredness and make the other the focus of concern and love. The challenge to make that kind of sacrifice is difficult and not easily attained in a culture that promotes looking out for the individual. Human beings need care and long to care because care is central to what it means to be a human being. Human beings care for one another because life is important. And the care that nourishes new life occurs in both directions in friendship. Mutual care along with intimacy and mutuality are dimensions of friendship that bring about transformation in human lives.

According to Paul Wadell there are particular lessons of care that occur in friendship.[37] Friends teach friends how to care when they give up time for themselves for their friends, when they make sacrifices on behalf of their friends, when they learn to be patient and to discern which shortcomings to overlook in their friends, when they stand alongside a friend through failures and difficulties no matter the personal cost and when they do not giving up trying to forgive even if a friend has

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[36] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (London: Continuum, 2005), 54.
[37] Wadell, *Becoming Friends,* 68.

committed the greatest wrong in the relationship – betrayal. [38] Care implicates a friend in the joy as well as the pain of someone else's life and has the power to transform.

Mark's story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman illustrates this claim:

> Jesus left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognised. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet. Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syrophoenician, and she begged him to drive the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.' And he said to her, 'For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter' (Mk.7: 24-29).

In this story Jesus and the woman are engaged in mutual care. Although he heals the woman's daughter, Jesus is not the only one doing the caring. The woman cares for him, as well. This story is difficult to interpret because it shows Jesus as less than perfect. He is a person with his own rough edges, which makes him vulnerable and accessible. Biblical scholars have given all sorts of explanation why a loving and perfect Jesus would talk to the woman in the way he did. Some say this is not a story about Jesus but a Markan interpretation to explain the difficulties Jewish Christians had in accepting Gentile Christians.[39] Others attempt to excuse Jesus and say he responded as any Jew would to a Gentile woman, who had just violated his honour by speaking to him.[40] Others say Jesus was only joking with the woman in order to test

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[38] William F. May, 'The Sin Against the Friend: Betrayal', *Cross Currents* 17 (1967), 160.
[39] 'The Syrophoenician Woman (7:24-20)', *Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 9 (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951).
[40] Chad Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 203-204.

her faith.[41] All these explanations merely obscure the unkindness of his response to a woman who is desperate for Jesus to heal her tormented child. In this story Jesus is fully human and still moving towards maturity in his personal life and ministry (Lk. 2:52).

Jesus responds to the woman's request with an insult. She surprises Jesus with her response. Robert Fowler says: 'The woman takes up the figures of speech Jesus uses and turns them against him. In this instance he who lives by the metaphor dies by the metaphor. She bests Jesus in this contest of wits and words'.[42] This pericope follows a familiar pattern in Mark's narrative. Jesus often wants to get away from the public (1:35; 3:313; 4:10; 6:31-32) and goes to 'houses' for that purpose (1:32-33, 36-37, 45; 2:2; 3:7-12, 20; 6:33-34).[43] In this story Jesus retreats to a house in the region of Tyre where the woman finds him. His reply to her request is offensive. He calls her a dog. For the Jews, and possibly for their Semitic neighbours, dogs were unclean. When Jesus refers to the woman as a dog, he not only offends but also says he wants nothing to do with her.[44] A Gentile might expect to hear this sort of language from a Jew, but to hear Jesus saying it is disturbing.

The woman refutes him and presses Jesus further. She admits the children have priority, and then the dogs. Even though she is a Gentile and he is a Jew, she sees beyond that boundary and challenges Jesus, the healer, to act. The location of this story is important for understanding the relationship between them. It follows Jesus' teaching on clean and unclean (Mk. 7:5-7; 13-23). Jesus has admonished the Pharisees

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[41] James A Brooks, *The New American Commentary* vol. 23: Mark (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 121.
[42] Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991), 117.
[43] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* in Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (eds.), *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 297.
[44] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 298.

and the disciples for using Jewish purity laws to keep them from relating to other human beings. He teaches that it is what comes from the person's heart that makes them unclean and not the food. France explains:

> Whereas in English 'heart' tends to connote emotion, in both Hebrew and Greek it conveys equally, and perhaps more strongly, the spiritual and intellectual processes, including the will. It refers to what makes people what they really are, their individuality. It is thus particularly with the heart that a person relates to God, and a purported relationship with God which bypasses the heart is a mockery. It is then the heart, in this sense, which Jesus declares to be unaffected by what comes in from the outside.[45]

The woman, although she could not know what Jesus has been teaching, challenges him to act on what he believes. She is doing to Jesus what he does to his own people. She turns what he says against him just as Jesus turns what the Pharisees say against them (Mk, 7:6). She recognises his true identity and not only wants him to heal her daughter but cares that he is honest about who he is rather than what he is. Jesus' mission as the Messiah cannot be contained to Israel.

Mutual care is not an ideal to be achieved. Mutual care is a way of being with another human being where both are 'continually co-creating each other and the reality they share'.[46] There is good and bad mutual care and it rarely exists without some condescension. According to Steinhoff Smith a model of mutual care with condescension intertwined in it is the one in which there someone actively giving care and another passively receiving it. Condescension protects the one giving the care but frequently isolates the one receiving the care. The most harmful form of condescension is the denial of mutuality.[47] When Jesus dismisses the woman and her

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[45] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 291.
[46] Roy Herndon Steinhoff Smith, *The Mutuality of Care* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999), 23, and Becker, *Living and Relating,* 158 who describes friendship as a 'vulnerable co-creation'.
[47] Steinhoff Smith, *Mutuality of Care,* 22-26 and Sheila Cassidy, *Sharing the Darkness: The Spirituality of Caring* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1988), 58-63.

daughter as dogs, he is condescending and denying them mutuality. It is the woman's response that changes Jesus' mind. Her actions initiate mutual care. She is asking Jesus not to desert her and her daughter. Jesus' authentic identity is pressed to its full extent. He will no longer be held back because of his Jewish roots and grants her request. The Syrophoenician woman assisted Jesus in his healing ministry. The care occurred when both were on the mutually common ground of truthfulness about who they were. Jesus, the healer for all the world and the Syrophoenician woman, a woman who cares deeply for her daughter and understood Jesus' true potential, empowered one another to grow. By the end of the story Jesus and the woman are friends and have brought out the best in each other and helped each other to live fully.[48] In this story Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman had needs and gifts to bring to each other. When each was able to care in ways that assisted and strengthened one another, there was new life for both of them.[49]

Friendship and Self-Awareness

Friendship teaches self-awareness. Friends can see things in another friend that might otherwise go unnoticed. This includes undeveloped talent as well as aspects of personality that one might prefer a friend not to know. Friendship also teaches that human beings are unique and irreplaceable. No two people are exactly alike or equal or worth more than another. Friendship is appreciation for the individuality of each person. Friends depend on the recognition from another friend of that individuality,

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[48] Carter Heyward, *Staying Power: Reflections on Gender, Justice and Compassion* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 97.

[49] See Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For?: Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationship and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 144-151, for the history of care and women's subordination in it. Friedman believes an ethic of care should be liberating for men and women.

which affirms the friend's unique identity.[50] Friends act as mid-wives and help bring forth new life. In the role of a midwife, friends remind each other that all life is an act of liberation beginning at birth, happening throughout life and even through death. Indeed if one were to place friendship in a theological category, it would be part of a theology of creation. By encouraging one another to be true to themselves, friends are helping each other to have a relationship with the image of God within and to bring that image to greater visibility.[51] The act of being fully alive is a glorious way of praising God. In addition, even when friends move away, fail or betray each other, the experience of self-awareness and identity in place can be the beginning of another friendship inside of a human being – friendship with God.

Friends encourage each other to let go of life-draining images and roles imposed on human beings by social and cultural expectations. It is important to face the reality of images and roles in human lives. More often than not they are what human beings believe to be true even though they may be far removed from reality. Images and roles govern behaviour much more than are recognised. According to Kenneth Boulding they have an overwhelming importance in the interpretation of human behaviour and of the dynamics of society.[52] They are also resistant to change because they help to stabilise fragile self-images. Even when a human being receives messages, either outside themselves or from within that challenge the falsehood of an image and role, human impulse is to reject the truth about the image and role as an untruth. Most human beings have no idea of the power that images and roles have on

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[50] Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 209. Brümmer also understands God's love of human beings as 'a supreme appreciation of the individuality of each person', 212.
[51] Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What it Means to be a Christian* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1999), 9, 101.
[52] Kenneth Boulding, *The Image* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1956), 31.

them.[53] Without realising it human beings put themselves at the mercy of false images and roles sometimes at the cost of their lives. Naomi Wolf contends that 'ideal (false) body imagery' is an obsession with women.[54] An example of a false image is the thinness ideal, which is resulting in an epidemic of eating disorders in Western society. Wolf describes how women are starving themselves:

> To share a meal with a young woman of the present generation, you have to be prepared to witness signs of grave illness. You ignore her frantic scanning of the menu, the meticulous way she scrapes the sauce. If she drinks five glasses of water and sucks and chews the ice, you mustn't comment. You look away if she starts to ferret a breadstick in her pocket and ignore her reckless agitation at the appearance of the pastry tray, her long shame-faced absence after the meal, before the coffee. "Are you okay?" "I'm fine." How dare you ask.[55]

The body should be the first place where men and women know freedom. Instead it is labelled with gender discourse.[56] Images and roles can even control friendships. Human beings need to maintain a certain amount of equilibrium in their lives, which images and roles provide. Boulding points out that images and roles function at three levels-conscious, unconscious and subconscious.[57] Only when the conscious and subconscious parts of images and roles become apparent is there hope for the power they hold over human development to be redirected towards positive growth and maturation rather than continued enslavement to an ideal.[58]

The basic structure of the individual image, which is built in early childhood, is not easily laid aside. As an individual grows, the image accommodates the roles that are added to it. Minimal adjustment to the roles is necessary for survival in all societies. By virtue of their importance in society the family, state and church encourage

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[53] Boulding, *The Image,* 8.
[54] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth,* 59.
[55] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth,* 209.
[56] Judith Butler, *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 12.
[57] Boulding, *The Image,* 46-48.
[58] Boulding, *The Image,* 51-54.

individuals to adjust their images and roles to the institutions in which they live and work. Even though there is recognition in the social sciences of the blocks images and roles impose on the discovery by human beings of who they are, adherence to social roles and images is encouraged for the sake of society. Thus quite often either human capacities are sacrificed for the maintenance of them or human beings will sacrifice their own identity and talents for the sake of the approval that comes with specific roles and images. The consequence of the depersonalisation of human beings in favour of roles can be immense, destroying personal identity and personal relationships, leading to human beings feeling more like objects to be acted upon than agents.[59]

Friendship opens new insights of self-awareness and challenges existing norms imposed by roles and images. In the long run roles and images actually cut human beings off from themselves and others. Friendship awakens human beings to reflective consciousness which gives them the power to make choices about roles and images and whether they are life-enhancing or life-impoverishing. Two anecdotes illustrate the power of friendship to release human beings from the bondage of roles and images.

In Western society the image and roles of the patient-doctor relationship are carefully orchestrated. A patient is expected to be passive. In fact the majority of doctors do not want patients who want to have a say in their care or who ask questions. Vergie's story exemplifies the societal image of a patient-doctor relationship. She had an aggressive liver cancer. When she joined the support group, Vergie discovered true friends, who encouraged her assertiveness, which soon became

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[59] Boulding, *The Image,* 79.

an important aspect of her self identity.[60] As a result of this self-discovery Vergie began to take an active part in her cancer treatment, much to the dismay of her Oklahoma oncologist. She made an appointment at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York City to see a leading oncologist who had more experience than her doctor in treating her type of cancer. Vergie learned many new facts about her disease and all the treatments left to her, none of which guaranteed anything except prolonged suffering and expense to the health insurance company. There was no hope of either a cure or remission of the cancer. When she was satisfied that she had learned as much as possible about her disease, Vergie was ready to discuss further treatment with her oncologist in Oklahoma.

Much to Vergie's surprise her oncologist was horrified when she told him that she was not going to continue the chemotherapy which she had learned was ineffective and was only making her weaker. She asked for a referral to hospice care where she would have better pain management, more time to spend with her family and friends, and opportunities to enjoy the time left to her rather than spending it in treatments that left her weak and ill. Frustrated by his patient's decision, the oncologist refused to see her again and would not refer her to hospice care. He was unable to welcome her self-actualization and only wanted a patient who would fit the image and role of a passive and voiceless human being. Vergie lived another year after her oncologist discharged her. She found another doctor who treated her as a friend and welcomed her participation in the treatment. Together they agreed that she would benefit from a milder form of chemotherapy for a short while and then would go into hospice care for pain management until she died. At the time I was teaching a course to medical students on how to relate to the dying patient. I invited Vergie to talk about her

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[60] From 1997-2000 I was a facilitator of a support group for men and women with terminal cancers. Vergie was a member of the group.

experience as a cancer patient and the importance of being treated as a person by a doctor instead of an object. Hopefully she has made a difference for other cancer patients who refuse to participate in a role and image that rob them of their human dignity.

Ann's story is another example of how friendship can expose and undermine the power of roles and images.[61] Ann believed she had a call to ordained ministry, enrolled in seminary after a time testing her vocation with others and began a journey of self-discovery because of her friendships. Two of Ann's professors became good friends, helped her to discover her gifts for ministry and gave her the space to become self-aware, something she had never known before this time. Ann had perfected the images of dutiful daughter, devoted wife and mother and nearly lost her self-identity in those roles. Ann's friends helped her discover her potential and a changed Ann became a threat to her husband.[62] The couple sought help but it was too late. At one of the sessions Ann's husband said that she no longer met his image of what a wife and mother should be. Ann's response was that she was not the Virgin Mary.[63] Her answer revealed that she would not allow herself to be bound by images and roles any longer. Ann declared she was a real person with her own needs, feelings and interests. She had redefined her image and role, which gave her the freedom to become her own person. The redefinition had dire consequences. Her marriage ended and she lost all her social friendships which were in keeping with her husband's

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[61] Ann (the name has been changed) came to me for counselling after her divorce.

[62] Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marital Slavery and Friendship: John Stuart Mills' *The Subjection of Women', Political Theory* 9, no. 2 (1981), 229. Mills believes that male-female equality is essential for friendship in marriage and to the progress of human society.

[63] Bassin, *Representations of Motherhood,* 6-8. See Mary Grey, *Introducing Feminist Images of God,* Introductions in Feminist Theology 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 27, for the limits of the image of motherhood.

achievements and societal expectations.[64] But along the way Ann had discovered true friends who helped her to be herself.

True friendships will conflict with existing social images and roles which can restrain life instead of encouraging its full expression. According to Carter Heyward because people are captivated by playing roles and maintaining images in society as if there were no choice to do otherwise, they have lost themselves as human beings who are connected to others. This loss of self and the other is relational impoverishment or alienation.[65] Friendship gives the space needed for self-awareness and choice. But newly acquired self-awareness does not mean that the roles and images one now wears need to be discarded. Some roles and images will certainly need to be let go; but just as self-awareness brings new freedom to a human being, one can choose to bring new life to former roles and images. Some social scripts can be rewritten without destroying the fabric of society. Hopefully then the fabric of society can be brighter because it is reflecting more of God's image in it.

Friendship and the Strength to Change

Friendship gives strength to identify oppressive and domineering communities, to move away from them and find communities that enrich life. Carter Heyward points out that in a society captivated by false images, power becomes domination over others, leaving many human beings feeling isolated and powerless.[66] Friendship is not accepted as one of the chosen communities in society as are the family,

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[64] Rosemary Blieszner and Rebecca G. Adams, *Adult Friendship,* 71, include research on how friendships between women are often used to maintain the status quo and discourage self-awareness. In my research I would not call these relationships true friendships. They are social relationships.
[65] Carter Heyward, *Touching our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1989), 51-52.
[66] Heyward, *Touching our Strength,* 53.

neighbourhood, school, church and government. It is not thought of as a moral institution as it once was. Instead in the twenty-first century it has been privatised and sentimentalised.[67] Friendship is a private affair for enjoyment and recreation. This is not friendship but mutual self-interest. It has a friend-like characteristic but can end up being a complete fusion of wills.[68] Where there is fusion in friendship, there is no space to think and to change.

Marilyn Friedman says about true friendship: 'Friendship has socially disruptive possibilities, for out of the unconventional living which it helps to sustain there often arise influential forces for social change'.[69] This is especially true for women, as Ann's story illustrates. When feminists raise women's consciousness about the exploitation embedded in the ascribed roles of hierarchical societies, women begin to make their own choices and move out of their given communities to find new ones where they can explore their own needs, desires and potential. Janice Raymond identifies the social changes that occur with true female friendships: the awakening of hope of new life; knowing the difference between the old and the new - from what one was to what one is now; being responsible intellectually and financially; identifying when there is oppression and who is the oppressor, becoming politically involved in the world community, discerning which part of the world community to join and changing that which is unjust. [70]

Friendship gives the freedom to change because it gives permission to mourn. Elizabeth Stuart describes it as 'the movement of mourning', a process of being

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[67] Digby Anderson, *Losing Friends* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2002), 171.
[68] Montaigne, *Essays,* 93, 'Complete fusion of wills' is Montaigne's description of a perfect friendship. I believe there should not be fusion or enmeshment in friendship but the space and freedom for new life to grow and flourish.
[69] Marilyn Friedman, 'Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community', in Neera Kapur Badhwar (ed.), *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 298.
[70] Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), 200.

connected and pulled apart.[71] In mourning the term 'closure' betrays an obsession in Western society to control change. It is one of the most commonly used words in recent years, indicating that whatever the problems are, there is a solution, preferably either a technical or organisational one, because human beings despise living with uncertainty. The kind of change that requires struggling with loss, letting go and moving towards new life is not easy but is a necessary part of living true friendship with meaning and purpose. It is a struggle, sometimes chaotic and lonely, 'even waiting in hell' according to Stuart.[72] But with genuine friendship there is the strength to go through the struggle because the promise of new life, which is the power of God's continual presence, gives strength. Friendship can make change a time for grace, allowing for the transformation to be a time of joy and surprise even in the midst of pain. Luce Irigrary's words, 'Be what you are becoming, without clinging to what you might have been, what you might yet be', explain beautifully this gift of strength to change in friendship.[73]

Friendship and Respect

One of the deepest of all human desires is to be respected as a beloved person by others no matter what one's imperfections might be. Human beings respect one another by taking the time to know all the complex and unpredictable sides of the other. In a culture where time is money, friendship can become a valueless endeavour. There are no monetary rewards for spending time with a friend – staying by a friend's side while she is receiving chemotherapy, holding a friend's hand in the

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[71] Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 4-18, 55.
[72] Stuart, *Just Good Friends,* 10.
[73] Quoted in Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 248.

middle of the night as he lies dying, delivering groceries and paying the rent secretly when a friend is without a job or having lunch with a friend whose alcoholism has destroyed all her other friendships and made her the subject of their gossip. The list is endless of things friends will do for friends without expecting anything in return.[74] Friendship does not operate on profitability or reciprocity. The value of friendship is the hope of new life it brings to others. That is priceless.

Another way friendship exhibits respect is to make the other feel seen. Respect (as the derivation of the word implies) generates a positive interaction between human beings which produces the realisation that each is being seen. Nathaniel Branden calls this the principle of psychological visibility.[75] So often human beings see each other as a means to an end, as something that serves another's aims rather than people who help bring more life. Human beings can only know who they are because of their relationships with others, which in turn helps each find the true mirror for perceiving who they really are.

How visible one human being is to another obviously varies. However, all interaction between people produces a sense of either being visible or invisible or something between the two. Even a conversation with the check-out clerk in the grocery store involves a marginal amount of visible interaction. But in friendship above all other relationships there is a profound degree of mutual visibility in which one human being encounters the other and in the process encounters one's self.

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[74] See Lawrance A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 190-197.
[75] Nathaniel Branden, 'Love and Psychological Visibility', in Badhwar (ed.) *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, 67.

Conclusion: Friendship Matters

Before he was condemned to death for heresy and sedition by the Athenian court, Socrates proclaimed that an unexamined life is not worth living. Socrates believed that being denied the opportunity to find the truth and search for wisdom, both essential for growth, destroyed all the purpose and meaning for living. True friendship is the relationship that risks looking at the unexamined life. It requires that two persons be in relationships that are healthy, intimate, caring, open to change and unafraid of self-knowledge. Friendship matters because it desires happiness and human flourishing, the reason God created the world. In a world of increasing inhumanity and violence, one might wonder if God loves humanity. True friendship assures human beings that God's love is real.

Three

Friendship in the Hebrew Bible

God as the Source of Friendship in Hebrew Thought

Like everything else in Hebrew thought, friendship can be seen as beginning in God, and in God friendship becomes a relationship which transcends the interaction and needs of persons. The work of Martin Buber can help us here. For Buber friendship is the way of access to discovering the character of God. Friendship is God's *dynamis* moving mutually between and among human beings to create life. Friendship between human beings is only possible when there is an 'original relationship to the Godhead'.[1]

The original relationship occurs when a human being turns and returns 'into the way of God and penetrates into the *dynami'*.[2] Penetrating into the power of God has nothing to do with possessing the power of God. Human beings never possess the power of God; God's power possesses human beings. This is only possible when one gives into that power.[3] Furthermore God demands more than simply turning and returning from a human being in the original relationship. God requires total trust, *Emunah*, regardless of circumstances. Anything less than complete trust makes the person turning towards God 'an intruder, charged with power but unfit for the world of God'.[4]

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[1] Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith,* trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951), 26. There are echoes here of Plato's concept of *proton philon.* See page 30.
[2] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 26.
[3] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 27.
[4] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 26.

Correspondingly God responds to a person's turning and returning by turning away from anger at the loss of the original relationship. Buber compares the mutual turning to a conversation between 'partners' (friends) 'in which the one who is infinitely subordinate preserves also a mode of freedom'.[5] The original relationship achieves 'essential stability' because there is 'reciprocity of permanence' or commitment and trust. For Buber reciprocity of permanence 'should become an attitude of life and exist in the actual realm of relationship between two persons'.[6] Ultimately the 'true permanence of the foundations of a person's being derives from true permanence in the fundamental relationship of this person to the Power in which his being originates'.[7] Who God has created one to be, fully and completely, emerges through the original relationship.

Buber points out that Israelites were expected to relate to all those encountered in life with the same genuine mutuality as they knew in the original relationship. Friendship is the participation with others in the power of God's love operating among and between them. The commandment 'to love one's neighbour' (Lev. 19:18b), which Buber notes is usually mistranslated 'to love your neighbour as yourself', means 'conduct thyself in such a way as if it concerned thyself. An attitude is meant and not a feeling'.[8] Grammatically speaking, Buber notes that the command is not to love someone but to direct love to someone (the dative and not the accusative). Thus, the neighbour is not an object of the verb, 'to love'. The one who is to be loved is not necessarily the person who is useful to us, who compensates for our weaknesses or admires our good qualities. Rather it is the *re'ah* – 'the one near by, the near', in the Hebrew Bible, 'first of all one to whom I stand in an immediate

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[5] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 27.
[6] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 29.
[7] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 28.
[8] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 69.

and reciprocal relationship, and this through any kind of situation in life, through community of place, through common nationality, through community of work, through community of effort, *especially also through friendship'*.[9] *'Love thy re'ah* therefore means in our language: be lovingly disposed towards anyone with whom thou hast to do at any time in the course of thy life'.[10]

With God there is no difference between love and the action of love. And to love Him with the complete feeling of love can be commanded for it means nothing more than to actualise the existing relationship of faith to Him, as in trust so in love, for both are one. But if a person really loves Him, he is led on by his own feeling to love the one whom He loves; naturally not the sojourner [stranger] only – it merely becomes quite clear in his case what is meant – but every man whom God loves, according as a person becomes aware that He does love him. To the loving attitude towards one's fellow love itself is added here, *awakened by the love to God'*. [11]

Linguistic Evidence

In the Hebrew Bible *re'ah* or a derivation of it is used most often for friend. It can also mean a close associate, brother, male or female companion, fellow, husband, lover, neighbour, and another. Its closest meaning in Greek is *plesios,* near, close by, such as a neighbour. *'Âhab* and *mêrêa'* also mean friend in the sense of companionship. These words are used less often. The Alexandrian translators, who were acquainted with the Greek ideas of friendship, randomly used *philos* in their translation for the three Hebrew words and varied its meaning when it was used. In the Septuagint (LXX) *philos* describes an intimate friend (Deut. 13:6); the friend of

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[9] Buber, Two Faiths, *69 (emphasis added).*
[10] Buber, *Two Faiths,* 70.
[11] Buber, *Two Faiths* ,71-2 (emphasis added).

the house (Prov. 27:10); friends of the bridegroom (1 Mac. 9:39); political supporters (Est. 6:13) and the title, 'King's friend' (1 Chron. 27:33).[12]

Friendship is an important theme in the biblical Wisdom literature. Proverbs and Ben Sira (called 'Ecclesiasticus' in the Greek translation) have numerous sayings about the joys and tragedies of friendship. In Proverbs friends and kin are juxtaposed: 'a friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity' (17:17); 'some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin' (18:24). There is a warning about friends and wealth. Prosperity attracts untrustworthy friends, 'many seek the favour of the generous, and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts (19:6). And even though they might hurt, truthful words from a friend are to be treasured, 'well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts' (27:6).

Ben Sira devotes almost half of chapter six to friendship. He advises care in choosing friends for the sake of maintaining respectability in social relationships and praises the priceless value of faithful friends:

Pleasant speech multiplies friends,
  and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies.
Let those who are friendly with you be many,
  but let your advisers be one in a thousand.
When you gain friends, gain them through testing,
  and do not trust them hastily.
For there are friends who are such when it suits them,
  but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.
And there are friends who change into enemies,
  and tell of your quarrel to your disgrace.
And there are friends who sit at your table,
  but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.
When you are prosperous, they become your second self,

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[12] Gustav Stählin, 'φιλος' in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. IX (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 154.

and lord it over your servants;
But if you are brought low, they turn against you,
and hide themselves from you.
Keep away from your enemies,
and be on guard with your friends.
Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter:
whoever finds one has found a treasure.
Faithful friends are beyond price;
no amount can balance their worth.
Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;
and those who fear the Lord will find them (6:5-16).

Ben Sira gives more advice in other verses. Old friends are not to be forsaken: 'Do not abandon old friends, for new ones cannot equal them' (9:10). 'Only a fool admits having no friends' (20:16). Reconciliation is always possible between true friends: 'Even if you draw your sword against a friend, do not despair, for there is a way back. 'If you open your mouth against your friend, do not worry, for reconciliation is possible' (22: 21-22). Friends also help one another behave properly: 'Be ashamed…of unjust dealing, before your partner or your friend' (41:18).

Warnings about betrayal and friendship come from the psalmist and the prophets. Psalm 55 observes: 'But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company' who betrays (v.13). Jeremiah and Micah add to the complaints about slandering friends. Jeremiah distrusts friends and kin: 'Beware of your friends, and put no trust in any of your kin; for all your kin are supplanters, and every friend goes around like a slanderer' (9:4). Micah echoes Jeremiah's suspicion: 'Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one' (7:5a). This negative attitude is common among people who have been stung and wounded by the betrayal of friends.

Friendship and Wisdom Theology

Friendship is used metaphorically in the Wisdom of Solomon to create an image of God befriending the world through wisdom. Wisdom is 'an unfailing treasure for mortals; those who get it obtain friendship with God' (7:14). 'In every generation she (*Hokmah* in Hebrew, *Sophia* in Greek) passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets' (7:27). For the first time in the Hebrew Bible God relates differently to human beings. According to Gerhard von Rad:

> Wisdom is truly the form in which Jahweh's will and his accompanying of man (i.e. his salvation) approaches man. ...the most important thing is that wisdom does not turn towards man in the shape of an 'It', teaching, guidance, salvation or the like, but of a person, a summoning 'I'. So wisdom is truly the form in which Jahweh makes himself present and in which he wishes to be sought by man'.[13]

In other words, God reveals God's self through the befriending and life-giving actions of human beings. God remains hidden but exercises providential control through righteous (caring, merciful, benevolent) and responsible actions of people towards one another. Wisdom friendship breathes 'the power of God' (7:25), images 'God's goodness' (7:26) and 'renews all things' (7:27).

Old Testament Stories of Friendship

Jonathan and David

The Old Testament has two famous stories of friendship: Jonathan and David and, before them, Ruth and Naomi. Both are exceptional because they give precedence to

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[13] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions,* trans. D.M.G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 444. See Elizabeth Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

relationships outside kinship. The story of Jonathan and David is an epic tale of passionate, perfect and pure friendship between two men who loved each other and remained loyal and trustworthy to each other even beyond death. Jonathan loved David from the moment he heard David speak to King Saul, Jonathan's father. Jonathan 'was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul' (1 Sam. 18:1). They made a covenant of their friendship and Jonathan gave David his robe, sword, bow and belt (18:4).

Saul, Jonathan and David were great warriors. However it was not long before David's fame as a soldier far surpassed even that of Saul and Jonathan's. Saul became envious, suspicious and even afraid of David. He told Jonathan and his servants of his intentions to kill David. Jonathan intervened and convinced his father he should not kill an innocent person. Saul listened to Jonathan and invited David back to his house. But Saul's evil intentions towards David surfaced again. Jonathan continued to risk his life for David's because 'he loved David as he loved his own life' (20:17). Their friendship overrode all other loyalties.

Saul's jealousy of David consumed him, and soon Jonathan realised his friend would have to flee in order to stay alive. Jonathan was overwhelmed with sorrow. After making sure that Saul and his men would not ambush them, Jonathan and David met to say goodbye; it would be the last time they would see each other:

> As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever" (20:41-42).

Saul and his warriors relentlessly and ruthlessly pursued David. David and Jonathan never met again. Saul and Jonathan died in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. When David heard of their deaths, he movingly lamented their tragic end:

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions…
How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places,
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women (2 Sam. 1:23-26).

After Jonathan's death David did not forget the covenant of friendship between them. When he became king, he invited Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, to eat at his own table and returned his grandfather's land to him.

The ties of friendship between Jonathan and David were stronger than any loyalty to family. A friendship like the one between Jonathan and David depended on the 'willingness of each man to give for that which is received, to forgo self-interest and to convert separate identities into togetherness'.[14] In ancient cultures the most splendid occasion for the demonstration of that kind of friendship was the funerary lament at the death of one of them.[15] David's lament was the public sign of the bond

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[14] Robert Brain, *Friends and Lovers* (London: Hart-David, MacGibbon, 1976), 28.
[15] Brain, *Friends and Lovers,* 29.

of love between him and Jonathan and brings to mind Achilles' display of grief for Patroclus (page 13).

David showed commitment and respect to Jonathan by not killing Saul. David spared Saul's life two times and chose exile rather than dishonour his and Jonathan's loyalty and integrity. During the sixteen months he lived as a fugitive in Gath, the Philistines were suspicious of David's loyalties to Saul and would not allow him into battle against the king of Israel (28:1-2; 29:1-11). His respect for the office of the king was as much a sign of respect for Jonathan as it was for Saul. If it had been necessary, David would have sacrificed his life for Jonathan. These men were warriors with the conviction that each would do whatever was necessary for the good of the other, including dying. The essence of their friendship was selflessness.

Historically, the story of Jonathan and David's friendship is difficult to prove. Recently it has been suggested that the covenant between them was only political, and Jonathan functioned as a mediator between Saul and David. Jonathan's handing over of his royal armour and sword to David is viewed as an abdication of his right to the throne.[16] The other issue is whether David's lament implies a sexual relationship between the two men. It is important to keep in mind the narrative's specific function as a royal history. Within that genre the story of Jonathan and David is better understood as an ideal relationship with 'personal integrity, the love of God, an insistence on benevolent actions and speech, the praise of beauty, self-control, bravery and purity' as its primary foci.[17]

Ruth and Naomi

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[16] P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel,* The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 77.
[17] Brain, *Friends and Lovers,* 30.

One plausible reading but not the only reading of Ruth and Naomi is a story of friendship. The narrative lacks the epic grandeur of Jonathan and David's friendship. Some contend the story is not an account of friendship.[18] It has had many interpretations: a protest against the postexilic ban on marriage between Jews and foreigners, an emphasis on 'levirate marriage', a legitimation of David and his monarchy, a conversion story for proselytes, a lesson for women on obedient self-sacrifice and family loyalty, an explanation of boundaries, fertility and lineage and most recently a story of friendship.[19]

The writer of the book of Ruth locates the story in the time of the Judges: 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 21:25). The concluding verse of Judges sits in stark contrast to what follows in the book of Ruth. The nature of Israelite society presented in the book of Judges is one of upheaval: populations being forced to relocate after major destruction of settlements and warfare between Israelite tribes as well as warfare with the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites and Jebusites. The Israelites are not acting as covenantal partners with God and their unfaithfulness threatens their survival. By the end of the book the injustice, cruelty and arrogance of warfare even threatens to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:17).

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[18] See D.R.G. Beattie, *Jewish Exegesis of the Book of Ruth,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 2 (Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1977) for some of the earliest descriptive commentaries from the Targum on Ruth and the Midrash Rabbah that expand the story to more than twice its original length. Most recently David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), insists that Ruth is nothing more than a 'tale of eroticism, procreation and agricultural fertility', 13.

[19] See Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 7, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975); David Biale, *Eros and Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (eds.), *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Story* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994); Ellen van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi,* trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1997); and Joan D. Chittister, *The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Women's Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

With political and economic chaos on the home front, Elimelech relocates his family from Bethlehem to Moab. The family's move to Moabite territory would not have been considered unusual. The Israelites were known to migrate to Egypt or Moab when there was not enough food to support them (Gen. 12:10, 26:1, 37-50 and II Kings 8:1). Moab was closer than Egypt for a family travelling with two children. On a clear day the hills of northern Moab are visible from Bethlehem. Elimelech and his wife Naomi would not have moved the family from Judah to an entirely hostile place. They leave to find a new life.

Historically there had been an ongoing love/hate relationship between Israel and Moab, but the precise dating of their political ups and downs is speculative. According to the Hebrew Bible, Moab's history begins with the story of Lot's seduction by his daughters that resulted in the birth of two sons, Moab and Ben-ammi (Gen. 19:30-38). When the Israelites arrive in Moabite territory after their escape from the Egyptians, King Balak of Moab commands the prophet Balaam to curse their arrival (Num. 22-24). Balaam blesses them instead. From time to time in the biblical narrative (Genesis to 2 Kings) political and religious conflicts erupt between them. In the book of Judges there is the story of Ehud, the Benjaminite, assassinating Eglon, the king of Moab, who had occupied the Israelite 'city of palm trees'. After murdering the Moabite king, Ehud leads his countrymen the same day into battle against the Moabites and kills ten thousand men (Judges 3:12-30). When the conflict stops, they intermarry and live together in peace. David even sends his parents to the Moabite king for protection (I Sam. 22:3-4). And the Ruth genealogy (Ruth 4:18-22), an appendix to the story and possibly an extraction from Chronicles (I Chron. 2:5, 9-15),

still persists and served a cultural purpose for the creation of the Israelite nation under King David, the Moabitess' great-grandson (4:17).[20]

The social and historical setting of the story of Ruth and Naomi reflects a culture in the process of change. Transitions involve struggles that deeply affect all aspects of personal, social, economic, religious and political life. As mentioned earlier friendship plays an important role in times of change. It is not surprising that between Israel's premonarchic and monarchic narrative, a story of friendship is crafted to set forth the virtue needed for Israel's transforming journey from tribal enclaves to a nation. The story portrays friendship as a prophetic relationship that enables two women and a man to learn new ways of relating to one another.

The Story Analysed

> Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me (1:11-14).

Naomi is right to say it is far more bitter for her. She sees nothing but an empty future. A tearful Orpah kisses Naomi good-bye and begins her journey back to Moab, but Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law. She holds tight or clings to Naomi. In Hebrew the word is *dabaq* – to cling, hold tight, be close or cleave.[21] In Genesis 2:24 it refers to the closeness between a married couple: 'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife, and the two become one!' The

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[20] Campbell, *Ruth, AB,* 173.

[21] Campbell, *Ruth, AB,* 72. Campbell points out that a different verb is used to translate *dabaq* in chapter 2:8, 21 and 23, which implies that there was a special meaning to the Hebrew word in 1:14.

sexual connotation is clear in the Genesis text. However, in Proverbs 18:24 it describes the nature of close friendships: 'Some companions are good only for idle talk, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother'. According to Ellen van Wolde physical closeness underlies the idea of *dabaq*.[22]

At this moment in the story Ruth does something extraordinary. She becomes the loyal friend to Naomi. She does not allow Naomi out of her sight. Whatever Naomi says to convince Ruth to go with Orpah back to Moab, falls on deaf ears. Ruth is determined:

> Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you' (1:16-17)!

According to Danna Fewell and David Gunn, Naomi 'turned on the Jordan Road and started to walk, aware of the *shadow* moving along beside her'.[23] Ruth's words are a passionate affirmation of her commitment of friendship to Naomi. Ruth sees Naomi's needs and acts. Ruth's response is a deeply humane one. Her determination to keep both of them alive and well is the energetic force behind her words.

The two women journey to Bethlehem, and their arrival stirs up a commotion in the town. A group of women greet them and say to Naomi, 'Is this Naomi'? (1:19). Naomi responds:

> Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? (1:21).

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[22] Van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi,* 20.
[23] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 29.

Naomi's words are a lament. They allow her a place in the community and establish an identity different from the one she had when she left ten years earlier. Naomi knows life is not the same for her, and she shares her pain with those who have come to greet her. Naomi tasted grief and it is bitter. Ten years have changed Naomi. Ruth is not the only foreigner coming to Bethlehem. Naomi is different, as well.

Naomi seems to ignore Ruth when they arrive, but it is not likely that the community would have done the same. Hospitality in ancient times was an obligation for the entire community. Once established in Bethlehem, Ruth takes the initiative to provide for the two of them. She tells Naomi: 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain behind someone in whose sight I may find favour' (2:2).

A new and important character is now introduced called Boaz. He is a kinsman of Elimelech. The part of the field Ruth hopes to glean belongs to Boaz. He arrives and greets the reapers: 'The Lord be with you'; and they answer, 'The Lord bless you' (2:4). The greeting is standard and does not denote God's presence in particular, but it communicates Boaz's social standing in the community.[24] Boaz is a prominent, rich man. He sees Ruth and asks his overseer, 'To whom does this young woman belong' (2:5)? He tells Boaz that she is the Moabite who has come with Naomi from Moab (2:6).

The Hebrew text implies that Ruth has been waiting since morning to ask permission to glean.[25] Boaz allows her to stay and suggests she stays close (*dabaq)* to the young women working for him. He appears to be concerned for her safety, and has ordered the young men in the field not to bother her. As an expression of gratitude Ruth falls to her knees and bows before Boaz (Gen. 48:12; 2 Kgs. 4:37). Ruth also

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[24] Tod Linafelt, 'Ruth' in David W. Cotter, OSB (ed.), *Beit Olan: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 25.
[25] Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation,* The John Hopkins Near Eastern Studies (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1979), 47.

presses Boaz for more information. She asks him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight' (2:10)? The Hebrew word for 'why' (*maddûa'*) is specific and suggests Ruth wants to know the true reason for all the attention he is giving to someone whom ordinary convention dictates he ignore.[26] To question Boaz's motivation takes a lot of courage. He replies: 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before' (2:11).

Boaz's answer is ambiguous; he avoids answering her question, and thus creates a tense energy in the relationship. Perhaps Boaz's initial question to Ruth is motivated by his desire for her. The use of the word *na'ărâ*, the feminine form of the word for a young woman of marriageable age is revealing (e.g. Gen.24:14, 16; Deut. 22:15,16; 1 Kgs. 1:3,4; Esth. 2:4,7). It has explicit association with sexuality in Judges 19 and Amos 2:7.[27] Sexual motives might lie in Boaz's instructions to the young men not to molest Ruth (2:9). The overseer's emphasis on Ruth's Moabite roots may also be a reference to a 'stereotyped view of Moabite women as sexually available and even aggressive'![28] Because of this, it is not unreasonable to make the connection.

Later rabbis used the text to protect women from sexual assaults. A twelfth century rabbi commented:

> After [Boaz] said to her, 'Do not glean in another field,' what need was there for him to say, 'and do not go away from here'? The text says this because he said to her, 'Do not go to glean in another field so that you will not be molested in another field, for it is a disgraceful and abhorrent thing for a woman to be molested by young men.' In case you should think, 'Even here Boaz's men may molest me,' it is said 'Thus

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[26] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 36.
[27] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 31.
[28] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 31.

you shall stay close to my young women and I have commanded my young men not to touch you'.[29]

Some commentators prefer to avoid the sexualization of the relationship and portray Boaz's motivations as only altruistic.[30] Others face the issue squarely.[31]

Just as Naomi did earlier, Boaz distances himself from Ruth in a blessing:

May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge (2:12).

Ruth replies:

May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants (2:13).

The interchange between Boaz and Ruth has double meanings. 'Under whose wing you have come for refuge' is found in the Psalms (17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4) and is a familiar metaphor for God's care. Boaz uses it to invoke God's protection for Ruth. The word *kānāp* also means the skirt of a garment (1 Sam. 15:27; 24:5) or euphemistically male genitals (Deut 22:30; 27:20).[32]

Because of the ambiguity in Hebrew, Ruth's response can be understood on different levels. She thanks Boaz for his generosity and lets him know that she knows he desires her. The idiom 'to speak kindly' or 'to speak to the heart' occurs nine times in the Hebrew Bible and three of them mean 'to woo' or 'to entice' a woman (Gen. 34:3; Judg 19:3 and Hos 2:16).[33] Ruth tells Boaz she understands he is using

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[29] D.R.G. Beattie, *Jewish Exegesis of the Book of Ruth,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 2 (Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1977), 122.
[30] See Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth,* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988) and Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth,* The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1997).
[31] See Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* Linafelt, 'Ruth' and van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi*
[32] Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary,* 60.
[33] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 37.

speech to affect her emotions and actions.[34] Campbell believes Ruth's words probably left Boaz speechless.[35]

Boaz is kind to Ruth, but one wonders what motivates this kindness. If it is pleasure, that is one form of friendship. But friendship based only on pleasure rarely leads to friendship that cares about the well-being of another person. Aristotle points out that usefulness and pleasure are common reasons for forming a friendship. He also knew neither of these motives leads to a lasting friendship. As soon as one friend is no longer useful or pleasant to the other, the friendship dissolves.

Boaz invites Ruth to eat with the workers. He gives her bread, sour wine and roast grain. The roast grain is a delicacy.[36] After the meal Boaz orders his workers to allow Ruth to glean among the sheaves, a place where she has no right to be as a foreigner. Boaz instructs the young men 'to pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles and leave them for her to glean…' (2:16). Boaz's order demonstrates his desire to keep Ruth in his field. Ruth works until dark. When she finishes her day's work, Ruth carries home between thirty and fifty pounds of barley, enough food for several weeks.[37]

Ruth shows Naomi the grain and shares the leftovers from her lunch with her. Naomi wants to know where Ruth gleaned. Before Ruth can tell her, Naomi invokes a blessing on the man 'who took notice' of Ruth (2:19). Naomi knows a man has paid special attention to Ruth because a gleaner working in a stranger's field does not come home with cooked food.[38] Ruth tells Naomi she has been working in Boaz's field. Naomi responds with another blessing. Now Naomi is certain Ruth's good fortune is a sign of God's loyalty to them and their dead husbands: 'Blessed be he by

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[34] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 132.
[35] Campbell, *Ruth, AB,* 102.
[36] Nielsen, *Ruth, 61.*
[37] Sasson, *Ruth,* 57.
[38] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 41.

the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead! The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin' (2:20).

Ruth tells Naomi: '"He even said to me, 'Stick to (*dabaq*) my young men until they have finished all my harvest'" (2:21). She misquotes Boaz who had told her to stay close to the young women. Fewell and Gunn believe Ruth does this deliberately, either to shame Naomi for not warning her of the danger of working in a field or to imply she could marry a field hand.[39] Ruth possibly sends a message to her mother-in-law that she will not be used by Naomi. What is going on in this conversation?

Naomi did not need Ruth to come to Bethlehem with her. Ruth might have helped Naomi if she were able to marry and have a son to keep the family name alive. However, Israelite law prohibited Israelites from marrying Moabites. Naomi would have known the law and this is probably the reason she told Orpah and Ruth to go home (1:12). Now that Boaz is in the picture, Naomi's relationship with Ruth suddenly changes. She calls Ruth her daughter (3:22). She also knows Boaz's generosity to Ruth says more about what is going on than Ruth's words do. Naomi knows she would not be eating roast grain for supper if Boaz were not interested in Ruth.

Phyllis Trible writes, 'Slowly the bitterness of an old woman is being transformed'.[40] But ambiguity remains in the relationship because the narrator insists on mentioning Ruth's Moabite roots again (3:21), which raises a question about Naomi's motive. What does Ruth's inclusion in the family mean to Naomi? Is Ruth only useful for producing a child to keep a dead man's name alive (3: 20) or is Naomi genuinely concerned about Ruth's future well being and security? Fewell and Gunn conclude:

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[39] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 98.
[40] Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* 179.

> The juxtaposition of inclusion and exclusion, like the suddenness of Naomi's concern, suggest that Naomi's feelings about Ruth at this point are ambivalent still – she is uncomfortable about her and yet perceives her to be useful.[41]

Naomi might not have needed Ruth to come to Bethlehem with her before Boaz entered the picture, but now she can see the danger of Ruth 'sticking to' the young men in his field. Like Boaz she suggests that Ruth stay close to the young women. She echoes Boaz's words again when she calls Ruth 'my daughter' (2:22), a word full of meaning: a term of affection, an unequal power relationship or possibly a new identity. Chapter two ends with Ruth returning to Boaz's field and gleaning alongside the young women until the barley and wheat harvests are in.

Ruth's work is finished, and Naomi is worried about *mĕnûhāh,* security. The word denotes security found through marriage.[42] She says to Ruth: 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you' (3:1). Naomi continues, 'Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working' (3:2). Naomi emphasizes Ruth's obedience in staying close to the women gleaners. Naomi's plan for Ruth's future is taking shape. It is the custom to approach a family member who might be interested in marriage when there is an eligible young woman.[43]

Naomi has decided Ruth is eligible to be married to Boaz and that Boaz is interested. Naomi knows Ruth ought to marry Boaz and have children if there is to be any hope for security for Ruth. Naomi also knows the Israelite marriage laws concerning marriage. Naomi has devised a way of getting around the law. She has

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[41] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 77.
[42] Nielsen, *Ruth,* 67.
[43] Nielsen, *Ruth,* 68.

named Ruth her daughter and she has made Boaz a member of the family.[44] Naomi now tells Ruth the plan to approach Boaz and it is dangerous:

> Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do (3:2-4).

Ruth agrees to do everything Naomi tells her. Is this friendship? Dorothy Jerrome's research on the sociological significance of women's friendships throws some light on Naomi's request and Ruth's willingness to carry it out. In her study Jerrome points out the importance to women of maintaining a family's social position and name.[45] Jerrome's research backs up Naomi's exclamation: 'Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead'! (3:20). Naomi is desperate to keep her family's name alive, and Ruth seems to be of the same mind. Here the text suggests a position contrary to friendship which is not surprising. The tension between family and friendship is ageless.

The threshing floor in ancient times is a symbol of fertility. Naomi's decision to send Ruth to the threshing floor has the potential of new life for them and their family. Naomi depends on Ruth to follow her instructions. Ruth's timing is critical: 'When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. The NRSV uses 'contented' but the Hebrew idiom, *yātab lēb,* 'the heart was good' has two meanings: to be drunk and unable to

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[44] Campbell, *Ruth, AB,* 117, points out the different meanings of covenant language in the story. In 3:2 kinsman is understood as 'one of our covenant circle', which describes a closer relationship than the one in 2:20 where Boaz is 'one of our circle of redeemers'. Naomi's language in 3:2 indicates that she has made Boaz a family member. He is no longer a distant relative, what Naomi calls Boaz in 2:20.
[45] Jerrome, 'Good company', 697.

make a good decision or to be vulnerable (1 Sam 25:36; 2 Sam 13:28; Esth 1:10; Judg 19:22)[46] Ruth does not approach Boaz until his 'heart is good'.

'He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain' (3:7). Ruth must know where Boaz is sleeping; she cannot afford to make a mistake. 'Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down' (3:7). Ruth finds Boaz, undresses and lies down at his feet. There is no example in the Hebrew Bible of a woman uncovering a man and only a few examples of men and women uncovering themselves (Gen. 9:21; Ex. 20:26; 2 Sam. 6:20; Lev. 20:18; Isa. 57:8; Ezek. 23:18).[47] Van Wolde points out the Hebrew words are *gillit margelotaw* and mean 'she undresses' (*gillit)* and 'the place of the feet' (*margelotaw).*[48] The only other verse in the Hebrew Bible that comes closest to Ruth uncovering herself is Isa. 57:8 when a woman deserts God and undresses for other lovers. Ruth does what Naomi tells her to do; she undresses herself not Boaz.

At midnight Boaz wakes up. In the Hebrew Bible midnight represents a state of ambiguity or liminality, a time of existing between life and death which eventually demands a decision to go towards one or the other. In the story midnight on the threshing floor becomes a place of danger, mystery and secrecy. Liminality, according to the anthropologist, Victor Turner, is also a place of danger, mystery and secrecy. Turner describes it as 'being in the womb'.[49]

Boaz is startled. He turns over and there 'lying at his feet was a woman' (3:8)! Linafelt argues that 'turns over' does not describe accurately what is happening to Boaz. Boaz is trembling and shuddering with fear as he turns over.[50] He says, 'Who

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[46] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 51.
[47] Nielsen, *Ruth,* 69.
[48] Van Wolde, *Ruth,* 70.
[49] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 95.
[50] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 53.

are you'? and the woman answers, 'I am Ruth, your servant' (3:9a). The word she uses for servant is *'āmâ* and not *šiphâ* as in 2:13. Ruth's choice of *'āmâ* indicates she is eligible for marriage.[51] Naomi told Ruth that Boaz would tell her what to do. Ruth does not follow Naomi's instructions and tells Boaz what to do next: 'Spread your cloak over your servant (she is naked), for you are next-of-kin' (3:9b). Linafelt continues:

> In forcing Boaz to decide what to make of this woman lying at his feet, Ruth is also continuing to push him past his moral and theological platitudes, for we may recall that when they met in the field Boaz praised Ruth for seeking shelter under the Lord's wing (*kānāp*). Her reply then was to address him as 'my lord' (*'ădōnî*) and to wish for future 'favour' in his eyes. By using the word *kānāp* here she makes even more explicit, via a shrewd wordplay, her resolve not to wait around for the Lord but to take a gamble on Boaz and his *kānāp* instead.[52]

Ellen van Wolde has an imaginative perspective on Boaz's thinking on the events on the threshing floor:

> In Boaz's own words: There she lies, so vulnerable. 'Everything valuable is vulnerable.' Who said that? Lucebert, I believe, but it doesn't matter. It expresses precisely what I feel. In everyday life I come up against much harshness. Everyone tries to become richer, to earn even more money, to be even greater, better-off or stronger. Above all are people who can be ruthless in their search for power. I live among these people, I meet them, and I'm often one of them. In the gate where rulers and people in authority are active, in the market where traders and farmers have their say, at home discussing with other business people, only one thing counts: being too clever for the other. I'm used to it: hardness makes me harder, thoroughness makes me more thorough, and cleverness makes me cleverer. But I've never come across someone who is so vulnerable. She confronts me with herself in all her nakedness. And by that I don't mean just the physical attraction that she exerts. That someone dares to offer herself in that way, without any masks, without verbal violence, without status and without being backed up by anyone else, has moved me deeply.

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[51] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 54.
[52] Linafelt, 'Ruth', 55.

It's not that I'm a good person; the word *hesed* doesn't suit me. I'm simply dumbfounded that anyone can act like that in these times. For as everyone knows, these are hard times in which we live. Many people are hungry, few have power and food. It's a hard fight. But here's someone who fights not with hardness but with weakness. She's an alien, someone who doesn't have to have any recognized position in our society. Perhaps it's precisely because she's an alien that she can hold up a mirror to us. That's what a person looks like without a place in society, with no political or social power, no money. She's not afraid to lie there naked, waiting. To dare to show one's weakness is for me the greatest sign of strength. It's much easier to let yourself be seen in your strength or be admired in your beauty, power or status. When I looked into her naked face and saw her unclothed body I knew it: 'An incredible power emanates from this woman.' She won my heart. I'm ready to stand up for her, and through her I'm also able to show my vulnerability.[53]

Boaz recovers his composure and talks to Ruth in his usual manner: 'And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman' (3:11). Boaz reminds Ruth how the community sees her. His comment is important because in reality he has just agreed to marry a Moabite, and Boaz needs the support of the community if he is going to break conventional marriage laws. Unexpectedly Boaz informs Ruth of a nameless 'nearer kinsman' who needs to be asked first to act as next-of-kin before Boaz may assume that role.

Ruth remains with Boaz for the rest of the night and gets up while it is still dark to ensure that no one sees her returning to Naomi. Before she leaves, Boaz gives her six measures of barley to take with her. When she arrives home, Naomi asks, 'How did things go with you, my daughter'? (3:16). Ruth explains 'all that the man had done for her' (3:16) as well as something not said at the threshing floor. Ruth tells Naomi that Boaz has sent the six measures of barley for Naomi. For the second time in the story

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[53] Van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi, 89-90.*

Ruth puts words into Boaz's mouth. Naomi advises patience until Boaz sorts out the matter with the nearer kinsman.

Boaz goes to the heart of the community, the city gate, where he intends to keep his word with Ruth. Boaz is sitting at the gate when he sees the next-of-kin passing by. Boaz calls to him, 'Come over, friend; sit down here' (4:1). Boaz invites ten city elders to join them, as well. Boaz says to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech' (4:3). Boaz has the advantage; he knows what he wants and it soon becomes clear that he knows how to get it. He invites the nearer next-of-kin to buy the land. The response is, 'I will redeem it' (4:4b). Nothing has been mentioned up to this point about Elimelech owning land, so one might wonder whether Boaz is telling the truth or gambling. However, one could speculate that Elimelech expected to return home when he left Bethlehem with his family. He might have abandoned the land during the famine or left it to the care of a family member.

Boaz's response surprises the nearer next-of-kin: 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance' (4:5). Again there is the pull of family, but it is friendship that helps Boaz make the next move. Boaz plays his trump card and luckily wins because there is no law that requires marriage and land redemption to go together.[54] The next of kin says, 'I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance' (4:6). Boaz exposes the next-of-kin's real motivation - land acquisition. The next of kin, who had first rights to redeem the land, believed that Elimelech's land could never be repossessed. Naomi was too old to bear children. It would have been risky to marry Ruth who might bear a son. A son

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[54] Van Wolde, *Ruth*, 97.

would inherit Elimelech's share of property as well as part of the next-of-kin's (Lv.25:25). The deal is off.

The witnesses at the gate respond with a standard marriage blessing full of language about fertility. Boaz and Ruth marry and have a son, Obed, the grandfather of David. The women of Bethlehem congratulate Naomi:

> Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age (4:14-15a).

After they remind Naomi that her life is full again, they speak of Ruth's fullness: For your daughter-in-law who loves you bore him, she who is better for you than seven sons' (4:15b). Seven means fullness or completeness.[55] Naomi takes the child, lays him at her breast and becomes his nurse. Then Naomi disappears, and the men take over. The story concludes with the genealogy of King David. Boaz, the father of Obed, is in the place of fullness in the genealogy, seventh place.

Friendship seems to be lost by the end of the story. Although the story ends with the interest of patriarchy, it does not mean its original purpose had anything to do with royal ancestry. The genealogy was most likely added later because of its importance to David or as a way of making a different point about foreign wives.[56] Feminists are correct to raise questions about some aspects of the story. Vanessa Ochs questions the 'nonhuman perfection of Ruth' and believes the book is too elusive to be about women's friendship or women's survival.[57] She is partly right. It is important to ask whether women's friendships can be concerned with one another's flourishing when they are nourished in oppression. Research shows that men and women's friendships

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[55] Van Wolde, *Ruth,* 115.
[56] Sasson, *Ruth,* 179.
[57] Vanessa L. Ochs, 'Reading Ruth: Where Are the Women'? in Kates and Reimer (eds.), *Reading Ruth*, 297.

will reflect the institutional structures of the culture in which they exist.[58] In Western society where friendships are idealized it is not surprising that friendship in the book of Ruth seems elusive. Friendship operates on two levels in the story. It is a relationship for the social re-integration of Ruth and Naomi at a time of rolelessness. Women's friendships assist in the process of socialisation.[59] On a different level friendship is a transforming relationship for Ruth, Naomi and Boaz because they are committed to discovering and nourishing the good in one another. It is this level of friendship that needs further explanation.

Conclusion: *Hesed* Friendship in the Book of Ruth

In the book of Ruth friendship is *hesed,* extraordinary compassion, generosity and loyalty between human beings, regardless of who they are. *Hesed* does more than respond to the needs of human beings in order to maintain social cohesion; it reaches far beyond those duties and responsibilities towards abundant life. *Hesed* friendship is driven by the divine desire of seeing all human life flourish and grow in the image of God.

In the Hebrew Bible the meaning of *hesed* changes according to the culture in which it finds expression. For example *hesed* in Wisdom literature expects reciprocity. Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible was influenced by Greek philosophy, in particular Greek ideas of friendship which included the concept of reciprocity. In the book of Ruth the understanding of *hesed* is an ideal that developed alongside the pre-monarchic ideals of covenant. It encouraged that all human beings be respected and valued regardless of their social, economic, religious and cultural

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[58] Pat O'Connor, *Friendships between Women,* 177.
[59] Jerrome, 'Good company', 698.

backgrounds and that actions and words towards another human being come as close as possible to God's compassion towards human beings.

In the story Ruth embodies *hesed.* She lives her life with extraordinary compassion, generosity and loyalty. She challenges all the normal responses of care that one expects in the narrative with extra-normal gestures that allow the life of Naomi, Boaz, the community and herself to flourish. Ruth's *hesed* friendship brings Naomi's losses and Boaz's social prominence under God's protective wings and transforms them into exceptional blessings. Ruth, a Moabite, shows how 'human beings can come close to 'matching up the character of being human with the character of God without compromising the difference between God and human beings.[60]

In her study of *hesed,* Katherine Sakenfeld says there is a relationship between divine *hesed* and human *hesed.*[61] When Ruth acts with *hesed,* God responds with more *hesed.* Sakenfeld argues that it is God who causes Ruth to go to the part of the field belonging to Boaz. Ruth's determination to provide for Naomi is an act of *hesed.* God then initiates more *hesed* through a sequence of events, which allow new life to come forth. Sakenfeld believes it is entirely God's *hesed* in relationship to Ruth's in the story.[62] God responds to Ruth's needs, which might not otherwise have been met. Campbell notes there is an ambiguous placement of words in Naomi's blessing (2:20), which raises a question about *hesed*: 'Blessed be he by the Lord, whose *hesed* has not forsaken the living or the dead'! Campbell questions whose *hesed* it is – Boaz's or God's and concludes that it is God's divine *hesed.* He

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[60] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), 453.
[61] Katherine D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry,* Harvard Semitic Monographs 17 (Missoula, Missouri: Scholars Press, 1978), 104-5.
[62] Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed,* 94.

compares Ruth 2:20 to Gen 24:27: 'Blessed be Yahweh, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his trustworthy *hesed* with my master.[63]

According to Sakenfeld *hesed* is possible in three cases: when a person worships God, acts in obedience to God's specific command or does what is 'humanly right against all difficult odds'.[64] God's *hesed* worked alongside Ruth's *hesed* because Ruth risked everything to do what was right in her relationship with Naomi. She dismissed the reasonable and safe because she knows Naomi's needs come before everything else.

Hesed occurs in the story because Ruth acts faithfully in her relationships with Naomi and Boaz. She risks everything to care for Naomi and challenges Boaz to be honest about how he feels towards her and gives him the opportunity to act with integrity in the relationship. Ruth empowers both of them to set aside caution and take risks to be as kind to her as she is to them. The narrator might put words of blessings on the lips of Naomi and Boaz (1:8; 2:20; 2:12; 3:10) in the story, but it is Ruth who creates situations whereby Naomi and Boaz must act on their words. And whenever Naomi and Boaz attempt to put the focus of blessings on God and distance themselves from Ruth and their responsibility to her, Ruth brings them back quickly to the reality of the situation. She does not allow the focus to be anywhere else except on their relationship to one another and their responsibility for bringing new life to each other.

Naomi and Boaz do not extend *hesed* to Ruth.[65] They do obey God's command to offer hospitality to the alien (Lev. 19:34), but that is not *hesed.* Naomi gives Ruth protection and Boaz provides food. But they are unwilling at first to assume responsibility for Ruth. Perhaps they feared disapproval from the community if they extended extraordinary favours to Ruth. Certainly Ruth's Moabite background would

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[63] Campbell, *Ruth, AB*, 106.
[64] Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed,* 106.
[65] Sasson, *Ruth,* 52.

have caused ambivalence for all those who came in contact with her because ambivalence is a natural feeling when foreigners live in the midst of any community.

Friendship does not happen instantly. It is naïve to believe human beings have immediate relationships with one another. However, someone has to make the effort to start a relationship that could possibly become a friendship. Ruth is the person in the story who makes the first gesture of friendship. Ruth, a foreigner, risks friendship with Naomi and Boaz because she 'knows herself to be held securely and to be safe at some deep and essential level beyond [her] power to control'.[66] Her awareness of being securely held, what Buber calls essential stability comes because of reciprocity of permanence, the trust and commitment Ruth knows she has with the life-giving God and which enables her to extend friendship to Naomi and Boaz.

Names are important clues about the friendships between the main characters. In the Hebrew Bible a name represents the deepest desires of the person. Ruth's name means companionship or friendship and comes from the root word, *re ût,* to be saturated. Ruth's name conveys who she is as a human being: a bearer of friendship which saturates others with life. Ruth believes in friendship. Ruth's deepest desire is to be a friend and to have friendships that bring life, to others and to herself. According to Sheldrake desires are who we are as persons. To be in touch with our authentic desires brings us close to God who is at the heart of all human desire. Deepest desires come from the core of a human being. When one is able to know one's deepest desires, one in turn comes closer to an authentic identity. One's deepest desires 'also reflect God's deep longing for the world'.[67]

Naomi's deepest desire is to be joyful, not bitter. Naomi's name change reflects the changes in her life not her deepest desires, which do not change. She needed

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[66] Philip Sheldrake, *Befriending our Desires* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1994), 7-8.
[67] Sheldrake, *Befriending our Desires,* 13-14.

Ruth's friendship to help her reconnect with her deepest desires. Friendship with Ruth restores Naomi's name and joy. Boaz's deepest desire is to be strong and mighty, something he has achieved in the community but not within himself. Boaz's patriarchal, positional power distances him from his deepest desires for long-lasting strength and might. Only when Ruth confronts him on the threshing floor as an equal does Boaz recognise his deepest desire. Boaz's strength and might come from being able to choose to act responsibly towards Ruth in a way that increases his self-esteem and self-awareness. Boaz is not afraid to be vulnerable with Ruth, and because of vulnerability he learns the true meaning of strength and might. Before their encounter, Ruth and Boaz relate to one another from their positions of power and powerlessness which only diminish the personal power that comes through friendship.

Ruth brings Boaz and Naomi the gift of friendship. Without her friendship they were in danger of losing the ability to remember their deepest desires. Without their friendships, her deepest desires would not have been allowed to flourish either. The story of Ruth is a lesson in the true nature of friendship. Friendship is realising the completion of self through what one can give to others and helping others become whole through what they give in return. Without friendship Ruth, Naomi and Boaz would not have moved closer to reaching their full potential as human beings. Without their friendships God's deepest desire to share friendship, joy and strength with human beings would not have been a possibility either.

Four

Friendship with God:
Teresa of Ávila

I have not included many Christian writings on friendship in this study. This does not imply that friendship was an unimportant relationship in early Christianity, because it was. There are several good studies on friendship between the fourth and fifteenth century which I refer to in the footnotes. It is important to remember, however, that the preferred metaphor for Christian relationships came from family images, brothers, sisters, father and son. It was rare for Christians to call one another friends. In the New Testament the word (*philia*) occurs in only two places, Acts 27:3 and III John 15. By the fourth century a few Christians were arguing that friendship was a pagan ideal but most attitudes towards friendship were favourable.[1] Augustine was the first Christian writer to transform the classical concept of friendship.[2] Despite periods of estrangement in his personal life when he had few friends, gradually for Augustine friendships became schools for learning love and leading human beings to the love of God.[3] He believed that friendship was part of human nature: human beings have a capacity for love and need friendships with other human beings. Together friends could enjoy the fullness of friendship with God.[4]

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[1] Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 146-153.
[2] Maria Aquinas McNamara, O.P., *Friendship in Saint Augustine* (Fribourg: University Press, 1958), 196.
[3] Augustine, *The Confessions,* trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, New Jersey: Image Books, 1960), IX:23-27. Also see Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 17.
[4] Donald Burt, O.S.A., 'Friendship and Subordination in Earthly Societies', in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Recent Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 316.

The idea of friendship with God did not originate with Augustine. Christian martyrs, apostles, saints and bishops were identified as friends of God. Other references to friendship with God occurred in the writings of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandra, and Origen. Gregory of Nyssa believed friendship with God would be the reward for his holy life.[5] More common was the collective use of the title friends of God, which was applied to 'just men' and was defined as a dogma of faith by the Council of Trent (1528-1535).[6] In time the members of monastic communities became the new friends of God. Because they had given up the traditional social supports of identity, men and women now had the freedom to participate equally as friends of God.[7]

In his treatise on *Spiritual Friendship,* Aelred, the Cistercian monk and abbot of Rievaulx, wrote that friendship was the best path towards wholeness and redemption.[8] The ultimate goal of friendship was for a man to lay down his life for his friends.[9] He believed that 'nature stamped human minds with the emotion of friendship and then experience increased it and finally the authority of law put it in order'.[10] Although he had no scriptural authority for his statement, Aelred made the statement: 'I do not hesitate at all to ascribe to friendship that which follows from grace, since (as it were) he who abides in friendship abides in God and God in him'. For Aelred 'God is friendship'.[11]

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[5] White, *Christian Friendship*, 170.
[6] J.F. Dedek, 'Friendship with God', *The New Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. VI (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 202.
[7] Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 77. See Elizabeth Clarke, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and translations* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979) and Brian P. McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The monastic experience 350-1250,* Cistercian Studies Series, 95 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1988).
[8] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* trans. Mark F. Williams (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), 46.
[9] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* 48.
[10] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* 38.
[11] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* 40-41.

Slightly more than one hundred years after Aelred wrote *Spiritual Friendship,* the scholastic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, claimed in question 65, article 5 of the *Prima Secundae,* that 'charity signifies not only love of God but also a certain friendship with God'.[12] Thomas insisted that the Christians are called to be friends of God. For him friendship was the 'most accurate and the most helpful way to describe what our life with God is and should be'.[13] Because friendship with God demands the relinquishment of self, Thomas also knew that friendship with God is the most demanding relationship one would ever have with God. For in friendship with God it is possible for a human being to become what God has always wanted for him or her to be. The life and writings of Teresa of Ávila illustrate the demanding relationship of friendship with God. In her lifetime Teresa made a spiritual journey from worldly friendships to friendship with God. It was a struggle for her, but Teresa's life story reveals how she became God's friend and developed all the gifts that God had given her and wanted her to discover and use for the benefit of herself and others.

Teresa of Ávila

Teresa of Ávila had a gift for friendships. She longed for others to know friendship with God as she did and to live lives of friendship. She enjoyed a large circle of friends and interacted with people from all walks of life. Teresa befriended the muleteers who travelled with her and her sisters on trips to found convents. She was acquainted, as well, with the King of Spain, Phillip II and the Father General of the Carmelite Order, Giovanni Battista Rossi or Rubeo. Both men intervened on her

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[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* vol. 2, QQ 1-189, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1527.
[13] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life,* 120.

behalf when she encountered obstacles to her reform work. Teresa believed friendship was the model for the Christian life.

The sixteenth century was a time of religious and social changes. The Reformation, Counter-Reformation and Renaissance were transforming Europe. Teresa grew up in the Spanish city of Ávila which was just beginning a long period of economic and demographic growth. In this atmosphere of rapid and disturbing change, Teresa's friendships sustained, challenged and empowered her to live a flourishing and creative life and inspired others to do likewise.

Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda was born in Avila on 28 March 1515, the daughter of Don Alonso Sánchez y Cepeda and his second wife, Doña Beatriz de Ahumada. Her family identified itself with an aristocratic lineage and had a coat of arms to prove it. Teresa's father was a rich landowner, and her mother came from a noble Old Christian family. In her autobiography Teresa praises her parents' virtue. She remembers her father as being generous to the poor and merciful to the sick. She especially admired his determination not to own slaves. Her mother was equally virtuous. Teresa recalls her remarkable beauty, which 'she never showed the least signs of setting any store by'.[14] She endured a life of ill health. She married Teresa's father when she was fourteen and died when she was thirty-three, giving birth to her tenth child. Teresa was twelve when her mother died.[15]

Teresa's family might have led the life of nobility, but it was haunted by its past. Teresa's paternal grandfather was Jewish. Teresa does not mention this in her autobiography, and her genealogy only came to light in 1947 when an article was

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[14] Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself,* trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 1.2.
[15] *The Life,* 1.7.

published about a lawsuit in 1519 that involved her father and three uncles.[16] Teresa's grandfather, Toledan Juan Sánchez, was a successful *converso* merchant and farmer. He had converted to protect his family and himself from growing religious intolerance by Christians towards Jews. By 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella had issued the Edict of Expulsion, which evicted Jews who did not convert to Christianity from the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Prior to this climax of anti-Jewish feelings, the Inquisition of Toledo had begun looking for *conversos* who might secretly maintain their Jewish faith. Guilty parties were punished harshly. Juan wanted to avoid the Inquisition's brutality and came forward under an Edict of Grace to confess his sins and be punished with less severity. In 1485 he was found guilty of practicing Jewish customs in secret and was publicly beaten. For seven consecutive Fridays he and his sons had to make penitential walks around Toledo churches.[17]

Soon after this humiliation, Juan Sánchez moved to Ávila. By 1493 he had recovered from the social and economic ruin suffered in Toledo and was operating a very prosperous silk and woollen trade. He located his business in Avila's commercial district where Jews had settled in the eleventh century. Few Jews were rich like Juan Sánchez; most were poor artisans and shopkeepers. Teresa's grandfather might have escaped the anti-Jewish persecution he had experienced in Toledo, but he found discrimination in Ávila, as well. By the time he arrived, the Jewish community had lost its rights to its own municipal government and courts and was forced to live in a ghetto. They were banned from banking and forbidden to wear gold and silver jewellery and clothes made from expensive fabrics.[18]

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[16] Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 64-7.
[17] Bilinkoff, *Avila of Saint Teresa,* 109.
[18] Bilinkoff, *Avila of Saint Teresa,* 11-14.

Sánchez hid his Jewish past. As one of the New Christians (*conversos*), he was determined to establish unquestionable credentials for his family. He brought up his four sons in the Christian faith and because of his wealth was able to buy a new birth certificate and noble status. The Cepeda family, like other affluent New Christians, took advantage of the privileges afforded to them because of their new status in Avilan society. The four brothers became wealthy merchants and farmers like their father.

When Teresa was four her father, Alonso, and three uncles were sued by local tax officials for non-payment of taxes on the grounds that they were not true *hidalgos*, lower nobility. One of the special privileges of belonging to the lower nobility was exemption from taxes. The Cepeda brothers outmanoeuvred their accusers with enough witnesses who verified they were *hildagos* but not before Alonso's first wife's brother-in-law had further damaged the family by telling the court about the public disgrace in Toledo and their true origins. Though the appeal court ruled in favour of the family and vindicated their social status, the shame of the experience would never be forgotten.

The family's money and connections might have kept their class privileges intact, but Alonso would always be on guard. Teresa was seven when the lawsuit was settled, and it seems improbable that the intelligent and sensitive girl did not know the family history. She was as much a victim of the past as other members of the family. Teresa betrays her and the family's sense of shame in her subsequent obsession with honour. Rowan Williams points out that had she had the desire she could have written a book on honour alone.[19] Interestingly Teresa believed that honour paralyzed the lives of many persons living in her culture and was one of the world's greatest deceptions.

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[19] Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila,* Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Continuum, 1991), 21.

Her strong awareness of the hold which honour had on lives would have come from a childhood where her family's honour dictated everything they did and quite possibly stole the freedom and innocence of childhood from her. Cathleen Medwick describes Teresa's father:

> Alonso was not an easy man. He had very set ideas about behaviour and social identity, not at all unusual for a man of his time and place. Ortega y Gasset writes in *Invertebrate Spain* about the posture he calls *altanería*, "or at least the muscular beginning of this," an attitude that shored up Alonso's fragile persona. He was also known for his sombre cast of mind, which was probably exacerbated by his having been shamed as a child before the population of Toledo. Adults who as children endured much less humiliation than that have been known to overprize their dignity.[20]

One can only speculate how seven-year-old Teresa dealt with family shame. Her upbringing would have instilled in her the importance of controlling any feelings related to shame. It is arguable her preoccupation with guilt and sin was more than worrying about having broken rules but came from the sense of shame, which is often confused with guilt. Whereas shame is a distorted and embarrassed perception of the quality of a person's total being, guilt is about actions, either involved in harm or breaking a law. Shame is often the 'hidden power behind what occupies one in everyday life'.[21] Shame moods can become so toxic that they are often interpreted by others as depression.[22] And all human beings will occupy a place on an imaginary line of shame which is created by the culture in which they live. Even young children are attuned to a culture's line of shame, including Teresa. She would have adapted to a particular script within her family for how to grow up and live in a culture obsessed with honour and its shadow of shame.

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[20] Cathleen Medwich, *Teresa of Avila: The Progress of a Soul* (London: Duckworth, 2000), 22.
[21] Donald L. Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of the Self* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 19, 21.
[22] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 146, quotes Silvan Tomkins' description of shame as a sickness that feels like an inner torment. It does not matter how one has been shamed. To be shamed is to feel naked, defeated, alienated and lacking in dignity or worth.

As a youngster Teresa had a vivid imagination. She and Rodrigo, her favourite brother and closest friend, loved to read stories in the *Lives of the Saints*. She was fascinated with martyrdom, which inspired her to persuade Rodrigo to go with her to the land of the Moors where she hoped they might be beheaded. The only beheading came from their uncle's scolding when he found the two of them not too far along on their journey and took them home to their mother. After that incident Teresa's religious adventures took place in the family's orchard where she repeatedly tried to build hermits' cells, pretended to be a nun with other girls or imitated her mother praying the Rosary.[23]

Teresa was approaching womanhood when her mother died. Desperate to fill the void of that devastating loss, she turned to the Virgin Mary for comfort. Although she did not realise it at the time, in years later she would look back on that moment and see the benefits of her devotion to Mary, 'for whenever I have turned to the supreme Virgin I have always been conscious of her aid'.[24] Teresa's teenage years were turbulent. She was distressed by her inadequacies. She knew she was attractive, and 'if she had not been so wicked' she might not have offended God.[25] She believed her wickedness was the innocent pleasure she received from being an adolescent. At sixteen she liked pretty clothes and indulged in perfumes and jewellery, quickly discovering she could charm others with her beauty.

By then her father was getting worried about her flirtations, in particular one with a male cousin. He sent her to the Augustinian convent of *Nuestra Sẽnora de Gracia*, which educated the daughters of the wealthy. At first Teresa was restless at the convent and worried about her reputation. She did not believe she had disgraced her father with her behaviour, but she suffered embarrassment before God from whom

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[23] *The Life, 1.6.*
[24] *The Life,* 1.7.
[25] *The Life,* 1.1.

she could hide nothing. However, within a week of arriving in the convent, she had adjusted and discovered she was happier there than in her father's house. She was impressed by the nuns, 'most pure and observant and modest in their behaviour', but she did not want to be a nun.[26]

Teresa lived at the convent for eighteen months. She was befriended by the novice mistress, whose 'good and holy conversation she enjoyed' and whose life of prayer she admired.[27] The novice mistress, Doña María de Briceño, was sixteen when she entered the convent, and therefore able to relate to sixteen-year-old Teresa.[28] She listened to what Teresa had to say, and through their friendship Teresa learned how María had become a nun. Teresa was not yet convinced she wanted to be a nun, but she did see something in the lives of the sisters that interested her. Teresa was beginning to think about taking responsibility for her life but not yet sure how to do that, seeing a passion for life in the nuns and recognising the lack of it in her own life. She wanted a prayer life and envied those who had one. And she was also deeply grieved by the hardness of her heart which was so great that 'even if she had read the whole Passion through she would not have shed a tear'.[29]

Teresa was struggling about what to do next with her life. As a young noble woman she had only two choices, either to marry or enter a convent. She was anxious about both, along with the inner conflict that Teresa began to experience after she left *Nuestra Sẽnora de Gracia.* She would think about entering a religious community but only briefly. She could not make up her mind, and her indecision about important things in her life would be a struggle for Teresa for the next twenty years. The inner conflict or neurosis she wrestled with says more about the culture in which she was

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[26] *The Life,* 2.9.
[27] *The Life,* 3.1.
[28] Medwick, *Teresa of Avila,* 20.
[29] *The Life,* 3.1.

trying to find a creative way to live than it does about Teresa's mental well-being. Karen Horney suggests that neuroses are a 'product of a particular civilisation and a serious indictment of the culture in question rather than the person'.[30] After eighteen months at *Nuestra Sẽnora de Gracia* Teresa at least knew that she was looking for a divine plan for her life. Years later she would write to some of her sisters and tell them they were fortunate not to be married and have to risk death from childbirth and total submission to a husband.[31] Intuitively Teresa knew God's divine plan for her was not going to happen through marriage.

Teresa was frightened about what was happening to her spiritually and used her disapproval of certain devotional practices at the convent as an excuse to leave. Shortly after leaving, she became ill but does not identify the cause in *The Life.* This sickness was the first of many in Teresa's life, when she would have fevers, chest pains, paralysis, nervous disorders, headaches, and anxiety attacks. Whatever made her sick at the convent also kept her from having to make a decision. She did not have the strength to make a choice.[32] Teresa returned to her father's house to recover. During her convalescence she visited her father's brother, Uncle Pedro. Teresa's uncle was a pious man and she read books to him, which she confesses she did not like but pretended to, in order to please him. During this visit it was her uncle's words more than her love of reading that impressed Teresa. 'Thanks to his good conversation, I began to understand the truth which I had heard as a child, that all is nothing, and that the world is vanity which quickly passes away.'[33] It took Teresa another three months of arguing with herself before she decided to enter the Carmelite

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[30] Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts,* 161.
[31] *The Letters of Saint Teresa,* vol. 1, trans. Benedictines of Stanbrook (London: Thomas Baker, 1926), 149.
[32] See Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts,* 157, for the physical consequences of unresolved conflicts.
[33] *The Life,* 3.5.

convent of the *Encarnación*. She says she made the decision 'out of servile fear rather than love'.[34]

Teresa's father was angry with his daughter's decision, which distressed Teresa because she was scrupulous about pleasing others, especially him. Even her friends could not persuade him to change his mind. Teresa writes, 'The most I could get from him was that I could do as I liked after his death'.[35] But Teresa refused to give in to her father's manipulative threat. On the morning of the 3 November 1536 when she was twenty-one, Teresa left her father's house. She described the pain of leaving her father as worse than death, 'every bone in my body seemed to be wrenched asunder'.[36] Teresa was convinced that it was the Lord who gave her the courage to fight for herself and walk to the convent of the *Encarnación* just outside the city wall. Her brother, Antonio, probably helped, too. By then she had convinced him to become a friar, and they went together. At the convent she was met by her friend, Doña Juana Suárez, a novitiate.

At first Teresa felt enlivened by her decision and determined to do whatever was required of her to be a good nun. She developed the habit of hours of prayer, fortnightly confession and self-inflicted disciplines of flogging, wearing a hair shirt and tying nettles to her wrists.[37] She practiced self-abasement: fasting, speaking sparingly, keeping her eyes cast downwards, and prostrating herself at the feet of other nuns that she offended. Teresa found an inner freedom in living in the convent that she had not known at home. She loved everything about the religious life, and says God 'converted the dryness of [her] soul into a very great tenderness'.[38] The

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[34] *The Life*, 3.6.
[35] *The Life*, 3.7.
[36] *The Life*, 4.1.
[37] Medwick, *Teresa of Avila*, 25.
[38] *The Life*, 4.2.

hardness of heart she had felt earlier at *Nuestra Sẽnora de Gracia* was beginning to soften.

Teresa also said she suffered 'long periods of disturbance about things which were of little importance in themselves'.[39] She became upset when she was blamed for something she had not done, 'I could not bear anything that seemed to make me look small'.[40] Her preoccupation with doing everything perfectly and pleasing others began to take its toll on her physically, and by the end of her novitiate and profession of her vows, she had become very ill: 'My fainting fits began to become more frequent, and I suffered such pains in the heart that everyone who saw them was alarmed'.[41] Her fainting spells seemed to be a recurrence of the illness she suffered at *Nuestra Sẽnora de Gracia*, only more severe. The doctors from Avila who treated her that winter were at a loss to find a cure so Teresa's father arranged for her to see a local healer, a *curandera,* in Becedas the following summer. Since the nuns at *Encarnación* were not under vows of enclosure, Teresa and her friend, Juana, who accompanied her, were allowed to leave for her treatments.

Teresa's father arranged for his daughter and her friend to stay with Teresa's sister, Doña María, who lived close to Becedas. On the way there they visited Teresa's Uncle Pedro again, who gave her *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by the Franciscan writer, Francisco de Osuna, to read. This book would be the catalyst to help her prayer life and bring her into an extraordinary relationship with God. The nuns at St Joseph's, the first convent Teresa founded, still have Teresa's copy of Osuna's work in which she marked her favourite passages, including what de Osuna wrote about friendship: 'Friendship and communion with God are possible in this life of exile.

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[39] *The Life,* 5.1.
[40] *The Life,* 5.2.
[41] *The Life,* 4.5.

This friendship is not remote but more sure and more intimate than ever existed between brothers or even between mother and child'.[42]

The Third Spiritual Alphabet, published in Toledo in 1527, taught Teresa the ideas of the *devotio moderna,* a spiritual movement intended to renew the Church. Osuna's text is thought to be the first attempt in Spanish to describe the stages of contemplative prayer that was attracting more and more people in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. *Recogimiento* or 'recollection' is mental prayer, the quieting of the rational mind in order to hear God's will. Osuna's instructions in mental prayer inspired Teresa to begin her path of interior, mental prayer which would transform her life. Teresa was 'so delighted with this book and decided to follow its instructions with all [her] strength'.[43] For the first time Teresa experienced God's grace in her life. Along with a daily practice of at least two hours of mental prayer, she began a lifelong discipline of reading devotional literature which included St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi,* Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue* and Bernardino de Laredo's *The Ascent of Mount Zion.*

Teresa and Juana left Uncle Pedro's and stayed in Teresa's sister's home while Teresa was treated by the local faith healer. During the nine months she and Juana lived with María, Teresa made rapid progress in prayer and experienced for the first time the prayer of quiet and the prayer of union. She also realised her need for confession and chose a local priest to be her confessor. They developed a spiritually intimate relationship, and before long Teresa's spiritual guide was confessing to her. Pedro Hernández told Teresa he had been involved with a woman in town for seven years. Even though the affair was public knowledge and he had lost the respect of others, he had continued to celebrate Mass. No one in the town could be bothered to

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[42] Shirley du Boulay, *Teresa of Avila: An Extraordinary Life,* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2004), 25.
[43] *The Life,* 4.6.

confront him about his behaviour. Teresa befriended him. She was not only worried about the state of his soul, but she was growing very fond of him. She said, 'I felt very sorry for him, because I liked him quite a lot; and I was so worldly and blind that I considered myself virtuous for being grateful and loyal to anyone who cared for me'. [44]

Teresa eventually convinced him to end the illicit relationship. She worried about committing a mortal sin in their friendship but never felt there was any wrong in the great affection they felt for one another. Pedro died exactly one year from the day they met, and Teresa was certain that 'this friend was on the way to salvation'.[45] Teresa was still finding it difficult to balance her need for human friendship and her friendship with God. She had not yet discovered that God's friendship with her was manifested in her friendships with others. However, Teresa knew mutuality in the relationship with Pedro, and because of that she grew in confidence.

Teresa's daily purges and herbal concoctions for her poor health sapped her of strength. According to Teresa, 'The treatment was more severe than my constitution could stand'.[46] Fearful that she might go mad with the pain, Teresa's father took his daughter back to Ávila where her condition worsened. She suffered what she called 'an attack' (catalepsy) that left her unconscious for four days and convinced everyone that she was about to die. The nuns from *Encarnación* came to her home and prepared her body for burial. They wrapped her in a shroud, waxed her eyes shut and had a grave dug at the convent for her body. Teresa woke suddenly on the fourth day and asked to confess. She would have eight more months of excruciating pain before she was able to return to the convent on Palm Sunday:

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[44] *The Life*, 5.6
[45] *The Life*, 5.10.
[46] *The Life*, 5.11.

I was then in such a hurry to return to the convent that I had myself carried there as I was. So instead of the corpse they had expected, the nuns received a living soul, though the body was worse than dead and most distressing to look at. My extreme weakness is beyond description; I was nothing but bones. As I have said, I remained in this state for more than eight months, and my paralysis, although it grew less, continued for almost three years. When I began to crawl on hands and knees, I praised God.[47]

The doctors who examined Teresa had a list of ailments for her - heart disease, consumption, and malaria. For a long time Carmelite scholars refused to entertain the possibility of psychological causes for her illnesses. Doctors have since reviewed the medical evidence in *The Life* and tend to see her three-year paralysis as mostly psychosomatic and brought on because of a neurosis.[48] Their conclusion was based on the fact that the three-year paralysis did not cause muscular degeneration. It is arguable that the cause of the paralysis had its roots in shame. Shame has been described as a sickness of the soul with the power to mortify.[49] Shame can manifest itself in severe physical symptoms analogous to panic disorder. 'Shame panic' can be unremitting in its production of debilitating physiological responses with no apparent cause.[50]

The nuns at the convent believed Teresa's recovery was a miracle. Teresa continued to impress them with her life of prayer and holiness. Gradually the sisters learned that their conversations with her would not lead to gossip. She made friends within the convent as well as outside. Although Teresa managed to 'keep the sisters' good opinion' of her, she still felt shame about her way of life:

> I began, by way of amusement after amusement, of vanity after vanity, and of one occasion for sin after another, to expose myself to very great dangers, and to let my soul become so distracted by many vanities that I was ashamed to turn back to God

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[47] *The Life,* 6.2.
[48] Medwick, *Teresa of Avila,* 32.
[49] See Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 146.
[50] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 148-9.

> and approach Him in such intimate friendship, as that of prayer. What is more, as my sins increased I began to lose my joy and pleasure in virtuous things. I began, then, to indulge in one pastime after another, one vanity after another and in one occasion of sin after another.[51]

Teresa carried on with a superficial existence and enjoyed a busy social life in the convent which had turned into a salon and attracted many visitors to its parlour for intelligent and lively conversations with her. She also received invitations from wealthy widows to go to their homes and provide spiritually comforting conversations. Teresa saw dangers in the freedom she enjoyed and viewed the time spent with visitors a dangerous pastime. She decided she would have been far better in an enclosed convent where friendships would not distract and possibly injure her reputation. For more than a year Teresa was unable to pray, but she began teaching others mental prayer. Her father was her most enthusiastic pupil. She described her life up this point as 'nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and evermore rising again, but to little purpose as afterwards I would fall once more'.[52] After her father's death, his confessor, the Dominican theologian Vicente Barrón, helped her through the bereavement. When he heard Teresa say she could no longer pray, he told her to take communion once a fortnight and return to mental prayer.

When she was forty and exhausted by what she considered to be a life of inner contradiction and self-deception, Teresa had a religious experience, which marked the beginning of a new relationship with God. In a moment of deep prayer before an image of the wounded Christ in the convent's oratory, Teresa was shaken to the core of her being:

> It was of Christ terribly wounded and it was so moving that when I looked at it the very sight of Him shook me, for it clearly showed what He had suffered for us. So

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[51] *The Life,* 7.1.
[52] *The Life,* 9.1.

> strongly did I feel what a poor return I had made for those wounds, that my heart seemed to break, and I threw myself on the ground before Him in a great flood of tears, imploring Him to give me strength once and for all not to offend Him again.[53]

For the first time in her life, Teresa touched the depth of her own damaged self through an encounter with the suffering Christ: 'It seemed to me that when He was alone and afflicted he must, like anyone in trouble, admit me'.[54] The feelings Teresa had buried for such a long time and that kept her disconnected from herself and other human beings were finally released. Her past world would no longer have the same power to impinge on her complete and full development. When she allowed herself to feel the Passion of Christ, Teresa took responsibility for her inner wounds. For years the true self had been buried by her parents' control, no matter how kind, loving and well-intended it was. Through her grief and a desire for a mutual relationship with Christ, she found the will 'to escape from so absolute a death'.[55] The intensity of the religious experience empowered Teresa to begin her quest for authenticity.

Teresa's Journey towards Friendship with God through Prayer

Until her conversion experience, Teresa used friendship to keep her from facing her own alienation and loneliness. It was easier for her to please others rather than to face herself. Suddenly her longing for the God of life was greater than she had ever experienced. Perhaps for the first time in her life Teresa was confident in her relationship with God because she knew God in Christ as a 'friend and lover of courageous souls'.[56] Teresa began to claim a new authority in her religious life. The authoritarianism and scrupulosity, which dominated Teresa's former self and were

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[53] *The Life,* 9.1.
[54] *The Life,* 9.3.
[55] *The Life,* 9.8.
[56] *The Life,* 13.3.

destroying her spiritually and physically, disappeared. When Teresa turned and saw the suffering Christ, she finally made the connection between her suffering spirit and that of Christ's. She identified her deepest desire to live a life with the same integrity that Jesus had lived his life. Teresa's religious experience made her realise that her desire to be what she was meant to be was God's desire for her as well. Teresa had experienced God as friend and the healing power of love in a moment of mutual relationship. For this reason Teresa' friendships for the rest of her life would no longer be ones that used people but ones that would bring life to them. Friendship with God changed her life completely. She had been drawn through the suffering of Christ into the mystery of God's power in mutuality, the creative basis of all human lives, the world and God and the dynamic of life together.[57]

Because Teresa felt accepted by Christ and able 'to see herself as needed and welcomed 'simply as a human companion, as someone whose mere presence might be a grace or comfort to another', she finally had the courage to let go of her spiritual addictions.[58] Teresa desired God more and more and embarked on a life-changing journey into mystical theology and prayer which would lead to experiences of union with God. Her deepest desire to commune with God would bring together the fragmented life she was living in order to please others and open the door to her wholeness and holiness. God desired to restore in Teresa's life that which had been lost.

Teresa earnestly sought to know God's love and be a servant of that love. The changes that came into her life of prayer lead Teresa into a true and faithful friendship with God. She described this friendship in the *Life* with metaphors of watering the

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[57] Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right,* 62.
[58] Williams, *Teresa of Avila,* 53.

garden. The garden symbolises new creation and prayer and friendship with God occurred in four stages. Growth in friendship occurred in four stages of prayer.

In stage one when the soul is at the beginning of friendship with God, one sets out to create a garden for the sake of the fruit of friendship, tender consolations from God only to discover that friendship with God is not about tenderness and consolations. The soul's desire to keep flowers alive even when the garden's water supply is gone is not friendship but self-gratification. In stage one Teresa recognises that her need to do things for God in order to get something from God is not friendship. Friendship in stage one requires courage, fortitude and true humility rather than self-gratifying consolations. God is 'the friend and lover of courageous souls so long as they proceed humbly and without trust in themselves'.[59] Teresa visualises Christ as a precious companion and understands that advancement in friendship comes in the willingness to carry Christ's cross. Teresa believes the determination to tend the garden despite tremendous toil is God's test of those who would be friends.

In stage two the gardener discovers simple irrigation for maintaining the garden. It is human effort giving way to divine action in the prayer of quiet that brings Teresa closer to God and where communication between Teresa's soul and God begins. Teresa discovers God's steady presence in the garden because she is letting go of the need to control the relationship. Gradually in the prayer of quiet Teresa's soul touches the supernatural and she feels anchored to God and the place where it is God's rather than her will that matters. Teresa's description of this stage of friendship is a relationship where calmness and quiet prevail rather than the disruptive noise of ego-laden words in stage one which hinder the full blossoming of friendship with God. Stage two is the beginning of all the good things that friendship brings, 'The

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[59] *The Life*, 13.3.

flowers have now grown and are on the point of bursting into bloom'....[60] Furthermore when God's spirit has the freedom to work, 'there is no need to cast around for ways of inducing humility and shame. For our Lord reveals them in a very different way from any that we could find by our own poor reflections, which are nothing compared to that true humility which springs from the light thus given us by the Lord'.[61] The growth in true humility allows Teresa to dismiss the servile fear that has been controlling her life.

In stage three God provides a stream of water for the garden. At this point Teresa gains a deeper confidence in God and is more assured that God is in control of her life. It is difficult for her to express in words what occurred. It is not union with God, but a sense of being betwixt and between. Teresa experienced being on the threshold. She used numerous expressions to describe the experience of the soul not knowing what to do: 'It cannot tell whether to speak or be silent, whether to laugh or weep. It is a glorious bewilderment, a heavenly madness, in which true wisdom is acquired, and to the soul a fulfilment most full of delight'.[62] She was learning to live and pray non-possessively. Teresa said stage three was 'a splendid preparation for the attainment of very great quiet'.[63] But it was the most difficult stage to move into because it required a conscious decision to live without the need to be in control. In stage three the boundaries between what she desired and what God desired began to blur. Teresa felt powerless and vulnerable, unable to move forward or backwards while at the same time becoming more aware of detachment from things of the world and a desire for more life.[64]

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[60] *The Life,* 15.21.
[61] *The Life,* 15.21.
[62] *The Life,* 16.1.
[63] *The Life,* 17.7.
[64] *The Life,* 16.1.

Stage three was the beginning of Teresa's true understanding of friendship with God and with others. Living in a state of liminality or incompleteness or non-possessiveness is the firm foundation for friendship. In stage three friendship is vital because one no longer knows one's self as completely as one would like to believe. There is the profound realisation that one's identity depends more upon the insights of others rather than self-awareness, which is prone to ego-centric deceptions or the noise of the intellect. For Teresa the liminal state shattered the veneer of false humility and exposed the beauty of true humility. True humility arose from allowing others to help dispel one's illusions and move towards perfection. She wrote: 'For no one knows himself so well as those who observe him, provided they do so lovingly and with the wish to do him good'.[65]

In stage three Teresa also realised that false humility kept her from friendship with God. Her litany of sins was one form of false humility that she used to avoid true friendship. Once she recognised how self-induced humility and shame extinguished the spark of desire between them, Teresa learned the importance of presenting herself 'simply before God' and experiencing God's desire for her just as she was.[66] True humility gave Teresa a sense of self-worth which deepened her desire for God. True humility also provided Teresa with a new security that expelled 'servile fear [i.e., false humility] from the soul and put in its place a fear of much stronger growth, which springs from faith'.[67] For Teresa stage three was the 'beginning of all good things', the place where the flowers have now grown and are one the point of bursting into bloom'.[68]

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[65] *The Life,* 16.12.
[66] *The Life,* 15.12.
[67] *The Life,* 15.20.
[68] *The Life,* 15.21.

In the fourth stage the garden is soaked and saturated by rain and there is nothing to do except watch the flowers grow and bloom. Teresa said the heavenly rain brought union, the possession of her spirit by the divine Spirit. God was in Teresa.[69] What happens in prayer in stage four was difficult for her to articulate adequately. Union could be explained in *mystical theology* but that she did not know the mystical vocabulary. Gradually Teresa's perceptions of the reality of her religious life deepened, and she became more committed to serving others. Her numerous experiences of union increased her desire to serve God without any fear of losing her life or honour. Teresa was engulfed in the living water where her desires and God's desires were one.

By stage four Teresa saw Jesus Christ as a true friend, one who never fails and would never abandon her in trials and tribulations:

> When we are busy, or suffering persecutions or trails, when we cannot get enough quiet, and in times of dryness, Christ is our very good friend. We look at Him as a man, we see Him weak and in trouble, and He is our companion. Once we have got this habit, it is very easy to find Him beside us, though times will come when we can do neither the one nor the other. To this end, it is advisable to do as I have said, and not show ourselves to be trying after spiritual consolations. Come what may, the great thing is to embrace the Cross.[70]

Teresa's friendship with the human Jesus in stage four contradicted what she had read or been told by her confessors about prayer at this level. For her continued spiritual growth she was advised to stop reflecting on Jesus' humanity and focus on his divinity. In Osuna's prologue to the *Alphabet*, perfection could only be achieved through meditation on the divine. Jesus' humanity stood in the way of true growth. But Teresa would have no parts of this dualistic theology: 'We are not angels but we

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[69] See Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 446.
[70] *The Life,* 22.11.

have a body'.[71] As she was able to touch the centre of her deepest desire for God, she came closer, as well, to the heart of God. Teresa's life of prayer culminated in mystical experiences identified as the Transverberation of her heart, intense experiences of God's love whereby all the fragmented parts of Teresa's self were being purified and healed:

> It pleased the Lord that I should sometimes see the following vision. I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form – a type of vision I am not in the habit of seeing, except very rarely…It pleased the Lord that I should see this angel in the following way. He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire…in his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by the intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it – indeed a great share. So sweet are the colloquies of love which pass between the soul and God that if anyone thinks I am lying I beseech God, in His goodness, to give him the same experience.[72]

From the moment of her first union Teresa talked to God like a friend. She called mental prayer 'an intimate sharing between friends'.[73] Teresa's prayer experiences changed her but frightened others who were observing her transformation. Teresa lived in an age when mystical experiences were viewed with great suspicion by the *letrados,* or trained theologians who valued religious doctrine rather than personal experience. In obedience to confessors, who wanted to protect Teresa from charges

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[71] *The Life,* 22.11.

[72] *The Life,* 29.13. Bernini portrayed Teresa's extraordinary mystical experience in a famous sculpture in which he placed, I believe, too much emphasis on the erotic. The intensity of the experience concerns the love of God that brought healing to Teresa's fragmented and damaged self. It is the most profound experience of love and one that Teresa might not have shared if her confessor had not insisted. Her analysis of this mystical state could be considered the finest ever recorded.

[73] *The Life,* 8.5.

of heresy being brought against her by the Inquisition, she wrote at length about her prayer life and repeatedly acknowledged her dependence on her confessors for guidance. When the interior voice told her one thing and her confessors another, she would obey the latter, most of whom affirmed her supernatural experiences.

Friendship Becomes Political as Teresa Moves towards Reform

According to the feminist theologian, Mary Hunt, friendship not only brings one face to face with one's self; it makes one face others and the world.[74] Teresa could no longer ignore the problems within the Carmelite order and moved towards making substantive changes. Teresa's friendship with God changed the direction of her outward life as much as her contemplative one. The transformative potential of friendship became evident in her life.

Teresa had numerous friendships with clerics and lay people, who were either involved in contemplative prayer themselves or had great respect for the increasing depth of her spirituality. She made friends easily and her influence began to extend outside the convent. However, life inside the convent became less suitable for Teresa's ascetic spiritual life. One evening in her cell at the *Encarnación*, she and some other nuns were asked by Teresa's niece, María de Ocampo, if they were willing to follow the primitive rule of the Discalced Carmelites.[75] The monastic houses depended on the financial support of the wealthy and by the late fifteenth century in Avila a small number of elite families dominated the religious institutions, which had become places to preserve family honour through vocal commemorative prayer.

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[74] Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness,* 14. For Hunt friendship is personal and political. It is political when friends assume mutual responsibility for injustices.
[75] *The Life,* 32.10.

Much of the liturgy in the monastic houses was spent on anniversary masses and intercessory prayers for the souls of patrons and their family.

Teresa would have spent many hours praying for the souls of *Encarnación's* patrons, but even she had her limits. She was responsible for ending one burdensome endowment when she became prioress. In 1513 a local nobleman, Bernardo Robles, left *Encarnación* an impressive sum of money to build the main chapel along with detailed instructions about his burial and how the nuns were to pray for his soul. In order for the convent to receive payments from his heirs, who were in charge of the money, the nuns had to maintain a twenty-four hour vigil before the Blessed Sacrament for Robles' salvation. The sisters appealed unsuccessfully to the pope to commute the vigil because it violated the Carmelite rule of night time silence. When the community ended the vigils in 1533, Robles' family threatened to stop payment.[76] Teresa refused to keep the vigils at night, and the payments did not stop.

Teresa's reconversion, mental prayer and religious experiences convinced her of the need to reform popular aristocratic spirituality. She and other nuns who were exhausted from begging on their knees for the salvation of rich souls developed a new vision of religious life based on voluntary poverty and mental prayers.[77] However, there were other factors that contributed to the demand for reform. In Teresa's lifetime the population of Ávila doubled and the city suffered from a proliferation of social problems because of rapid urban growth. The poor were affected the most severely, suffering from lack of food and water, overcrowding and disease. In 1502 half the poor people died of starvation and one-third of Ávila's population were begging for food.[78]

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[76] Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, 51-52.
[77] Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa,* 53.
[78] Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa,* 60.

Ávila had its share of reformers. Its most famous was Juan de Ávila (1499/1500-1569) or Maestro Ávila, who led an extensive campaign challenging the clergy's support of the wealthy. He also began to work for relieving the plight of the poor. He was arrested by the Inquisition for preaching against the rich who tried to buy their salvation and the clergy who supported these efforts. It eventually acquitted him, and Maestro Avila went on to make a major contribution to the religious education of the poor. Before his death he had established fifteen schools to educate young men and several more to train priests. His spiritual ideals and social reforms went hand in hand. Throughout his lifetime he refused to neglect the needs of the underclass and preached salvation for all regardless of social standing.

Maestro Ávila's teachings attracted a group of reform-minded clerics and laymen around the time of Teresa's intense contemplative prayer experiences. Gasper Daza, an honorary canon in Ávila's cathedral, Don Francisco de Salcedo, a relative of Teresa's, Julián de Ávila, who would become Teresa's chaplain and biographer, and other laymen and priests played crucial roles in the initial efforts to change the moral life of the city. The reform efforts of these men would have been known at *Encarnación.* Teresa approached Daza and Salcedo for expert advice about her prayer life. Both expressed anxiety about her supernatural experiences, feared she suffered from demonic delusions and admitted their inability to help her.[79] Salcedo referred her to the Jesuits where she found sound spiritual direction but little support at first for her reform programmes.

Baltasar Álvarez, Teresa's second Jesuit spiritual director, dismissed many of her prayer experiences and questioned her vision of reform. Álvarez's caution was understandable. He was directing Teresa when the Inquisition was taking severe

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[79] *The Life,* 23.13.

action against those who practiced mental prayer. Mental prayer was suspect because it was seen as a screen for Protestantism and other forms of heterodoxy. Since Teresa's prayer life did not conform to the ecclesiastical standards put in place by the Inquisition, Álvarez hesitated to condone the voices and visions. He had a reputation for high standards in spiritual direction and was able to protect Teresa and himself from the eyes and ears of the Inquisition while remaining open to what God was doing through her mystical experiences.

Frequently Teresa's friendship with Álvarez was difficult and distressing. She was tempted to leave him because of the rigorous spiritual exercises he demanded from her. She wrote about this episode in the *Life*: 'Sometimes questions on the one hand and reproofs on the other utterly exhausted me. But I needed them all, for my will was not bent to obedience'.[80] In the end Teresa believed it was this young Jesuit confessor who benefited her spiritual formation, and she became very fond of him. Álvarez helped Teresa develop the strength to follow the way of the cross for the rest of her life, 'Once the Lord told me that it was no true obedience if I was not determined to suffer, and that I must fix my eyes on His suffering. Then everything would become easy'.[81] Because of her likeable personality, Teresa could easily have found another male spiritual director who would have made life comfortable. She spoke out against confessors who formed friendships with penitents from noble families in order to increase their status in the community. Álvarez abided by the Ignatian rule of retaining one's spiritual liberty and refused to compromise his standards for spiritual direction with self-serving friendships.

Álvarez even decided that some friendships at *Encarnación* were detrimental to Teresa's spiritual growth. Teresa disagreed with him and questioned why she should

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[80] *The Life,* 26.3.
[81] *The Life,* 26.3.

give them up. Rather than argue with the strong-willed Teresa, Álvarez told her to recite the *Veni,* and ask God to show her a better way in her relationships. Teresa spent a day in fervent prayer; and as she said the *Veni,* she experienced an ecstatic rapture for the first time and heard the words, 'I want you to converse now not with men but with angels'.[82] Álvarez's advice was prophetic. After this mystical experience Teresa stopped living a life to please others and chose to live her life in true friendship with God through Jesus Christ: 'But now the Lord set me free and gave me strength to do the work'.[83] The friendship between them should be remembered as an important one in both their lives. Teresa lived her life with nuns but her spiritual dynamism developed because of her honest and child-like friendship with Álvarez, who became famous later in life as a spiritual master.

Teresa and Carmelite Reform

Teresa's prayer experiences changed her dramatically. As she felt more and more anchored in the love of God through the voices and visions, she became aware of her own authority and acquired new determination to initiate changes in the Carmelite order. One day in prayer she found herself in hell and the deep distress she felt for the number of souls bringing damnation to themselves. The thought of meeting a Huguenot, or Lutheran as the Spanish called them, convinced Teresa to keep the 'Rule with every possible perfection'.[84] Perhaps if she had met a Lutheran, her gift for friendship might have ended these imaginary fears.

Teresa discussed the idea of the change with her friends but was not prepared to act as boldly as their vision of reform required. Teresa admitted she was happy living

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[82] *The Life,* 24.6.
[83] *The Life,* 24.8.
[84] *The Life,* 32.9.

at *Encarnación*, 'The place was pleasing to me, and so was my cell, which suited me excellently; and this held me back'.[85] However, following Mass one day she received a divine command, which compelled her to initiate the reforms:

> The Lord earnestly commanded me to pursue this aim with all my strength. He made me great promises; that the house would not fail to be established, that great service would be done Him there, that its name should be St Joseph's; that he would watch over us at one of its doors and Our Lady at the other; that Christ would be with us; that the convent would be a star, and that it would shed the most brilliant light. He said also that although the Rules of the religious orders were mitigated, I must not think that He was poorly served by them. For what would become of the world, if it were not for the religious? He told me to convey His orders to my confessor, with the request that he should not oppose them or in any way hinder my carrying them out.[86]

Teresa's renewed determination to found St Joseph's Convent on the rule of poverty created controversy. Her willingness to forfeit the fixed incomes that came from land investments and were the primary means of support for most religious houses threatened other orders' contentment with their way of life. In many ways, Teresa was responding to her dissatisfaction over the religious and social life in *Encarnación.* The convent was poor and overcrowded. Many nuns lived away in the homes of the city's noble women, who housed and fed them in return for their advice and consolation. Teresa's consolations were in great demand, and she was always being called away which was a 'serious inconvenience' to her and made her think 'the devil must have had a hand in these frequent departures of mine'.[87]

Teresa also dreaded the anxieties and work that lay ahead of her, but she could no longer ignore the Lord's repeated requests for her to begin the task at hand. She had to tell Álvarez, who thought it was humanly impossible but did not dare tell her to abandon the idea. He referred Teresa to the Carmelite provincial who vacillated.

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[85] *The Life,* 32.10.
[86] *The Life,* 32.11.
[87] *The Life,* 32.9.

Teresa also wrote to the spiritually prestigious Franciscan, Peter of Alcántara, founder of the Reformed or Discalced Franciscans, in 1540. Teresa had met Alcántara at the home of a widowed noblewoman, Doña Guiomar de Ulloa, whom she consoled. Alcántara and Teresa were kindred spirits. He reassured a doubtful Teresa that her mystical experiences were divinely inspired and supported reform of the Carmelites. He offered her practical advice about how to get official authorization for a new religious foundation and defended her work publicly until his death in October 1562, a few months after St. Joseph's opened. Alcántara shrewdly recommended that Doña Guiomar make the request for papal permission and that Teresa's sister, Juana, buy the house for the new order. Teresa stayed in the background because of the increasing anger in Avila about her ideas for an enclosed community. Feelings at *Encarnación* were mostly against her, too:

> I was very unpopular throughout the convent for wanting to found a more strictly enclosed house. The nuns said that this was an insult to them; that I could serve God just as well where I was, since there were others better than myself; that I had no love for my own house, and that I should have been better employed raising money for it than for founding another. Some said that I ought to be put in the prison-cell; but others, though only a few, came out on my side.[88]

But Teresa was more distressed by a letter her confessor wrote to her than the disapproval of the nuns. Álvarez urged her to drop her plans immediately because of the scandal she was causing and forbade her to talk further about the reform. Teresa became depressed but once again the Lord showed her the blessings she received from the trials and persecutions she suffered for Him. Teresa continued to grow in love for God and her raptures increased but now she had learned to keep quiet about what she was doing.

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[88] *The Life*, 33.2.

Teresa was an excellent administrator and understood the importance of enlisting the help of learned men to move the reform work along. After her disappointment with her Jesuit confessor, Teresa turned to the influential Dominican theologian, Pedro Ibáñez, for guidance. Ibáñez only knew Teresa by reputation, but agreed to hear her case. In the end he wrote an opinion for Rome in which he endorsed the project and asked permission for Teresa to found a house under obedience to the Carmelite order. When the papal brief came back to Ibáñez, it was invalid because the clause stating whose jurisdiction the convent was to be under was missing.

A disappointed Teresa turned to prayer and in another vision at the Dominican monastery church of St Thomas she gained strength for the difficulties that still lay ahead. About this vision she wrote: 'Our Lady seemed suddenly to seize me by the hands. She told me that I was giving her great pleasure by serving the glorious St. Joseph, and promised me that my plans for the convent would be fulfilled. She said that the Lord would be greatly served there, and that I need not fear any failure of the project at any time, even though the obedience demanded of us might not be to my liking'.[89] An even more determined Teresa applied with the help of her friends for a new Brief and requested that the convent be founded under the obedience of the Bishop of Ávila, Alvaro de Mendoza, instead of the Carmelite Order. Teresa was not happy with this idea: 'It was a grief to me not to make over the convent to our Order, but the Lord had told me that it would be unwise to do so. He gave me reasons why it would be quite impracticable, but told me to refer to Rome by a certain procedure which He also explained. He promised that in this way I should find security, and so I did'.[90] Papal permission arrived in February 1562 for Teresa to found a convent under Bishop Mendoza's jurisdiction. Mendoza was Teresa's friend and endorsed her

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[89] *The Life*, 33.14.
[90] *The Life*, 33.16.

reforms. Their friendship and his authority would protect St Joseph's from the city council of Ávila as well as from the conflicts between the Calced and Discalced branches of the Carmelite Order.[91]

While Teresa waited for a response to the second brief, she lived with her friend, Doña Guiomar. The opposition in Ávila to Teresa's reforms was accelerating and even Teresa's friend suffered. Doña Guiomar's confessor refused to give her absolution until she agreed to abandon her interest in the foundation of St Joseph. Around the same time that Doña Guiomar was encountering problems, Teresa received an order from Angel de Salazar, the Provincial General of the Carmelite Order, to go to Toledo to console the widow Doña Luisa de la Cerda, daughter of the Duke of Medacineli and one of the richest women in Spain. The assignment annoyed Teresa who did not want to leave Avila until the second Brief arrived from Rome, but she believed that God had told her to go. Her obedience saved her from the remonstrations of the Carmelite Provincial General when he learned the Carmelite Order had no authority over St Joseph's.[92]

Teresa's six-month stay at Doña Luisa's palace also benefited her spiritual growth. She saw the artificiality of the extravagant lifestyle and the slavery it placed women under in order to live up to social expectations. Teresa came to 'hate the very thought of being a great lady' as she watched Doña Luisa go against her own desires in order to live up to others' expectations. Teresa would recall this feeling when she wrote the constitutions for her foundation. However, she made important contacts and new friendships in Doña Luisa's home and around Toledo and renewed her association with Father García de Toledo, a Dominican who had been in Ávila. García encouraged Teresa to work on her spiritual autobiography and she finished the first

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[91] Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa,* 148.
[92] *The Life,* 34.2.

draft of the *Life* in Toledo. At Teresa's request Doña Luisa invited the aged ascetic, Peter of Alcántara, to her home. María de Salazar, one of Doña Luisa's ladies-in-waiting, begged Teresa to help her become a nun. Teresa refused at first but later accepted her as a novice. She became one of Teresa's most important sisters and the prioress of the foundation in Seville. Later in life she was one of Teresa's beloved friends and a correspondent.[93]

Teresa also met the religious woman or *beata,* María Yepes, who walked nearly two hundred miles to see Teresa when she heard about her plans for reform. María had recently returned from Rome with the patents to reform the Carmelite convent in Granada and had run into fierce resistance. She had even been threatened with a public whipping.[94] María knew the ancient Carmelite rule better than Teresa, and for two weeks they discussed reform. María's knowledge strengthened Teresa's resolve to found the convent in poverty, a socially unacceptable idea because it would eventually end the utilitarian friendship between the religious institutions and the social elite.[95] Shortly after María's visit, the Provincial General released Teresa from her duties in Toledo.

Teresa returned to Ávila in July 1562 to learn that the authorisation to found St Joseph's had arrived from Rome. The troubles with the people of Ávila and the Provincial General were not over but these problems did not stop Teresa. The house that her sister had secretly bought for the convent was ready to be occupied, and in August 1562, Gasper Daza presided at the first Mass in St Joseph's convent for four Discalced Carmelite nuns who wore habits of brown sackcloth. Four hours later Teresa had serious doubts about what she had undertaken. She was summoned the next day to appear before the prioress of the *Encarnación* and not long after that

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[93] *The Letters of Saint Teresa,* vol. 3, 298.
[94] Boulay, *Teresa of Avila,* 90.
[95] Medwick, *Teresa of Avila,* 80.

meeting received a rebuke from the Provincial General and his committee of clergy, who said she was 'wickeder than the other nuns', had failed to observe the many rules in *Encarnación* and was 'scandalizing people' with her new ideas.[96]

Teresa begged forgiveness and Angel de Salazar privately promised that once the furore in the town had ended, she would be permitted to live at St Joseph's. Two days after St Joseph's opened, the mayor and town councillors decided the convent should be dissolved and sent the magistrate and police to close it. The nuns refused them entrance. The city councillors met again and brought a law suit against the convent. Most of members of the established religious communities sided with the city. Only one, the Dominican, Domingo Báñez, did not oppose the convent, but he objected to its vow of poverty. The reform party members, who commanded respect in Ávila, eventually succeeded in convincing Bishop Mendoza that Teresa's reforms were correct. The law suit was dropped after six months but Teresa and those who supported her had 'sustained a good deal of persecution'.[97]

Eventually the Provincial General gave Teresa permission to move from the *Encarnación* to St Joseph's. Before Teresa entered St Joseph's, she changed her name from her noble title of Doña Teresa de Ahumada to Teresa de Jesús. She left her comfortable private quarters and servants at the *Encarnación* and joined a community of twelve other women who had also abandoned their nobility. They shared all property in common, accepted privation and followed a strictly enclosed life of prayer and work.[98] Teresa enjoyed the simple life at St Joseph's and lived there for five years, later describing it as 'the most restful years of my life'.[99] However, the decision to enter St Joseph's was not easy for her: 'The fact is that when

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96 *The Life,* 36.11.
97 *The Life,* 36.13.
98 *The Complete Works of St Teresa of Jesus,* trans. E. Allison Peers, vol. 3, *Constitutions,* 221-226.
99 *The Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Book of the Foundations,* I.1.

I came to this house I did not know how I was going to live.'[100] It was more difficult than she imagined giving up the values of honour and family in which she had been raised. She found herself constantly apologizing to other sisters who were easily offended. They, too, were having just as much difficulty giving up their former lives of worldly comfort. But the holy freedom, *santa libertad,* which Teresa and the sisters found, ensured the success of the reform movement. The privilege to speak to God as to a friend increased their confidence. They were no longer worried about pleasing others and discovered the freedom 'to walk in truth, in the presence of Truth itself'.[101]

Teresa was a missionary of friendship. She was deeply distressed by the destructive forces of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and saw the apostolate of prayer that the Discalced Carmelite women maintained as a powerful support for the Church in crisis. In 1567 the Prior General, Giovanni Battista Rossi (Rubeo), visited Teresa at St Joseph's. Rubeo had come from Rome to Spain to inspect the religious houses. At first Teresa feared Rubeo might send her back to the *Encarnación*, but he was impressed with what he saw and issued Teresa patents for founding more houses along with censures to prevent provincials from stopping her work. Teresa's reform coincided with the decision of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to reform all religious orders. King Philipp II was equally anxious to reform the religious houses in his country. With clearance to move ahead, Teresa established seventeen new religious communities between 1567 and her death in 1582. In these communities Teresa taught friendship through intimate conversation with God and mutual care for one another.

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[100] *The Life,* 37.11.
[101] *The Life,* 40.3.

The Way of Perfection, a Handbook on Friendship

Teresa wrote *The Way of Perfection* shortly after she moved to St Joseph's. *The Way* is a teaching manual on prayer. As mentioned earlier her understanding of prayer was based on friendship – prayer is intimate conversation with God. Teresa had written *The Life* for the benefit of her confessors. She wrote *The Way* for the sisters. Still aware of the shadow of the Inquisition following everything she did, she began it with deference to the theological experts and kept the language in the text informal, as if she were conversing in person to the members of the community. Teresa did not want to appear as an authority on contemplative prayer which was still highly suspect. Thus she described her work as trivial and only suitable for weak women like herself and the sisters at St Joseph's. Ironically the small matters she attended to in *The Way* were nothing less than the recognition of the difficulties and temptations that would befall the sisters in their pursuit of spiritual growth and their imitation of the love of Christ.

Teresa was determined that the reformed community of sisters become friends of God, since, as she frankly said, 'He has so many enemies and so few friends'.[102] According to Teresa, friendship with God began with total detachment from everything for the sake of God. Teresa knew from her prayer life and friendship with God that God never fails to be friends with those who know how to let go and live without power and possessions. She was well acquainted with the difficulty of detachment in sixteenth-century Spain, a culture addicted to its attachments to honour and purity and restrictive of friendships across social boundaries. Teresa believed that friendship with God and others is never determined by social standing. She

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[102] *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection*, 1.2.

envisioned a community of sisters where 'all must be friends with each other, love each other, be fond of each other and help each other with no regard for their former place in society'.[103] For Teresa friendship was the most important relationship between human beings, but it was only possible through detached and humbled love.

Teresa echoed St Augustine when she claimed that without God in a friendship there was no friendship. The presence of God in a relationship was essential in order to know how to respond with complete spiritual freedom to another. If God were absent, the response to one another was too easily influenced by social position and advantage. Teresa knew that her relationship with God depended on nothing she had done and wanted the sisters to learn that their relationship with God and others had to be grounded in the same awareness. If God abandoned all dignity and status in the incarnation to be friends with all men and women, then the sisters were expected to do the same. There should be no question about one's background.

Even though she had many special friendships outside the convent, Teresa advised against them in the community. When the sisters were not loved equally, which often happened in large communities, the prayer life of the community was affected. Preferential friendships were also a temptation to forget service to God. Only friendships initiated with God in mind could be protected from the seductiveness of the external features of another. Teresa firmly believed that the inward goodness of each person was the reason for friendship. Through inward goodness one discovered the true image of God. Inward goodness could only be recognised and appreciated when the sisters were able to live with each other non-possessively and not be concerned about what they would gain from the relationship. This happened when one learned to hold onto someone or something only momentarily with thanksgiving and

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[103] *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection*, IV.6.

then let them go and give to them the gift of freedom. Teresa knew how long she had clung to honour in order to maintain friendship with God and recognised how that kept her from true friendship with God. She admonished the sisters to recognise when they were clinging to others and things. Only when someone was giving freedom to another would true friendship occur. And in loving freely friendship would flourish. Teresa called this way of loving 'holy affection'.[104]

'Holy affection' could take a lifetime to attain and Teresa accepted that preferential friendships even in a small community were better than no friendships. It was only by being in relationships that the opportunity to learn true friendship was possible. The formation of preferential friendships during community gatherings was unavoidable but Teresa insisted that the sisters socialize. It was an important time to be sensitive to what was happening to others in the community and offer help and affection to those in need, regardless of the risks. Religious discretion was still required in order for religious obedience to be maintained. Teresa would not tolerate friendships where one prospered at the expense of another. From personal experience she knew her friendship with the princess of Eboli, Doña Ana, had been detrimental, but she acknowledged that without this experience she would never have known the difference between possessive and non-possessive relationships.[105] She wanted the sisters to develop discernment in their relationships.

Friendship demanded taking risks and being willing to suffer on behalf of another person. The temptation to indulge another's self-gratification was especially strong in a culture that operated on honour. It was difficult to be truthful to another sister about what was necessary to grow in imitation of Christ. Friendships were tested at St Joseph's. Teresa knew from personal experience how phoney reassurances and

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104 *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* VI.7.
105 Medwick, *Teresa of Avila,* 138.

consolations from another prevented her growing spiritually. She never denied the human desire for affection but warned the sisters about the tendency for this natural human need to turn into an unhealthy neediness without God's guidance. Teresa's astute knowledge of herself and observations of others over the years enabled her to see when desires in relationships were moving towards the addiction of pleasing others at the expense of personal spiritual perfection.[106] The life of prayer, work and austerity that Teresa required of herself and the nuns was intended to focus their desires more acutely and learn to distinguish true desire that is non-possessive and life-giving from desire that is possessive and suffocating. She knew that a healthy asceticism did not leave room for self-indulgence.[107]

Teresa wanted the relationships between the nuns and their confessors to be friendships that would lead to mature Christian growth. She knew from personal experiences the value of a good conscience and of having weak confessors who would indulge her shortcomings rather than challenge her towards greater perfection:

> It happened that I had to go about matters of conscience to a man who had taken a complete course in theology; and he did me a great deal of mischief by telling me that certain things were of no importance. I know that he had no intention of deceiving me, or any reason for doing so: it was simply that he knew no better. And in addition to this instance I have met with two or three similar ones.[108]

For this reason Teresa believed firmly that a sister should be able to change confessor if the direction offered was not leading to spiritual growth. It was essential that the superior of the community be non-judgemental towards a nun when such a situation arose. Concern for the sister's spiritual perfection and the welfare of the community came before the superior's relationship with the confessor in question. It was

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106 *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection*, VII.2.
107 *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection*, IV.2.
108 *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection*, V.3.

essential for a community to have a rule of 'holy liberty' that allowed sisters to discuss matters of conscience.[109] Teresa questioned any superior's right to restrict the relationship between a penitent and confessor and argued that no confessor could fully know the needs of the penitent, '…for God leads [His handmaidens] by different ways and it is impossible that one confessor should be acquainted with them all'.[110]

Teresa understood the temptations human beings encountered in their search for God. She wanted the sisters to have deep friendships with their confessors that would help them grow into mature Christians. She knew only too well how intimate connections were able to facilitate this growth. Intimacy is how one experiences God's presence. But sensuality and union with God were boundaries that could easily be confused and crossed in the relationship between confessor and penitent. Teresa warned the nuns about the close intertwining of *agape* and *eros* love with sensuality and placed the responsibility for the moral discernment of sex on the sisters:

> The important thing is that these two kinds of mutual love should be untainted by any sort of passion, for such a thing would completely spoil this harmony. If we exercise this love, of which I have spoken, with moderation and discretion, it is wholly meritorious, because what seems to us sensuality is turned into virtue. But the two may be so closely intertwined with one another that it is sometimes impossible to distinguish them, especially where a confessor is concerned. For if persons who are practising prayer find that their confessor is a holy man and understands the way they behave, they become greatly attached to him.[111]

From her experience Teresa understood that the experience of sensuality is as much about being able to claim one's personal authority as it is about physical and instinctual forces. The sisters would have had a negative attitude towards sexual feelings. Teresa empowered them to gain confidence in their sensuality and assume responsibility for it. In this area of her own spiritual growth Teresa never indulged in

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[109] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* V.2.
[110] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* V.4.
[111] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* Appendix to Chapter IV.

blaming a confessor and expected the same from the sisters. They were accountable for knowing when the boundaries were breaking down and destroying mutuality and were expected to extricate themselves from the relationships:

> Reflect upon the great importance of this, for it is a dangerous matter, and can be a veritable hell, and a source of harm to everyone. I advise you not to wait until a great deal of harm has been done but to take every possible step that you can think of and stop the trouble at the outset; this you may do with a good conscience.[112]

Teresa did not want the sisters to be afraid of emotions and believed there were times when it was appropriate to show and feel love for one another. The health of the community depended on equal and caring responses to the needs of others: 'It is a very good thing for us to take compassion on each others' need....Get to know what are the things in your sisters which you should be sorry to see and those about which you should sympathize with them'.[113] Empathy provided the foundation for relationships at St Joseph's. Teresa understood that the lack of empathy in a community led to indifference and shallowness in relationships. Learning to be equally caring in this community would have been difficult for the sisters who came from families of rank where relationships of domination and submission were normal. Teresa challenged the sisters to learn that equality was the natural way of being in relationship rather than domination and submission.

When she thought about it, Teresa became depressed about what the Church and society said about being a woman. As she became aware of her spiritual and intellectual capacities through her friendship with God, she experienced tension with the Church's teaching. Teresa reconciled this tension by identifying herself with strong men rather than weak women. Nor did she want the sisters to be identified

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[112] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* IV.13.
[113] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* VII.8.

with weakness and told them, 'I want you to be strong men. If you do all that is in you, the Lord will make you so manly that men themselves will be amazed'.[114] Teresa accepted as truth the limited knowledge about women's development because that is how she had been defined herself. Her only way to indicate the empowerment she knew through friendship was to identify it with male power rather than the experience of equality.

Teresa would have preferred that the sisters at St Joseph's practise contemplative prayer but she realised it was not suitable for everyone. Some of the sisters did not have the talent for this form of prayer. She removed that burden of responsibility from the sisters for how they prayed and gave it to God, '…for the choice is not ours but the Lord's'.[115] God chose those who were to engage in contemplative prayer and those who were to practise vocal prayer, and neither way of praying was inferior. Both were signs of God's friendship with them.[116] Teresa knew that one's prayer life could be used as a means of honour in the community and would not tolerate spiritual perfection through prayer to be confused with self-glorification because of one's method of prayer. True humility in prayer would bring God's special graces regardless of the form used.

Friendships were not perfect at St Joseph's or at the other foundations Teresa established. Living together equally was a new model of relationship for the sisters. To find themselves in relationships that allowed them to feel a new sense of power encouraged growth in some of the sisters and threatened others. Illness was common in convents. Teresa knew the pitfalls of excessive penances that injured the sisters' health and would not allow them in the convent.[117] At the same time she realised

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[114] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* VII.9.
[115] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* VII.7.
[116] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* VII.8.
[117] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* XV.4.

many of the health problems were the consequence of loss. She warned the sisters not to use their illnesses to protect themselves from spiritual growth. She had suffered from a long list of illnesses but discovered that for the first time in years she experienced good health at St Joseph's.[118] She refused to minimize the physical and emotional struggles she and the sisters endured as they learned detachment. It was better to be touch with their sadness and difficulties as they lived through them instead of denying them. Spiritual freedom brought with it emotional freedom and encouraged the sisters to learn that this way of life was its own kind of long martyrdom for those who wished to be among God's closest friends.[119]

Teresa taught in *The Way of Perfection* that true friendship was not easy. Over the years she had learned the difference between friendships that colluded with societal honour and friendships where status and self-gratification had no place. She chose the latter and wanted the sisters to have the same choice. She refused to idealise friendship and exposed the difficulties of having a friendship in the convent. Without friendship with God, which required mutual, non-possessive love, there would be no true friendship between the sisters. The life of prayer and obedience to God's will determined the quality of friendships in Teresa's foundations.

Conclusion: Teresa's Gift of Friendship

Teresa presented her world with a new understanding of spiritual growth through friendship. Any interpretation of her life needs to be looked at through the lens of friendship. She was passionate about it. Her friendship with God and others revealed to her the true vision of herself as a beloved daughter of God. Her life of prayer enabled her to experience God's accessibility and mutuality. She was transformed by

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[118] Berkowitz, 'UCLA Study on Friendship Among Women', 414.
[119] *The Complete Works,* vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection,* XII.2.

God's mutuality which allowed her to claim her interior authority at a time when the obsession of political and religious institutions with honour discouraged true friendships between human beings.

Teresa's revolutionary encounter with Jesus and knowledge that she was desired by Jesus as a friend also lifted the stigma of family shame that had haunted her. The redeemed shame empowered Teresa to become more self-aware and freed her to believe that she was capable of progressing towards spiritual perfection. This growing awareness increased Teresa's desire for God. Friendship is a form of desire in which we become like the ones we love.[120] In her mystical experiences she encountered the image of God within her. As she shared more deeply in the image of God within, she was able to bring the spiritual fruits of that relationship to others. The life that had been fragmented was healed by divine friendship. Teresa no longer worried about pleasing others. She lived her life in fulfilled service to God.

Teresa served God in a community of friends through the foundations of convents and in her writings. Once Teresa knew how she had been disempowered as a woman, she was determined that other women and men be given the opportunity to have mutually empowering friendships that would help them grow in self-awareness. Her experience of true friendship inspired her to act.

Teresa's life of friendship with God and others remains a powerful witness in today's world where competition and expertise, modern-day forms of honour, damage and even destroy mutual relationships. Teresa did not know how the self is created through relationships, but her desire for wholeness led her to find in herself God, who desired her as much as she desired God. Empowered by a relationship of friendship, Teresa reached out to others in mutual friendships on the way to spiritual maturity.

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[120] John W. Crossin, O.S.F.S., *Friendship: The Key to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 45.

Five

Friendship between a Man and a Woman: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer

The correspondence between the eminent German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Maria von Wedemeyer, his fiancée, and between him and his best friend, Eberhard Bethge, reveal important aspects of friendship between parents and children, between male friends and between a man and a woman. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was known to have many friends, but until his imprisonment, he had never given much thought to his friendships. In his letters from Cell 92 in Tegel Prison to his family, Maria and Eberhard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about friendship and learns what it means to be a friend.

Apart from his close attachment to his twin sister, Sabine, Dietrich had had only one other important female friendship with his distant cousin Elisabeth Zinn before he became engaged to Maria. He and Eberhard Bethge were soul mates. Even though I will look briefly at that friendship, my primary interest is in the friendship between Maria and Dietrich. The friendship between them was a struggle and raises the question whether a man and woman can be true friends. Dietrich's patriarchal opinions about the roles of men, women and children in society made it difficult for him to see the value of friendship as the basis for all the relationships in family and married life. Maria insisted friendship was the most important relationship between parents and children and husbands and wives. She believed strongly that friendship was the place for recognition of otherness to grow and develop and that marriage was stronger when it had its basis in friendship.

After ten months in his cell, Dietrich reconsidered friendship, largely because of his changing understanding of friendship through his relationship with his fiancée. He expressed for the first time what friendship meant in a letter written to his closest male friend, Eberhard Bethge:

> It must be confidently defended against all the disapproving frowns of 'ethical existences', though without claiming for it the *necessitas* of a divine decree, but only the *necessitas* of *freedom.* I believe that within the sphere of this freedom friendship is by far the rarest and most priceless treasure, for where else does it survive in this world of ours, dominated as it is by the *three other* mandates? It cannot be compared with the treasures of the mandates, for in relation to them it is *sui generis*; it belongs to them as the cornflower belongs to the cornfield.[1]

These 'ethical existences' or 'mandates' were concrete forms of social life commissioned by God that enabled all human beings to live together responsibly. Church, marriage and the family, culture and government were the mandates Bonhoeffer identified in his *Ethics,* an unfinished text he wrote to resist the evils of Nazi social policies.[2] He used the term 'mandate' deliberately as a way to point to God, who created these forms of life as duties for humanity to enable human society to flourish. Bonhoeffer viewed human flourishing as the ultimate good, and human fulfilment would come about through the practice of the Christian life under these mandates, which originated, continued and achieved their goals in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer intentionally used the term mandate rather than orders of creation. The term 'orders' diverted attention from the foundations of the institutions in the revelation of Christ towards the institutions which the Nazi government had co-opted as 'orders of creation' for the purpose of reading into them a messianic ideology to justify evil.

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* ed. Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1953), 193.
[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1959), 204, 282.

Bonhoeffer, the intellectual, could not find a sociological classification for friendship as he had for the other mandates. At one point he regarded friendship as a subdivision of culture and education. He eventually decided to put friendship beside culture, art and play and placed them into an area of freedom outside but surrounding the spheres of the mandates. Bonhoeffer believed freedom was essential for one to be a complete person. Freedom is not a possession, quality or characteristic of individuality but something human beings have for others. It is the ability to surpass one's needs and desires in order to be responsive to the other. This surpassing or letting go of self-absorption creates a spirituality of freedom where people can grow together as friends. Bonhoeffer's concept of freedom as a non-possession then allows the creative Spirit to move freely between human beings.

By placing friendship in the area of freedom, Bonhoeffer made it a relationship that transcended the mandates but could still influence and transform each mandate just as culture and education were able to. At the same time by putting it outside the acceptable and approved relationships, Bonhoeffer kept friendship at a safe distance from traditional social roles and did not have to deal with friendship influencing or challenging the inequality in these role expectations. People naturally play to the roles they have been assigned at a particular time in culture even though it might not be the natural way of acting. And those who define the social roles expect behaviour consistent with the roles. Bonhoeffer lived in a time when Western hierarchical relationships were the order of the day. Women and children could not be afforded equal and reciprocal relationships with men because they were believed to lack the moral capacity for the highest forms of friendship.

His comments about friendship to Eberhard might have also been an attempt to soothe his friend's hurt feelings. Eberhard had not hidden his feelings of exclusion in

an earlier letter in which he had complained to Dietrich about the struggle he was having with Dietrich's father over the question of visits and letters:

> Friendship – no matter how exclusive and how all-embracing it may be – has no *necessitas,* as father [He is referring to Bonhoeffer's father] put it over the question of visiting. Your letters of course go to Maria, and almost as automatically to Karl-Friedrich, but it takes an extra struggle to make the point that I have to have them too. You can understand from all how your letters and the visit had almost a liberating effect on me. In the army, you also say, no one pays any attention to the fact that someone has a very good friend. Friendship is completely determined by its content and only in this way does it have its existence.[3]

Six weeks before Eberhard wrote the above; Dietrich had told Eberhard in a deeply moving letter about aspects of their longstanding friendship. At the same time he attempted to prepare Eberhard for the changing nature of their relationship because of changes in their personal circumstances. Dietrich had become engaged the year before to Maria, and Eberhard had married Dietrich's niece, Renate Schleicher, four months after his friend's engagement. Bonhoeffer had written to Eberhard, 'At the beginning it's not at all easy to resolve the conflict between marriage and friendship'.[4] Even though both men used engagement and marriage as the reason for a difference in their relationship, it is Bonhoeffer's imprisonment that allows him to set aside his neediness and look at life less possessively. Only then does Dietrich Bonhoeffer learn true friendship.

Bonhoeffer's Early Life

Bonhoeffer's life story is essential for understanding his theology and his thoughts on friendship. He said that he carried the parental home in himself and the sense of

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[3] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 181.
[4] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 131.

belonging to his family throughout his life.[5] He used particular words in letters to his fiancée, Maria, his parents, Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, and his friend, Eberhard, that reflect the nature of his upbringing - love, loyalty, courage, faith, solidarity, patience, acceptance, forgiveness, confidence, strength and above all gratitude. From his prison cell he often expressed deep gratitude for his family: 'I want them all to know how grateful I am [a reference to the parcels of food, clothes and books that arrived regularly from the family]. It is a real help. What a blessing it is, in such distressing times, to belong to a large, closely-knit family, where each trusts the other and stands by him'.[6]

The parental home included a distinguished ancestry. His father's family served the public as clergy, physicians, lawyers, city councillors and mayors. Dietrich's father, Karl, was a world-renowned doctor of psychiatry and neurology and held the leading professorship for his field at the University of Berlin from 1912 until 1938. Even though he did not spend a lot of time with his children, Karl Bonhoeffer had a strong influence on them. When the children needed him, he was there for them. He had a high degree of emotional control, was reserved in his speech and was rarely contradicted. His great-niece, Renate Bethge, described Karl's authority and discipline in the home as 'empirical, rational and liberal.'[7] But he was also remembered for his sensitivity to the suffering of others and his gift for empathy.[8] Dietrich respected his father's model of parenting. After he had read the memoirs of his fiancée's father, Hans von Wedemeyer, and had discovered both men disciplined their sons similarly, Dietrich wrote to Maria from prison:

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[5] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 38, 70.
[6] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 70.
[7] F. Burton Nelson, 'The life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in John W. de Gruchy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.
[8] Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr* (London: Collins, 1975), 22.

> That element of severity in the father-son relationship is a sign of great strength, and of an inward self-assurance that derives from an awareness of the sanctity of fatherhood. Most parents today are too spineless. For fear of losing their children, they devalue themselves into their friends and cronies, and end by rendering themselves superfluous to them. I abhor that type of upbringing, which is nothing of the kind. I believe our families think alike in that respect.[9]

Maria did not agree with him and the passion in her reply would not have escaped Dietrich's attentive reading of her words:

> You write that parents can't and shouldn't be their children's 'friends'. In order to debate that, I think one should first define what 'friendship' means. The word is used so often and so superficially. If you equate it with 'camaraderie' or derive its meaning from 'friendly', I quite agree with you. But friendship is surely very much more than that. Don't be alarmed, but I believe that friendship is the most exalted bond that can exist between people here on earth. I can't deliver a logical dissertation on the subject – I can't even explain exactly what I mean.[10]

Maria's letter to Dietrich about friendship echoed what Dietrich had written to Eberhard, namely that it was the 'rarest and most priceless treasure'.[11]

The maternal sides of the Bonhoeffer family were also pillars of the communities. Paula von Hase, Dietrich's mother, had historians, theologians and pastors in her family. She was a school teacher and educated Dietrich and his seven siblings at home while managing a busy household. She was even more demanding of the children than her husband. The Bonhoeffer children excelled intellectually and musically. In his biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge attributed many of Bonhoeffer's characteristics to his mother. Paula went to great lengths to protect the children. Bonhoeffer complained about this to his youngest sister, Susanne:

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[9] Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz (eds.), *Love Letters from Cell 92: The Correspondence Between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer 1943-45,* trans. John Brownjohn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 168-9.

[10] *Love Letters,* 173. See Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985)* , who argues that friendship is the first relationship infants experience with caregivers, 43.

[11] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 193.

> I should like to live an unsheltered life for once. We cannot understand the others. We always have our parents to help us over every difficulty. However far away we may be from them, this gives us such a blatant security.[12]

Paula is also remarkably reserved and careful in her letters to her son in prison as is Dietrich's father. It is not certain whether she knew anything about his involvement in the conspiracy although her husband did. His mother wrote:

> None of us can imagine how you could have got into such a position when you are so outspokenly law-abiding in your attitude. We just cannot find any solution to the riddle. So we keep returning to the comforting conviction that everything will soon have to be cleared up and that you will be with us again.[13]

On the other hand, the death of Walter, their eldest son, in the First World War, could also have influenced what they said to Dietrich. Grief over Walter's death overwhelmed both parents. Paula spent weeks in bed and Karl could not make an entry in his diary for ten years on the anniversary of his son's death. Dietrich was deeply affected, too, by the death of his brother but even more by his parents' grief. He continually offered comfort and encouragement to them from prison, not wanting them to be tormented by anxiety about him.[14] At the same time he knew his parents left many things unspoken, and he did the same. When Maria went to their home to help, Dietrich cautioned her about an important difference in their families:

> They're both extremely fond of you, but it's a fact that such things are hardly ever voiced [He is making a reference to Maria's freedom of expressing her sensitiveness to the reality of their circumstances] in our family, whereas in yours they are. There's certainly no point in arguing over which is 'better'. They are different people, and they behave as their inner selves dictate. But I can imagine that you'll find it hard at

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[12] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography,* rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 20.
[13] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 55.
[14] Bonhoeffer, *LLP,* 22.

first to accept that we leave many things unspoken, especially in the religious domain.[15]

True friendship can exist between parents and children.[16] I believe that children first learn how to be friends from their parents. Friendships do not begin in nursery school but at home. Psychological insights recognise that parents not only provide their children security but they can also help them develop an awareness of themselves. Parents can maintain their moral authority when they have a strong sense of self-integrity. They use their personal power to empower their children without compromising the boundaries needed to raise them to be responsible human beings. Parents who do not have a strong centre of self often use their societal role to control their children.

Had Bonhoeffer lived longer, he might have understood how friendship is the first relationship between parents and young children. Socialization changes the nature of the relationship between parents and children particularly in hierarchical cultures where parents are encouraged to objectify and control their children. It is also possible that Bonhoeffer was influenced by prejudices developing at that time towards friendship. In 1932 the Swedish theologian, Anders Nygren, had published his book *Agape and Eros* in which he said all human love is motivated by the value of the object. According to Nygren it is impossible for human beings to love unselfishly. Even though Bonhoeffer did not have a copy of Nygren's book in his library, he would have known about this influential work.[17]

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[15] *Love Letters,* 262.

[16] See Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship,* 91, and Hite, *The Hite Report on the Family*, 226, 375, on friendship between parents and children.

[17] See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love,* trans. A.G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1932). Details of the books that Bonhoeffer owned are to be found in Dietrich Mayer and Eberhard Bethge, *Nachlass Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987).

True friendship does exist between parents and children when trust is present. Bonhoeffer experienced that trust in his family. He said, 'What a blessing it is, in such distressing times, to belong to a large, closely-knit family where each trusts the other and stands by him'.[18] Bonhoeffer understood that this kind of trust allowed him to really live and work especially in a time when the atmosphere was polluted 'with so much distrust that it chokes'.[19]

Bonhoeffer's parents stood by him throughout his lifetime. When he decided to become a theologian, his family was sceptical. Karl believed his son was wasting his intellectual gifts but he did not discourage him. He eventually changed his mind about Dietrich's chosen profession. In 1934 Karl wrote a birthday letter to him in London where Dietrich was pastor to two German congregations:

> At the time when you decided to devote yourself to theology I sometimes thought to myself that a quiet, uneventful, minister's life, as I knew it from that of my Swabian uncles and as Mörike describes it, would really almost be a pity for you. So far as uneventfulness is concerned, I was greatly mistaken. That such a crisis should still be possible in the ecclesiastical field seemed to me with my scientific background out of the question.[20]

Karl Bonhoeffer saw many of his colleagues hiding behind science when the Nazis gained power whereas his son and many of his colleagues took public stances against the injustices they saw. When the propaganda ministry wanted to make a film of him, Karl Bonhoeffer refused until his children were released from prison.[21] And his parents risked their lives to deliver food and books to him during heavy Allied air attacks on Berlin.[22] The bond of friendship, characterised by trust, generosity and

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[18] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 70.
[19] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 11.
[20] Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, 43.
[21] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 92. The Gestapo also arrested Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans Dohnanyi.
[22] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 403.

solidarity, is what Bonhoeffer carried in him from the parental home. Obviously Bonhoeffer had an experience of true friendship with his parents, but not a reasoned understanding of it.

Bonhoeffer's Relational Theology

One month after his arrest, Bonhoeffer answered his parent's request to describe life in prison. He wrote, 'One day lasts fourteen hours, of which I spend about three walking up and down the cell – several kilometres a day, besides half an hour in the yard. I read, learn and work'.[23] A few days later he made some notes for himself about life in prison. He began with a litany of separation –from people, work, past, future, marriage and God and concluded with a list of words to describe his emotional and spiritual reality. Dissatisfaction, tension, longing, indifference, fantasy (distortion of past and future) and suicide, 'not because of consciousness of guilt but because basically I am already dead' were some of the words Bonhoeffer wrote down.[24] The isolation made Bonhoeffer realize his life was at stake even before any legal action had been taken against him by the state. Nine months later he wrote to Eberhard:

> The wish to be independent in everything is false pride. Even what we owe to others belongs to ourselves and is a part of our own lives, and any attempt to calculate what we have 'earned' for ourselves and what we owe to other people is certainly not Christian, and is, moreover, a futile undertaking. It's through what he himself is, plus what he receives, that a man becomes a complete entity. I wanted to tell you this, because I've now experienced it for myself, though not for the first time, for it was already implicit all through the years of our *vita communis*. I've certainly not received less from you than you from me.[25]

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[23] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 29.
[24] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 33-35.
[25] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 150.

In prison Bonhoeffer experienced becoming a person in relation to others. He did not want to lose touch with those nearest and dearest to him. Perhaps he realised for the first time in his life that people were more important to him than intellectual discussions. He commented on this understanding of the person to his parents:

> It's remarkable how we think at such times about the people that we should not like to live without, and almost or entirely forget about ourselves. It is only then that we feel how closely our own lives are bound up with other people's, and in fact how the centre of our own lives is outside ourselves, and how little we are separate entities.[26]

Bonhoeffer's idea of a centre outside our selves echoes his understanding of all reality, which he developed in his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*. However it was in prison that Bonhoeffer truly began to understand and live his theology of sociality.

Like his contemporary, Martin Buber, Bonhoeffer believed in the primacy of human relationships, making a huge ontological shift with his theology of sociality. In an outline for a book, which he wrote following the indefinite postponement of his trial, Bonhoeffer stated the importance of relationship for experiencing transcendence:

> Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable – that is not authentic transcendence – but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection). The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form… the man for others', and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.[27]

Because of the incarnation God is with human beings and for human beings. Through Jesus Christ, God chose to be in relation to human beings. Bonhoeffer dismissed any spirituality that advocated the invisibility and other worldliness of God. Such fantasy

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[26] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 105.
[27] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 381.

spirituality betrayed the incarnation. Bonhoeffer believed God could only be met and heard in the real world within 'the real experience of historical, social and ethical existence' between persons.[28] God's presence is everywhere but human beings are not always ready to receive it. But when an encounter between human beings is filled with mutual respect, God is present and available to transform and renew their corporate life.

Bonhoeffer believed human beings were fundamentally relational. He was extremely critical of the subject-object model of epistemology, which he considered inadequate for genuine social and ethical relationships. In the subject-object model, habitual objectification of one for the other interferes with mutuality and creates all sorts of misunderstandings about another human being. Self-absorption and projection of the self on another are the dangers inherent in the subject-object model. Self-absorption fosters isolation and gradually numbs the human need for intimate relationships. Projection of the self is simply reverse self-absorption. It, too, creates barriers between human beings. Both eventually deaden relationships between human beings so that unless there is recognition of the other and the need to objectify, life between two human beings ceases because it is difficult for deadened spirits to respond in life-giving ways to one another.

This is the reason Bonhoeffer rejected the subject-object model in favour of the I-You relation. In this model the otherness of each human being is not only recognized; but once the otherness is encountered, the encounter requires a response, literally *Verantwortlichkeit,* answerability, for the other.[29] When there is honest communication between human beings, projections and egocentricities, which

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[28] Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 36. See also Martin Marty (ed.), *The Place of Bonhoeffer: Problems and Possibilities in His Thought* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1962).

[29] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Enquiry into the Sociology of the Church* (London: Collins, 1963), 33.

obstruct the face of the other, will be subdued. Then the opportunity to see the other as a free human being made in the image of God instead of objective images becomes a greater possibility. Bonhoeffer believed that in human encounters boundaries were present which created resistance to the tendency to dominate, manipulate or use the other person. When these boundaries were respected, the invisible power of the Holy Spirit became known through transforming communication. The outcome of this answerability was increased human well-being.

Bonhoeffer's relational theology went beyond that of individual persons. Because of his emphasis on the ethical aspects of human encounters, he was just as concerned that other forms of human community should operate from the I-You model. He saw a range of social forms from marriage, family and friendship to the nation and the whole church where the I-You relation would function.[30] The reason Bonhoeffer applied this model of relationship to communities was to ensure that all social structures would have ethical responsibility for each other as their prevailing ideology. Without a sense of responsibility for and solidarity with the other, a community cannot exist. Ego-gratification, selfishness, power over others and self-love destroy all forms of human community and make I-You relationships impossible to maintain.

Bonhoeffer could not have known how God would call him to live the relational theology about which he had written. In prison he would learn gradually a new freedom from the drive and ambition that had kept him from intimate relationships for most of his life. It was not unusual for him to withdraw suddenly into his room to be alone, and he admitted his tendency toward depression later in life. For years Bonhoeffer had been a solitary figure with only a few intimate friendships with his

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[30] Clifford Green, 'Human sociality and Christian community', in de Gruchy (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* 118.

male colleagues. His decision to study theology was influenced by his need to be alone; he was determined not to need others in his life. But his need for intimacy suddenly changed when he was no longer in control of events. Only then did Dietrich Bonhoeffer begin to understand what was meant by an I-You relationship. One of the most important relationships that would change his understanding of friendship occurred only months before he was imprisoned. In January 1943 he secretly became engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, and the correspondence between them until shortly before his death revealed the life-giving gift of friendship in their relationship. However, before looking more closely at that friendship it is important to mention first his ten-year friendship with Eberhard Bethge.

Bonhoeffer's Friendship with Eberhard Bethge

On Eberhard Bethge's thirty-fifth birthday, Dietrich Bonhoeffer described their friendship in the poem, 'The Friend', which he wrote from prison less than a year before his death. [31] Eberhard was the friend who gave Bonhoeffer the support, recognition, happiness, strength, counsel and faithfulness, gifts that helped him overcome his feelings of loneliness and inferiority which he felt acutely at times. Bonhoeffer confessed that the spirit of friendship, that freedom, risk and trust which they had together, allowed him to feel valued.[32] By now Bonhoeffer realised that his friendships were the most important things in his life and were used by God to help him know what it meant to be a vulnerable human being. Bonhoeffer confessed that frequently he was too rational and curbed his emotions because they frightened him:

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[31] See Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 388-390.
[32] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 386.

'...and if I were not so 'reasonable', I might do something foolish'.[33] It is likely that his willingness to trust Eberhard's loyalty permitted Bonhoeffer for the first time in his life to express his truest feelings. He could talk to Eberhard with a matter of factness that he could not share with Maria.[34]

Eberhard Bethge came from a small country village near Brandenburg. He was the son of a Lutheran pastor and chose to follow his father's vocation. When he was a seminarian, Bethge was forced to make a choice. The Reich Church demanded an oath of allegiance to Hitler and Nazism from its seminarians and pastors. Bethge refused and supported the Council of Brethren of the Confessing Church, who also opposed the nazification of the church. He was immediately expelled from seminary, losing his chance for ordination. Now Bethge needed a place to complete his seminary training. The Council of Brethren sent him to one of the five illegal seminaries they had established to replace those closed down by the state church. Bonhoeffer was the director of the seminary, which was eventually located in Finkenwalde. At Finkenwalde the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge began.

The friendship developed through their mutual love of music. When they were together Bonhoeffer played the piano and Bethge sang. But they also managed to discuss theology. Bethge saw Bonhoeffer as a friend who built up his confidence. When he first arrived at the seminary, the unsophisticated Bethge felt theologically incompetent. Bonhoeffer encouraged Bethge in his studies, and before long Bethge was recognized as one of the seminary's most able theologians. Bonhoeffer depended on Bethge to clarify his ideas: 'I may often have originated our ideas, but the

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[33] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 312.
[34] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 319.

clarification of them was completely on your side. I only learnt in conversation with you whether an idea was any good or not'.[35]

Some seminarians at Finkenwalde were unhappy with their friendship and felt it disrupted the community life. There was no doubt that Bethge was Bonhoeffer's favourite student, and he was described by a fellow student as the 'representative of the Führer'.[36] Gerhard Vibrans, Bethge's cousin and closest friend since childhood, feared Bethge's relationship with Bonhoeffer would destroy his friendship with his cousin. Bonhoeffer demanded a lot from Bethge and at times his friendship appeared to be possessive. In the summer of 1936 they planned a holiday together and Bethge had taken the liberty to invite his cousin, Gerhard, and brother, Hans, to join them. Bonhoeffer was irritated with Bethge's spontaneous invitations. It took a long time for the hard feelings to sort themselves out. Bonhoeffer eventually apologized to Gerhard and in turn, Gerhard admitted he was envious of the special friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge. Gerhard remained his cousin's close friend and a friend of Bonhoeffer's, as well, until his death in action on 3 February 1942.[37]

Bethge was known throughout his lifetime for his ability to make and keep friends. Bonhoeffer said of him: 'I don't know anyone who does not like you, whereas I know a great many people who do not like me'.[38] Bethge's friendship with Bonhoeffer was not an easy one. Bonhoeffer was often moody, anxious and depressed, and Bethge was the only person who knew 'how often *accidie, tristitia,* with all its menacing consequences' affected his friend.[39] In spite of his depressions, Bethge remained loyal to him:

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[35] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 130.
[36] John W. deGruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit: Bonhoeffer's Friend Eberhard Bethge* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 17.
[37] de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit,* 32.
[38] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 189.
[39] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 129.

These depressions were not occasioned by feelings of deprivation or by vain desires. They tended to beset him precisely when he realized how strongly others believed in the success of his path and placed great faith in his leadership. They were less the doubts of weakness than of weariness brought about through his own talents. His own power to control and influence others shocked him. He would be over-whelmed by self-contempt and a sense of inadequacy so strong that it threatened to rob his happiest and most successful undertakings of all meaning. His intellect had gained an evil ascendancy over faith. Then, in private confession, he would seek and find a renewed innocence and sense of vocation.[40]

Bonhoeffer admitted he was a demanding and difficult friend for Bethge.[41] However, Bethge tolerated his friend's volatility because he respected Bonhoeffer's vocational sincerity. According to John de Gruchy, Bonhoeffer's and Bethge's friendship held together because of their 'shared spiritual commitments'.[42] Their relationship was strengthened when Bethge married his friend's niece, who lived next door to the Bonhoeffer's parents' home. Bethge was a frequent guest there, and his room overlooked the Schleicher garden where one of the Schleicher children, Renate, became more and more attractive to him. Renate was seventeen years younger than Eberhard, and at first her parents were worried about the age difference. Renate and Eberhard became engaged early in 1943 and were married in May of the same year just weeks after Bonhoeffer had been arrested.

On 26 November 1943 Bethge, Bonhoeffer's parents and Maria were able to visit Bonhoeffer in prison. This was an important visit for Bonhoeffer and Bethge. Bonhoeffer was terrified how this separation would affect their friendship. After the visit he wrote to Bethge:

> When I got back to my cell afterwards, I paced up and down for a whole hour, while my dinner stood there and got cold, so that at last I couldn't help laughing at myself when I found myself repeating over and over again, 'That was really great!' I always

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[40] Bethge, *Bonhoeffer,* 506.
[41] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 148.
[42] de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit,* 63.

hesitate to use the word 'indescribably' – but at the moment that is just what this morning seems to be... Now you've been able to convince yourself that I'm my old self in every respect and that all is well. I believe that a moment was enough to make clear to both of us that everything that has happened in the last seven and a half months has left both of us essentially unchanged; I never doubted it for a moment, and you certainly didn't either. That's the advantage of having spent almost every day and having experienced almost every event and discussed every thought together for eight years. One needs only a second to know about each other, and now one doesn't really need even that second any more.[43]

That visit brought Bonhoeffer and Bethge new hope and energy. Bethge and Bonhoeffer were each other's anchors. They felt the loss of any ability to control their situations – by now Bethge was in military training camp in Lissa and would eventually be sent to Italy at the beginning of 1944, while Bonhoeffer's hopes for a trial were constantly being frustrated. Both men continued to overcome their sense of loneliness and powerlessness through correspondence. Bethge would tell Bonhoeffer about his everyday life, and in turn Bonhoeffer would reflect on it theologically. He did not always share with Bethge the harshness of his life in prison. Bonhoeffer was able to endure the physical strains but found the psychological ones more difficult to bear. He began to feel that his life was 'more or less over'.[44] Bonhoeffer was a very private person. Although he was available to listen to others talk about their loneliness, he believed he was giving into self-pity if he revealed he had the same problem.[45] Disclosure was extremely difficult for him.

Bonhoeffer overcame a lot of his depression and isolation through his letters to Bethge. The letters to Bethge were not censored like those sent to his family and Maria. Corporal Knobloch, one of Bonhoeffer's prison guards, smuggled his letters out and mailed them to Bethge from home. When Bethge received the letters, he hid

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[43] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 145.
[44] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 163.
[45] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 168.

them in gas mask containers in the Schelicher's garden. Some he destroyed for security reasons.[46] Bethge preferred to read Bonhoeffer's letters and found it more difficult to express his thought in letters back to him. He wrote:

> It has been nine months without you... During this time you've become much more aware of some things which have escaped me as a result of Renate's existence: a critical feeling for empty phrases, hasty and false conclusions, self-satisfaction, pietistic style, Pharisaic bourgeoisie in the church. Although you don't really say much explicitly, your ever-present ear for such things compels one to examine everything all over again... It seems to me that you have made many things about yourself clearer and more comprehensible, the difference in our backgrounds – yours and mine; what it meant for you to become a theologian and to be one in *this* family... I admire your tone... I haven't yet been through such serious situations as you have. I'm not sure how well I would come to grips with the situation if I saw what is really at stake.[47]

Occasionally Bonhoeffer scolded Bethge for not writing or for the brevity of his letters. Bonhoeffer depended on Bethge's letters and found it difficult to write without Bethge echoing his thoughts back to him.[48] Unfortunately Bonhoeffer was not as sensitive to what Bethge was going through. Bethge agonized over some of the horrors of war. Bethge was assigned to a non-combat *Abwehr* unit and served as 'chauffeur, secretary and night watchman'.[49] However, he knew about Hitler's order that fifty Italians be killed every time a German soldier died on Italian soil. As a result of this order thousands of Italians, including women and children, were killed. The Germans also plundered and destroyed property. Bethge was sickened by what he saw and heard. And when he had the opportunity to share his agony with his friend during an unexpected visit in May 1944, Bonhoeffer rebuked him for expressing the pain of separation from his family. Bethge might have been worried for the safety of

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[46] de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit,* 71.
[47] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 183.
[48] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 281.
[49] de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 75.

his wife and son. He was also being overwhelmed by guilt and grief. Bonhoeffer later realised the severity of his comments and attempted a half-hearted apology in a letter he wrote two days after the visit:

> Did you find here recently that it's now 'harder to speak' than before? I didn't. I only ask because you said this in a recent letter. Perhaps you were surprised that yesterday's letter was on the one hand intended to say something to *you*, but on the other was itself so helpless. But isn't this what happens? One tries to help and is oneself the person most in need of help... The day before yesterday you said something to the effect that perhaps I had things better than I knew. Certainly, Eberhard, I'm in much less danger than you, and I would therefore give a great deal to be able to change places with you in this respect. That's not just empty speaking; it keeps entering into my prayers quite automatically; I've already seen more of life and experienced more than you... but perhaps that is precisely why I'm more 'tired of life' than you may be.[50]

Even in prison Bonhoeffer continued to be a demanding and at times possessive friend. However after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July, Bonhoeffer knew his days were coming to an end. He told Bethge that suffering was a way to freedom and that death 'was the supreme festival on the road to freedom'.[51] In another letter written on 23 August 1944, Bonhoeffer is saying good-bye to his friend:

> Please don't ever get anxious or worried about me, but don't forget to pray for me – I'm sure you don't! I am so sure of God's guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. You must never doubt that I'm travelling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I'm being led. My past life is brim-full of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified. I'm most thankful for the people I have met, and I only hope that they never have to grieve about me, but that they, too, will always be certain of, and thankful for, God's mercy and forgiveness. Forgive my writing this. Don't let it grieve or upset you for a

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[50] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 305.
[51] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 375.

> moment but let it make you happy. But I did want to say it for once, and I couldn`t think of anyone else who I could be sure would take it aright.[52]

Bethge continued to receive poems and theological letters from Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer's 'Outline for a Book' was the last thing Bethge received from his friend. Bethge wrote his last letter to Bonhoeffer on 30 September 1944:

> Once again we're living in a great pause. I find your thoughts about the future bold and perhaps even comforting... If only I could tell you of my latest spiritual and worldly experiences![53]

On 22 September the Gestapo discovered documents that made Bonhoeffer's situation worse. In October he was transferred to the Gestapo prison for intense questioning. Bethge, Klaus Bonhoeffer and Rüdiger Schleicher, Bethge's father-in-law, were imprisoned in the same month. Bethge was ordered to stand trial on 15 May. When the Russians entered Berlin on 25 April, before the German prison guards fled, they opened the cell doors, and Bethge and other prisoners walked free.[54] After the war Bethge and Bonhoeffer's brother, Karl-Friedrich, shouldered responsibility for the entire family. Bethge was also determined to find out the circumstances around the arrests and deaths not only of Dietrich but of Klaus Bonhoeffer, Hans von Dohnanyi, Christine Bonhoeffer's husband, and his father-in-law.

By 1946 Bethge began to write and talk about Bonhoeffer's life and thought. Other friends and colleagues of Bonhoeffer who were still alive confronted Bethge with some of his interpretations. Some were even jealous of Bethge's task, but Bonhoeffer had asked Bethge to write his biography. Bonhoeffer recognized Bethge's natural ability to see things with unbiased eyes. In August 1944, Bonhoeffer remarked on this gift:

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[52] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 393.
[53] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 398.
[54] de Gruchy, 91.

> Your gift of *seeing* seems to me to be the most important thing. And precisely *how* and *what* you see. This is no urgent, analytical, curious seeing, that wants to pry into everything, but clear, open and reverent seeing.[55]

Bethge was Bonhoeffer's closest friend for the last ten years of his life as well as a member of the family through marriage. Bethge devoted a large part of his life to keeping the memory of Bonhoeffer alive. When Bethge was eighty-nine-years old, he was still travelling and lecturing on Bonhoeffer's life and theology. Their names were inseparable. What accounts for this devotion? Bonhoeffer was Bethge's mentor and had a strong influence on him - perhaps stronger than even Bethge realized. John de Gruchy attributes it to their friendship:

> In Bethge, Bonhoeffer had found the companion with whom he could share his concerns and from whom he knew he would receive wise counsel and strength. In Bonhoeffer, Bethge found a friend who encouraged and appreciated his own gifts, who set him free to be himself, and one to whom he could so willingly give his loyalty.[56]

Undoubtedly the biblical image of friendship as the knitting of souls applies to the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Bethge. They were lost without each other. Might the absence of part of his own soul account for the dedication Bethge had to maintaining Bonhoeffer's legacy? Might not the helplessness they experienced need to be redeemed? Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge and Renate in January 1944:

> I think this realization of one's own helplessness has two sides…it brings both anxiety and relief. As long as we ourselves are trying to help shape someone else's destiny, we are never quite free of the question whether what we're doing is really for the other person's benefit – at least in any matter of great importance. But when all possibility of co-operating in anything is suddenly cut off, then behind any anxiety about him there is the consciousness that his life has now been placed wholly in better

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[55] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 385.
[56] de Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 209.

> and stronger hands. For you, and for us, the greatest task during the coming weeks, and perhaps months, may be to entrust each other to those hands.[57]

Bonhoeffer and Bethge saw with each other's eyes. Their friendship was exacting, more than most people's. They shared the same commitments in ministry and they maintained their faithfulness to each other beyond death. Bonhoeffer entrusted Bethge to give a clear account of his life and work. One cannot imagine the pain Bethge felt as he retrieved the legacy of his closest friend and brought it back to life. Bethge's lifetime of work could not make up for the loss of his closest male companion. But perhaps it was the loss that kept the bond alive between them. It became the creative space in which Bethge was allowed to come into his own as a writer and theologian, something that might not have happened if Bonhoeffer had lived.

Maria von Wedemeyer's Life

Bonhoeffer's closest female friendship was with Maria von Wedemeyer. Like Dietrich, Maria came from a highly educated, upper-middle-class family with an equally distinguished list of ancestors. She was one of seven children born to Hans and Ruth von Wedemeyer. Hans was a successful Prussian landowner and farmer. He fought in both World Wars and was killed just west of Stalingrad in August, 1942, when Maria was eighteen.

Maria's mother, Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, came from the landed aristocracy. Ruth's father died when she was six months old. At the age of seventeen Ruth and her mother, Countess Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, ran the family estate after Ruth's brother was called up in 1914. Maria's grandmother, Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, became

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[57] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 190.

acquainted with Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he was director of Finkenwalde seminary. For two years Ruth attended Sunday services at Finkenwalde and several of her grandchildren, including Maria, frequently accompanied her. Maria's grandmother was a great admirer and close friend of Bonhoeffer. He visited her regularly and even stayed at her home to work on his books. Bonhoeffer respected her theological astuteness and spiritual depth. She persuaded Bonhoeffer to prepare three of her grandchildren for confirmation including Maria's favourite brother, Max.

Max and Maria were very close and following the news of their father's death, Max wrote to his mother and expressed concern for Maria's well being: 'When my thoughts turn to you, Mother, I'm not worried about you. It's only when I think of dear Maria, with her passionate temperament and extreme sensitivity that I wonder how she'll fare'.[58] Max served on the Russian front and was killed in action in October 1942, barely two months after their father had been killed. In her diary Maria wrote that she would have given her life to save her brother's.

Maria was educated in strict Protestant boarding schools which excelled in academic rigour and Christian discipline. Her best school friend, Doris Fahle, said she was unwavering in her views of the world but was, at the time, very vulnerable.[59] At school Maria discovered she had exceptional abilities in mathematics. After the war she read for a degree in mathematics at Göttingen University and won a scholarship to continue her studies at Bryn Mawr College in the United States. She worked for Remington Rand Univac as a mathematician and also learned computers and data-processing. In her last job with Honeywell, she managed a team of computer scientists and technicians. Her professional colleagues described her as strong and

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[58] *Love Letters,* 298.
[59] *Love Letters,* 300.

intelligent and a person of great courage. Close friends said she reflected life even when she was dying of cancer in 1977.[60]

Events Leading to Maria and Dietrich's Engagement

Maria renewed her acquaintance with Dietrich in June 1942 when she visited her grandmother's home following her graduation from high school and before she was to begin her year of national service. He arrived a week into her stay to work on his *Ethics.* At first she was annoyed with his company but gradually found him to be engaging in conversation and respectful of her opinions even though there was a gap of eighteen years between them.[61] Dietrich described that meeting with Maria in a letter to Eberhard Bethge as very significant for him: a 'few highly charged minutes' along with uncertainty about whether to hope for another meeting with her or allow the feeling to recede into his memory as 'unfulfilled fantasies'.[62]

During their time together at Maria's grandmother's, Bonhoeffer was in the midst of the most unsettled years of his life. It is uncertain what, if anything, Maria knew about his current situation although it was likely her grandmother had some awareness of the double life Dietrich was leading. By that time he had become completely disillusioned with the lack of resistance to Hitler's regime from the leaders of the German churches, including his Confessing Church colleagues. In 1939 when it looked like war was ready to break out in Europe, he had hastily returned from a teaching and pastoral post in America to share in the hardships facing the German people. He joined the underground resistance movement that intended to remove Hitler from power. With the help of his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi,

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[60] *Love Letters,* 362.
[61] *Love Letters,* 330.
[62] *Love Letters,* 331.

Bonhoeffer became a civilian member of the *Abwehr*, the counterintelligence agency of the German army as well as the major organization for providing cover-ups for the resistance that was planning assassination attempts on Hitler.

The chief of staff of the *Abwehr* persuaded the Gestapo that Bonhoeffer's years of ecumenical contacts could be manipulated to gather intelligence and assess the Allied position. As a double agent Bonhoeffer's frequent trips abroad were used to provide information to the Allies about the resistance. He made his first trip for the *Abwehr* in 1941. In Zurich and Geneva he renewed communications with old ecumenical friends, who received him warmly but doubted his hints about the resistance movement.[63] His most dangerous trip occurred between 30 May and 2 June, 1942, when he went to Sweden for the third time and met with Bishop George Bell, his British ecumenical partner and personal friend since 1932. At that meeting Bonhoeffer gave Bell a list of the names of the key conspirators in the resistance and asked that Bell convey to the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, his request for support for the resistance. Bell wrote numerous letters to Eden and finally had a meeting but could not convince him that the resistance group existed and needed aid.[64]

A few days after his dangerous visit to George Bell, Bonhoeffer arrived at Maria's grandmother's home at Klein-Krössin. Her home had become a place of refuge for him. Here he could relax, converse and write in freedom. By that time Bonhoeffer had been forbidden to speak in public and write because of subversive activities. He could no longer teach or do any work on behalf of the church. And for a short time he was required to report to the police regularly about his whereabouts and was not allowed to go to Berlin where his parents lived. The police restriction placed him in an insecure position, and Bonhoeffer experienced increasing isolation in his personal life.

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[63] Bethge, *A Biography*, 728.
[64] Bethge, *A Biography*, 763.

Bonhoeffer had had no lack of friendships for many years but they were evaporating. Of his own choice he had distanced himself from his colleagues in the Confessing Church because he was ashamed of their oath of loyalty to the *Führer*. When war broke out he lost contact with his ecumenical friends. He continued to write to his Finkenwalde students, most of whom were serving on the front lines. But after his first trip for the *Abwehr* in 1941 he cut back on his correspondence with them because he was not willing to be tempted to involve them in the risks he was taking.

The insecurity and loneliness that Bonhoeffer was experiencing when he met Maria at Klein-Krössin might explain his unexpected attraction to her. In the free and friendly space of her grandmother's home, Bonhoeffer felt the restraints lifted from him and was able to enjoy Maria's spontaneous friendliness, which was missing in his life. He was living in a dangerous and fearful environment which would have kept his heart closed to the human experience of unexpected love. Furthermore Bonhoeffer was not a risk taker; his calculating personality needed to be in control of events no matter how big or small. He was known to become quite angry if he had not carefully thought out his actions beforehand.[65]

Obviously Bonhoeffer wanted to see Maria after that June visit, but he was uncertain how to arrange another meeting 'in such a way as to seem unobstrusive and inoffensive to her'.[66] He thought about writing to her but decided it was not the right time; however, a future life with Maria seemed to be the underlying reason for wanting to see her again. In the mid-1930s Bonhoeffer had believed that being married would be impossible because of his total commitment to his work. By 1941 he seemed to have changed his mind and was more positive about marriage:

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[65] Bethge, *A Biography*, 598.
[66] *Love Letters*, 331.

> Now, in the midst of demolition, we want to build up; in the midst of life by the day and by the hour, we want a future; in the midst of banishment from the earth, a bit of room; in the midst of the general misery, a bit of happiness. And what overwhelms us is that God says Yes to this strange desire, that God acquiesces in our will, though the reverse should normally be true. So marriage becomes something quite new, grand, for us who want to be Christians in Germany.[67]

A year after he wrote the above, Bonhoeffer was also in a race for time with his co-conspirators to pull off the assassination of Hitler and avoid arrest. Suddenly his private life became extremely important to him. He wrote his will and decided to become engaged. When Maria's father died from shell wounds in the Ukraine in August of 1942, she went home. Around the same time her grandmother was in the hospital recuperating from eye surgery and asked Maria to nurse and read to her until she recovered her sight. Bonhoeffer was a frequent visitor at the hospital. Even Maria was surprised by the number of visits and the attention she received from him. She was mourning the death of her father and welcomed the support Dietrich gave to her. On one occasion following his visit to the hospital, he invited Maria to have lunch with him.

Maria has numerous entries in her diary for October 1942 concerning Pastor Bonhoeffer, as she called him, and her perceptions of conversations they shared. Because of the sacrifice her father had just made for his country, she struggled with Bonhoeffer's comments about being a conscientious objector but decided not to judge him or look for an ulterior reason behind his principles. Maria's grandmother, observing the growing and deepening attachment between her granddaughter and Dietrich, began to think how she might encourage the relationship. Maria had resumed her national service when she received word on 26 October that her brother

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[67] Bethge, *A Biography,* 743.

Max had also been killed in Russia. Maria returned home to be with her mother and to plan the memorial service for Max. Because Bonhoeffer had confirmed Max, Maria's grandmother invited him to attend the service. Maria's mother vehemently disagreed with the invitation and asked Bonhoeffer not to come. Maria's mother was worried about the attraction between her daughter and Dietrich and intended to discourage it as much as possible. She believed Maria was too young for Bonhoeffer, and she suspected he was in danger because of his activities in the resistance. When Maria found out about the argument between her mother and grandmother, she took it on herself to write to Pastor Bonhoeffer and voice her opinion about what was going on.

Two days after he received her letter, Bonhoeffer wrote to thank Maria for shedding some light on a confusing situation for both of them, and at the close of his letter hinted about his deeper feelings for her. Maria was shocked by his openness and hid the letter. By the end of November 1942 Maria's mother was convinced of his intention to ask Maria to marry him and requested that he visit her at the family home. Frau Wedemeyer asked that he break off contact with Maria for one year so her daughter could regain some stability in her life after the deaths of her father and brother. In a letter to Eberhard, Bonhoeffer decided it was best to be quiet for the time being and respect her wish although he was convinced he could talk his way around Frau Wedemeyer's argument for delaying an engagement.[68]

Somehow Maria learned that Dietrich wanted to marry her and was convinced, even though he had not asked her directly, that he understood her well enough to know what he was doing. She resolved to marry him. Before she faced her mother about the proposal, she stubbornly informed her at the beginning of January 1943 that

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[68] *Love Letters,* 336.

she was going to marry Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But Maria's mother insisted she have some control over her youthful daughter's decision, and with the backing of Maria's uncle, she forbade Maria to talk to Dietrich unless they agreed to extend the time between the public announcement of their engagement and the marriage. Maria agreed and the couple became engaged on 17 January 1943. At the beginning of February Bonhoeffer told his parents.[69]

Maria's initial feelings about the engagement were ones of security and a sense of relief that allowed her to postpone all her worries. The inner turmoil she was experiencing was most likely because of the deaths of the two most significant persons in her life. Dietrich's proposal made her feel alive again and able to breathe freely. The thought of a future of happiness enabled her to push aside the heaviness of the grief she was carrying inside, but even Maria understood the innermost reality of the aching loneliness for her father and brother that she would know for the rest of her life.[70] At such times Maria was wise beyond her years. She was realistic about the differences between Dietrich and herself:

> The innermost reality still stands, even though I don't love him. But I know that I will love him. Oh, there are so many superficial arguments against it. He's old and wise for his age – a thoroughgoing academic, I suppose. How will I, with my love of dancing, riding, sport, pleasure, be able to forgo all those things…? Mother says he's an idealist and hasn't given it careful thought. I don't believe that...[71]

Between the time of their meeting in June and their love letters after his arrest and imprisonment, Dietrich and Maria wrote to one another and slowly a relationship began to take root. A high priority for Maria was to be able to communicate about

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[69] Bethge, *A Biography,* 790.
[70] *Love Letters,* 337.
[71] *Love Letters,* 337.

herself to him and trust that what she said was between them alone.[72] She especially did not want him discussing their affairs with her grandmother. Maria was at an important transitional stage in her life where she wanted to take possession of it and make a healthy break from the strong Prussian influences of her grandmother and mother. She now had an opportunity to communicate about herself to someone outside the family who respected her opinions. In fact during the early days of the engagement Maria was convinced that even by returning home she would lose her resolve to marry Dietrich.[73]

Maria's sister, Ruth, noted that even though there was a strong sense of solidarity growing up in their family, there was little room for healthy conflict or capacity for self-individuation, especially between Maria and her mother. When Maria's father was away at the war, solidarity in the family might have been motivated by fear which would have prevented healthy interaction. Family closeness would have masked an underlying anxiety which in turn would have inhibited free expressions of love and friendship between Maria and her mother. They loved each other but real mutuality, which is also real closeness and which Maria had with her father, was missing between Maria and her mother. Maria desperately longed for a free expression of love and friendship with her, but expressions of love only came about in times of crisis, and friendship was never mentioned between them.[74] After the war Maria's mother regretted demanding that they wait a year and denying her daughter the freedom to spend time with Dietrich. Maria was unable to relieve her mother of the guilt she felt even though she tried.[75]

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[72] *Love Letters,* 339. See Steve Duck, *Friends for Life: The Psychology of Personal Relationships* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 9, on the importance of being able to keep confidences for developing true friendship.
[73] *Love Letters,* 337.
[74] *Love Letters,* 337.
[75] *Love Letters,* 297.

Dietrich's first reaction to Maria's acceptance of his proposal was sheer excitement and joy:

> May I simply tell you what is in my heart? I feel, and am overwhelmed by the realization, that I've been granted a gift beyond compare. I'd given up hope of it, after all the turmoil of recent weeks, and now the inconceivably great and happy moment has come, just like that, and my heart is opening wide and brimming over with gratitude and confusion and still can't take it in – the 'yes' that is to determine the entire future course of our lives.[76]

In the same letter he agrees with reluctance to Maria's request to have some time in solitude to test herself and her decision. Her desire to be alone would seem to contradict a fundamental need in friendship – spending time together or, in this case, getting to know one another through their letters. Maria might be testing Dietrich as well as herself. She was aware of the strong influence her grandmother also had on him. The testing could have been her way of making sure that their attraction towards each other began on common ground without outside influences, what she refers to as a 'false picture'.[77] In light of the unusual circumstances surrounding the engagement, it was essential they work on their relationship in a way in which they could co-create a world for themselves, even if it meant being separated in order to establish new boundaries and to free themselves of the social conventions expected by their families.

Dietrich was not pleased with Maria's self-assertion. But he seemed to understand intellectually although perhaps not emotionally what she was trying to achieve:

> Don't say anything about the 'false picture' I may have of you. I don't want a 'picture', I want you; just as I beg you with all my heart to want me, not a picture of me – and you must surely know that those are two different things…[78]

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[76] *Love Letters,* 339.
[77] *Love Letters,* 338. See Becker, *Living and Relating,* 150, for the importance of attraction, interest and attention to establish mutuality.
[78] *Love Letters,* 340.

In the same letter he suggests that Maria contact her grandmother and tell her about their engagement. In spite of Maria's wishes that their relationship be a private matter, Dietrich continued to insist that Ruth be kept up to date on them. In a letter from him written one week later, Dietrich is obviously becoming impatient with her rule of silence and believes it threatens the spontaneity of their friendship. In the same letter he hints for the first time about the uncertainty of the immediate future and how vital communication would be for them, if only by letter. Dietrich ventures for the first time to tell Maria he loves her very much and thinks of her constantly.[79]

Maria continued to write letters to him every day in her diary. She was struggling with confused desires and uncertain whether it would be acceptable to send them and uncertain about what to do with the ones she had. She wrote in her diary because she could not bring herself to disclose her passions to him. Maria believed he would find them awful, and she was determined to change some of her behaviours in order to respond better to his needs.[80] This personal entry in her diary also revealed that Maria was growing up in a family as well as a culture that was all too ready to tell her what she wanted. She did not yet understand that disclosing to him her authentic desires would bring to both her and Dietrich a more vibrant friendship.[81] Maria was equally determined that Dietrich should not be the one to change her. This revelation spoke of her willingness to accept responsibility for her life and not give in to dependency. During this time of self-imposed solitude Maria appeared to be doing a lot of mental work that would help sustain their relationship in the very near future.

Just over one month after their engagement Maria received a letter from her grandmother implying that Dietrich was in danger. Alarmed and distraught, she broke

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[79] *Love Letters*, 342.
[80] *Love Letters*, 343.
[81] Prager, *The Psychology of Intimacy*, 44.

her rule of silence and telephoned. Certainly their limited communication up to this point kept Maria from knowing the extent of his involvement in the resistance. It appeared she knew nothing about what he was doing and the danger he was in until her grandmother's letter. Maria was relieved to hear his voice. Dietrich pretended not to know what she was driving at and told her not to worry about him. For the time being he was able to convince her, but Dietrich also knew his telephone conversations were being monitored by the Gestapo and how careful he had to be with his words. Dietrich wrote a letter immediately after their phone conversation to assure her she need not worry and that he was not worried either. Again he reminded her that danger was everywhere, and he was not shunning nor shrinking from it. Dietrich also acknowledged how much her presence-in-spirit had helped him in recent weeks and asked her to remain calm, confident and happy.[82] What Maria did not know when Dietrich wrote his letter of 9 March 1943 was how close to the truth her grandmother's correspondence was.

An attempted assassination on Hitler's life on 13 March had failed. Maria had no way of knowing that two of her relatives, Henning von Treschow and Fabian von Schlabrendorff, had smuggled the bomb that did not explode on board the plane Hitler took that day to the German front. That same day Bonhoeffer received an order to report for military service.[83] Bonhoeffer's co-conspirators in the *Abwehr* made every attempt to send him on another trip and get him out of Germany. Another attempt was made on 21 March. It, too, failed. During this month of suspense and frustrations, Bonhoeffer wrote another letter to Maria. Her grandmother was back in hospital and Dietrich visited her on 23 March. In a letter dated 24 March he asked Maria to write to her grandmother mainly to bring her some relief from the guilt she was feeling for

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[82] *Love Letters,* 345.
[83] Bethge, *A Biography,* 784.

having interfered in their relationship in December 1942. He closed that letter with the words, 'I love you very dearly'.[84]

On Monday, 5 April 1943, Dietrich was arrested and taken to the military prison at Tegel. In Maria's diary entry of the same date, she wrote, 'Has something bad happened? I'm afraid it's something very bad...'[85] Although she suspected the danger he was in, Maria did not find out about Dietrich's arrest until 18 April, the same day she had made up her mind to disobey her mother's prohibition and go to Berlin to see him.

Friendship between Maria and Dietrich

After his arrest, Maria and Dietrich were forced to come to terms with an alien situation. They no longer had control over their lives and both had to accept that grief and sorrow now shared the same soil where joy and future aspirations were trying to take root. They struggled to stand on that soil braced by a friendship which slowly grew and provided a canopy of live-giving nurturance essential for them at this anxious and frightening time. Between his arrest in April 1943 and the last word from Dietrich at Christmas 1944, they encouraged one another as best they were able to with letters and visits to Tegel Prison. Before Dietrich's execution on 9 April 1945, two years and four days after his arrest, he had written his fiancée at least thirty-one letters. Maria wrote him sixty-seven and visited him seventeen times. They lived for these letters and through them the essential attributes of friendship slowly appeared. Before her death in 1977 Maria gave their correspondence to her sister. The letters were published in 1992.

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[84] *Love Letters*, 346.
[85] *Love Letters*, 347.

If Maria had any inkling of how serious his situation was, there is no record of it. She continued to write to him in prison even though Dietrich was not allowed to correspond with her until the end of July 1943. Prior to then any information Maria got about Dietrich came by way of his parents, the only people Dietrich was permitted to write to and then only every ten days. In those letters he worried about the extra burden he was asking Maria to bear and was concerned about creating embarrassment for her family.[86] He begged his parents to pass on his letters to his fiancée until he was allowed to write to her directly.

Maria tried to maintain a cheerful and hopeful tone in her letters to help him get through this ordeal. Of course neither she nor his parents had any idea at the time of the gruelling interrogations he was being subjected to and perhaps this was just as well. By the beginning of May Dietrich had written a note on a scrap of paper from a letter his father had written to him. He was in a battle with himself against death, struggling with illness, anxiety, loneliness, deep depression and suicidal thoughts. For him the only way to overcome the grief was prayer and thankfulness for what he could do rather than what he could not.[87]

Dietrich never abandoned hope of being released when he was at Tegel. He kept in contact with his family, with Eberhard and with Maria. Most of his correspondence with Eberhard and his father was in code and designed to inform him of the activities of the conspirators as well as to divert the censors' attention from them as they continued working to overthrow Hitler. His letters to his mother were full of concern for her health and safety and assurances that he was coming to terms with an entirely new situation. But his correspondence with Maria was of a different nature. Maria's intuitive and emotional nature surprised him at first. He was both unaccustomed to

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[86] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 21, 25.
[87] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 35, 39.

her frankness and uncomfortable answering her questions about his true condition. At first he projected his needs onto her in the form of advice, but Maria saw through this at once. She had a strong sense of what it meant to be in a relationship and naturally expected the same frankness from him. Relating to a woman mutually was new for Dietrich, and it would take months before he relaxed into this intimacy. In August 1943 he confessed to Maria the reason for his lack of emotion:

> My sheet of paper is running out, I see, and I've been able to tell you so little of my emotions when I think about you. You're still condemned to go on waiting and I'm still unable to give you any definite or cheerful news. It's very hard... It's strange, but I sometimes think I must be insensitive to remain so utterly untroubled.[88]

But Maria also had difficulty expressing feelings in her early prison letters to Dietrich. She wrote that her happiness depended on his happiness, and she was determined to be brave and not allow her thoughts to be sad.[89] This did not last long. Six weeks after his arrest Maria visited Dietrich's parents and there she could not avoid the painful reality of his absence and the ache of missing him. She was surprised by powerful reminders of him. Dietrich's brother's laugh and his father's mouth evoked memories that hurt her deeply. Maria had exposed herself to the burden of pain and vulnerability that went with caring for Dietrich. She could no longer protect herself as she had managed to do months earlier during her self-imposed silence. Although it would take many more weeks for her to admit fully to herself what was happening inside her, she could not pretend that their friendship did not implicate them in each other's pain as well as their joys.[90] Gradually she gave up trying to convince him and herself that her happiness was greater than her sorrow. She

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[88] *Love Letters,* 69.
[89] *Love Letters,* 23.
[90] Becker, *Living and Relating,* 155.

admitted she was depressed and lonely and powerless to do much about the situation except to work and to pray.[91]

It was not easy or even possible at times for them to share personal details which were necessary for the growth of intimacy. They could not correspond with freedom. Dietrich did not want to endanger Maria or her family. Many of his letters to Maria were smuggled out and delivered by friendly prison censors and guards.[92] Occasionally a letter that passed through the hands of a Reich Central Security reader would end up as a fragment when Maria received it. It is remarkable that their friendship achieved the level of sharing it did because the freedom they needed to discuss important topics was not available to them most of the time. Maria voiced how difficult it was to share in and enhance one another's life: 'Our destination is sure, but the way there is still uncertain. Everything needs time to grow, because it first has to become one with what was inside us before'.[93]

For a long time Dietrich was not able to tell Maria what troubled him. At one point, after another disappointing blow over possible release, he even begged her not to talk of what they both were feeling: 'Dearest Maria, let's not talk of what we both feel; we know it, and every word merely makes the heart heavier'.[94] As much as Dietrich longed to share personal and private matters with her, he held back. However, at the same time that he asked Maria not to bring up this important topic for discussion, he sent a letter to Eberhard in which he said that the duty of a friend was to tell the truth.[95] He told Eberhard he wanted to spare his parents and Maria but he would not deceive him in any way and Eberhard was not to deceive him. Dietrich

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[91] *Love Letters,* 27.
[92] Bethge, *A Biography,* 838.
[93] *Love Letters,* 59. See Prager, *Psychology of Intimacy,* 29-42, on the role of self-disclosure in friendship.
[94] *Love Letters,* 134.
[95] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 173.

compared their friendship to a purification plant in a lake – friends helped purify one another.[96]

Two months before Dietrich's letter to Eberhard, Maria had spoken to him about her need for the same kind of friendship with him that she knew he had with others, but if Maria had Eberhard in mind, she did not mention him:

> If I want to be your best friend, why should I mind about your other friends? They can't love you the way I do. And why should I love you because other people are fond of you? I've no wish to find my way to you via other people, not even members of my immediate family and very close to me. I accepted you because I love you. Not because I discovered more reasons for than against after long deliberation, or because other people described your good points to me, or because I may have been captivated by some particular aspect of you. The best part about your letters is that I sense an affinity in them, and that I find visible proof of its existence again and again. It can be so hard sometimes, simply believing in this direct relationship without any intermediate or subsidiary aids.[97]

In the same letter she also asked his forgiveness for the silence she imposed between them after their engagement. By now Maria had recognized the obstacle that her request had been to the formative days of their friendship. Perhaps Maria thought this was the reason for the difficulty in forming a bond of friendship with Dietrich. It might have contributed to it somewhat, but the problem in their friendship was more than that.

Some Reflections on Dietrich and Maria's Friendship

Friendship is a relationship in which two personalities share in mutual communication. When there is an equal or nearly equal communication, the

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[96] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 173. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 84, for the subordination of women in patriarchal discourse.

[97] *Love Letters,* 96.

relationship is strengthened and given durability. When there is a resistance to equal communication, especially in a matter that is more important to one personality, the resistance can damage the friendship or even cause it to end. Mutual communication is necessary for tolerance, respect and recognition of one to the other.[98]

The balance between the constant, hopeful reassurances Maria and Dietrich gave to one another was not equalized by the candidness which is required by friendship. It seemed more difficult for Dietrich to talk frankly with Maria than it was for her to tell him personal things, and the reason for this discrepancy was not wholly due to their age differences or to his situation. At no time did Maria ask Dietrich any question that would have endangered him. She protected him as much as he protected her. Of course his imprisonment hindered their communication, but it was not the primary reason for the barriers that seemed to go up when Maria talked about being angry, depressed or despairing. She never felt that these outweighed the hope in their relationship.[99]

Dietrich had strong opinions about the role of women in marriage which might have affected his perspective of Maria as a friend. As much as Maria hoped for Dietrich to be her best male friend, Dietrich did not seem to understand what Maria was asking for. Although nowhere did he say husbands and wives could not be friends, Dietrich believed there was a conflict between friendship and marriage that was not easy to resolve.[100] He told this to Eberhard and said it was a 'private and passing thought'.[101] But there is no record he shared this thought with Maria. According to Bonhoeffer the relationship between parents and children and the relationship between husbands and wives were orders of creation. He believed that

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[98] Diogenes Allen, *Love: Christian Romance, Marriage, Friendship* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1987), 41.
[99] *Love Letters,* 96.
[100] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 131.
[101] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 131.

these orders of creation should not be blurred with friendship because they would no longer be pure and divine.[102]

As mentioned earlier, Maria passionately disagreed with him about parents and children being friends, and it is just as likely she would have disagreed with him about friendship and marriage. She once told Dietrich that her father was the only friend she had ever had.[103] Unfortunately Dietrich was never able to explain how he would resolve the conflict between marriage and friendship or why it would not be a problem later on in their marriage. He had strong convictions about marriage. In the wedding sermon he wrote from prison for his niece and Eberhard, Dietrich stated that it was not love that sustained marriage but marriage that sustained love.[104] If the word friendship is substituted for love, then friendship would not sustain marriage. Marriage would sustain friendship. However, his idea of marriage might not have been one that would have enhanced and furthered friendship with Maria. He believed the place for the wife was in the husband's home, and the wife's life work was to build up the husband. The husband was head of the home and he was responsible for his wife, for their marriage and for their home.[105] He did not think husbands and wives should have different opinions but needed to stand together like 'an impregnable bulwark'.[106] In an aside to Eberhard, he said his insistence that husbands and wives should not have conflicting views might have come more from his 'tyrannical' nature than anything else.[107] Dietrich wanted Maria to agree with him and thought it would only be a matter of time before she did. Her loyalty to him as his wife was important to him because he saw it giving him strength and courage to avoid

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[102] *Love Letters,* 161.
[103] *Love Letters,* 173.
[104] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 43.
[105] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 44-45.
[106] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 148.
[107] Bonhoeffer, *LPP,* 148.

spells of self-criticism that plagued him, and helping him 'face life with confidence of an entirely new order'.[108]

Maria believed friendship was the most exalted bond between people living on earth. Undoubtedly she would not have agreed with his idea of marriage sustaining friendship. Instead she would have been more likely to see friendship sustaining and enriching marriage. As much as she tried to take an interest in everything Dietrich did and was at first easily persuaded by some of his suggestions about how she should change for him, she did not give in to his requests. He asked her to give up playing the violin and learn the guitar. She tried the guitar but said she did not have the talent for it and returned to the violin. Maria loved riding, which Dietrich thought inappropriate for a pastor's wife. At first she considered giving it up because he did not like it but she changed her mind.[109] She read theology which thrilled him until he found out the work she was reading was *Das Evangelium* by Paul Schütz.[110] He thought it was a dangerous book for theologians and said it would take too long to explain to her why. Dietrich suggested she needed a strong dose of Kierkegaard. She eventually dropped *Das Evangelium* but told him she thought theologians often missed the importance of faith while arguing over minutiae.[111] He disagreed with her choice of authors, especially her love of Rilke. But Maria would not accept his disapproval nor allow 'interchangeable sameness' to ruin the friendship.[112] Friendship demands the recognition of the other. In her letters to him Maria reaffirmed her selfhood even though she was under constant pressure from Dietrich, her mother and her

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[108] *Love Letters,* 58.
[109] *Love Letters,* 177.
[110] *Love Letters,* 186.
[111] *Love Letters,* 198.
[112] Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 'Introduction', in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

grandmother, and eventually his parents to conform to their expectations. In a letter to him in which she explained her reasons for liking Rilke, she also wrote:

> I don't want to 'arrange' my life at all. Neither according to Rilke, nor according to Grandmother's repeated and detailed descriptions of what being married to you should be like. I firmly believe that we shall be granted what is essential, and that we shouldn't worry about it now. But I don't want to be one-sided either, and I want to listen to all I'm told. Yes, and I want to assimilate and transpose it and make it my own. Doesn't one always have to transpose what one reads and hears into a key of one's own?[113]

Maria was willing to be guided by Dietrich's thoughts but she would not become his thoughts. She insisted on her freedom to develop herself independent of his image of what she should be. Maria seemed to know intuitively that nourishing each other's freedom was essential for a healthy friendship. Maria developed and maintained her uniqueness and her right to differ from Dietrich on particular subjects. Without the recognition of each other's uniqueness, the growth of their relationship would have been seriously hampered. Maria maintained her 'otherness' even when Dietrich sometimes tried to control her. He accepted most of the differences and even admitted they needed to arrange their lives without interference from their families.[114]

As their relationship developed Dietrich slowly came to appreciate Maria's determination to be herself, though at times her independence threatened the relationship. On the one hand Dietrich might have found it easier if she had been more compliant, but on the other he enjoyed her spontaneity. He told her he was delighted for her to be herself and would not have anything else: 'just you as you are'.[115] However, in the same letter he commented on how much she resembled her

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[113] *Love Letters,* 108.
[114] *Love Letters,* 112.
[115] *Love Letters,* 134.

grandmother and thought Maria would write letters more like her in years to come.[116] As much as he tried to affirm Maria's growth process, he often sabotaged it with remarks that undermined Maria's freedom and their closeness as friends.

Maria and Dietrich spent less than twenty hours together after their engagement.[117] None of those hours were private. From the beginning of their relationship, they were actors on a stage, either for the family or the prison guards, and it was an unnatural environment for friendship. Maria's visits to Tegel were stressful for both of them. Dietrich used huge amounts of physical and emotional energy to cope with imprisonment. He would have no warning about her visits except minutes before she arrived and then would spend a lot of time apologising to Maria for his clumsiness and inability to show how much he loved her.[118]

The visits were just as tense for Maria. She admitted there had been a gap between how she dreamed their time together would be and its reality. For Maria it was like sitting on a stage and acting out a bad play. At first she joked about the visits and thought the prison guards found their 'tasteless theatricals' interesting.[119] She faithfully visited Dietrich, taking him food, clothes, cigars, books, medicine, blankets, and even a Christmas tree. But by the summer of 1944 she suffered panic attacks after each visit.[120] She became more and more distraught about Dietrich's appearance and realized that the chances of being reunited with him were dwindling. She began to have all kinds of doubts about their relationship. As Maria's interior tensions increased, she became depressed, moody and unstable. Her family wanted her to break off the engagement.

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[116] *Love Letters,* 135.
[117] *Love Letters,* 153. By January 1944 they had only spent eight hours together. Her last visit to Dietrich was on 23 August 1944. By then they had spent approximately seventeen hours with one another.
[118] *Love Letters,* 56.
[119] *Love Letters,* 72.
[120] *Love Letters,* 253.

Maria wrote to Dietrich and told him what it was she was finding unbearable in the relationship. Although that letter is missing, its contents can be inferred from his reply. Apparently she told him that she would not visit him for a while. Dietrich feared this would create a barrier between them. His words were frank and sometimes harsh. For the first time in their relationship Dietrich said neither of them knew how often they would see each other again in this lifetime, and she was burdening both of them with something depressing and disquieting. He wrote as if they were married and insisted as husband and wife they should be together 'for as often and for as long as possible'.[121]

Dietrich was going through an emotional crisis the same as Maria's. He had begun to write poems, his theologising becoming more reflective and productive even while he was writing numerous letters to Eberhard in code. Another attempt on Hitler's life was planned for 20 July 1944. The future looked dimmer the longer he remained in prison and by now he had begun a serious dialogue with the past:

> This dialogue with the past, the attempt to hold on to it and recover it, and above all, the fear of losing it, is the almost daily accompaniment of my life here; and sometimes, especially after brief visits, which are always followed by long partings, it becomes a theme with variation. To take leave of others, and to live on past memories, whether it was yesterday or last year (they soon melt into one), is my ever-recurring duty, and you yourself once wrote that saying good-bye goes very much against the grain.[122]

During the month Maria wanted to stop her visits, he wrote two poems, *The Past* and *Sorrow and Joy*. He hesitantly sent them to Maria, afraid that some of the things he had written would frighten her. There is no record when she received the poems and if they had anything to do with the letter she had written to him. However, both

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[121] *Love Letters*, 256.
[122] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 319.

were frightened and losing hope of ever being husband and wife. Maria was questioning her love for him, and he was more afraid than he had ever been of losing her. Their anxiety threatened to destroy the relationship. Dietrich asked Maria to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of their love and to continue to visit so they could overcome their difficulties together.

It took two months for Maria to decide what to do. She had been working as governess to the children of her cousin Hedwig von Truchsess at Bundorf. When her mother sent a telegram asking her to come home for a weekend, Maria took this opportunity to terminate her job and announce her decision to go to Berlin. She wrote to her cousin:

> But you know very well that I don't want to break off my engagement now, nor can I. I tried to ask him for some time to myself, but I failed. When it takes almost a month to write a letter of that length, one simply can't fail to take it seriously or sense how important it is. And if Dietrich doesn't grant my request, I can't carp at him or bully him into accepting some extremely selfish viewpoint of my own – under present circumstances least of all. But because I just can't go on travelling to Berlin all the time, I'm going to go and be really near him.[123]

Maria went to Berlin and lived at his parents' home. She only had six weeks to see him in Tegel. According to the records, she was granted one visitor's permit on 23 August 1944. Dietrich wrote about the visit to Eberhard and said Maria was 'so fresh and at the same time steadfast and tranquil in a way I've rarely seen…'[124] On 8 October the Gestapo removed Dietrich from Tegel Prison and took him to the underground cells at State Security headquarters in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. No one was allowed to see him there, but Maria continued to take parcels for him to the Central Security Office, from where they would eventually reach him. Maria received two more letters from him – one smuggled out of Tegel on 5 October and

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[123] *Love Letters*, 263.
[124] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 393-94.

one Christmas letter. Dietrich begged Maria not to lose heart and to stay confident and courageous. Knowing that she was thinking of him and doing all she could for him was the most important thing of all.[125]

On 7 February after the State Security Headquarters had sustained heavy damages from an air raid, Dietrich was removed from Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse with nineteen other prisoners to a shelter close to Buchenwald concentration camp. Maria was not in Berlin when the transfer occurred. She had returned to her home in Pätzig to help her brothers and sisters escape to the west before the Russians broke through the German defences. When Maria returned to Berlin and learned Dietrich had gone to an unknown destination, she went to Flossenbürg concentration camp. He was not there, and she felt the trip had been pointless:

> Dear Mother, Dietrich simply isn't here. Who knows where he is. In Berlin they won't tell me and at Flossenbürg they don't know. A pretty hopeless situation, but what am I to do?... I'm feeling pretty awful, but that's only because I spent two days in the train, walked the seven kilometres there, and then had to trudge the seven kilometres back with no news at all.[126]

Seven weeks later on 8 April 1945 Dietrich arrived at Flossenbürg. He was tried and executed the next day. Maria continued to search for him and learned of his death in June.

Conclusion: Dietrich and Maria's Friendship 'changed the face of sorrow'

'Loyal hearts can change the face of sorrow, softly encircle it with love's most gentle unearthly radiance', were the ending lines of a poem Dietrich sent to Maria towards

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[125] *Love Letters*, 269.
[126] *Love Letters*, 277.

the end of his life.[127] Theirs was a friendship forged in joy and sorrow, where each knew they could depend on the other even when they were feeling powerless in the face of destructive and devastating circumstances. It was the face of sorrow that each showed to the other that shaped them and their relationship. Both had a strong faith, believing that God was at the centre of their friendship. And when they were able to share genuinely in each other's pain, they were able to grow in ways different from theirs and others' expectations. Dietrich and Maria believed the grief and sorrow that they shared was the proper foundation for the friendship. They felt deeply that their meeting was inevitable, that they belonged together and that trust in God's grace and mercy would make them greater people through their shared pain.

Friendship founded on grief and sorrow guards against neediness and possessiveness. Because of their personal suffering and the high cost of life which two world wars had exacted from their families, Maria and Dietrich learned the importance of living every day as if it were their last. Suffering was the lens through which they explored the world and how they lived in it. It was the invisible thread that connected their hearts. Maria felt an affinity to Dietrich as he did to her. The invisible thread of suffering knitted them to God and to each other.

Their friendship also developed under the shadow of anticipatory grief. As far as can be known, Maria did not know anything about Dietrich's links with the conspiracy, but she sensed the great danger he was in and knew how powerless she was in the face of it. In spite of her intuitive knowledge, Maria remained in solidarity with him and took great responsibility for caring for him at incredible expense to her self even though she bore no responsibility for his political decisions. Dietrich felt guilty about the burden he had placed on Maria which could have undermined their

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[127] Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 335.

friendship. However, Maria could not overlook his suffering because she recognised his needs were greater than hers.

In the end, their friendship, even though it was far from being perfect, gave them hope and courage. Maria struggled for mutuality in their relationship and refused to give into most of Dietrich's attempts to control her. Perhaps for friendship to succeed between a man and a woman there needs to be a struggle. Dietrich was not used to having his authority challenged by a woman. He had difficulty recognising the 'otherness' of Maria and knowing her in her own way rather than in his. His preconceived image of her as a pastor's wife sometimes kept him from knowing how to respond to her independent spirit. He was torn between letting Maria have her own voice, which is absolutely critical for friendship between men and women and speaking for her.

As much as she wanted to feel connected to Dietrich, Maria respected his reluctance to talk much about himself to her. I believe Dietrich knew Maria was trustworthy but he probably needed to be careful not to say something to Maria that would put her in danger. The unusual circumstances of their friendship most likely affected the relationship much more than their letters indicated. Dietrich was also the eternal optimist. When he said this experience was good for them, Maria would bring him back to reality. True friendship is not sentimental but deals with the facts of life with strength and courage. Maria certainly gave Dietrich more strength than he gave to her.

Dietrich, the theologian, might have believed in the universal nature of friendship but it was Maria, the young woman, who understood the true meaning of friendship. Dietrich's attraction to Maria was sometimes marred with possessiveness and a need to control her uniqueness. Maria was able to reach behind the social conventions

about the way a relationship should look between a man and woman in the 1940s and risked giving herself to him in friendship. She wrote in Easter 1944:

> I don't think love is something you possess and can give to a person you're fond of; you're at its mercy, that's all. It comes from outside and merely passes through you to that other person, and you simply have to go along with it.[128]

She could have just as easily said friendship is something you cannot possess. You give it to a person you are fond of and then you are at its mercy. Friendship comes from the outside and merely passes through one person to the other. One simply has to go along with it. Friendship passes through one human being to another because we have been created for friendship. For Maria it was the 'most exalted bond to exist between two people', and although she could not logically explain its existence, she knew its importance and risked her life to share it with Dietrich.[129]

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[128] *Love Letters*, 219.
[129] See footnote 10.

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In the Beginning is Friendship

Over the centuries influential and importance figures have believed friendship is the most important relationship human beings can have. In this study thus far Maria von Wedemeyer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's fiancée, thought, although she could not explain why, that friendship is the most exalted bond possible at any age between people on earth. Teresa of Ávila believes that friendship is the most important relationship between people and the only relationship in which individuals can respond to one another with complete freedom. Aelred of Rievaulx writes that friendship is the best path towards wholeness and redemption. Thomas Aquinas insists that friendship is the most helpful way to describe what our life with God is and should be like. In his life, death and resurrect Jesus demonstrates how friendship is the most godlike relationship that human beings can have with one another. In Hebrew thought friendship is seen as beginning in God. And lastly the Greek philosophers know that there is something within the nature of each human being that longs for friendship.

Friendship has been intuitively identified as the universal relationship. My question is whether these ancient and modern claims still have significance in Western culture where parent-child relationships and husband-wife relationships dominate all others and receive unquestioned cultural approval, as well? I believe that the claims I present in this work about friendship have great importance. Developmental psychology, psychiatry and sociology are now able to illuminate how the first relationship between a baby and caregiver is one of friendship. This new understanding can then justify the statement that friendship is the foundational

relationship for all human beings. In this chapter I present summaries of the work of Daniel Stern, Sue Gerhardt, Colwyn Trevarthen, Jean Baker Miller and Jessica Benjamin as the basis for the argument that friendship is the first, universal relationship human beings know.

Daniel Stern

Daniel N. Stern, Professor of Psychology of The University of Geneva and Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry of Cornell University Medical Centre – New York Hospital, is a recognized expert on the development of infants. Stern began his research in the late 1960s, using portable televisions and video cameras to observe in minute detail the interactions between infants and carers. With these new research tools, Stern was able to study interactions at the micro-level, breaking them down into frames, freezing them and reviewing them as often as needed. Stern recognised that important actions occurred in seconds and split seconds. His ground-breaking research into the nature of the relationship between an infant and caregiver reveals that friendship might be the first relationship human beings know even before birth.

Stern asks the important question – what is our first sense of self? Even before the development of language, an infant has a preverbal sense of self and is able to communicate that to a caregiver. As he says, 'The infant comes into the world bringing formidable capabilities to establish human relatedness'.[1] At two months infants can share companionship with people they recognise as friends. A baby at two months has all the essentials for a conscious self-awareness and desire for relationships.

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[1] Daniel N. Stern, *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother* (London: Open Books, 1977), 41.

Stern observes four senses of self in the infant that define unique areas of self-experience and social relatedness. The first is the *emergent self,* from birth to age two months, the *core self,* from two to six months, the *subjective self,* from seven to fifteen months and the *verbal self,* from fifteen months onwards. One sense of self is not replaced by another. Each sense of self remains active throughout a lifetime, growing and coexisting. As each self takes shape, there is a distinctive change in how the infant experiences the other.[2]

The *emergent self* is a period of high intersubjectivity for the infant. Although the infant is physically quiet, he or she is alert and takes in all external events. The infant communicates non-verbally through gazing activities. Classical psychoanalysis argued that the infant at this age was asocial. Freud believed infants had no ability for relatedness because of a 'stimulus barrier' that kept them from being able to deal with any external stimulation. He argued that infants could not relate directly to another and remained undifferentiated with no sense of self or of other.[3] Building on the work of the British object-relations 'school' and the American, H.S. Sullivan, who believed that intersubjectivity was present from birth, Stern videoed interactions between the infant and caregiver and observed that at two months an infant can join in a pre-verbal conversation with attentive and caring caregivers.[4] Even an infant is extremely sensitive to expressions from other human beings. Setting aside the natural attachment behaviours that focus on physical needs necessary for survival, an infant also exhibits companionship/friendship behaviours that have nothing to do with physiological needs. These behaviours include hand gestures, looking into the other

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[2] Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), 11.
[3] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 44.
[4] See Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1953)

person's eyes and smiling. All are preverbal modes of communication and indicate that the infant recognises the other as friend.

In turn, the infant's friendship behaviour elicits reciprocal behaviours from caregivers. Caregivers' behaviours are very different with infants than with older children and adults. They engage in baby talk, more animated hand gestures, closer interpersonal space and facial expressions that are different from adult to adult ones.[5] According to Stern the social world of the infant's emerging self is one of vitality. Stern calls these interactions vitality affects, which are not the same thing as affects, the strictly biological portion of emotions.

Affects are unvarying physiological mechanisms that exist in every human being. The affects were first discovered in the mid-1940s by Silvan Tomkins, who was intrigued by the similarity between the cry of a newborn and the cry of an adult. Tomkins concluded that whereas an adult might understand the reason for crying, the infant does not. It simply cries. Tomkins realized that the cry is 'an organized behaviour with a precise form'.[6] He had discovered the affects, 'the group of "hard-wired" pre-programmed, genetically transmitted mechanisms that exist in human beings, most probably in the area known as the reptile brain, and are responsible for the earliest forms of emotional life'.[7] Tomkins identified nine innate affects in three categories, positive, neutral and negative. Excitement and joy are positive affects; surprise is a neutral affect and fear, distress, anger, disgust and shame are the negative affects. These affects cause behaviours all over the body and are triggered by a stimulus which releases a programmed pattern of biological events which affect the nervous system.

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5 Stern, *The First Relationship,* 30.
6 Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 56.
7 Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 58.

Stern recognises Tomkins's nine innate affects, which he calls regular affective acts, but distinguishes them from what he identifies as vitality affects. These are social affects and are a result of direct encounters with people.[8] Stern observes that in the world of the infant, vitality affects can be experienced within the infant or because of the behaviour of other persons. Vitality affects are feelings that convey to the infant a sense of being fully or intensely alive as well as feelings that are needed for the infant to flourish and be creative. Stern has observed a variety of vitality affects between an infant and caregiver. These include how the caregiver picks up the infant, folds the diapers, combs the baby's hair and reaches for the bottle. Stern says, 'The infant is immersed in these feelings of vitality'.[9] Vitality affects are contagious with life. Nathanson has also observed the resonating power of affects, although he has not distinguished between Tomkins' nine innate affects and vitality affects as Stern does.[10] It is arguable that the vitality affects might connect human beings with one another's spirit of life and foster the desire for friendship. Vitality affects communicate life, are the beginning of the capacity for empathy and invite human beings to become attuned to one another. Perhaps it is within the domain of the emerging self where friendship begins and where all learning and creativity occur in relationships, first with the caregiver and later with others as the infant's social world grows and matures.

Stern identifies the *core self* as another important area for an infant's social experience of self and ability to relate socially. Until Stern's observations the widely held view was that infants had no ability to differentiate between self and other. Infants basically merged with the caregiver and only by the end of the first year were they able to come to distinguish between themselves and others. Stern challenges this

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[8] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 54.
[9] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 55.
[10] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 63.

theory and observes that infants have a sense of self between the ages of two and sevens months. He says that with this sense of self comes the capacity for infants to have some control over their own actions (they can move their arms when they want to), to understand their actions have consequences (they close their eyes and it gets dark), to take ownership of their own affectivity, and to develop a sense of other people as distinct and separate from themselves.[11]

At this age the infant is beginning to establish a world of interpersonal relationships with a variety of caregivers. Having a sense of self enables the infant to communicate for itself. Infants have what are known as protoconversations or chats with caregivers and their expressions - smiling, looking into the other person's eyes or looking away, coo vocalisations and hand gestures - all transmit feelings of taking pleasure and interest in social contact. These communications allow them to share in friendship with those persons that they recognise as friends. These protoconversations are not the same as signals that an infant makes when it needs bodily care. The signals for food, comfort and protection are attachment behaviours not friendship ones.[12]

The infant's effort to find companionship is essential for its cognitive development. The infant actually looks for positive relationships because there is the realisation on the part of the infant that it is growing and flourishing because of its relationships. Infants even look for friendship from their peers in the early months of life. A six-month-old baby can share feelings and interests with its peers without any adult help at all. Before infants can walk or talk they are sociable beings in their community. From their early months infants are able to sense what it means to be with an other who is socially available as well as what it means to be with someone

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[11] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 69.
[12] Stern, *The First Relationship,* 25-30, 100-104.

who is not actually present. As Stern says the core sense of self from two to six month is the 'existential bedrock of interpersonal relations'.[13]

Stern concludes that the social experiences of an infant become generalized over time. He calls the social interactions, RIGS, representations of interactions that have been generalized.[14] When one of the attributes of the RIG is present, a memory of a social interaction is retrievable. Stern suggests that each self-regulating relationship with another will have a distinctive RIG. And more importantly when a RIG of being with someone who has changed self-experience is activated, the infant encounters an evoked companion. The evoked companion is the equivalent of a friend who wants the other to flourish as a human being. Stern argues that the concept of RIGs and evoked companions is not the same as self objects and mergers but is an experience of friendship as an I-You relationship. It is a relationship to learn to be with someone and to create and share experiences that the relationship is built on:

> Friendship involves mutual creation of something being shared: joy, interest, curiosity, thrills, awe, fright, boredom, laughter, surprise, delight, peaceful moments, silence resolving distress, and other such elusive phenomena and experiences that make up the stuff of friendship and love.[15]

A distinctive feature of this friendship is the amount of freedom in the interaction. Stern objects to any idea of a fixed and rigid range of interactions that is controlled by the caregiver. Instead the infant and the caregiver are able to negotiate a relationship that allows for constant change along with a broad range of tolerance. The friendship contains a 'natural ebb and flow' and there is an obvious lack of control in the

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[13] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 125.
[14] Stern, *TheInterpersonal World of the Infant,* 111.
[15] Stern, *The First Relationship,* 80.

relationship.[16] Stern's observations of these interactions upset the attachment theories between an infant and caregiver, which place undue emphasis on control and expectations of the security-attachment states of the infant.[17]

The *subjective self* is Stern's third recognized sense of self, another important sense of self for demonstrating that friendship is the first relationship. Between seven and nine months of age, an infant is capable of intersubjectivity and empathy. Stern defines intersubjectivity as 'a deliberately sought sharing of experiences about events and things'.[18] Traditional psychoanalytical theory does not believe an infant is capable of intersubjectivity. According to ego psychoanalytic theory, fusion between the infant and caregiver is only beginning to lessen between seven and nine months as a sense of self begins to take shape in an infant. There is no such thing as a differentiated, pre-verbal self at this age. Stern observes that even without language, there are three possible experiences that can be shared between an infant and caregiver: sharing joint attention, sharing intentions and sharing affective states.[19] Through these three preverbal mental states intersubjectivity occurs. Intersubjectivity, in turn, establishes relatedness and mutuality between an infant and caregiver.

Although it seems difficult to imagine intersubjectivity and empathy occurring before language, the example of pointing is an important one to illustrate how it happens. Stern examines the caregiver's pointing. If the caregiver's pointing is to be capable of intersubjectivity, the infant 'must know to stop looking at the pointing hand itself and look in the direction it indicates…'.[20] It was believed that infants were too ego-centric to do this before they were two-years-old. However, it has now been proven that infants are able to transcend egocentrism and appreciate what is

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[16] Stern, *The First Relationship,* 85.
[17] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 114.
[18] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 128.
[19] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 128.
[20] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 128.

happening in the world of the other, in this case, the caregiver. Even more astounding is that the infants not only follow the direction of the points, but then they will look back at the caregivers and affirm that they have shared the experience with them.

Infants also begin to point for themselves somewhere between six and nine months and their gestures are attempts to engage intersubjectively with others. It has been observed that an infant will offer a gesture to a stranger, which has been interpreted as an attempt to make a connection. At this point a friendly response from the stranger is important for the infant. A laugh or unfriendly gesture may distress the infant and create a fear of strangers. 'Stranger fear' is actually anxiety about appearing stupid or being misunderstood by another who cannot comprehend the gesture of friendship the infant is attempting to make.[21]

Sharing the focus of attention, sharing intentions and sharing affective states are of paramount importance as the infant experiences the world of intersubjective relatedness. As mentioned above these early experiences of relating with others are never forgotten and become the foundation blocks from which more elaborate forms of social experiences are built. Regardless of when these foundational blocks were formed, the infant has the ability to recall them. It has been incorrectly assumed that an infant cannot remember early relational connections, but Stern's research proves that an infant is capable of remembering contacts with others in the third month of life and perhaps before.[22] In fact the infant has such a sophisticated memory of experiences, both positive and negative, of being with others from a very early age and can draw on those memories to know the intentions later in life of others toward them.[23]

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[21] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 132.
[22] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 123.
[23] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 252.

The quality of an infant's intersubjective relatedness continues to develop throughout childhood and applies to relationships with peers as well as with caregivers. The *verbal self*, Stern's fourth and final sense of self which he uses to describe areas of social relatedness, is 'quite culture-bound'.[24] How many children are taught that it is impolite to stare? From the age of two months an infant understands how important the gaze is for forming human relatedness. From birth the visual motor system comes into operations and an infant does not need to learn how to gaze. From the beginning of life an infant finds other human faces fascinating and interactions begin with a gaze. Relationships are now influenced by all the cultural and social expectations attached to them. The spontaneity of relatedness present in the *emergent self* at two months still exists, but, cultural templates now dictate the dos and don'ts of relationships, including friendships. Friendship, the first relationship known by an infant, is weighed down by restrictions and narrow interpretations of what that relationship means. The ancients were correct when they said that friendship was the crown of life, the happiest and most human form of love. Because of Stern's research, it is now known that infants come into the world wearing the crown of friendship.

Sue Gerhardt

Sue Gerhardt is a practising psychoanalytic psychotherapist who lives in Oxford and co-founded the Oxford Parent Infant Project (OXPIP) in 1998, a charitable organisation that helps caregivers in their relationships with infants. In her groundbreaking book, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain,* she

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[24] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 187.

looks at the development of the social brain and the emotional life of the infant in the first two years of life. Her thesis is that we are shaped by other people and that our mental systems are developed with other people. She says in the introduction to her book:

> Both our physiological systems and our mental systems are developed in relationship with other people – and this happens most intensely and leaves its biggest mark in infancy. We live in a social world, in which we depend on complex chains of social interaction to bring food to our table, put clothes on our bodies and a roof over our heads, as well as the cultural interactions we are stimulated by. We cannot survive alone.
>
> But more than that, the human baby is the most socially influenced creature on earth, open to learning what his own emotions are and how to manage them. This means that our earliest experiences as babies have much more relevance to our adult selves than many of us realise. It is as babies that we first feel and learn what to do with our feelings, when we start to organise our experience in a way that will affect our later behaviour and thinking capacities.[25]

When friendship, as Stern describes it, is recognised as the overriding relationship between the caregiver and infant, then the social brain develops in such a way that it actually learns how to 'manage feelings in line with other people' (empathy) and how to develop stress response, immune response and neurotransmitter systems which affect all future relationships.[26]

The brain is a social organ organised through relationships with others. The patterns of those relationships become part of the infant's body and brain. They are not forgotten and dictate throughout a lifetime expectations and behaviours. Indeed, early experiences of relationships with caregivers dictate how one will relate to other people as an adult. The recognition now that friendship is how infants want to relate

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[25] Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 10.
[26] Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 3.

to caregivers is important for understanding the reason why it is the most important relationship in culture at this time. Because of the lessening of social constraints and pressures that dictated the nature of early relationships between caregivers and infants, there is more opportunity for friendship to come into its own. As the cultural restraints on friendship are dismantled, perhaps it will become possible to see friendship bloom as the most important relationship between human beings.

When Sigmund Freud compiled his theories of human development, he did not have the benefit of the research about how infants develop. Freud believed sexual and aggressive urges drove human beings. Freud's ideas of ego and superego to explain bodily urges and how to control them because of social rules have been the basis for most of psychoanalytical theory. No one can deny how influential Freud's theories have been but they no longer fit with new research about social interaction. The Cartesian idea that human beings are self-made and self-generated individuals has to give way to the new research that shows that we are shaped by relationships. And when the first relationship is friendship, we have a better chance to be healthier and happier human beings.

Stern's theory that an infant actually looks for positive relationships because there is a realisation on the part of the infant that it is growing and flourishing because of this relationship is now verifiable with research on the development of the social brain. When Stern first did his groundbreaking research, he questioned whether intersubjective relatedness was a function of the ego (Freudian theory) or a primary psychobiological need.[27] Gerhardt's research shows it is both. The mind body split has finally been bridged. According to Gerhardt 'well-managed infants come to expect a world that is responsive to feelings and helps to bring intense states back to a

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[27] Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant,* 137.

comfortable level; through the experience of having it done for them, they learn how to do it for themselves'.[28] As mentioned above, infants have the ability at an early age to sense what it means to be with a caregiver who is socially available as well as what it means to be with someone who is not actually present. In other words, infants know and relate to carers who have their best interests at heart and want them to flourish as human beings.

Gerhardt's research also shows that an infant who is around a depressed caregiver adjusts to the lack of interaction between them and becomes accustomed to not having positive feelings in the relationship. Infants of agitated caregivers are over-aroused and will adjust in that relationship by trying not to have any feelings. They already sense that these feelings might explode, and there is nothing that anyone could do about it. Even more amazing is that these unhealthy responses from caregivers actually upset the natural rhythms of the infant's body and cause muscle tension, shallow breathing and immune or hormonal disturbances.[29] An infant knows it needs someone who is socially available for its well being and if possible looks for other carers who are able to respond in friendship.[30]

From Stern's research it is known how social infants are. Stern recognises the infant's ability to respond to caregivers with sensitivity and how each interaction builds the capacity for further interactions which last throughout a lifetime. But this only happens as the social brain develops. Understanding the development and function of the social brain is essential for understanding how friendship affects the growth of the social brain. In her study Gerhardt brings together the research of scientists who have been looking at the structure of the brain. It is now known that a human being's rationality and language abilities develop because of the ability to be

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[28] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 19.
[29] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 27.
[30] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 19.

emotional in interactions with others. Emotional interaction forms the social brain which continues to develop and enable even more 'emotionally complex and sophisticated' forms of interactions with others.[31]

According to research on brain development, the social brain develops at its fastest between six and eighteen months. It is particularly sensitive during this time to social interactions. The part of the brain that responds to social interactions is the orbitofrontal cortex, which is located behind the eyes. By studying what happens when this part of the brain is damaged, neuroscientists now know the orbitofrontal cortex is the major part of the centre for emotional intelligence.[32] People with orbitofrontal brain damage cannot relate to others. They are unable to detect the social and emotional clues necessary for relationships.

Colwyn Trevarthen

Colwyn Trevarthen, a New Zealander biologist and psychologist, is Professor (Emeritus) of Child Psychology and Psychobiology in the Department of Psychology of The University of Edinburgh. Trevarthen has also looked at the action of the social brain. Like Gerhardt Tevarthen recognises that an infant's capacity for social relatedness requires a developed orbitofrontal cortex, which picks up on the motives and emotional signs of the other in such a way that allow for growth of this part of the brain. The orbitofrontal cortex is the centre for intersubjectivity or for communicating states of mind. The orbitofrontal cortex allows the baby to share companionship with persons they recognise as friends. An infant's inborn effort to find company and share experiences with others is necessary for their education. An

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[31] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 37-40.
[32] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 36. The other parts of the social brain include the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate, as well.

infant's ability to learn and speak grows as the social brain develops. The cortex, from where rationality and language skills come from, depends first on the development of the social brain. Trevarthen says:

> It seems that an inborn human effort to find company and share experience is necessary for the child's cognitive development and for learning with others, or education. The baby is a person looking for joyful company in the family, and is soon looking for friends in a community. The transmission of knowledge and skill depends on children's attraction to other people and one's emotions of 'companionship', which are different from attachment for care.[33]

It is now known that the kind of orbitofrontal cortex an infant develops depends on the particular relationships it has with caregivers. Healthy development depends on mutual awareness or a 'dyadic state of consciousness'.[34] In other words healthy development depends on friendship. When the caregiver, as Stern has observed, exhibits mutuality towards the infant through hand gestures, gazing and smiling, the orbitofrontal cortex of the infant develops. In addition, the caregiver experiences a sense of well being or pleasure as it interacts with the infant because of increased opioids in the caregiver's orbitofrontal cortex. Friendship fosters a physiological state of well being between the infant and caregiver. Trevarthen has introduced the term amphoteronomics to describe this physiological coupling or 'ruling together in a two-way relationship or "containment"'.[35]

Because the infant innately seeks friendship or amphoteronomic care but is at the same time physically dependent on the caregiver, the infant is also easily moulded to fit particular family and social expectations where friendship might not even be

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[33] Colwyn Trevarthen, 'Helping Synrhythmia: Infant Intersubjectivity and Companionship from Birth', *Improving the Mental Health of Parents and Their Infants – An International Perspective (Ante and Post Natal Support),* http://222.cpdeducation.co.uk/veroc/conferences/archive.html (28 October 2005), 3. Synrhythmia means mutually shared well-being and experience.

[34] Trevarthen, 'Helping Synrhythmia', 2.

[35] Trevarthen, 'Helping Synrhythmia', 2.

considered as a remote possibility let alone a natural and essential relationship between the infant and caregiver. Child-rearing theories about how to treat infants abound. And when a social image of what it means to be a caregiver and an infant determines and motivates the relationship, the concept of infant intersubjectivity and companionship is almost out of the question. An understanding of a relationship between an infant and caregiver where the infant is just as capable of bringing out the best in the caregiver is new and revolutionary. Relational power continues to be the underlying principle between infants and caregivers. The caregiver still knows best. There is no consideration that an infant does something for the caregiver. Infants learn quickly who has the power in order to survive. However, because Stern has shown that an infant already has a sense of an emerging self, it would follow that an infant has a preverbal sense of what is positive for both of them even if it is limited by lack of communication. In the past the strength of attachment and object-relation theories would have disregarded the possibility of this being possible. As long as cultural pressures dictate and dominate how an infant develops, the system of control and domination might erode the first friendship which an infant experiences; however it can never erase it from an infant's memory.

An infant is also vulnerable to caregivers who cannot respond to the infant's needs for mutuality. Just as the sense of being with a caregiver who interacts mutually can be one of the most forceful experiences of social interaction for an infant; the experience of being with a caregiver who is not actually present is equally forceful. Chronic and severe caregiver neglect, intrusiveness and physical abuse can create lasting problems as infants mature and predispose them as adults to multiple emotional disorders. These disorders include depression, anxiety, suicidal feelings, hostility, addictive behaviours and substance abuse.

Infants categorise all their relational experiences in their brains, what Stern calls RIGS.[36] An infant especially notices what happens repeatedly with a caregiver. It is the repeated experiences that begin to structure infants' brains. For example a caregiver who reacts consistently with facial expressions of disgust to soiled nappies and pulls them roughly off the infant teaches the infant aversion to his or her own bodily functions. Even as an adult, the infant memory of these experiences may remain and generate feelings of shame towards the body. When an infant looks at the person changing the nappy and sees a distorted look of disgust on their face, the infant, who perhaps is accustomed to an expression of interest or enjoyment, will drop its head in shame and momentarily become disoriented and confused. Generally a caregiver's concern for the infant replaces the disgust because of the nappy, and the caregiver will smile at the infant. That social interaction between the infant and caregiver allows the infant's social brain to override the earlier negative experience of shame.[37]

Before turning to the work of Jean Baker Miller at the Stone Centre at Wellesley College, Massachusets, one more aspect of the development of the social brain needs to be looked at – the importance of the face and of the gaze. Even before the work of Stern, Gerhardt and Trevarthen, the French ethical philosopher and religious thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, wrote about the face: 'My exploration begins with the face, the place where God comes to expression'.[38] Levinas realised that 'the Other is face; but the Other, equally, speaks to me and I speak to him'.[39] David Ford, points out in his

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[36] See footnote 14.
[37] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 174.
[38] Emmanuel Levinas, *Transcendance et Intelligibilité,* (Genève: Centre Protestant d' Études, 1984), 38-39.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 87.

book, *The Shape of Living,* in turn influenced by the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, that faces and voices shape the human heart.[40]

Culture's unwillingness to recognise the other solely as the other has resulted in a habit of treating others as if they have no faces. For an infant faces play an important part in social relatedness, possibly the most important role unless, of course, the infant is blind from birth. The infant looks for friends and for happy, positive responses from them. Infants particularly enjoy imitating the expressions of their caregivers' faces. Nathanson would agree with Ford's insights. His research shows that vitality affects are contagious because 'it feels good to resonate with another person's affect'.[41] Before language infants communicate with their faces. It is only as adults that most facial communication is controlled by cultural expectations. Children are expected to learn to control facial expressions. It is not acceptable, as Nathanson says, 'to have people walking around infecting each other with laughter, anger, excitement, sobbing or surprise'.[42]

However, Gerhardt shows that attentiveness to faces is actually programmed into all human beings and is most evident in infants. Infants use visual communication as the barometer for feelings and actions. And it has been shown that positive looks 'are the most vital stimulus of the growth of the social, emotionally intelligent, brain'.[43] Positive looks and smiles trigger off a biochemical response in the brain and release beta-endorphins specifically into the orbitofrontal cortex of the social brain. Beta-endorphins, like opioids, help neurons grow. In addition to beta-endorphins being released because of a smile, another neurotransmitter, dopamine, is also released from the brain stem and travels to the prefrontal cortex. Dopamine also makes an infant

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[40] David Ford, *The Shape of Living* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1997), 3-14.
[41] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 62.
[42] Nathanson, *Shame and Pride,* 62.
[43] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 41.

feel good and helps brain tissue grow in the prefrontal brain.[44] In other words loving, positive looks from caregivers trigger biochemical reactions that help infants' social brains to develop. The more positive experiences of friendship infants have early on in life make it more likely that the brain will have more neuronal connections and be better networked. Gerhardt points out that human beings have all the neurons necessary at birth, but the connections have to be made in order to work. There is better ability to use more parts of the brain if many connections are made early in life. The creative power of friendship that abides in the smile cannot be underestimated for healthy, happy and joyful human beings.

Jean Baker Miller

Until her death on 29 July 2006, Jean Baker Miller was Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine and founding director of the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, a division of the Stone Centre at Wellesley College, Massachusetts. In 1976 Miller published *Towards a New Psychology of Women,* a ground-breaking work on mutual psychological development. After comparing what they saw and heard with what had been written about women and friendship, Miller and her team at the Stone Centre discovered discrepancies and decided to investigate. Their work led to the model of mutual psychological development and has become the foundation for understanding intersubjectivity. Miller's thesis in *The Healing Connection* is that 'as relationships grow, so grows the individual'.[45] Twenty years before neuroscientists saw the connection between the

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[44] Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters,* 41-43.

[45] Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 22. Also see Jean Baker Miller, 'Women and Power', *Works in Progress,* no. 82-01 (Wellesley, Massachusetts: Stone Centre for

development of the brain and social interaction, Miller recognised how friendship, where each person has equal power and equal control, fostered growth in both. This kind of mutual interaction is necessary for human development. Miller believed friendship could not only happen in families but was just as necessary in schools, workplaces and other institutions. In other words, friendship is essential for all of life.

In her early research Miller exposed the myth of individuality and made the revolutionary proposal that human beings begin life with the ability to build friendship, mutually empowering relationships. She blamed the hierarchical systems in Western culture for keeping alive skewed views of relationships. One interesting finding in her studies was the prevailing view that adolescents needed to separate from their parents. Miller claimed this was incorrect.[46] She believed it is more important for the relationship to change from domination and condescension, what parents should do and how adolescents should respond, to friendship where mutual connections are available, which enable them to make better choices about how to discover and fulfil their potential. Friendship between parents and adolescents is essential for physically and emotionally healthy adults. It goes without saying how emotionally stressful adolescent life is. If parents could tap into the infant intersubjectivity and companionship that they had with their children from birth, it is likely that parents' and adolescents' capacity to respond positively to life's challenges would be greatly enhanced. Genuine friendship between parents and children gives both of them the strength to endure the pain of maturing and leaving home.

Miller's initial insights came from her work with depressed women. The value of women's relational capacities is either undervalued in society or interpreted as a sign of women's weaknesses. The consequence of this understanding is to restrain or

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Developmental Services and Studies, 1982) and Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (London: Penguin Books, 2nd ed., 1986).

[46] Miller, *The Healing Connection,* 53.

restrict women from what they have known they have needed since birth to be whole human beings – relationships where there is two-way interaction and where both persons in the relationship can understand and be understood by the other so each can grow as well as participate in the growth of the other.[47] Miller and her colleagues wanted to do away with the idea of the growth of the autonomous self through separation.

The rate of depression for women is twice as high as it is for men. Without question depression is seen as a women's disorder. The sense of loss, the internalisation of anger, the sense of helplessness and low self-esteem remain the essentials of depression. Since women are constantly experiencing the loss of their relational selves, it is not at all surprising that depression is the natural outcome of this loss. Women talk about their relationships. This is often misinterpreted as dependency or smothering. However, what women are saying about their relationships is not about needing or wanting to be dependent or smothering. They are simply talking about being in relationships with others, trying to understand the other, trying to be in tune with the other's feelings, trying to make a positive contribution to the well being of the other and desiring, at the same time, that the other is engaged in the same way with them.[48]

Thanks to the work of Stern, Gerhardt, Trevarthen and others which verifies the interacting sense of self in infants of both sexes and their need for friendship both biologically and psychologically, it can be said with certainty that culture discourages

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[47] Alexandra G. Kaplan, 'The "Self-In-Relation": Implications for Depression in Women', *Work in Progress,* no. 14 (Wellesley, Massachusetts: Stone Centre for Developmental Services and Studies, 1984), 6. For an account of the damage that can be done to a woman in psychotherapy when there is not a two-way interactions see Carter Heyward, *When Boundaries Betray Us* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1999).

[48] Kaplan, 'The "Self-In-Relation"', 10.

mutuality and constructs its understanding of friendship around gender.[49] Miller's understanding about mutuality is that all human beings, not only women, long to exist with each other, co-creating the other and the reality they share. This is the true meaning of friendship. Miller says:

> Mutuality is a creative process in which openness to change allows something new to happen, building on the different contributions of each person. It is not so much a matter of reciprocity but a quality of relationality, a movement or dynamic of relationship'. It is a capacity to participate in mutually empathic relationships, which replaces the concept of the need for or need to provide empathy.[50]

For Miller mutuality/friendship is always a two-way relationship.[51] The two-way relationship builds something new for both human beings as long as they have equal power and equal control. Whilst Miller sees the importance of a new understanding of mutuality/friendship in society, she knows the world in which human beings live is not welcoming of this understanding of equal power and equal control. However, the value of Miller's work is her early recognition of the importance of this kind of mutuality, especially for women and other marginalised people, so they could know what it means to develop and use all their potential, and the conviction that all human beings have the ability to build co-creating friendships.

Jessica Benjamin and Mutual Recognition

Jessica Benjamin is a practicing psychoanalyst in New York City and on the faculty of New York University's Postdoctoral Psychology Program in Psychoanalysis and

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[49] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[50] Miller, *The Healing Connection*, 43.
[51] See footnote 34.

Psychotherapy and of the New School for Social Research Program in Psychoanalytic Studies. Benjamin's primary interest lies in intersubjectivity, which she also calls emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality and sharing states of mind.[52] Using Stern's work as the basis for her research in conjunction with her clinical observations of frame-by-frame analysis of films of mothers and babies interacting, Benjamin became intrigued by the infant's capacity to relate as a friend to caregivers. She views the beginning of new life as an intense moment of friendship, which is formed through a paradox of mutuality whereby the primary caregiver, in this case the mother, sees her infant as having come from her but basically being unknown to her. Benjamin insists that what sustains the mother at this time is the friendship she forms with her infant. She says of this friendship:

> To experience recognition in the fullest, most joyful way entails the paradox that "you" who are "mine" are also different, new, outside of me. It thus includes the sense of loss that you are no longer inside me, no longer simply my fantasy of you, that we are no longer physically and psychically one, and I can no longer take care of you simply by taking care of myself. I may find it preferable to put this side of reality out of my consciousness – for example, by declaring you the most wonderful baby who ever lived, far superior to all other babies, so that you are my dream child, and taking care of you is as easy as taking care of myself and fulfils my deepest wishes for glory. This is a temptation to which many new parents succumb in some measure.
>
> Still, the process of recognition, charted here through the experience of the new mother, always includes this paradoxical mixture of otherness and togetherness: You belong to me, yet you are not (any longer) part of me. The joy I take in your existence must include both my connection to you and your independent existence – I recognize that you are real.[53]

At that moment there exists a bond of mutuality between the caregiver – the mutual recognition of two separate human beings. Benjamin claims the intersubjective self of

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[52] Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 16.
[53] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 15.

the infant is firmly established at seven to nine months. This is the time when the baby knows that others exist who feel and think as it does. She accepts Stern's findings that this mutuality is not about gratification of physical needs but is about the infant and caregiver being attuned to each other. What sustains the mother at this time is the friendship she is forming with the infant; the question of the inequality of the parent-child relationship does not matter. There is simply a relationship of true friendship where both the mother and infant will grow as human beings in and through their relationship to each other.[54]

The problem for Benjamin is at what point do mutual recognition and attunement change to at-one-ment, the existence of one narcissistic subject with the other as an object of domination?[55] The importance of this question cannot be overlooked. Perhaps finding an answer to it might mean the recovery of true friendship in Western society. If friendship is the first relationship, the universal way human beings know how to relate to each other, what has happened to it? The answer to this question might lie in the struggle for life in the process of giving birth. Both the infant and the mother are living with an experience of subjective loss.[56] The infant is losing the comfort and security of the womb where all its needs have been met usually for nine months. The mother experiences the loss of her dreams and fantasies and is immediately confronted with the vulnerability of the infant and its future. Whether or not it can be named, both the infant and the mother are experiencing a sense of mutual powerlessness. The powerlessness does not linger because the mutual recognition contained in friendship takes its place:

> As she cradles her newborn child and looks into its eyes, the first-time mother says, "I believe she knows me. You do know me, don't you? Yes, you do." As she croons to

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[54] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 30.
[55] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 46.
[56] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 14.

her baby in that soft, high-pitched repetitive voice (the "infantized" speech that scientists confirm is the universal baby talk), she attributes to her infant a knowledge beyond ordinary known. To the sceptical observer this knowledge may appear to be no more than projection. For the mother, this peaceful moment after a feeding – …this moment is indeed one of recognition. She says to her baby, "Hey, stranger, are you really the one I carried around inside of me? Do you know me?" Unlike the observer, she would not be surprised to hear that rigorous experiments show that her baby can already distinguish her from other people, that newborns already prefer the sight, sound and smell of their mothers'.[57]

Friendship is born. The baby comes into the world as a unique human being. There is never any doubt in the above conversation that the mother sees the infant as a subject, a person in its own right. And very quickly the infant exhibits signs of mutuality towards its mother. In the first days of an infant's life, the paradox of the infant having been part of the mother and at the same time a completely new human being is known. The process of mutual recognition has occurred in the midst of loss.

There is a possibility that true friendship could disappear. Benjamin believes this is because of the inability to sustain the mixture of togetherness and otherness in mutual recognition. Benjamin sees how mutual recognition is easily mistaken for other forms of recognition that are close to it but not exactly it. The 'near-synonyms' for mutual recognition are: to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathize, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with, find familiar …'. [58] She recognises mutual recognition in some of the experiences described in mother-infant interaction, such as 'emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind'.[59] Mutual recognition originates in the earliest experiences of relationship for a human being and enables the infant and the caregiver

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[57] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 13.
[58] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 17-20.
[59] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 16.

to create an environment between them which allows both to function as subjects. Mutual recognition is a life-giving exchange which empowers the potential in each human being to flourish and develop fully over time. Benjamin compares mutual recognition to sunlight, the essential element in plant life needed for growth.[60] Mutual recognition is the fuel necessary for a human being to have a purposeful and meaningful life. Because of mutual recognition human beings can know themselves as the authors of their acts and learn to assume responsibility for them. Benjamin describes it:

> A person comes to feel that "I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts," by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existence, her independence. Recognition is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, "I am, I do," and then waits for the response, "You are, you have done." Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response. We recognize ourselves in the other, and we even recognize ourselves in inanimate things…'[61]

Mutual recognition is difficult because of the uncertainty that goes along with it. What if the other does not respond? What if there is no recognition? Human interaction is fraught with the anxieties of "what ifs". Mutual recognition cannot and does not occur all the time. Attunement breaks down in any number of ways between the infant and caregiver. A tired and fussy baby, a depressed and bored caregiver, a sick baby and a worried caregiver are examples of the times when mutual recognition will be frustrated.[62] Benjamin acknowledges the difficulty of mutual recognition happening because of these very human moments of self-absorption. There needs to be a balance between self-absorption and being fully present to the other. There will

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[60] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 22.
[61] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 21. See Nathaniel Branden's principle of psychological visibility, 64.
[62] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 27-29.

be successes and failures between the infant and caregiver in developing the capacity for mutual recognition.

Inevitably the tension between independence and dependence cannot be maintained and will break down. But without the tension, which acts as a springboard to keep the projections that inevitably move back and forth in all relationships from alighting on the other, the development of mutual recognition is hampered.[63] The paradox of mutuality is necessary for a healthy development of awareness of one's dependence on others as well as one's need for independence from others. These are the two sides of mutual recognition – a sense of awe along with a sense of anxiety. The awe goes with the co-creativeness in the relationship; the anxiety goes with the chaos that happens as new creation takes shape. Frequently the anxiety leads to fear which expresses itself in relationships of domination and submission.[64]

In Western culture mutual recognition is particularly difficult to maintain. Independence and individuation are privileged over against dependence and mutuality, which are often seen as human weaknesses. Because Benjamin sees how vital mutual recognition is for the healthy development of the adult, she has gone so far as to claim that the original sin is to deny mutual recognition, to acknowledge the other as other - to acknowledge each human being as a subject.[65] Taking Benjamin's thinking one step further, it might be said that the original sin is the absence of true friendship.

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[63] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 31-36.
[64] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 37.
[65] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 83.

Benjamin on Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity is the interaction between self and others and the need for mutual recognition from one another that comes in the interaction. There will always be tension between two interacting subjects. Mutual recognition is risky. Who truly wants to be known by the other let alone by one's self? According to Benjamin, mutual recognition is only possible if the tension within it is accepted and the fear of losing it for a while is also accepted.[66] When the equal magnetism of mutual recognition becomes unbalanced, inevitably conflict is the result.

The first breakdown of mutual recognition begins at fourteen months when infants enter rapprochement, the phase of conflict between the excitement that comes with being independent and the reality of vulnerability.[67] The realisation that both they and the caregivers are free to choose between independence and dependence or to accept the paradox of living with both creates anxiety. Suddenly there is a need to control the anxious feelings that are part of conflict, loss and vulnerability. When the feelings cannot be addressed, either the caregiver or the infant go for complete control of the other. The intersubjective relationship once characterized by mutual recognition breaks down in favour of a relationship of complementarity in which the seeds for domination and submission are sown and friendship is destroyed.[68] If the crisis of rapprochement in the infant is not responded to appropriately by the caregiver, the consequences are emptiness, isolation and negation for both parties.[69] The proper response is to help the infant learn a healthy and respectful understanding of boundaries as the caregiver accepts the necessity of those boundaries in order to avoid

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[66] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 21, and Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 64.
[67] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 34.
[68] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 47-48. 63-65.
[69] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 35.

the danger of wanting to be seen by the infant as the one who can make and keep the world perfect. Benjamin says:

> The rapprochement crisis is thus also a crisis of parenting. By identifying with her child's disillusionment, and by knowing that he will survive it, the parent is able to respond appropriately; in doing so she has to accept that she cannot make a perfect world for her child (where he can get everything he wants) – and this is the blow to her own narcissism.[70]

Without denying the difficulty of the crisis of rapprochement and the variety of negative psychological consequences if the struggle for control is dealt with inappropriately, Benjamin argues that mutual recognition can never be achieved 'through obedience, through identification with the other's power or through repression'.[71] Mutual recognition requires contact with the other. Only when there is contact with the other can reality be discovered and tested. During the crisis of rapprochement it is healthy for infants to know the extent of their anger and rage and for the caregivers to remain calmly connected to what is occurring but not judging it:

> Naturally you want to do what you can to get the child out of this state. It can be said, however, that if a baby cries in a state of rage and feels as if he has destroyed everyone and everything, and yet the people round him remain calm and unhurt, this experience greatly strengthens his ability to see that what he feels to be true is not necessarily real.[72]

As mentioned above by accepting the reality of their vulnerabilities, the caregivers will not be tempted to control the infant but will be available to care for the infant. The end result will be a return to mutual recognition where the tensions of sameness and difference are back in balance. Friendship returns to the on-going dynamic of

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[70] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 36.
[71] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 40.
[72] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love,* 40.

influence and change between two subjects. Benjamin would like classical psychoanalytical theories to take on board the dynamics of mutual recognition between the infant and caregiver and use the relationship of friendship as the paradigm for growth and transformation in adult relationships.

A More Specific Illustration of Mutual Recognition

The movie, *Swimming Upstream,* is based on a true story of relationships between a gifted Australian student and athlete from Brisbane and members of his family. The film vividly portrays scenes in the life of a family where cries for friendship cannot be heard over against the roar of parental authority as well as one poignant scene where the power of the memories of friendship transforms the life of the story's protagonist, Tony Fingleton. It illustrates how the building blocks of friendship from early childhood are present and ready for interaction with those from whom mutual recognition is desired even when relationships go horribly wrong. Tony longs for a relationship with his father, Harold, Sr., an alcoholic with volatile mood swings. Harold's moods dominate his relationships with his wife, Dora, and their children, Harold, Jr, Tony, John, Ronald and Diane. Harold, Sr., is haunted by his past which controls his relationships in the present. Tony wants nothing more than to be recognized by his father who does not care about Tony's academic and musical achievements. Tony finally realises that the way to his father's heart is to be good at sports. He and his younger brother, John, excel at swimming.

Tony and John invite their father to watch them swim at the local pool. Harold is not happy to be there and does nothing to hide his irritability as he watches the boys race one another across the length of the pool. They finish the swim and Harold asks

them, "Do you always swim as well as that?" Tony tells his father that John is best at freestyle and John says the backstroke is Tony's strength. Harold asks them to swim the length of the pool again and this time he times them. John and Tony's potential to become championship swimmers is obvious to Harold. Harold is impressed with Tony's time and says to his son, "Backstroke is definitely your stroke and nobody is going to take it away from you!" Tony knows he is good at backstroke, and for the first time in his life, he receives that longed for recognition of his potential from his father. Harold becomes John and Tony's swimming coach and for the next five years they keep training and keep winning. When Harold is not working at the docks, he is at the pool with Tony and John screaming at them, "Faster, faster, come on! Don't stop. Go back, faster, faster."

Tony and John have a special handshake which is an important symbol of their friendship. They share it before practice and swim meets, and it seems to represent the shared power they have between them. Harold is jealous and cannot stand the close relationship between his sons. That jealousy along with the alcoholism and mental problems contribute to Harold's drive to destroy the friendship between Tony and John. Harold convinces John that he can beat his brother in the backstroke and secretly trains him to compete against Tony in the junior backstroke race at the Australian Swimming Championship in Sydney. Tony is shocked when he sees John standing on the block waiting for the signal for the race to begin. John wins. Tony is devastated by his brother's betrayal and numbed by the loss.

After this defeat Tony wants to give up swimming. In separate scenes, his mother and older brother convince Tony that he is responsible for making something of himself and convince him not to give up swimming. Even if Tony cannot see his potential, they can. Tony returns to swimming. One scene follows another showing

Tony driving himself in training. Before long Tony is winning again. His greatest achievement is a victory in the backstroke at the Australian Championships which gains him a place on his country's team in the Commonwealth Games.

Tony not only wins a silver medal in the Games but returns home to learn he has been awarded a full scholarship to Harvard University. Tony accepts the scholarship and goes to say goodbye to his father, who is now living in a furnished flat after having been kicked out of the home by Dora because of his drinking. When Tony goes into the flat, he hears classical music playing on the radio. Harold quickly turns off the radio but not before letting it slip, much to Tony's surprise, how much he knows about music. Tony starts to tell his father about the choice he has to make between gaining a place on the Australian Olympic Team or going to Harvard. Harold suggests they take a walk to the docks. Tony continues talking and recalls the first time he went swimming. It was with his father. Harold put Tony, who was terrified of drowning, in the water. Tony says to his father, "You had me there and just let me go. I didn't go under. I floated. And then I swam away from you, away from you to the other side." Father and son can no longer look at one another. Harold tells Tony he will not be there to see him off, barely shakes his son's hand and asks Tony not to give up on him.

The final scene is in the swimming hall at Harvard University where Tony is arriving for a swim. The swimming coach greets Tony and tells him that another Australian swimmer has won her third Olympic medal. He also mentions that he has just looked at the times for the 100 meter backstroke - Tony's race. The coach says to him, "I bet you wish you were there." Tony shakes his head no and asks the coach to time his 100 meter backstroke. Tony begins to swim. As he races down the length of the pool, he has flashbacks in his mind's eye of growing up and swimming. He hears

encouraging voices from family members, including the words of his father, who says, "That's good – the backstroke's your strength and nobody can take that away from you." Tony swims faster and faster. He touches the pool wall and surfaces to an excited coach, who is shaking his stop watch at Tony. He says excitedly to him, "You have just made the swim of your life. Look at that time!" Tony realises he has broken the Olympic record for the 100 meter backstroke. He jumps with sheer joy, smiles and shakes the coach's hand.

Swimming Upstream is about the human need for mutual recognition and friendship. Regardless of the age of the child, the mutual recognition found in true friendship will be desired. Without mutual recognition there is the feeling of being an object for someone else's use, which drains the self of meaning and value. As Tony matured he realised he was being used by his father. That is the reason he chose a Harvard education over an Olympic medal. At the same time Tony still longed for friendship with his father and recognition by him of his potential to be a champion. However, by the time he left Australia, Tony, even though he deeply admired and cared for his father, had accepted the reality that he would never receive the mutual recognition he hoped for. It seems very likely that Harold never knew true friendship in his life so he was not capable of giving it to his son. Tony also became tired of the barriers between them. As long as Harold refused to accept responsibility for the alcoholism and mood swings, there could be no reconciliation between father and son.

The movie's ending illustrates how the earliest experiences of relating mutually with others are never forgotten. Tony never forgot his father's words, "That's good – the backstroke's your strength and nobody can take that away from you." These words were the closest Tony and Harold would ever come to the mutual recognition of friendship. Harold tried to take them from Tony by using John to compete against

his brother. Tony never forgot Harold's words because they were the jewels in the crown of friendship which he longed to wear with his father. Tony's search for mutual recognition came full circle because of the spontaneity of the Harvard coach towards Tony and what he had achieved. He related to Tony in a way that affirmed his father's words and restored the balance between self and other which Tony needed for healing. Friendship is present from the beginning. It might seem utopian; it is certainly difficult, but it is necessary for human beings to grow, to change and to move towards a purposeful life.

Conclusion: The Paradox of Loss and New Growth in Friendship

Thanks to the work of Daniel Stern, Sue Gerhardt, Colwyn Trevarthen, Jean Baker Miller and Jessica Benjamin, it is now evident that from the beginning of life, the desire for friendship is embedded in all human beings and visible as the first relationship between an infant and caregiver. All human beings have a desire to know others and to be known by others. And when mutual recognition exists between an infant and caregiver, both nurture one another. The caregiver provides strength for the infant to grow and flourish, and the infant also provides strength for the caregiver's presence in the community and the world to grow and flourish. As Carter Heyward points out, just as Jesus was strengthened by his relationship with God the Father, God the Father became known in human history because of his friendship with Jesus.[73]

Infants are born with an incredible capacity for remembering later in life those contacts when someone else treated them as a friend and wanted them to flourish as a

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[73] Carter Heyward, *God in the Balance: Christian Spirituality in Times of Terror* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 55-56.

human being. This implies an eternal nature within true friendship that can be called upon to overcome relationships that have not been mutual, possibly hurtful and even harmful. Because of the creative and life-giving power within true friendship, it might be that friendship is the relationship in which human beings learn about the transforming love of God and God's desire for every living creature to thrive, to know an other, to be known by an other, and to realize one's own God-given potential as well as to be grateful for the other's God-given potential. Friendship encourages the image of God to grow and flourish in every human being and possibly in all of creation.

Friendship is not easy. Mutual recognition is a struggle that requires keeping a balance between the desire for independence from others alongside the need for connections with others. Mutual recognition is acceptance of the interconnections within all of life along with a commitment to being responsible towards them. Unfortunately it is much easier to exercise power over others or to submit to being regulated by others rather than engaging in co-creating one another. Co-creation carries within it an ethic of responsibility towards the other. Times of loss, when mutual powerlessness is present and acknowledged, seem to be the moments when human beings have the best chance of connecting to one another in friendship. The first loss which human beings experience is in the birthing process. Benjamin has shown that both the infant and the caregiver experience a loss of self even while mutual recognition and friendship take its place. Friendship is born again and again when loss and mutual recognition learn to live together.

JESUS SAID "THE WATER THAT

Seven

Conclusion: Created for Friendship

The bronze sculpture, *Water of Life,* seen in the picture immediately before this chapter, is a study in friendship. The British artist, Stephen Broadbent, sculpted the 3.3m bronze water feature for Chester Cathedral in 1994.[1] The adage that a picture can speak more than a thousand words is close to the truth in the case of this sculpture. *Water of Life* helps to bring together all the words about friendship that have preceded this final chapter. It is a work of art filled with a complex mixture of views and contours, meanings obvious and subtle, the ordinary and the unexpected, put together to invite one to participate in friendship, true friendship, Christian friendship. It depicts the encounter in John's gospel between Jesus and the woman of Samaria (John 4: 4-14).

Broadbent intended his sculpture to show the life-giving power of water, which flows continuously and which the photograph cannot show. The juxtaposition of the two figures illustrates mutual recognition and friendship. Broadbent has welded Jesus and the Samaritan woman's feet together. From that position the two figures form a circular shape which brings them face to face. They hold between them a bowl from which a continuous flow of water spills over their hands and into a circular dish in the pool below. Around the base of the pool are the words: "Jesus said, 'the water that I shall give will be an inner spring always welling up for eternal life' " (John 4:14).

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[1] Stephen Broadbent was educated in Liverpool and studied under the sculptor Arthur Dooley. He does large public sculptures, like *Water of Life*, and urban design projects. Broadbent has his own design company, 'Broadbent'. His website is webmaster@sbal.co.uk.

The story is a familiar one. Jesus is sitting alone at Jacob's well in Samaria when the woman comes to collect water. Jesus asks her for a drink. There are two possible scenarios after Jesus' request. Perhaps the woman is shocked to be addressed by Jesus, as a Jew. The Jews and the Samaritans were not 'friends'. She says to Jesus, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"(4:9). As John records the incident, there could be a sound of mistrust in her voice. After all she would have had reason to mistrust Jesus.

Later in the narrative one learns that the woman has been married five times and is now cohabitating with a sixth man. It would appear she has had numerous failed relationships which would account for her mistrust and even fear of Jesus. On the other hand she might not be mistrusting of his question at all and could see it as an opportunity for another relationship. If that were the case, a tone of seductiveness could be heard in her question to Jesus. For the Samaritan woman Jesus might just be one more opportunity for getting her needs met. However, both possibilities appear to be wrong, and Broadbent's sculpture seems to imply visually a number of ways in which the mutual recognition necessary for friendship is occurring between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

What are some of the qualities of true friendship that I see portrayed in Broadbent's sculpture? The fusion of Jesus and the woman's feet represents their willingness to be part of one another's lives, so each may flourish. They are physically stuck together in their common humanity, which would not have been possible in first-century Palestine. Jesus would have had a common humanity only with his own people. Friendship would have only been possible with his own. However, Jesus is not concerned about meeting the right person, which has connotations of using another for one's own personal benefit but rather in befriending

another, which suggests an interest in one bettering the other. The togetherness of their feet eliminates social barriers caused by race and sex. They are sharing a common physical core that leaves no room for the growth of prejudices. In fact they would appear to be drawing strength from each other. Their feet are suspended above the ground, but they are able to maintain their balance because of the connection holding them.

The connection holding them demands that they maintain their balance by looking directly at one another. Jesus and the Samaritan woman cannot treat each other as faceless. If one or the other pulls back or they come too close or move aside to look beyond one another, they will lose the balance of their connection. There is no relationship if they refuse to see one another. And if they attempt to erase the other by changing positions, they would erase themselves as well. Friendship requires coming face to face with another. In the meeting of faces human beings experience contact with the living God in each other. Parents looking at their newborn child sometimes talk about seeing the face of God as they gaze with awe and wonder at the new life lying in their arms. In the absence of projections of self, which are usually few at this stage of the parent-child relationship, there is a deep sense of awe for the sacredness of life and responsibility to the newborn. It is only when there are social, cultural and religious projections flying between human beings that the face of the other is obscured and along with it any sense of responsibility, which allows the other to be wholly other. Responsibility to the other only comes when the other is recognized as other.

In *Water of Life* Jesus and the woman are not building masks of projections onto one another. Instead they are learning how to be friends and taking tremendous risks in the process. They are intimate with one another without being invasive.

Invasiveness implies a need to possess the other. Intimacy is a desire to be connected to another without being owned by the other or owning the other. Jesus and the woman are enclosed in a circle of intimacy. As they attend to each other without possessing each other, the living waters flow. Their non-possessive intimacy is the most powerful contribution to a loving union with God, symbolized in the flowing waters. This intimacy recognises that no matter how much two people care for each other, they can never know the other fully. The strangeness in the other person is the immanence of God. The closest that human beings can come face to face with God is in coming face to face with the other without overshadowing the other. Their intimacy reflects their desire to know the mystery within each other without owning the mystery of each other.

The sculpture breaks open the mysterious, sensual, life-thirsting power of desire, perhaps the most important aspect of friendship but one that has terrified, puzzled and challenged many thinkers on friendship and even compelled some to harness desire's power into theological restraints. Andres Nygren's work, *Agape and Eros*, comes immediately to mind.[2] Theologians have begun to re-examine the importance of desire.[3] Anne Bathurst Gilson, has redefined desire as the 'resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling'.[4] Although initially identified as a feminine

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[2] Andres Nygren, *Agape and Eros,*44, insisted that *Eros* was an unchristian form of love and separated it from *Agape*.

[3] See Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred* (London: SPCK, 1989); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essay and Speeches* (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984); Haunani-Kay Trask, *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986); Heyward, *Touching our Strength;* Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

[4] Anne Bathurst Gilson, *Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 53.

power, it is now accepted that such desires are part of the reality of all human beings.[5] When we are able to identify our deepest desires, we touch that which is authentic about us and begin to live a meaningful and purposeful life out of those desires. By tapping into such desires appropriately, life can be lived with integrity, fulfilment and sacred power. One may come closest to God because attending to genuine desires helps in the image of God being reflected in one's life. Philip Sheldrake says: God is at the 'heart of all desire' and 'deep desires are the basis for friendship with God'.[6]

Just as such human desires invite human beings into friendship with God, so they also make them want to be friends with others. In Broadbent's sculpture the words around the dish, "The water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life", are an expression of the desire that is a necessary for friendship. Desire is the inner spring in human beings that longs for a meaningful and purposeful life. That desire for life is given to all human beings at creation and is drawn out and nourished through the relational matrix in which human beings are born, live and die. However, the life force of desire cannot be touched unless mutual recognition exists. Mutual recognition is present because the life-thirsting energy of desire respects and protects the otherness of the other. Thirst and water depict the mutuality of desire in the sculpture and remind one of the Sufi mystic and poet, Rumi, who said: 'it is not only the thirsting who seeks water; it is water that also seeks the thirsty'.[7]

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[5] In Ivy George and Margaret Masson, *An Uncommon Correspondence: An East-West Conversation on Friendship, Intimacy and Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 69, Ivy George says, 'One might dare say that Jesus' life exemplifies the culmination of Eros in his highly energised passion for God and the world'. Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1989), 150, also identifies the pattern of Jesus' life as one that was lived in 'relational power', especially with the 'creative source of that power'.

[6] Sheldrake, *Befriending our Desires, 15.*

[7] Quoted in Dorothy Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance,* trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001), 128.

Another important aspect of true friendship that the sculpture conveys is a feeling of non-possessiveness. Jesus and the woman are connected in their common humanity, but the respect between them indicates a refusal to dominate and possess the other. Possessiveness in any relationship destroys the freedom that is necessary for human life to flourish. Possessiveness in friendship sucks up the life-giving water which is necessary for human growth. In many ways friendship might be thought to be a Sabbath relationship, one where there is abstinence from remaking and reshaping another but one where there is a sanctuary space in time for the blossoming of eternal life in another. Just as the Sabbath is a time of liberation for human beings from the need to dominate and possess life, so friendship is a relationship that liberates another from everything that takes away the eternal in human authenticity.

True friendship is a relationship that celebrates the life of the other and brings joy. The woman at the well is filled with overflowing joy when she tastes the desire of life welling up in her because of what Jesus recognises in her. Jesus, too, experiences joy because the woman does not refuse to give him water but recognises and respects him. The relationship frees them from all the social conditions each has brought to the well. True friends discover who each other is and in the process catch glimpses of eternal life in each other. In the story the woman runs to tell people in the town that Jesus has not only told her everything she has done in her life in a non-judgemental manner but seems to have empowered her to be more than who she is. Friendship not only celebrates life it increases it. Human beings have no right to try to contain life but only to be grateful for it in all living beings.

True friendship does more than tolerate differences; it respects and celebrates them. The hands of Jesus and the woman in the sculpture indicate an openness and ability to receive and hold their differences – a male Jew and a female Samaritan,

probably the most significant differences possible between two human beings at that time and the basis for prejudice and justification of evil actions towards one another. The reason they are able to accept their differences is because of empathy, which is another quality of friendship. Empathy is the practice of trying to meet people on their own terms. All relationships require a minimum of empathy; but in friendship where there is an opportunity to engage with a specific other, empathy can enlarge one's perspective, help overcome misconceptions and transform both parties. Frequently sympathy is mistaken for empathy. Gestures of sympathy, as helpful and necessary as they are during an emotional crisis, move in one direction. Empathy is a two-way street. Like sympathy, empathy is the ability to feel someone else's feelings and thoughts but it is more than that. Empathy is a willingness to act in such a way that the other will flourish.[8] Jesus could have felt sympathy for the Samaritan's isolated life and not said anything to make her think about her situation. The woman could have understood Jesus' fatigue and need for water and not made an effort to do anything for him. But they risked empathizing with one another, and something unforeseen happening – their views of their world changed.

It is not possible to see and hear the water running over the hands of Jesus and the woman in the sculpture. The free-flowing water represents the non-possessiveness that is necessary for friendships to be transformative relationships. Friends are not objects to own, but bearers of the mystery of God within us that is longing to be known and shared with the other. Friendships, like all relationships, are not free from the temptation to own the other and to make the other an idol for one's self-gratification. When this happens, the life-giving water which is friendship's vitality stagnates and eventually dries up. A non-possessive friendship encourages and

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[8] Daryl Koehn, *Rethinking Feminist Ethics: care, trust and empathy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 57.

nourishes new possibilities. It is not afraid of change, even if it means losing a friend and ending the relationship for the time being in order for the change to happen. Non-possessive friends are people who are able to live on the threshold of new potential, expecting to be filled and able to fill the other without concern about having enough to share. Non-possessive friendship involves loving the other without limits. Finally non-possessive friendship is the closest relationship for knowing the true nature of God. A non-possessive friendship understands resurrection life and never loses hope for it in the other.

Jesus and the woman appear to be balancing the bowl of water between them and might be saying to each other, "I am here to help give you the water of life." This gesture represents another important quality of friendship – the responsibility friends have for one another. If one or the other is no longer able to help hold the bowl, the other would continue to hold it and be sure the other was receiving the water. Genuine friendships do not treat the other as a means to an end but are concerned for and foster as much as humanly possible the well-being of the other. Friends respond to the needs of the other out of compassion because of the other's needs, particularly where pain and suffering are encountered. When one person is in the midst of a crisis, a friend tries not to abandon or betray the other. And even if friends do not know the right things to do or to say, they will simply be present for each other. That is difficult to do, but friends are willing to share not only in the other's vulnerability but in the powerlessness and uncertainty that are part of any crisis.

The last quality of friendship portrayed in this sculpture is forgiveness. Forgiveness brings new life, and one can see the beginning of that new life in the figure of the woman who could be said to be dying to her old self and rising to a new one. She appears to be embodying the shape of Christian forgiveness. The newness

of life she is experiencing depends on the friendship she has with Jesus. She knows the power of forgiveness through the mutual recognition which Jesus gives to her and she receives. Forgiveness depends on mutuality, generosity and equality. Forgiveness is also seen in the reaching out between Jesus and the woman. The gesture of reaching out creates a space in which change can occur. Sometimes forgiveness is misunderstood as bringing someone over to the other side or even backing someone into a corner where there is no alternative left. It is neither of these.

In many ways forgiveness is a form of hospitality where there is enough room for the one to let go of the burdens that diminish life and make new choices and commitment towards a new form of creation. The reaching out between Jesus and the woman encourages her to face up to the fear that rules her life while still giving her the space in which God is waiting to help her transform that fear. Forgiveness is more than the absolution of guilt. Its primary focus is on the reconciliation of human brokenness and the restoration of communion with God, with one's self, with one another and with all of creation. True forgiveness occurs in the friendship between Jesus and the woman. She is able to let go of the shame that has pulled her down, to feel the love freely given by Jesus through mutual recognition and to become a witness seen in her rising posture in the sculpture to God's good creation in her and her aspiration to know it.

The purpose of this study of *Water of Life* was to show that friendship is the most necessary relationship between human beings. Too often its importance as a transforming relationship has been overlooked in favour of family and marriage relationships. To ignore the value of friendship will be to the detriment of human happiness and fulfilment. The Jewish mystic and social theologian, Martin Buber, said that in the beginning is the relationship. Now with the insights of developmental

psychology one can say with even more certainty that friendship is the beginning relationship in life and that human beings are created for the purpose of friendship. The desire for companionship, the desire to be seen and the desire to see one's self are the miracles of friendship. Friendship might even be said to be the greatest gift human beings can offer to one another. Before he died Jesus said to his disciples:

> This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you... I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father... And I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. My command to you is to love one another (John 15:12-17).

The lasting fruits of friendship are the constant growing and evolving that comes to human beings, who call forth of the best in one another, are willing to suffer and die for one another and are committed to create a better world.

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