

The Present Moment as Home in Mindfulness of
God – A Spiritual Autoethnography

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Abstract

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This is a spiritual autoethnography. I focused on emergent, iterative, discovery-based research questions that I revisit in a form of spiral learning. The first was, 'what is mindfulness of God and how might I cultivate it?' My lived experience suggested my home was in the present moment with God. However, I was unable to be in the present because of anxiety. This led to a second question, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxiety to be mindful of God?' I discovered the roots of my anxiety lay in trauma of childhood separation. Through this experience of complete aloneness, I had to find my home in my own body. I recognized I did not live in all the rooms of my being. A deeper question emerged, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole self to further reclaim my present moments?' To be at home in the present moment with God I needed to be aware of my whole self. My embodied self only fully became home through awareness in the present moment, which became a graced spiritual re-perceiving. My part was cultivating ethical mnemonic awareness, meditating on scriptural metacognitive propositions until they became metacognitive insights. This is part of my original contribution. I became aware I was in an implicit relationship of knowing with God, with moments of meeting. Part of this implicitness was an underground stream of symbolic knowing, my symbolic self. This adapted analogy of implicit relational knowing is also part of my original contribution. This ethical awareness crystallizes into an act of moral creativity where I re-perceive God, myself, and others, recognizing the God-given creative word in each of us. I cultivate this mindful recognition, a novel application of mindfulness and recognition theory, in a unique mindful rule of life.

Dedication

This has been a long and winding road and I would like to dedicate this to my mindful family, Clare, Zac, Amy, and Coco the dog, without whom it would not have been possible. We are a pod of free creatures swimming the ocean of life together. I would also like to dedicate this to Phil Stone and the Scargill Community who gave us a home and loved us when we needed it the most. My mum helped set the direction of my life when she taught me to read at the age of three, and my dad has always encouraged my studies.

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Abbreviations

ACT	Acceptance & Commitment Therapy
A&E	Accident & Emergency
AE	Autoethnography
BSS	Boarding School Syndrome
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LPs	Long Playing Records
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OSB	Order of St. Benedict
OT	Old Testament
St.	Saint

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Part One: Introduction, methodology & evocative narrative

Chapter One

Introduction

Suddenly an angel touched me, through these words...

Fix your eyes...

Fix your eyes on the depths of your heart...

With an unceasing...

With an unceasing mindfulness of God...

I was fragile in process

The touch held me...¹

My life story in this research has been a meeting point between my intuitive impulse for healing and transformation and the cultural phenomenon of mindfulness. This confluence of the personal and cultural makes this research an autoethnography (AE). One way of defining AE that matches my intersection with culture is as ‘the convergence of the “autobiographical impulse” and the “ethnographic moment.”’² I am researching the convergence between personal context and cultural context. One stream that enters this convergence that differentiates my research is the autobiographical impulse to explore mindfulness of God. Because of this additional context I am writing a spiritual autoethnography. In this spiritual autoethnography I will incorporate both evocative and analytic AE. In the evocative narrative I am congruently vulnerable; my writing seeks to be emotionally evocative, not through a rhetoric of persuasion but to help

¹ An allusion to Elijah being touched by an angel in I Kings 19:5. A poetic rendering of the words that launched my research, Diadochus of Photike, *Gnostic Chapters*, 56 (SC 5 bis. p. 117), quoted in Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

² Tami Spry, “Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 6 (December 2001): 706, accessed March 10, 2022, <http://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700605>.

people re-perceive my life, and perhaps identify with it. I use poetic and creative representation in this story.³ In the more analytic sections I adapt qualitative methods that enable me to critically analyse my personal data.⁴

I value the use of the word impulse since it suggests we do not always know what has led to the desire, which may have motivations outside of our awareness, often the result of intuitions. The insight that such personal impulses converge with cultural shifts to produce ethnographic moments also mirrors my experience. I have chosen this definition of AE to structure the key convergences in my life which form the backbone of my research. This definition also helps me as researcher draw out of the complex field of personal data, the significant aspects that can be researched as AE, namely the genuine convergence between personal experience and cultural shifts. I want to say more about the significance of context as this is central to my theological endeavour. My personal context is that I have immersed myself in secular mindfulness for health and wellbeing. I have also immersed myself in a quest to be mindful of God for transformational purposes.

This research has been discovery-based and iterative. I have an intuitive way of revisiting the key concepts and building on them, which fits with spiral learning theory. This theory was developed by Bruner in which he outlines a ‘spiral process where initially ideas/concepts are introduced and mastered (or acquired) in a rather intuitive way.’⁵ I naturally work with concepts in an intuitive way. These concepts are then ‘revisited for a more formal/operational understanding with some connection to other knowledge.’⁶ I iteratively revisit my core concepts with a different

³ For a summary, see, Tessa Muncey, *Creating Autoethnographies* (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2010), 35-36.

⁴ See Muncey, 36, for a brief outline of analytic AE.

⁵ Russell Woodward, “The Spiral Curriculum in Higher Education: Analysis in Pedagogic Context and a Business Studies Application,” *E-Journal of Business Education and Scholarship of Teaching* 13, no.3 (2019): 16, accessed February 22, 2022,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1258243&site=eds-live>.

Woodward refers to J. Bruner, *Entry into Early Language: A Spiral Curriculum* (Swansea, University College of Swansea, 1975) without referencing a page number.

⁶ Woodward, 16.

application and in the light of theory and other knowledge. This spiral process describes how I ruminatively return to concepts, seeking a 'spiral progression' and deeper understanding of the concept.⁷ It may be that mindfulness with its emphasis on a mindful repetition of practice and theory invites this spiral process of learning. I surmise that Christian contemplation mirrors this process as well. My intuition is that anxiety has also shaped a ruminative style to my thinking. I own this ruminative style in the research, seeking to be mindfully aware of it and unnecessary repetition, but recognizing that it is a part of me that is changing but should not be eliminated. It is part of the autoethnographic shaping of the research that is particularly me.

This approach with its revisiting of core concepts, which are applied in different contexts led to three research questions. The first was, 'what is mindfulness of God and how might I cultivate it?' My lived experience suggested my home was in the present moment with God. The problem of the present moment was that I was unable to be present in the here and now because of anxiety. This led to a second question, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?' However, I also found the roots of my anxiety lay in the trauma of separation from my family. I discerned through this experience of complete aloneness that I had to find my home in my own body. I recognized I did not live in all the rooms of my own being, and so discovered a deeper related question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self to further reclaim my present moments?'

A contextual study

My professional context as a Baptist minister, secularly trained psychotherapist, and mindfulness researcher also converged with the cultural shift to mindfulness. This led me to notice that although secular

⁷ Woodward, 16.

mindfulness and Buddhist mindfulness dominate the marketplace, Christian mindfulness, whose intention, I argue, is mindfulness of God, barely features. This led me into the area of contextual theology and the missional possibilities of engaging with mindfulness.

In his article on the central role of contextualization in the creation of New Testament (NT) theology, Von Allmen identified several key movements. The first key movement is the need for missionaries to the Gentile world, 'Wanted: Missionaries' as he puts it.⁸ My realization as a minister was that mindfulness was a missional opportunity. I could be a missionary to the mindfulness movement. For example, I ran a mindful church café in our local Costa in London which explored mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God. But for that I needed to understand the context. This was a further impulse to research and practise mindfulness, whilst considering and developing a form of mindfulness of God. Von Allmen identifies a second key movement within the contextualization at the centre of the development of NT theology, 'Wanted: Translators.'⁹ If the early church was to reach the Greek-speaking Gentile world, then it needed people who spoke Greek, and could translate the gospel into the Greek culture.¹⁰

Because of my immersion in secular mindfulness, and Christian contemplation and theology I was such a translator for the post-modern age. I speak both the language of mindfulness and the language of the gospel. I wish to translate the gospel theme of mindfulness of God into the language of secular mindfulness that the marketplace understands. This initial missional impulse situates me within the model of contextual theology that Bevans calls the 'translation model.'¹¹ I see a link between the

⁸ Daniel Von Allmen, "The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the Dynamic Element in the Formation of New Testament Theology," *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 253 (1975): 38.

⁹ Von Allmen, 40.

¹⁰ Von Allmen, 40-41.

¹¹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 30.

contextual nature of this research, and the desire to convert this research into a second-person guide for others, which will be the vehicle for the missional impulse that motivates me.

There are different models of contextual theology. Stephen Bevans defines five key models, recognizing that these can be synthesized. Like AE, contextual theology acknowledges that a theologian must engage with human experience of self and culture as well as scripture and tradition.¹² One of the models of contextual theology that overlaps with spiritual AE is the transcendental model. The starting point for transcendental contextual theology is not to begin with gospel, tradition or culture but ‘with one’s own religious experience and one’s own experience of oneself.’¹³ Another key presupposition, which overlaps with evocative AE is the idea that my subjective experience can resonate with others, that others can identify with my experience.¹⁴ A further point of contact with a sideways look at my spiritual experience, is the idea that ‘The only place God can reveal Godself truly and effectively is within human experience.’¹⁵ Because of this transcendental focus I wish to prioritize AE as the primary methodology of this research.

Autoethnography (AE), came out of ethnography. Ethnography is a key methodology in anthropological research and is based on participant observation in and of a group of people.¹⁶ In a brilliant turn of phrase Tedlock outlines the key turn, ‘Beginning in the 1970s, there was a shift in emphasis from participant observation to the observation of participation.’¹⁷ In this way she distinguishes between ethnography as participant observation and AE as the observation of participation. However, for it to be true AE it needs to be the observation of one’s participation in culture and

¹² Bevans, 2.

¹³ Bevans, 98.

¹⁴ Bevans, 99.

¹⁵ Bevans, 99.

¹⁶ Paul Atkinson et al, “Editorial Introduction,” in *Handbook of Ethnography* eds. Paul Atkinson et al (Los Angeles, London: Sage Publications, 2001), 5.

¹⁷ See Barbara Tedlock, “From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47, no.1 (1991): 69.

society. I am, therefore, *locating* my research as autoethnographic because I am observing my own participation in mindfulness. I am observing through mindful awareness, although I expand my perceiving beyond that of observing.

Heather Walton has pioneered the use of AE within practical theology.¹⁸ I recognize, therefore, that there is an overlap between my AE research with practical theology. I am drawing on my experience as a minister, psychotherapist, contemplative, and mindfulness researcher which would fit within the parameters of practical theology. However, I see my work primarily as a piece of contextual theology.

Epiphanies and moments of meeting

Another AE principle that has helped me to focus my research is the idea of examining epiphanies.¹⁹ I am using Norman K. Denzin's version of interpretive autoethnography to focus on 'meaningful biographical experience.'²⁰ He calls these meaningful experiences 'epiphanies.'²¹ These epiphanies are 'Effects at the *deep level*' which 'cut to the inner core of the person's life and leave indelible marks on him or her.'²² I am also calling them 'moments of meeting,' to signal these are the key times I had insights or moments of heightened awareness about God.²³ A key epiphany was the realisation that if I wanted to be mindful of God, I needed to reclaim my present moments, which were often overwhelmed with anxiety. This meant

¹⁸ Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 1-42.

¹⁹ Focusing on epiphanies is highlighted in Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no.1 (2011):347. Accessed August 26, 2016, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589>.

²⁰ Norman K. Denzin, "Interpretive Autoethnography," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2013), 126.

²¹ Denzin, 126.

²² Denzin, 130.

²³ See The Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy: A Unifying Paradigm* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 5-7, for the idea of moments of meeting in implicit relationships.

my original research question, ‘what is mindfulness of God and how can I cultivate it?’ which needed to start with historical retrieval led to a related more present moment focused question: ‘how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?’ I am aware that God is mindful of me but in this question, I want to establish my part, ‘how am I to be mindful of God?’

I pick on key moments in my story that converge with the cultural phenomenon of mindfulness as epiphanies. Other epiphanies have emerged out of the research. Some of my epiphanies have been positive realisations or insights that came out of my brokenness and vulnerability. This is another key focus of AE, through researching autobiographical impulses, the self becomes visible and vulnerable ‘in research and in writing.’²⁴ This is also true of the data that the autoethnographer collects; without losing the sense that this is personal data collected from the worlds the researcher inhabits – stressing again the link between the researcher and culture.²⁵ This vulnerability is part of the evocative strand – research that provokes an emotional response in the readers.²⁶

The autobiographical impulses and ethnographic moments in my AE research converged with vulnerable and transformational epiphanies. A near breakdown in 2006 was like an unmaking of my sense of self, through stress, anxiety, and burnout. This resulted in an impulse to explore secular mindfulness. This unmaking led to the vulnerable epiphany that the cultural ‘making of me’ at boarding school had created a rigid identity that fractured under extreme pressure, because it was self-sufficient, emotionally avoidant, and, therefore, avoidant of the body. At my boarding school unquestioning loyalty was encouraged rather than awareness, exploration, and curiosity. Mindfulness turned me toward an aware inhabiting of my body, emotions, and awareness. As it did so it brought spiritual life. This

²⁴ Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, “I Learn by Going,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography* eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc, 2013), 71.

²⁵ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 72.

²⁶ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 75.

slow turn to incarnational living was followed by a spiritual epiphany, a moment of meeting that was brief but has stayed with me ever since.

A spiritual impulse in 2006 led to the discovery of mindfulness of God and the foundational epiphany for my research. One phrase from my contemplative reading has been a second-person guide to me since 2006 when it first sounded in my awareness. It has led me by the hand into a lived experience of its intention. Olivier Clement translated an original Greek phrase from fifth-century Greek Bishop Diadochus of Photike, a pioneer of the Jesus Prayer, as ‘Let us keep our eyes always fixed on the depths of our heart with an unceasing *mindfulness* of God.’²⁷ These words were a summary statement, a theological fragment, that became the cornerstone of my research. This phrase struck my heart and I still ring with it today. It was a spiritual defibrillator but one that shocked me into awareness, my body, and emotions. It was more than words on a page; it was something sensed spiritually in my embodied being. This phrase had creative power, but it was as if I was read, rather than that I read the phrase. It was as if in the moment God read me and the phrase and I realised that the phrase was what I needed to redeem my story. And as if I was read, and then God turned the page, started a new chapter with these words, ‘Fix your eyes...’

The paradoxical mutual indwelling of the physical and spiritual in me in that moment of meeting with God helped shape the rest of my research. All the key questions of this entwined journey were present in Diadochus’ pregnant phrase: what is mindfulness of God, how do I cultivate it, how do I bring the concept of mindfulness of God into our cultural marketplace? How am I present to God every moment of the day? The original phrase could be translated as remembrance of God, and this element of remembering has become important to my concept of mindfulness of God,

²⁷ My italics, Diadochus of Photike, *Gnostic Chapters*, 56 (SC 5 bis. p. 117), quoted in Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 7th ed. (London: New City, 2002), 204.

however, ‘mindfulness of God’ had become ‘ideationally real’ to me.²⁸ The phrase struck my awareness because I had been immersed in secular and Buddhist understandings of mindfulness which have no concept of mindfulness of God.

I outline in my thesis the emergence of five key themes in my autoethnographic journey, namely, remembering, re-perceiving, recognition, reclaiming and redeeming. I begin with the importance of remembering, which is a mindfulness of God idea. My intention is to remember God, to be mindful of God in each moment, and to cultivate an ‘ethical mnemonic awareness.’ I build on and refine this idea of ethical mnemonic awareness throughout the research. It takes its fullest shape in chapter four as I apply it intentionally. I foreground its genesis and meaning here because of its use as a summary statement in my research.

I define this awareness as ‘having in mind (being mindful) of the things of God and choosing them over the human things jostling for my attention’ (Mark 8:33).²⁹ This is both an intention to do this ‘having in mind,’ but also an experience – I have done it. Through an immersive reading of the gospel, I made an associative logical connection with Mark 8:33, that having in mind the things of God and choosing them in each ethical moment of choice was an element of being mindful of, remembering God. Interestingly in the New King James Version (NKJV) of this verse, the phrase is, ‘For you are not *mindful* of the things of God, but the things of men.’³⁰ My felt sense was if I am to have in mind, in the present moment, the things of God, that I need a mnemonic awareness that holds those things of God. This felt sense is part of experiencing Mark 8:33 as manuductive. I was invited to participate in the ethical spiritual reality this verse describes or

²⁸ In Critical Realism something can be ideationally real, like the tooth fairy, even though it is not materially real, Joe O’Mahoney and Steve Vincent, “Critical Realism as an Empirical Project: A Beginner’s Guide,” in *Studying Organizations Using Critical Realism*, eds. Paul K. Edwards, Joe O’Mahoney, and Steve Vincent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

²⁹ My paraphrase here of Mark 8:33.

³⁰ My italics. I also recognize the lack of inclusivity in the language here.

commends.³¹ I chose the word ‘mnemonic’ because it has an important symbolic meaning to me. The phrase ‘mindfulness of God’ is *mnēmē theou* in the Greek.³² I carry that through into the phrase ethical ‘mnemonic’ awareness to remind myself of the origin of the idea for me.

Dreyfuss criticizes secular mindfulness for not emphasizing the ‘mnemonic’ element within mindfulness.³³ He links this element to ‘working memory, the ability of the mind to retain and make sense of received information.’³⁴ From a Buddhist perspective he argues that ‘if mindfulness is to distinguish wholesome from unwholesome mental states, it must be explicitly cognitive and evaluative...’³⁵ That evaluation between wholesome and unwholesome must be held in the mind.³⁶ However, in my experience of using secular mindfulness there is an implicit evaluative and mnemonic element where I am being asked to evaluate my thoughts as just thoughts.

This can be seen in a key element of Teasdale’s Interacting Cognitive Subsystems theory.³⁷ In this theoretical framework Teasdale distinguishes between ‘metacognitive propositions’ and ‘metacognitive insights.’³⁸ For example, the metacognitive proposition that ‘thoughts aren’t facts,’ has ‘little “saving” power in protecting...from the effects of depressive thought patterns.’³⁹ However, if ‘negative self-critical thoughts are experienced with metacognitive insight as “events in the mind”’ rather than as propositions that are seen as ‘reflections of reality,’ then those thoughts lose their power

³¹ See Peter M. Candler Jr, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (SCM Press, 2006) for this idea of manuduction, texts that are written to lead you by the hand toward God, 1-20.

³² Cliff Ermatinger, *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photike*, Vol. 239 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 32.

³³ George Dreyfus, “Is Mindfulness Present-Centred and Non-Judgmental? A Discussion of the Cognitive Dimensions of Mindfulness,” in *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Applications*, eds. J. Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn (London: Routledge, 2013), 43.

³⁴ Dreyfus, 46.

³⁵ Dreyfus, 45.

³⁶ Dreyfus, 47.

³⁷ John D. Teasdale, “Metacognition, Mindfulness and the Modification of Mood Disorders,” *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* 6 (1999), 146-155.

³⁸ Teasdale, “Metacognition,” 147-148.

³⁹ Teasdale, “Metacognition,” 146.

to depress.⁴⁰ This insight lies at the heart of the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy.⁴¹

I took this idea of metacognitive propositions needing to become metacognitive insights as I had experienced this in my own life and created a new practice of meditating on scriptural propositions until they became insights held in mnemonic awareness. Through them I would be able to choose the thing of God over the human things jostling for my attention in each moment of ethical choice (Mark 8:33).

As I cast around to see if this phrase was used elsewhere I became aware that Levy and Anderson use the term 'mnemonic awareness' as a mechanism that allows 'selective retrieval' of memories, or what they call 'retrieval stopping' of unwanted memories.⁴² My recollection within the research process is that I coined my phrase, 'ethical mnemonic awareness,' because of my interaction with mindfulness of God, Mark 8:33, and my use of Teasdale's idea about metacognitive propositions. However, I wish to acknowledge that Levy and Anderson use the term 'mnemonic awareness' in a related way. It may be that their mechanism explains how I am able to hold the things of God in my lived experience. I am not looking to repress memories in mindfulness, but within my ethical mnemonic awareness I am looking to retrieve in the moment my key values. Perhaps my holding of scriptural propositions happens within working memory. However, I am less concerned here with how it happens, but more that it does happen, and I am selecting what I hold in mnemonic awareness in a particular way.

⁴⁰ Teasdale, "Metacognition," 153.

⁴¹ Teasdale, "Metacognition," 153.

⁴² B.J. Levy and M.C. Anderson, "The Control of Mnemonic Awareness." *Encyclopedia of Consciousness* vol. 1 (2009): 207.

As I engage with mindfulness, I begin to re-perceive. I have taken the term from mindfulness theory, where Shapiro et al define it as:

through the process of mindfulness, one is able to disidentify from the contents of consciousness (i.e., one's thoughts) and view his or her moment-by-moment experience with greater clarity and objectivity.⁴³

I have experienced this 'shift in perspective,' with my anxious thoughts.⁴⁴ However, the word has also taken on a symbolic significance for me, with a wider spiritual meaning. The aim of my mindfulness of God is to see clearly to re-perceive myself, God, others, and creation. This re-perceiving is to perceive in the way God wants me to perceive. If I am to do this, I recognize that I need to reclaim my present moments from anxiety which is a distorted form of perceiving, a way of not seeing. As I reclaim my present moments it becomes possible for God to redeem them, for me to have moments of meeting with God. In re-perceiving I begin a journey of recognition. What started as a personal journey found its way to the theory of recognition, which helped shape my ethical view on life.⁴⁵ In recognition theory I treat people with respect because they are persons not just individuals.⁴⁶ This recognition or seeing clearly of others, comes out of the re-perceiving that mindfulness enables. In mindfulness of God, I come home to the present moment to re-perceive God, myself, and others, in re-perceiving I recognize our essential relational reality. This central epiphany challenges the implicit assumptions of my boarding school self and culture, and the information-based disembodied culture of my church experience.

⁴³ Shauna L., Shapiro et al, "Mechanisms of mindfulness," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 62, no. 3 (2006): 377.

⁴⁴ Shapiro, et al, "Mechanisms of Mindfulness," 377.

⁴⁵ See Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen & Rita Palmen, "Introduction," in *Recognition and Religion: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen & Rita Palmen, (London: Routledge, 2019):1, for a brief summary of recognition theory around recognizing the other as a person through respect, esteem and friendship.

⁴⁶ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1.

Reflexivity

An important question to ask as an autoethnographer is how to critically examine my own experience. This is an important theme in AE.⁴⁷ The critical gaze I use to uncover the implicit and observe my own self experience to gain some critical distance is mindful awareness. Part of that mindful awareness is ‘reflexive self awareness,’ which is the ‘reflexiveness’ that the autoethnographer uses.⁴⁸ I recognize that reflexivity is a complex term, however, I wish to keep to a simple definition. Muncey defines reflexivity as ‘the awareness of being aware,’ and this ‘allows us to represent and re-present the products of our imaginations in a variety of ways.’⁴⁹ This reflexive self-awareness overlaps with my interest in self-awareness as a mindful capacity. This is how I seek to be a ‘contextually sensitive researcher.’⁵⁰ In reflexivity I am critically examining my context in culture. It is through mindful awareness that I can reflect critically on my own self and culture.

Jamie Barnes in his reflexive ethnography of Christian experience, which has autoethnographic strands, uses the ‘anthropological gaze’ to critically examine his personal, and other ethnographic data.⁵¹ This gaze can recognize ‘alternative knowledge systems,’ such as spiritual experience.⁵² This is appropriate for Barnes as an anthropologist. As I am using AE as a methodology which is a strand of ethnography, the main tool within anthropology, I acknowledge that in examining my spiritual experience, I am exploring an alternative knowledge system. Barnes also acknowledges that in writing about spiritual experience there is an alternative ontological

⁴⁷ Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, “Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc, 2013), 22-23.

⁴⁸ Muncey, 16.

⁴⁹ Muncey, 55.

⁵⁰ Muncey, 49.

⁵¹ Jamie Barnes, *Stories, Senses and the Charismatic Relation – A Reflexive Ethnography of Christian Experience* (London: Routledge, 2021), 7, Kindle.

⁵² Barnes, 20.

position, a statement of an ‘ontological assumption generally at odds with most secular-scientific worldviews.’⁵³ I am also occupying an alternative ontological position in my research as I write about spiritual experience. Barnes acknowledges that in inhabiting this alternative ontological position he is appealing to a ‘sensorium that extends beyond the commonly accepted corporeal sensorium by which the legitimate knowledge of a scientifically supported, secular society is created and sustained.’⁵⁴ In my approach to understanding my spiritual experience I will use the phrase ‘spiritual senses,’ and argue that these are my physical senses inhabited and transformed by God’s presence. I return to what I mean by spiritual senses later in the research. I also expand on my ontological position later in this introduction.

Mindfulness also has an anthropological stance in its emphasis on awareness as the central aspect of the good life. This is a critical gaze when directed toward Western culture and its emphasis on information and the mind. Williams and Kabat-Zinn in the context of critiquing Western culture make the point that ‘While we get a great deal of training in our education systems in thinking of all kinds, we have almost no exposure to the cultivation of intimacy with that other innate capacity of ours that we call awareness.’⁵⁵ This critical gaze and anthropological stance can not only be used to examine my boarding school self, and other cultural shaping, but also to critically examine my experience within a specific charismatic church culture. The manner in which I have used mindful awareness as the way of perceiving my participation in mindfulness of God may also be an original contribution within the methodology of AE.

From an anthropological perspective it can also be said that I am in ‘a dynamic charismatic relationship with a divine Other.’⁵⁶ Barnes defines this

⁵³ Barnes, 7.

⁵⁴ Barnes, 7.

⁵⁵ J. Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Multiple Applications at the Intersection of Science and Dharma,” in *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Applications*, eds. J. Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn (London: Routledge, 2013), 15.

⁵⁶ Barnes, 21.

further as a relationship involving ‘devotion and trust, an embodied “following after” that engenders transformations in perception and conception.’⁵⁷ I am devotedly ‘following after’ Jesus of Nazareth. This has involved leaving my career as a bank manager to become a Baptist minister, and more recently to living in an intentional Christian community. I am acknowledging here how my spiritual relationship with God might be conceived outside of my Christian context.

This devoted ‘following after’ also involves working with scripture as authoritative and a living Word (Hebrews 4:12). In this sense I can add another layer to my charismatic devotion and that is through attentiveness to the Holy Spirit as I read God’s Word in scripture. From a Pentecostal perspective the Bible can be seen as ‘subject,’ rather than ‘object.’⁵⁸ This means that the Bible can become a meeting place:

Inasmuch as the biblical text is Spirit-Word, and inasmuch as it is a sanctified vessel; the text becomes an avenue for emergence of sacred space. This space is created as a field or zone wherein Word, Spirit, and person(s) meet.⁵⁹

This is my lived experience; the text became more than words on a page, it came alive for me, I met God. Another way of describing it would be as a speech-act; the words had power. Speech-act theory is complex, but here I draw on the simple description of Jesus speaking in speech-commands which move people with power and embodied force as outlined by Louise Lawrence.⁶⁰ I come back to this idea and the impact of certain scriptural verses on me later in the research.

Within my research process I grasped that my participative approach led me to read scriptural and mindfulness texts in a distinct way. I wanted to

⁵⁷ Barnes, 21.

⁵⁸ Cheryl Bridges Johns, “Grieving, Brooding, and Transforming: The Spirit, the Bible, and Gender”, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no.2 (2014), 145.

⁵⁹ Bridges Johns, 149.

⁶⁰ See Louise Lawrence, “Exploring the Sense-scape of the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 4 (2011), 391, for Jesus’ use of speech commands in Mark’s gospel.

apply theory to this way of reading, and the best way to describe it is as one articulated by Peter Candler, that is I read manuctively, allowing the text to 'lead you by the hand.'⁶¹ I have done this with scripture, but also with the mindfulness self-help texts and some key contemplative texts.

As a young man, not yet a Christian, I was drawn to the charismatic movement because of its lively embodied worship. Pete Ward describes the charismatic movement in the UK as the 'adoption of Pentecostal worship and spirituality by mainline denominations...'⁶² He adds 'between the 1960s and 1990s evangelical religious identity in Britain was gradually structured around the production and consumption of worship songs.'⁶³ However, my immersion in secular psychology as a psychotherapist provided another critical gaze. I felt that much of the practice of charismatic worship had not been reflected on, it was not an aware or particularly self-reflective movement. This was especially highlighted when I began to explore mindful theory and practice. My experience of charismatic worship was that it is very relational, based on gatherings of people singing for extended lengths of time. I was looking for more introspective, meditative practices in my own spirituality. This led me to historic Christian contemplation, which can also be used as a critical gaze on charismatic worship, because of its contemplative emphasis on silence, solitude, and meditation on scripture. However, there was still something missing, and I did not know what that was until I discovered mindfulness theory and practice.

In charismatic worship I did not fully inhabit awareness, but in Christian contemplation I felt I was practising a disembodied platonic spirituality. Mindfulness theory and practice with its emphasis on the cultivation of mindful awareness, a clear seeing of reality, became the new critical gaze for me. Although I am critiquing my experience of charismatic worship, I still identify as belonging to a charismatic spirituality, in believing in the person

⁶¹ Peter M. Candler Jr, 1-20.

⁶² Pete Ward, "Affective Alliance or Circuits of Power: The Production and Consumption of Contemporary Charismatic Worship in Britain," *International Journal of Practical Theology* vol. 9, no. 1 (2005): 25, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJPT.2005.003>.

⁶³ Ward, 26.

and presence of the Holy Spirit as the transforming presence of God. However, that charismatic spirituality has required a new anthropological understanding of my mindful and embodied capacities that are inhabited by that divine presence.

Journey, quest, and pilgrimage

This retrieval of the phrase ‘mindfulness of God’ from contemplative history led me on both personal and research journeys. I have found Willis’s reflections on the key transformations within my own self as a researcher instructive. He lists three transformations, the first is the idea of ‘organic transformation,’ that is ‘growing to maturity as an independent scholar.’⁶⁴ I have found adopting AE as the research methodology has encouraged this independence as I have thought very carefully about using it for my research considering its controversial turn in some quarters to the exploration of self. I explore this criticism of AE later in this introduction. Another ‘transformational process’ is ‘unitary transformation,’ where the student centres on the ‘human powers of image making and imagination...’⁶⁵ This has been a central part of my development as a researcher, particularly in how I represent the work, and the re-inhabiting of my symbolic self and poetic imagination. The final process Willis outlines is ‘critical transformation,’ where there is a ‘radical change to people’s ways of looking at the world.’⁶⁶ With my emphasis on re-perceiving, and developing a critical awareness of my anxiety, boarding school past, and church culture this is also a key transformational process in my work. I comment on these elements in my research process as the work develops.

⁶⁴ Peter Willis, “Mentorship, Transformative Learning and Nurture: Adult Education Challenges in Research Supervision,” in *Whose Story Now? (Re)generating Research in Adult Learning and Teaching*, ed. C. Hunt (Sheffield, University of Sheffield: SCUTREA, 2004), 323.

⁶⁵ Willis, “Mentorship, Transformative Learning and Nurture,” 324.

⁶⁶ Willis, “Mentorship, Transformative Learning and Nurture,” 324.

I am aware there are different possible patterns for quests, but I have used the one laid out by Auden. AE often uses the quest motif to organise the journey of discovery. W. H. Auden's summary of the 'Quest Hero' argues there are six essential elements in the typical story:

- 1) A precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married.
- 2) A long journey to find it, for its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers.
- 3) A hero. The precious Object cannot be found by anybody, but only the person who possesses the right qualities of breeding or character.
- 4) A Test or series of Tests by which the unworthy are screened out, and the hero revealed.
- 5) The Guardians of the Object who must be overcome before it can be won. They may simply be a further test of the hero's *arête*, or they may be malignant in themselves.
- 6) The Helpers who with their knowledge and magical powers assist the hero and but for whom he would never succeed. They may appear in human or in animal form.⁶⁷

The holy grail for me is to be mindful of God, so that I may be present to God, others, and creation, but also enable others to be mindful of God. It has been a long journey looking for clues that can enable me to fulfil the quest. I knew my initial research question (later amplified) very early on but did not originally know where the journey would take me. I am undertaking the journey, as someone who was broken and is trying to glue himself back together. It is and has been a test of my character, a test of my moral virtue (*arête*). One aspect of my story, my biographical journey, has shaped the subject of my research – and that is my boarding school experience. It is because of that experience that I turned to mindfulness for transformation and self-awareness.

⁶⁷ W. H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," In *Tolkien and the Critics*, eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 44.

I am aware that there are aspects of my own self that get in the way of the quest: my anxious thoughts, the self that was made at boarding school, and has since been unmade and is being remade. This means that there were tests I needed to pass or overcome, both personal, cultural, and academic. Within the quest I have come across what could be conceptualised as guardians: guardians of secular mindfulness, guardians of evangelical purity, and academic guardians. Within the quest I have been helped by key texts and practices, as well as academic helpers, and those I have led on retreats and in seminars who have responded to the material.

Two central metaphors of pilgrimage and quest will help shape the research in terms of its representation and wider resonance as there are archetypal elements to both ideas. This realisation emerged as I read AE writings exploring pilgrimage. I saw that mindfulness itself as a cultural phenomenon could be described using pilgrimage language.

I began to make connections between mindfulness and pilgrimage after reading Jill Dubisch's autoethnographic book on pilgrimage to a Greek island. A common factor between pilgrimage sites and mindfulness as a cultural phenomenon as I observe it, is that both have 'spiritual magnetism'.⁶⁸ Mindfulness has personally attracted me, and it is a widespread cultural phenomenon in the West in terms of numbers of people practising, the rise of self-help books, the new therapies incorporating mindfulness and the emergence of mindfulness gurus. Traditionally it is places that have spiritual magnetism. On pilgrimage one is drawn to a place that has spiritual magnetism. Certain sites even within secular psychology could be said to have become must-go-to pilgrimage places, like Jon Kabat-Zinn's hospital in Massachusetts, or Mark Williams's Oxford Centre for Mindfulness.

It is not just 'places' that attract pilgrims, 'Pilgrimage may also center around a sacred person.'⁶⁹ Mindfulness in secular psychology has its 'saints'

⁶⁸ Jill Dubisch, *In A Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 35.

⁶⁹ Dubisch, 35.

and gurus that have spiritual magnetism. People flock to hear the main mindfulness speakers. In the virtual world we now live in with internet connectivity you do not have to physically go to a site anymore to make a pilgrimage. Mindfulness can be accessed via the online world, as well as in the physical world.

As Dubisch underlines, ‘At the heart of pilgrimage lies the notion of a journey,’ in ‘time and space.’⁷⁰ In secular mindfulness there is a journey, from mental health distress to wellbeing. Pilgrimage as a journey, which is how I have described my discovery and immersion in mindfulness, has both ‘real’ and ‘symbolic’ elements.⁷¹ For me mindfulness is symbolic of self-transcendence and wisdom. Mindfulness is often described as a way of life, a form of being rather than doing; it cannot be reduced to mere technique.⁷² Pilgrimage has a different relationship to time not just space.⁷³ This time is ‘removed (to some extent at least) from ordinary life.’⁷⁴ In mindfulness the present moment is the sacred time, the time you are to inhabit as a practitioner. In pilgrimage the time experienced is one where ‘the power of the spiritual world crosses over in one way or another into the mundane world,’ there is power and transformation at work.⁷⁵ Mindfulness has that mystique, that it offers the power of transformation and renewal.

People who are in pain are attracted to pilgrimage.⁷⁶ People who are in pain are attracted to mindfulness. Mindfulness research shows that mindfulness can help alleviate chronic pain.⁷⁷ On pilgrimage people hear stories of healing and transformation.⁷⁸ Mindfulness books tell stories of healing and

⁷⁰ Dubisch, 35.

⁷¹ Dubisch, 35.

⁷² Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), 6.

⁷³ Dubisch, 37.

⁷⁴ Dubisch, 37.

⁷⁵ Dubisch, 37.

⁷⁶ Dubisch, 111.

⁷⁷ See Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness for Health: Relieving Pain, Reducing Stress and Restoring Wellbeing* (Piatkus, 2013), 32-35, and 27-32

⁷⁸ Dubisch, 72.

transformation, people give testimony in them.⁷⁹ Dubisch asks the question as to why pilgrimage has become so popular, and the same question can be asked of mindfulness.⁸⁰ With regard to mindfulness I believe it is something to do with the search for wellbeing and wisdom, and an intuitive response to a culture inimical to health, as well as a desire for self-transcendence which is something mindfulness offers. Dubisch adds from her study of Orthodox Christianity and pilgrimage that for this strand of faith ‘the doctrine of the Incarnation shows that the human and the divine are not mutually exclusive, and that the divine is, moreover, accessible to the senses.’⁸¹ This is my AE experience, although I argue my physical senses are enabled to sense the spiritual without moving into a dualistic anthropology. I am operating out of a holistic view of myself as a human being here. I see the Old Testament (OT) and NT as operating out of a holistic unified anthropology.⁸² However, mindfulness is also very embodied and sensual in this way, and perhaps in a virtual world this is also part of its appeal. I will come back to these elements of pilgrimage in chapter seven, as perhaps a way to initiate people into a mindful rule of life, so that it can have phases and shape as well as personal fluidity.

Autoethnography revisited

Autoethnography has fluidity and flexibility, but I have found that it lacks clear phases, and so have adopted methods within the overall methodology of AE that enable a clearer pattern of research. One such approach is the heuristic method, which has a clear process for working with lived experience, that resonates with AE, and involves a personal ‘immersion’ in a

⁷⁹ See Burch and Penman, *Mindfulness for Health*, 32-35, and 27-32 where both authors tell story of terrible injuries leaving them in chronic pain, and page 2-11 for reference to the efficacy of mindfulness in reducing pain.

⁸⁰ Dubisch, 39.

⁸¹ Dubisch, 68.

⁸² See Joel B. Green, “Embodying the Gospel: Two Exemplary Practices,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 11-21, for a summary of this holistic theology.

research question.⁸³ In this way my whole research could be described as heuristic, as I have lived and breathed mindfulness since 2006. I particularly draw on heuristic ideas in chapter six as a way of patterning that research and define it fully there.

The initial research question was ‘what is mindfulness of God and how can it be cultivated?’ Although my research was built on a moment of meeting with God, I was not aware that I did not inhabit fully most of my present moments. As the research progressed, my AE data and analysis revealed that if I wanted to be more mindful of God, I needed to reclaim my present moments from being overwhelmed by anxious thoughts.⁸⁴ I was also aware that anxiety is a symptom; I had recognized that my anxiety came from automatic boarding school narratives that operated out of my awareness with anxiety being their symptom. In this sense the past is always in the present and I knew I had to also see if I could rewrite these scripts through engagement with scriptural propositions.⁸⁵ As I became less anxious and more mindful of God, the question can be asked, ‘what did mindfulness of God do for me?’ Within the context of my research as I became more mindful of God, I had more moments of meeting with God. In those moments of meeting, I began to see more clearly to re-perceive my anxiety. However, my aim in seeking to be mindful of God is not therapeutic, although I need that element to reclaim my present moments. My aim re-perceiving, is to cultivate an ethical mnemonic awareness. This ethical awareness is always in relationship with God and others.

Paradoxically it was secular mindfulness that helped me be more mindful of God, by allowing me to be more mindfully aware in the present moment. I realised that the theory, practice, and anthropological insights of secular mindfulness were a key foundation in my practice of mindfulness of God. This led to a missional impulse, for me to translate the idea of mindfulness

⁸³ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 9, 28.

⁸⁴ See Chapter Four.

⁸⁵ See Chapter Three for a development of this idea and chapter Four for an application of this idea.

of God into the language, theory, and practices of secular mindfulness, as well as adapting two key mindfulness of God practices in *Lectio Divina* and the Jesus Prayer, using secular mindfulness theory and practice.

In asking the question, ‘what is mindfulness of God, and how can I cultivate it?’ I am talking about my mindfulness of God which is dependent on God’s mindfulness of me (Psalm 8:4). One congruent methodology for examining one’s own consciousness of God is introspection, a first-person method. This AE research fits within the general field of first-person research. Historically Varela identifies four methodological strands within first-person research: introspection in psychology, phenomenology as a philosophy and psychology that is phenomenological and the meditative traditions in Buddhism and Vedic schools.⁸⁶ To this I would add Christian contemplation as practised by Diadochus and Evagrius, as well as secular mindfulness which is a recontextualization of mindful awareness and its practices.⁸⁷

AE involves an explicit owning within research of the researcher’s epistemological and ontological stance, rather than an implicit, hidden, or unaware one. As Spry observes, ‘In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns.’⁸⁸ The word ‘autoethnography’ can be used to create a way of testing the parameters of the research and avoid slipping into autobiography. Ellis and Bochner state that “‘autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto).’”⁸⁹ This is possible because within AE researchers argue that

⁸⁶ Francisco Varela, and Jonathan Shear, “First-person Methodologies: What, Why, How?” in *The View from Within: First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, eds. Francisco Varela, and Jonathan Shear (Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic, 1999), 5.

⁸⁷ See Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger OCSO (Spencer, Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1970).

⁸⁸ Spry, 711.

⁸⁹ C.S. Ellis and A.P. Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, and Personal Reflexivity,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 740, quoted in Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2008), 48.

culture and self are intertwined.⁹⁰ I intentionally focus on my own self and my cultural entanglement within my research process.

This AE methodology bears a family resemblance to the way early Christian contemplatives examined their own experience. The traditional historic way this has happened within Christian contemplation is for the contemplative to pray ‘*in recto* while at the same time observing themselves *in obliquo*, as it were photographing their own transcendence’ to help others also contemplate God.⁹¹ In other words I am being mindful of God directly in the moment, whilst also observing that contemplation with a sideways look. This is remarkably like what an autoethnographer is doing when observing his or her participation in a cultural phenomenon.

A collection of spiritual autoethnographies can create what Barry Lopez calls ‘a testament of minor voices,’ through attention to the local and the specific.⁹² His comment is set in the context of local geographies in America, as a necessary counterpoint to the rise of a ‘homogenized national geography.’⁹³ Alister McGrath makes a similar point in his essay on theological attentiveness, in the context of practical theology and ethnography, of the importance of investigating the local, what he calls the ‘terroir’, thereby resisting ‘globalization or universalization.’⁹⁴ The significance of AE in this area of collecting minor voices and creating a wider body of evidence, helps to answer the ‘so what’ question for this research.

My research is, for example, a minor voice, about my mindful spirituality. One of the terms that I have used to describe my mindful spirituality as it became apparent in the research process is kataphatic. Kataphatic spirituality can be defined as the possibility that ‘human persons may mystically experience the presence of God in and through creation and

⁹⁰ Walton, *Writing Methods* 3-42.

⁹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 117.

⁹² Barry Lopez, “The American Geographies,” *Orion Magazine* (Autumn 1989): 52-61.

⁹³ Lopez, 52-61.

⁹⁴ Alister E. McGrath, “The Cultivation of Theological Vision,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 119.

incarnation.⁹⁵ As the term kataphatic is a useful summary statement of my spirituality, which has been shaped by mindfulness to be embodied and aware of creation, I begin with this simple definition. As my understanding of my spirituality matured, I continued to be influenced by Ruffing's definition, and as she develops it elsewhere, as well as by Hans Urs von Balthasar's writings on the spiritual senses. I circle back to kataphatic spirituality and develop a more rounded understanding as the research process unfolds.

Kataphatic spirituality is often understood in contrast with apophatic spirituality. One such contrast is in the terms themselves, "kataphatic" in Greek means with images while "apophatic" means without form or images.⁹⁶ One is mediated the other is not. Although these two spiritualities are seen as 'opposite' the relationship 'between these two spiritual paths has often been asserted to be one of progression.'⁹⁷ In this progression one moves from the kataphatic 'mediated path to God,' for the 'self-emptying, knowing of unknowing,' of the apophatic pathway.⁹⁸ My own journey does not follow the assumed pathway of progression, which I comment on elsewhere. I would also question the sense of progression outlined here, which is not my experience of the spiritual life. I return to these spiritualities in the research, in which the kataphatic is my spiritual pathway.

Janet Ruffing who conducted her own qualitative research into kataphatic spirituality points out that, 'Very little research has been done on what people's actual religious experience is, even less has been done on Christian religious experience.'⁹⁹ Autoethnography did not have spiritual roots and so

⁹⁵ Janet Ruffing, "Kataphatic Spirituality," in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London, SCM Press, 2005), 393

⁹⁶ Ruffing, "Kataphatic Spirituality," 393.

⁹⁷ Ruffing, "Kataphatic Spirituality," 393.

⁹⁸ Ruffing, "Kataphatic Spirituality," 393.

⁹⁹ Janet K. Ruffing, "The World Transfigured: Kataphatic Religious Experience," *Studies In Spirituality* 5 (1995): 234-5, accessed December 7, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/SIS.5.0.2004170>.

requires a theological framework. However, AE, with its focus on context of self and culture can be adapted into a form of contextual theology.

There are two other personal directions to my research that contextual theology can give a framework to. The direction of most Christian engagement with secular mindfulness is to bring its therapeutic benefits into the Christian world.¹⁰⁰ I am seeking to go the other way and to translate the gospel and historical idea of mindfulness of God into the language, theory, and practice of secular mindfulness to make it accessible as a spiritual opportunity for those outside the church and Christian culture. In the translation model the message of the gospel is ‘translated’ into each local culture.¹⁰¹

I will come back to my use of contextual theological models in other sections but there is a final personal impulse that leads my research in a certain direction. I have a deep desire to make this research, the event of becoming mindful of God, accessible to others, and so I am trying to use accessible language that is evocative and clear to understand, but also poetic and symbolic. This is the direction I have taken the representation of this research in. I have done this because I want to make a difference in the world out there, outside the walls of the church. This links the direction of my work to the praxis model of contextual theology which is concerned with “right acting” (*ortho-praxy*).¹⁰² Since 2012 I have placed mindfulness of God in the marketplace through books, lectures, retreats, and seminars.

There are two other theological influences on the shape, structure, and representation of my research that I wish to briefly outline here. The natural and intuitive shape to my research resonates with a four-fold model of theology outlined by David Ford. This is a “wise and creative theology” that can be defined as ‘trying to do justice to scripture and tradition while also exploring new ways of conceiving the truth.’¹⁰³ I engage with scripture

¹⁰⁰ I expand on this point in Chapter Three.

¹⁰¹ Bevans, 30.

¹⁰² Bevans, 65,

¹⁰³ Ford, 6.

and the contemplative tradition whilst drawing on the wisdom of secular mindfulness with the aim of arriving at a wise and creative synthesis. The four elements of this ‘wise creativity’ include ‘*ressourcement*, a return to sources that can nourish theology and life now.’¹⁰⁴ Ford defines this as ‘wise and creative retrieval.’¹⁰⁵ I have retrieved the strand of mindfulness of God from Christian contemplative history. This then needs his second step which is ‘bringing up to date’ what you have retrieved.¹⁰⁶ I have recontextualized this strand of mindfulness of God through an integration with secular mindfulness. The third step is ‘wise and creative thinking.’¹⁰⁷ Within AE I see this as using my thinking, imaginative, and mindful capacities. Finally, Ford argues for ‘wise and creative expression.’¹⁰⁸ As Ford points out, ‘Theology often does not read well.’¹⁰⁹ He asks for the theological writing to be accessible, ‘to communicate theology as widely and effectively as possible.’¹¹⁰ I want my writing to be creative and accessible. Another point he makes, which resonated with me was that ‘At its core, theological wisdom is about the discernment of cries.’¹¹¹ He expands this by saying, ‘The Bible and life are full of cries: of suffering, joy, wonder, thanks, praise, victory, defeat, fear, faith, despair, hope, remorse, petition, and much else.’¹¹² Through this AE research I identify the cry of my heart.

I can also call my research a form of lived theology. Lived theology is a narrower field within practical theology that takes lived experience and reflects on it theologically. It is perhaps more ethnographic than autoethnographic, but there are strands within it that support AE. This includes the idea of reflecting on self-narratives.¹¹³ One example of lived theology that is AE, a self-narrative that explores culture, and does this in a

¹⁰⁴ Ford, 12, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ford, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Ford, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ford, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ford, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Ford, 20.

¹¹⁰ Ford, 20.

¹¹¹ Ford, 1.

¹¹² Ford, 3.

¹¹³ Susan R. Holman, “Daring to Write Theology without Footnotes,” in *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*, eds. Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky (Oxford University Press, 2017), 52-53.

creative-expressive way, is Melanie A. May's *A Body Knows: A Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection*.¹¹⁴ In successive chapters she explores a near-death experience, breast cancer, coming out as a lesbian, and manic depression. This is written in a narrative form with poetic interludes all woven with theological reflection on the cultures she inhabits, as an academic woman and minister. This form makes the writing theopoetic, and a work of 'imaginative construction.'¹¹⁵ It is doxological because she is arguing that her specific lived experience as a woman is a 'source of theological knowledge,' her body is a source of theological knowledge.¹¹⁶

Symbol, representation, and poetics



I have touched on my form of representation within this AE and this leads me to my next point which is the symbolic turn within this research. The

¹¹⁴ Melanie A. May, *A Body Knows: A Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹¹⁵ May, 23.

¹¹⁶ May, 23.

symbolic turn was part of the creating, testing, and revising nature of my research and is a very important element in my research process. I painted the 'pregnant waters' image I display above soon after I discovered mindfulness. When I first read the phrase 'mindfulness of God' there was a deep inner stirring, I was enchanted by it. I had this sense of an ocean teeming with life, pregnant waters. It was an epiphany, where I began to re-perceive the way forward. To me the picture represents more fully than words can how those words 'mindfulness of God' resonated with me. It was as if the Spirit of God was hovering over the deep seas of attention and awareness and inviting me to be mindful of it. Despite this deep attraction and resonance, I knew that it was a hidden, unexplored, and even feared area of research for some Christians. This phrase 'mindfulness of God' gave me the confidence to explore mindfulness in all its aspects. I am aware that I also had a range of emotions regarding how to handle a subject that could trigger fear and suspicion in others – and even lead to my rejection from the communities in which I lived and worked. I was fearful about being rejected. I proceeded cautiously at the beginning, hedging my bets as to whether mindfulness was a universal human capacity. I tentatively suggested there may be Christian forms of mindfulness. As with the choice of AE as my research methodology, the selection of mindfulness as my research topic, also led to the further development of my independent voice as a scholar within the research process.

This is one of many paintings I have done that are intuitively symbolic and parabolic and reveal that I am a symbolist in the way I think. This painting offers a big picture view of my research, namely that I was entering fertile waters. That I view life through the lens of symbols is a significant insight that has emerged during my research, and one I pick up on in some intentional fieldwork in chapter six. Here I enter the world of "imaginal processes," that contribute to my unitary transformation within the research process.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Willis, "Mentorship, Transformative Learning and Nurture," 324.

In my own quest for meaning the epiphany of survival in the wasteland of boarding school was followed by a breakdown, and then a new birth. The breakdown and new life that followed were transformed into deep experiences through my encounter with mindfulness in secular psychology, watchfulness in Mark's gospel and mindfulness of God in the monastic tradition. So, my research involves a dialogue between my mindless self, my emerging mindful self, and the current and historical reality of mindfulness. However, what came into view, and became the focal point of my research, was not the therapeutic benefits of mindfulness but the development of a model for mindful spirituality.

Within this metaphor of pregnant waters can be placed the representation of my research. To understand this aspect of AE it is important to consider the history of the methodology. The history of AE is a representative microcosm of wider turns within culture and academic research. Three main reasons are generally given for the rise of AE. First, there has been a turn in ontological and epistemological thinking away from positivism and detached objectivity toward a recognition of the historically situated nature of the researcher, a postmodern turn.¹¹⁸ Second, researchers also observed the strange absence of emotions, the body and the 'literary and aesthetic' in research, and emphasized a more integrated and holistic approach to research involving the whole person.¹¹⁹ This is where my interest in mindfulness overlaps with AE as the importance of the body and emotions is emphasized in mindfulness. Within my context of describing spiritual experience, and accessing the unconscious and symbolic, I need to be able to represent my research poetically, symbolically and in narrative form. This turn to the literary, evocative, embodied, and emotional has been called a 'crisis of representation.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding*," 10-11.

¹²⁰ Nicholas L. Holt, "Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, (March 2003): 19, 24, accessed December 22, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1177/160940690300200102>.

A third reason is the rise of identity politics and a search for a methodology that would enable ‘non mainstream others’ to tell their story as it unfolds in an oppressive culture.¹²¹ When I started my research into mindfulness in 2006 from a Christian perspective, I felt that I was one of only a few looking at this, and that my research would be viewed with suspicion by some in the evangelical and charismatic networks in which I worked. The development of AE has been contested within the field and within wider academic research.

As well as the crisis of representation there has also been a ‘crisis of legitimation,’ which questioned ‘traditional criteria used for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research.’¹²² Holt wrote of the negative reaction to an autoethnographic paper of his that underwent a peer review process, including criticisms of narcissism and self-absorption.¹²³ He outlines criticisms in the same article that questioned the ‘scientific merit’ of his AE paper judged by ‘traditional verification criteria.’¹²⁴ Holt’s argument around legitimation was that ‘different criteria’ should be used to ‘evaluate autoethnography.’¹²⁵

In a summary statement suggesting that certainly among autoethnographers writing in an evocative style, Spry observes there is a consensus that autoethnographic manuscripts should be ‘emotionally engaging.’¹²⁶ Spry also suggests, and this is echoed by Holt that the writing should be ‘well crafted.’¹²⁷ Spry emphasizes the connection between self and culture in that ‘Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory.’¹²⁸ I am wanting to prompt an evocative response in readers, and write in a well-crafted way,

¹²¹ Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding*,” 14-16.

¹²² Holt, 19.

¹²³ Holt, 19, 24.

¹²⁴ Holt, 21, 23

¹²⁵ Holt, 23.

¹²⁶ Spry, 713.

¹²⁷ Spry, 713, Holt, 23.

¹²⁸ Spry, 713.

and I expand on that in this introduction when I introduce the representation of this research. I am also engaging with theory throughout the research.

I want to address the concerns about narcissism and self-absorption. From an AE perspective, the self does not exist in isolation, rather the self is always entangled with culture, and so AE has a wider focus than just the self. Chang makes a strong case for this mutual entanglement.¹²⁹ My argument for the use of my own self in my research is that mindfulness research and practice pulls the researcher in, in terms of being immersed in practices, rituals, and self-examination – that is mindfulness cannot just be understood conceptually. My own data also shows that therapeutic and spiritual transformation has occurred as I have become entangled with cultural texts of mindfulness. Chang does make the point that it is possible to use personal narrative in AE in an unreflective way that is not context or culture conscious.¹³⁰ It is also possible in any research to be self-absorbed and narcissistic; how we represent that might only disguise that. I would argue that acknowledging my own subjective context as researcher may help protect against self-absorption and narcissism. For those who have pioneered it, it is a journey into emotion, body awareness and the importance of recognizing our cultural situatedness, but also that self and culture are intertwined.¹³¹

This led to new ways of representing that research including the rise of reflective self-narrative and what has been called ‘evocative’ AE, a way of writing that provokes a response in the reader.¹³² AE pioneers also positioned themselves in a different ontological and epistemological

¹²⁹ See Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 15-30.

¹³⁰ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 54.

¹³¹ See Carolyn Ellis, “Heartful Autoethnography,” *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 5 (September 1999): 669-683, accessed September 29, 216, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177//104973299129122153>.

¹³² See Carolyn Ellis’s comments in Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding*,” 3.

paradigm, which was much more relativistic.¹³³ The term evocative became, then, a term to describe a completely different way of approaching academic research. However, others who wanted to work with AE felt it needed to be rooted back in a more positivistic approach, especially Leon Anderson who made a plea for analytic autoethnography.¹³⁴

AE incorporates the poetic and creative expressive writing to enable an evocative response in the reader, as well as incorporating the subjectivity of the researcher and making this academic methodology accessible to a wider readership than just academics.¹³⁵ I outline my own autoethnographic journey to the poetic and poetics briefly below to set the scene for how poetics developed in my work. My own journey into the poetic began with being taught to read at the age of three by my mother. My favourite subject at school was English, and I did English 'A' level, and my first degree was in English Literature at Leeds University (1981-1984). The love of lyrical and poetic language is part of my ontology of being. I include poetry and narrative or prose in my understanding of lyrical language. I was drawn to AE because of its capacity to represent research in more evocative, poetic and story-telling form. This led to some dissatisfaction with more traditional academic writing, which has been criticized for being 'inaccessible and jargon-laden.'¹³⁶ I wanted creativity and evocative writing, to represent the fullness of lived experience more completely – especially as I had already lived a disembodied life. I am also aware of the development of poetics within practical theology and expand on that in a later section.¹³⁷

I first came across a more intentional use of the poetic in AE through the work of Richard Furman. He makes a distinction between poetry and

¹³³ Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding*, 5.

¹³⁴ Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* Vol. 35, no. 4 (August 2006): 373-395.

¹³⁵ Ellis, "Introduction: Coming to Know," 36-37.

¹³⁶ Ellis, "Introduction: Coming to Know," 36-37.

¹³⁷ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 133-185.

research poems, calling research poems ‘quasipoetic forms.’¹³⁸ He also highlights two uses of the poetic, since the poetic can be both a source of data and a way of representing data.¹³⁹ That is the poetic can be the data that is examined, or it can be the representation of raw data in a new form. Peter Willis makes a similar point about using ‘poetic forms’ in phenomenological research. In his article entitled ‘Don’t Call it Poetry,’ he prefers the term “poetic reflections.”¹⁴⁰ These are helpful distinctions in bringing the ‘expressive approach’ into the hands of all.¹⁴¹ It is in line with the approach I am adapting in my research. I use the term ‘awakened language’ to describe how I am representing my research.¹⁴² Heaney describes poetry as ‘awakened language’ and I wish to take that term and use it in a wider sense to describe expressive writing, whether poetic, narrative or prose.¹⁴³ I see awakened language as what happens when someone writes or speaks with their whole incarnated being, with their God-given creative word at the core of their being awakened within them. I will come back to the importance of this theme for me. This is my aesthetic aspect of the legitimization of AE as ‘well-crafted.’¹⁴⁴

However, I also have a specific rationale for using this form of expressive writing. I am using poetic and creative-expressive writing, both in research poems and other forms, to access what is dissociated – those parts of me that are hard to reach through reason and deductive logic. I use the word dissociated through the influence of Joy Schaverien’s book, *Boarding School Syndrome: the psychological trauma of the privileged child*. She argues that dissociation is part of the ‘hidden trauma’ of boarding school experience.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Rich Furman, “Poetic Forms and Structures in Qualitative Health Research,” *Qualitative Health Research* 16, no. 4 (April 2006): 560, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://dx.doi:10.1177/1049732306286819>.

¹³⁹ Furman, “Poetic Forms,” 561.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Willis, “Don’t Call it Poetry,” *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 2, no. 1 (April 2002): 1, accessed May 8, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2002.11433869>.

¹⁴¹ Willis, “Don’t Call it Poetry,” 1.

¹⁴² Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) 10.

¹⁴³ Heaney, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Spry, 713, Holt, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Joy Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome: the psychological trauma of the privileged child* (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), 113-123.

In this dissociation ‘traumatic events may be completely forgotten for years.’¹⁴⁶ The phrase that is particularly evocative for me and describes my experience of dissociation is when Schaverien writes, ‘There are times when the *broken attachments* have been so unbearable that they have been repressed and the emotions are *beyond conscious recall*.’¹⁴⁷

I explore this in my life in chapter five. The poetic and creative-expressive uses associative logic and the symbolic in a way that enables what is hidden to be expressed.¹⁴⁸ This is the specific rationale. A key counterargument asks how then, does AE as research, transcend autobiography and a mere telling of an individual’s story? Stein argues that such stories are generalizable in a metaphoric sense, in the way such stories resonate with others, and give self-insight to others.¹⁴⁹

Another way we can identify with a story is through the theory that creative narrative, parables, metaphors and fairy stories can trigger a process of ‘defamiliarization,’ or ‘deautomatization.’¹⁵⁰ This happens through the intentional use of stylistic features which the authors call ‘foregrounding,’ which help ‘to make strange’ or ‘to achieve defamiliarization.’¹⁵¹ This enables what could be a form of re-perceiving, in that the poetic ‘overcomes the barriers of customary perception, and allows us to see some aspect of the world freshly or even for the first time.’¹⁵² This enables us to step out of our automatic ways of perceiving things, the intentional use of ‘stylistic features of literary texts deautomatize perception.’¹⁵³ This concept could be used in mindfulness more intentionally, where poetic texts could be used to help people come out of autopilot into a new way of perceiving.

¹⁴⁶ Schaverien, 116.

¹⁴⁷ Schaverien, 9. My italics.

¹⁴⁸ Carol Gilligan & Jessica Eddy, “Listening as a Path to Psychological Discovery: An Introduction to the Listening Guide,” *Perspectives on Medical Education* 6, (2017): 79, accessed February 16, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40037-017-0335-3>.

¹⁴⁹ Howard, F. Stein, “A Window to the Interior of Experience,” *Families, Systems and Health*, 22, no.2 (2004): 179, accessed May 8, 2019, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1091-7527.22.2.178>.

¹⁵⁰ David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, “Foregrounding, Defamiliarization, and Affect: Response to Literary Stories,” *Poetics* 22, no. 5 (1994): 389-407.

¹⁵¹ Miall and Kuiken, 391.

¹⁵² Miall and Kuiken, 391.

¹⁵³ Miall and Kuiken, 389.

I also want to acknowledge that this creative-expressive writing as well as giving a ‘window to the interior of experience,’ otherwise inaccessible, is also in the service of the theological and the contemplative.¹⁵⁴ Mark McIntosh in his book *Mystical Theology* highlights the problem of a purely anthropological approach within the academic study of spirituality.¹⁵⁵ In such an approach the danger is that ‘all the details of the spiritual journey are going to be read as data of human experience, while their polyvalence as signs of the divine in the transformation of human life might easily be left unexplored.’¹⁵⁶ My argument is that I found God in the data of my human experience. As I cultivated my self-awareness I became more God-aware. That data, my human experience was polyvalent. However, I also believe I cannot just represent that polyvalence like a pinned butterfly being dissected. I need another way of expressing it.

This has been a central concern in Christian contemplation since the beginning of Christianity. Contemplative language is not propositional but paradoxical, playful, and poetic.¹⁵⁷ In utilizing the poetic and creative expressive in my AE research I am seeking to express my spiritual experience in this way. My poetic turn is a necessity because I am trying to express something that needs a spiritual re-perceiving of the ordinary details of my life, as well as the epiphanies. I am also representing my relationship with God as implicit, with much of God’s interaction with me being out of my awareness. There are other words I will use that try and convey this liminal realm of divine-human interaction. I am especially drawing on nature writers, who also try and express what is almost inexpressible. In tracking animals, one follows spoor, ‘an ancient magnetic language...They speak a mutable tongue, transforming from the moment they appear before finally vanishing.’¹⁵⁸ These fragile ‘impressions’ can be ‘as delicate as the

¹⁵⁴ Stein, 178.

¹⁵⁵ Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Blackwell Publishing), 1998.

¹⁵⁶ McIntosh, 21.

¹⁵⁷ McIntosh, 125.

¹⁵⁸ Julian Hoffman, *The Small Heart of Things: being at home in a beckoning world* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 22.

brushstroke of a bird's wings.¹⁵⁹ I am trying to notice the tracery of God's presence in my consciousness, which is a form of tracking, scenting fragile impressions.

Critical realism

Why should a researcher use AE as a methodology? I would argue that one of the main benefits of the flexibility of AE is that it can fit with the epistemological and ontological philosophy of critical realism. Wright argues that:

One of the key achievements of critical realism has been to expose the modernist myth of universal reason, which holds that authentic knowledge claims must be objectively "pure", uncontaminated by the subjectivity of local place, specific time and particular culture.¹⁶⁰

Autoethnography recognizes this principle of 'epistemic relativism,' as do I in this research.¹⁶¹ Wright argues that critical realism sits between modernity and its idea of universal reason and postmodernity, which 'tends to deny that our language and sense experiences possess any epistemic purchase on ontological reality.'¹⁶² This postmodern view exists on a continuum where at one end a 'soft form' attests to 'a thoroughgoing scepticism about the possibility of knowledge of external reality.'¹⁶³ At the other end there is a 'systematic anti-realism that denies the existence of any reality beyond the language employed by individuals' sceptical and fractured consciousnesses.'¹⁶⁴ The history of the development of AE shows that it generally sits within a postmodern mindset, especially within the evocative strand.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Hoffman, *The Small Heart of Things*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ Andrew Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism: Ambiguity, truth and theological literacy* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

¹⁶¹ Andrew Wright, 4.

¹⁶² Andrew Wright, 10.

¹⁶³ Andrew Wright, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Wright, 10.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 373.

I use the idea that in critical realism ‘we make sense of the world by developing explanatory models that we are justified in embracing until such time as they are trumped by more powerful and comprehensive models.’¹⁶⁶ If I use a mindful perspective in the service of critical realism, then what I have written is the tip of the iceberg; beneath the surface are my internal workings as researcher – that includes embodied awareness, emotions, positionality, cultural prejudices and unseen areas. A mindful critical analysis of academic research would ask if it has been led by automatic assumptions about what constitutes academic research, including the automatic assumption that the scientific, empirical objective paradigm was the only way to do research. From the perspective of mindful learning theorist Ellen Langer, this is ‘mindlessness,’ believing there is only a ‘single perspective.’¹⁶⁷ A questioning of these assumptions by scholars and researchers who developed AE in the 1970s is then being more mindful. However, also from a mindful perspective, the question that then needs to be asked is, if the turn towards the subjective also has automatic assumptions that are unexamined behind it?

From a mindful perspective it is important not just to work from a thinking mode, but from all the dimensions of our embodiment: minds, emotion, body, awareness, self-awareness and relational awareness of the world(s) in which we are embedded.¹⁶⁸ However, I recognize, drawing on Doehring’s work that I live in a world where I have to engage with premodern, modern and postmodern worldviews.¹⁶⁹ For example, I have immersed myself in the premodern writings of scripture and Diadochus of Photike. The mindfulness research I am reading puts itself in a modern empirical worldview.¹⁷⁰ Within AE and other theory and practices I am working with,

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Wright, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Ellen J. Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., 1997), 4.

¹⁶⁸ Williams & Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning,” 15.

¹⁶⁹ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ Brown et al see that ‘the mindful state of mind is inherently empirical...’ Kirk Warren Brown, Richard M. Ryan & J. David Cresswell, “Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations and Evidence for its

it is clearly a postmodern approach. For this reason, I am adopting Doehring's pragmatic trifocal approach in engaging with all these worldviews where appropriate.¹⁷¹ In this sense for me critical realism is a bridge which enables me to walk between these different ontological and epistemological positions.

For my own way of making sense of a complex subject I use the analogy of a typewriter and a pencil. Whilst at university I bought an orange, old-fashioned manual typewriter. It typed solid letters and words. This is like the reality that exists out there in the world. I do believe in 'ontological realism,' that 'objects exist and events occur in reality whether we are aware of them or not.'¹⁷² My grasp of it (epistemic purchase) is more like a pencil. I look at reality and write in pencil my plausible explanatory model of it. From a mindful perspective not only is my context a subjective one, but my perceptions of the world are also distorted. When I need to, I rub out elements of my model that no longer make sense in the light of fresh evidence, and I write a new model. I do recognize my subjectivity, and that I need to bring it into my awareness as I do my research. I am, therefore, also an 'epistemic relativist.'¹⁷³

I am also aware from a mindful perspective that reality is complex and multi-layered, Langer calls the appropriate response to this complexity 'mindfulness.'¹⁷⁴ I am using her definition from mindful learning theory, which is different to mindfulness meditation. She defines mindfulness as 'the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective.'¹⁷⁵ Critical realism as defined by Wright also recognizes that reality is 'pluriform and stratified,'

Salutary Effects," *Psychological Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (2007):213, accessed March 20, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10478400701598298>.

¹⁷¹ Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 2-3.

¹⁷² Andrew Wright, 11.

¹⁷³ Andrew Wright, 13.

¹⁷⁴ Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning*, 4.

and because of that we can ‘provide multiple explanatory accounts of the same object.’¹⁷⁶ AE is one such explanatory account.

Methodological tools in AE

Principally AE uses the methodological tools of ethnography, except the focus is not solely on culture, but on self and culture. The same terminology can be used. The researcher examines data, and in terms of AE these are various combinations of personal material and material from culture. The fieldwork is done wherever the researcher is involved, including internal consciousness. For example, I will be drawing on my journals from the last 10 years, some of my published writings including self-help books, a novel, as well as articles. I am also drawing on intentional field journals and field-notes.¹⁷⁷ Within these different forms of data will be what Chang calls ‘personal memory data.’¹⁷⁸ Chang in her book on AE as method also talks about collecting self-observational and self-reflective data. Self-observation data she defines as ‘factual data’ (external) and self-reflection as gathering ‘introspective data.’¹⁷⁹ I also collect these forms of data. But this is not enough in itself; there then needs to be analysis and interpretation of the data.¹⁸⁰ This is perhaps for her the critical reflection that is needed. I will also be using some of my symbolic paintings, drawings, and poetic writings as data. This data will enable me to critically reflect on my own self as a visible and vulnerable presence which are two key AE ideas.¹⁸¹ I will expand on making visible my vulnerable self later in this chapter. Critical reflection can be a form of self-interview and I have done two self-interviews.¹⁸² AE can use personal texts as data, as well as examine cultural texts. In fact,

¹⁷⁶ Andrew Wright, 11.

¹⁷⁷ Within ethnography field journals record ‘personal thoughts and feelings,’ and field-notes ‘more objective data,’ see Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 95.

¹⁷⁸ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 71.

¹⁷⁹ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 89-90.

¹⁸⁰ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 125.

¹⁸¹ See Ellis, “Heartful Autoethnography,” 672.

¹⁸² See for a brief discussion, Anderson and Glass-Coffin, “I Learn by Going,” 69.

these two types of texts are intertwined, as the cultural texts transformed my vulnerable self. I will come onto how I might work with the data from these cultural texts. Within these different forms of data collection, I also draw from the past as well as in the present. Chapters four to six intentionally capture data from the present moment.¹⁸³ I can summarize this as a form of ‘participant observation,’ except the ‘data collection field’ is ‘the researcher’s own life,’ not ‘the lives of others’ as in ethnography.¹⁸⁴

Chang’s work also affirms the entanglement and influence between self and culture.¹⁸⁵ Chang’s work is helpful in that it gives methods as to ‘how’ critical reflection and may be done, including gathering data, in a more analytic manner. The visibility and vulnerability of the self being researched requires ethical reflection appropriate to AE to make sure there is no harm to myself, or any other person.

Ethical reflection

As I am the sole human participant in my research a central concern amongst others is doing no harm to my own self. This is pertinent to AE in the form of a self-narrative as it engages with a cultural phenomenon. AE research may include taboo subjects such as incest or abuse, and so the possible trauma of bringing this into the public domain needs to ethically be considered. At a positive ethical dimension AE would consider it unethical to silence such voices, and ethical to bring them into the light. My autoethnography has been approved by the Ethics Committee at London School of Theology where I am studying. I outline my ethical considerations below.

¹⁸³ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 89.

¹⁸⁵ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 125.

In terms of self-care, it became clear that afflictive thoughts got in the way of me being mindful of God. Anxious thoughts overwhelmed my present moments making it difficult to be mindful of God. This is important data and part of the presentation of a vulnerable self which is a key element in evocative AE. However, I do need to rigorously consider my self-care within the presentation of this data. I have been researching mindfulness since 2006 within a longer period of training of counselling and psychotherapy (1998-2010) which included an extended period of personal counselling and ongoing monthly supervision. In that monthly supervision I regularly discuss my PhD and any ethical concerns and self-care. Since 2006 and the diagnosis of anxiety as a condition I have been a mental health advocate and regularly shared my own story with anxiety in articles for the Baptist Times, Mind and Soul Foundation and other websites, as well as in other writings, seminars, retreats and so on. My basic ethical principle that guides all my appropriate self-disclosure is that what I say or write in public should be congruent with how I present myself publicly as a minister, psychotherapist, and contemplative teacher.

In all these roles and ministries there is an appropriate level of self-disclosure, vulnerability where it benefits others, and often on a case-by-case basis. In the area of being a mental health advocate I believe telling my story does and has benefitted many others, enabling them to be open about their own struggles and ask for help. This is particularly important when mental health has often been stigmatised in the church and people have not felt able to be honest about their mental health distress. So, what I am sharing in the context of my research, and about how to deal with afflictive thoughts to be mindful of God is to some degree already in the public domain. I also believe that my text will be a 'second-person' that can help others who are seeking to be mindful of God.

During my research, I have also discovered that afflictive anxious thoughts come out of historic scripts and narratives. The anxiety and associated scripts come out of my boarding school experience of separation. The experience of what is sometimes called *Boarding School Syndrome* is in the

public domain, and the use of my own data is not to add to that narrative, although that is important, but to further outline another obstacle to mindfulness of God – my historic scripts that need transforming.¹⁸⁶ This data is important and necessary in answering my research questions. Such knowledge historically has benefitted others who seek to contemplate, be mindful of God – and my research seeks to add to that long tradition.

It is recognized within AE that self-narrative can implicate others explicitly or implicitly.¹⁸⁷ I have deliberately, within the parameters of my research, which is not self-narrative for the sake of self-narrative, but self-narrative for the sake of *in obliquo* photographing my experience of religious transcendence, not brought anyone else's story into my writing. However, my boarding school experience does indicate I was sent to boarding school, and presumably by my parents. The data I am planning to present from my boarding school experience is around why I became anxious and the development of unhelpful scripts and why these get in the way of mindfulness of God, not about my relationship with my parents. My parents know about my research, and I have had many positive discussions about my boarding school experience with them. They did not wish to send me to boarding school, but living and working in East Africa in the 1970s gave them no alternative. My mother has read the main text which outlined the theory of Boarding School Syndrome (BSS) and tells stories of some who suffer from it.¹⁸⁸ My ethical consideration is that they will not be harmed by my AE research, nor will my relationship with them be harmed. However, it is important that I consider them as they are the intimate others most intricately linked to my boarding school story. In fact, what the research has shown me is that the relationship I had with them was not fractured but became implicit and unbroken, with moments of explicit expression in the

¹⁸⁶ Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome*, 1-94.

¹⁸⁷ See Ellis for a discussion of how when we write about our lived experience we often write about or implicate others, Carolyn Ellis, "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no.1 (January 2007): 13-22, accessed October 9, 2019, <http://doi.org/10.1177%2F1077800406294947>.

¹⁸⁸ Joy Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome*.

holidays. This was a healing insight. I also became aware how real 'home' was for me before I was sent to the 'unreal' boarding school.

A brief summary

I am looking to combine both analytic and evocative approaches in my representation. In this introduction I have outlined my immersion in AE as a methodology and the logic for choosing it. I now outline my spiritual AE in both analytic and evocative form, beginning with an analysis of my immersion in secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God. This can be represented analytically because I am drawing on the theory and practice of secular mindfulness, which is based on empirical research. However, as this theory and practice created a profound aware and embodied spiritual turn within me, I needed to represent this differently since my imagination, creative self, intuitive self, unconscious, and symbolic self were drawn into life through mindfulness. I have chosen to do this evocatively. As well as examining the AE data of my immersion in mindfulness since 2006, I have also created intentional pieces of research, in both evocative and analytic form.

I am on an autoethnographic quest to discover a personally congruent form of mindfulness of God, and how I can cultivate it. The form of mindfulness of God I have created is an integration of secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God becoming an original pathway to kataphatic spirituality. My autoethnographic evidence shows God is to be found in the present moment. If I am to be mindful of God I need to be in the present moment. I have identified the 'problem' of the present moment is that I am often not in the present moment due to anxiety. This anxiety stems from my childhood experience of boarding school. I need, therefore, to reclaim my present moments to be more mindful of God. I also recognize I need to reclaim the past to reclaim my present moments. Although I can reclaim my

past to some extent using mindfulness and other theory, again, as with the present moments only God can redeem my past. Using trauma theory to analyse the impact of the *Listening Guide* self-interviews I adapted to explore my boarding school past, I realised there was healing because in the *Listening Guide* I became aware of the depth of trauma and named it.¹⁸⁹ Following an intentional process of analysis enabled this insight to emerge.

I want to briefly introduce some of the mindful theory I have used to interpret my autoethnographic experience. The self that needs redeeming by God has three aspects: a narrative self, made up of the stories I tell myself; an experiential self that lives in the present moment through the body, breath, and senses; and a witnessing self that is underpinned with present moment awareness and can hold the other aspects of self as well as God's presence in that awareness.¹⁹⁰ Through a tentative model of creating embodied and spiritual ethically mindful present moment awareness I was not only able to relativize my old narrative self but recreate the old experientially avoidant self into an experiential self that fully inhabited the present moment. I was also able to cultivate an observer or witnessing self that was able to hold these aspects of self in awareness, as well as in spiritual experience. The mindful theory I draw on reoccurs congruently in later sections, as it is applied in different ways. There is an intentional and mindful repetition at work here.

What emerged unexpectedly with the creation of this mindful spirituality was the existence of symbolic interaction between my unconscious self and God that had been there hidden in my childhood, an interaction that was continuing as an adult. This included a symbolic aspect of that self through which God was able to redeem my interpretation of the past. Although the aim of mindfulness of God is a continuous awareness of God's presence,

¹⁸⁹ Hilary Ison, "Working with an Embodied and Systemic Approach to Trauma and Tragedy," in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, eds. Megan Warner et al (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 59. See Gilligan and Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 76-81. I italicise and use capitals for this method, as this is how Gilligan references it.

¹⁹⁰ See Norman A.S. Farb et al, "Attending to the Present: Mindfulness Meditation Reveals Distinct Neural Modes of Self-Reference," *Scan* 2, (2007): 313-314, accessed March 13, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/658052>, for the concept of narrative and experiential selves.

through the creation of another tentative analogical conceptual model (in chapter four) I am seeking to open myself to multiplying moments of meeting with God as a form of scaffolding on the way to continuous awareness. Moments of meeting with God are to be valued. My own AE experience in the foundational epiphany of this research shows that one moment of meeting with God can transform the direction of a whole life. Enabling this is ethical mindful awareness, a form of remembrance of God in the present moment.

The structure of this thesis

In part one of this thesis, I introduce my research, its methodological underpinning, and the evocative narrative of my experience of seeking to be mindful of God. This thesis is an autoethnographic exploration of my immersion in mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God. It is, therefore, an observation of my participation in mindfulness, and contemplative theory and practice through the context of my identity as a minister, psychotherapist, mindfulness researcher, and contemplative. It is a spiritual autoethnography (AE). I draw on contextual theological models of researching personal spiritual experience (transcendent model), including Sallie McFague's model of intermediate confessional theology,¹⁹¹ of translating mindfulness of God into accessible cultural language for missional purposes (translation model), and of putting mindfulness of God into the marketplace of our world (praxis model), as a transformational option of contemplation in action.¹⁹² I have made use of mindful theory through the gaze of mindful awareness to enable both intimacy with and critical distance from my lived experience. I have also used mindful anthropology as a critical gaze in examining the implicit anthropology of

¹⁹¹ Sallie McFague. "Parable, Metaphor, and Theology." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 4 (1974): 630, accessed November 25, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1461131>.

¹⁹¹ McFague, "Parable," 636.

¹⁹² See Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

my boarding school culture, and church culture. In the representation of my work, I have combined evocative and analytic elements of AE with theory from poetry therapy, arts-based research, psychodynamic thinking as exemplified by Carol Gilligan's *Listening Guide*, and contemplative writing to show the congruence of writing creatively and poetically, as well as analytically.¹⁹³ This enabled me to access unconscious as well as conscious experience.

In part two of the thesis, a more analytic section, I dialogue with the literature that acted as a second-person guide to me, as well as writing four intentional field work chapters. In contemplative history and the theory of introspection and first-person research there is usually a second-person to act as a guide to help one understand contemplative or mindful experience from the inside out. When I began researching mindfulness of God in 2006, it was a pioneering task, and I could not find another person within my Christian world who might act as a second-person guide in this area. I turned to written texts as a second-person guide. Drawing on the theory of reading manuductively I allowed the texts to lead me by the hand into a congruent reader-response. For example, secular mindfulness self-help texts led me by the hand into an experience of mindful awareness. A layer of wider reading as a minister and psychotherapist went alongside the manuductive response.

Early on within the research process I had decided that it was most congruent for my research questions for this to be a participative piece of work, that is I would immerse myself in the practice and experience of trying to be mindful of God. This meant that I worked with theory and practice in the moment, this theory and practice was like a seed that grew. I would then find another definition of mindfulness or practice and start sowing that seed of lived experience in my life. This too was a spiral process of revisiting the main quest, trying to go deeper each time, with different

¹⁹³ See, Gilligan & Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 79.

texts that were manuductive. The wider reading that I reference in this research was what enabled me to keep on track. For example, contemplative theology helped me recognize I could reclaim my present moments through mindfulness but not redeem them. Only God could redeem them. Beyond this was further reading that I haven't referenced. For example, I have read most of the popular level books written by Christians about mindfulness. However, I do not systematically review them here. In this research, and especially in chapter three, I am trying to follow as precisely as possible the manuductive path I was led on. This is I believe a more congruent approach with AE.

The same psychological texts on boarding school experience and the making of me in that environment revealed an experientially avoidant self, rather than one which fully embraced experiential living as promoted by mindful theory. I then created another intentional piece of present moment research in the field, in chapter four, adapting the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to gather data on my own present moment experience through a pilgrimage walk.¹⁹⁴ The aim was to see to what extent my present moments were overwhelmed by anxiety, and what practices might keep me in the present moment. I create a tentative model for cultivating in the present moment ethical awareness from a Christian perspective combining elements of Teasdale's Interactive Cognitive Subsystems Theory with an adapted meditation on scriptural verses that are personal values.¹⁹⁵ In this chapter I also draw on the Boston Change Study Group's theory of implicit relationship and moments of meeting in human interaction, to create an analogical conceptual model of how I was in an implicit relationship with God, with occasional transformative moments of meeting.¹⁹⁶ The study group do their work in the context of psychotherapy. I draw tentative theological implications from my AE data about my mindful spirituality as an original gateway to kataphatic spirituality. My felt

¹⁹⁴ See Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2009), 1-4 for a summary.

¹⁹⁵ Teasdale, "Metacognition," 147-148.

¹⁹⁶ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 5-7, 10-24.

sense was that my physical senses are enabled to perceive spiritually when transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. I outline why I have not drawn on mainstream apophatic contemplative spirituality and briefly address the family resemblance of my mindful spirituality to Balthasar's doctrine of the spiritual senses.

I then address the three aspects of self that need transforming, namely narrative, experiential and witnessing selves. Within the broad methodology of AE I have adapted other congruent methods that intentionally gather present moment data. As I critically examined my boarding school experience, I conducted two self-interviews in chapter five based on an adaptation of Carol Gilligan's *Listening Guide*. In the first interview I outline my reader response to a psychological text on boarding school experience by Nick Duffell.¹⁹⁷ This first interview identified my present moment experience of living with a distorted narrative self, shaped by boarding school, to be self-sufficient and unaware.¹⁹⁸ The narrative self has a distorted view of life because of 'maladaptive scripts and schemas,' such as 'I am worthless.'¹⁹⁹ I am particularly interested in this idea that maladaptive schemas created a distorted narrative self. Although I am working with a simple definition here, as adapted within mindfulness theory, I use the idea of a distorted narrative self and maladaptive scripts and schemas throughout the research as a convenient shorthand. I identify my own scripts and schemas originating from my boarding school trauma. This narrative self, filled by anxiety was able to undergo a process of transformation through my integration of secular mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God.

The second interview examines my reader-response to the trauma of boarding school experience, which I had previously repressed, through

¹⁹⁷ Nick Duffell, *The Making of Them: The British Attitude to Children and the Boarding School System* (London: Lone Arrow Press, 2010).

¹⁹⁸ I take the idea of a distorted narrative self from Vago and Silbersweig who talk about a 'dysfunctional' narrative self, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Vago and Silbersweig, 4, 6, who draw on Beck's cognitive theory, A.T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1976), without quoting a page.

engagement with another psychological text called *Boarding School Syndrome* by Joy Schaverien.²⁰⁰ Through the theory and practice of mindfulness and compassion I was able to be more compassionate to my early childhood self. Through reading Schaverien's book and her naming boarding school experience of separation as trauma I began to read the latest embodied trauma theory which draws on the insights of mindfulness. I then made a connection with Gilligan's *Listening Guide* as congruent with trauma theory and enabling some resolution of this early trauma. I expand on this in the research chapter built around my *Listening Guide* self-interviews.

Each research chapter is discovery-based and iterative, whilst retaining the autoethnographic gaze on my spiritual experience. In chapters four and five I identify the emergence of a symbolic self. In chapter six I examine the emergence of symbolic data. I begin by looking back at some of my earlier symbolic writings, before intentionally gathering more present moment data by taking a symbolic journey through Rome, using free association around each object that beckoned my perception. I structure this in a heuristic way. This further enhanced my understanding of the symbolic interaction between my unconscious and God. I use David Brown's theology of interaction between natural symbols, human unconscious, human creativity, and God as a sign of the generosity of God.²⁰¹

I see this symbolic interaction as a sign that creation is sacramental. This idea has come to me in fragments. I briefly outline this journey of discovery. For example, in conversation at Worth Abbey, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monastery, as I explained how creation spoke to me, a guest said, 'oh, you are talking about creation as sacramental!' I have followed its scent throughout the research, and it reappears in chapter three, and chapter six. James K.A. Smith, the Christian philosopher defines a

²⁰⁰ Schaverien, *Boarding School Syndrome*.

²⁰¹ David Brown, "God and Symbolic Action," in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 1990), 113-117, and David Brown, *Divine Generosity and Human Creativity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 5.

sacramental view of nature as meaning ‘that the physical, material stuff of creation and embodiment is the means by which God’s grace meets us and gets hold of us.’²⁰² This makes sense to my embodied, incarnational mindful spirituality. God speaks to me through nature. My application of creation as sacramental is to see our God-given mindful capacities as sacramental, full of created goodness. This means secular mindfulness that works with these created capacities has a sacramental element. This is a novel application of the idea of the sacramental.

In part three of the thesis, I consider the application of the research through a mindful rule of life and create a heuristic creative synthesis and conclusion. This included theological reflection on my mindful spirituality, expanding on the implications of mindful spirituality, and my mindfulness of God model as a gateway to kataphatic spirituality. I also consider if there is an ‘overriding directional image,’ to my research.²⁰³ I explore the theologies I have drawn on and identify awareness and attention and grace as implicit theologies within my work.

²⁰² James K.A. Smith in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 141.

²⁰³ David J. Leigh, *Circuitous Journeys: Modern Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 1, Kindle.

Chapter Two

The Evocative narrative

The ordinary world

In the ordinary world I have had brief conversations that have stayed with me and become small confessional or conversational tales, shining as points of wisdom for me in my life.²⁰⁴ I place some here at the beginning of this evocative narrative.

‘Most conflicts happen in church life because the person running the church doesn’t know how to relate to people.’ I’d always assumed that people running churches knew how to do it. I heard this said probably in 1996 whilst I was training to run a church. I have always joked that this was a heretical statement. But it stayed with me.

‘Christian theology is all about relationship. God is a loving community and calls us into a loving community.’ I heard this about the same time at Bible college. It stayed with me. My intuition pulsed. I followed the impulse and began relational training as a counsellor and psychotherapist in integrative and relational counselling, alongside my role as a Baptist minister. It was now 1998.

‘It’s no wonder you’re struggling as an adult you were sent to boarding school at a young age.’ It seemed like a throwaway remark, spoken by the counsellor sitting opposite me. I cried. The remark stayed with me like a piece of grit in my intuition. I followed an impulse. I began to search for psychological books or articles on boarding school life. I found a book called

²⁰⁴ See Dubisch for the idea of confessional tales, 119, and she takes the phrase from John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), ix, 3.

'The Making of Them.'²⁰⁵ I had been made. I was being unmade. It was 2006.

'Shaun come with me you look grey.' My lecturer took me into her study. It was my study day at Roehampton University. I was studying integrative and relational counselling and psychotherapy. It was 2006 and I was struggling.

She sat there and didn't say anything, but her presence drew something out of my inner being. 'I feel like I'm falling apart and there's nothing I can do about it,' I said.

'And yet you haven't fallen apart.'

I felt held by the remark in my fragmentation. I had been made and now I was being unmade. But her presence held me together until I was able to hold myself together. Mindful presence of another. In her presence I was able to be vulnerable and visible in my vulnerability.

'We are recommending autoethnography as a methodology for this personal research and lived contemplative experience.' I looked at my supervisors. It was 26th March 2014, and I was now formally registered at London School of Theology to pursue this research into mindfulness of God. 'I think research can use poetic language, paintings, photos, symbols,' I said.

Autoethnography agrees. I had epiphanies about using artistic, creative, and evocative representation. I found theory that supported this autobiographical impulse.

'People and texts have guided me.' By texts I mean books and articles. And impulses. Autobiographical impulses. An inner guide. I don't remember the exact text in which I read the word mindfulness. I know it was in 2006 at Roehampton. Why do some words hook us? This word hooked me. It invited me to explore it. It became a quest. Secular mindfulness which is mindfulness for health. For mental health. Struggling with anxiety and

²⁰⁵ Duffell, *The Making of Them*.

stress and burnout I followed an impulse. It was the moment for mindfulness in our culture and our paths crossed. It was still 2006.

‘Let us keep our eyes always fixed on the depths of our heart with an unceasing *mindfulness* of God.’²⁰⁶ This phrase rang me like a bell. It was a guide in a book, just one sentence but it changed my life. In this research I have shown some of my key epiphanies and told of their impact on me. This was the central one, the foundation. The words spoke to me like the first words in a conversation that has not yet ceased. I write these words in 2021. I asked myself, ‘what is mindfulness of God? How do I cultivate it?’ It was a very strong impulse. It was still 2006.

‘Oh, but mindfulness is Buddhist! When you meditate you are trying to empty your mind. You’re inviting the demonic in.’ I have heard this comment so many times in my church culture. I was reluctant in the beginning to let people know I was practising and researching secular mindfulness. It seemed even mindfulness of God was suspect for some, those guardians of evangelical purity. The suspicion was automatic, the minute I used the words mindfulness or meditation.

“‘Get behind me Satan! For you are not *mindful* of the things of God, but the things of men...’” (NKJV).²⁰⁷ I once had a dream where I saw words in the Bible raised up in gold and silver lettering and I knew these words were significant for me. I had a similar experience when I first read this verse in Mark’s gospel. I immediately associated it with the idea of being mindful. It was only later I came across this translation of the verse. It is a verse I keep revisiting in a spiral process. In my research process this is an early example

²⁰⁶ My italics, quoted in Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

²⁰⁷ MY emphasis and I use this version, despite its lack of inclusivity for its use of the word mindful.

of what has been called the logic of association.²⁰⁸ My mind works associatively.

I was examining my own experience of mindfulness. Much like the early contemplatives or Buddhist monks. Texts and persons. But there were no people in my church culture who knew about mindfulness of God (that I knew). Christians didn't feature in the marketplace of mindfulness. The texts on mindfulness became my guide, my mentors. A second-person guide. I had found my wardrobe, my cliff-edge, my painting that I could step into. The making of me. The unmaking of me. The remaking of me. Secular mindfulness was easy to find. Mindfulness of God was harder to find.

'Welcome to Gloucester, Shaun. Thanks for agreeing to talk to us. I thought I'd let you wander around Gloucester Cathedral before I take you home for supper.' On the 11th of October 2019 I was taken to Gloucester Cathedral. I was unaware that stained glass artist Tom Denny had created the Ivor Gurney Window, consisting of 8 Lights, or panes that tell the story of the First World War poet and songwriter. When I saw the windows, I had to just sit with them. I was moved to tears. They told aspects of my story. Later I had an epiphany about how I could partially represent this research. In the way the windows and poetic fragments of Gurney's writings spoke to me, I wanted to create the possibility of that resonance for others reading my words or looking at my images. I had an experience of identifying with the archetypal, symbolic themes of each window. Ivor Gurney is sometimes called the poet of mental health and the story and representation of his pain in his poems resonated with me. However, he was also wrestling with God. The repeated symbol of walking, the bodily postures, and colours of the figures in the scenes echoed in my story. The insight I received was to represent my story in eight similar windows, drawing inspiration from

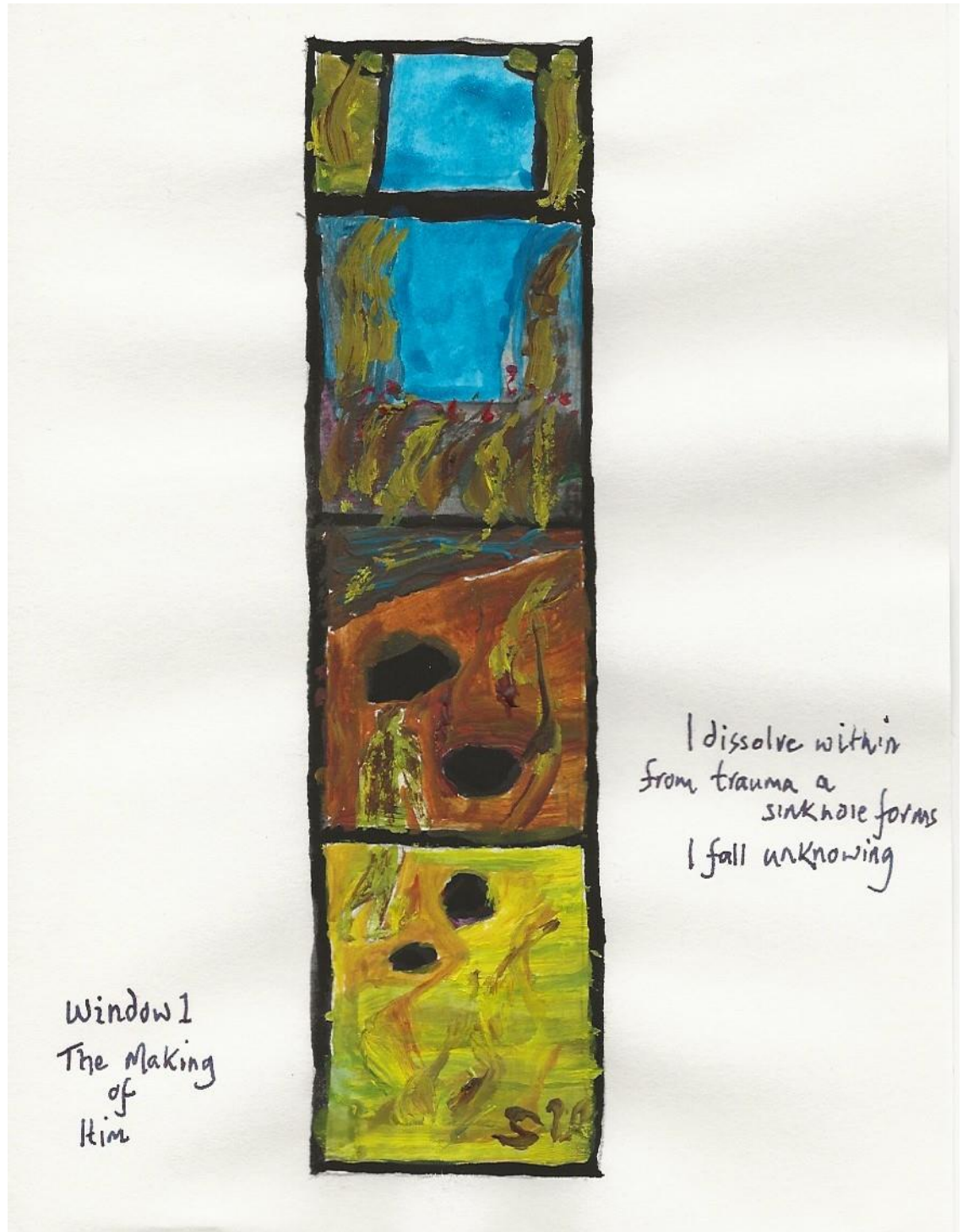
²⁰⁸ Mechtild Kiegelmann, "A Conversation with Carol Gilligan: Making Oneself Vulnerable to Discovery," *Forum for Qualitative Social Research* Vol. 10, no. 2 (2009):13, accessed June 3, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.2.1178>.

Denny and Gurney, with a creative-expressive telling of aspects of my story with each window. The idea was to distil some of the key epiphanies, and moments in my spiritual autoethnography from all the data I had collected from the field, through journals, field-notes, poems, drawings, and other forms of evidence.

My poetic imagination was stirred even further when I read a small booklet by Denny published by Gloucester Cathedral telling the story of his creative interaction with Gurney, a First World War poet, who was later incarcerated in an asylum. The fragments of poems quoted led me to create my own distilled Haiku-like poems for each window, summarizing the key epiphany infusing each pane.²⁰⁹ I place these windows and evocative narratives throughout the chronology of my evocative narrative. I further structure that chronology using AE's process of highlighting key convergences between autobiographical impulses and cultural ethnographic moments. I conceptualize this crisis of unmaking as the first key window into my world. Paradoxically it was the earlier making of me in my childhood schooling that was to be my unmaking. My windows are not numbered sequentially, because life is not nice and ordered.

²⁰⁹ Tom Denny, *Gloucester Cathedral: Stained Glass Windows*, (Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral, 2016). See David Cobb, ed., *The British Museum: Haiku* (The British Museum Press, 2002), 1-7 for an introduction to Haiku.

Window 1: The Making of him



I dissolve within
From trauma a sinkhole forms
I fall unknowing.

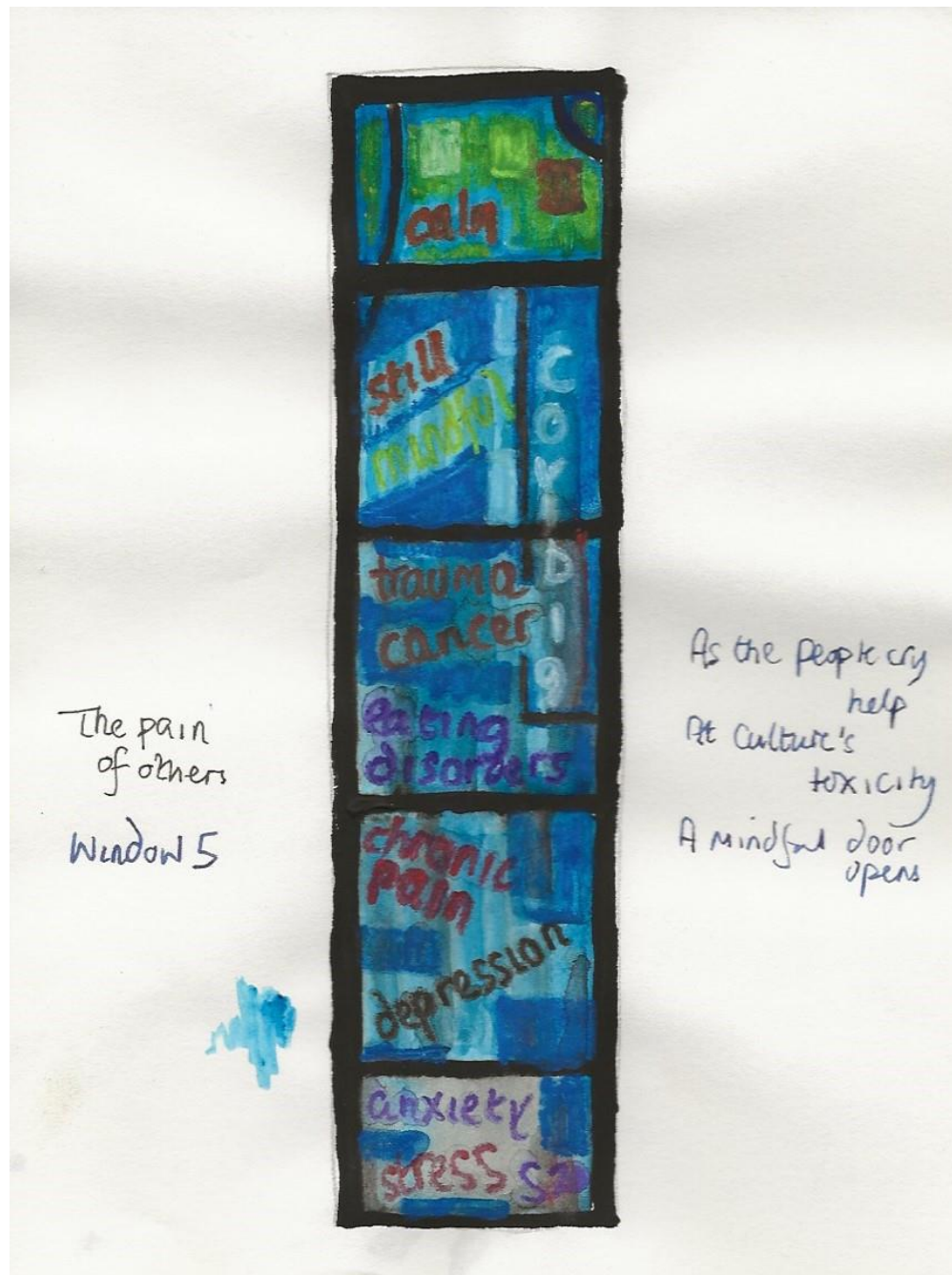
As I look at Denny's Light 1, *Glimmering Dusk*, I first find a place of open awareness to take it all in.²¹⁰ The light of dusk was gathering for me back in 2006, with night about to fall suddenly as in the tropics. On the road of Denny's scene are dark holes. I recreate these in my window as symbolic of my journey. Out of my awareness a sinkhole was forming. I was heading for a breakdown and would fall unknowing into it. There was an inevitability as potholes ringed my path, that I would fall. Intuitively I have used camouflage colours, chameleon shades, in my painting because they represent a hiding from reality. I hid my vulnerability and distress backstage. On my frontstage I appeared well. The sinkhole broke through from my backstage into the frontstage. I was a Christian, a Baptist minister and had been intentionally living a Christian life for 20 years. The 'making' of me was fragile.

'I don't know how to ask for help. I need to sort things out myself. It's also not safe for me to show my feelings.' This was my script. It was written in heavy type, although for most of my life I had not known this was my script. I recognized it was my script through reading Duffell's book on boarding school survival. That book became a guide.

'Shaun I'm suffering from recurrent depression. My doctor has said try mindfulness. Someone in the church says don't touch it with a barge pole. I'm in so much pain.' I begin to help those in pain.

²¹⁰ Denny, 4.

Window 5: The pain of others



I have used the motifs of quest and pilgrimage, and both have been helpful. However, my life hasn't followed the hero's path of the traditional quest, although I am still drawn to that model. I am on a pilgrim journey, but it is not linear. It is more a making, an unmaking, a remaking, a breaking, a remaking. The journey remains unfinished. Walton makes a similar point

about 'life writing' in commenting on Augustine's quest model, 'it is no longer the case that we feel the same theological imperative to reconcile the disparate elements of our life stories into one coherent narrative with a happy ending.'²¹¹ It is important to me that the hero Frodo, in one of my favourite stories, does not have a happy ending.²¹²

Denny's fifth window is called 'Pain.' It takes Gurney's words of the 'continual pain' of the battlefield as its inspiration.²¹³ It is grey, unrelenting grey, with shades of mustard – perhaps symbolically indicating the gas that may have been present. The figures are indistinct as if they have lost all sense of self and personhood. The poem is not just about his pain, but about the pain of others.

My Window 5 is called 'The Pain of Others.' The background colour is a more hopeful blue, but grey and red colours of trauma bleed into the reality of goodness and wholeness. Some of our cultural traumas are written into the window: stress, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, eating disorders, cancer, trauma, and Covid-19 as symbolic representatives. As the window moves upwards there is the recognition that calm, still, mindful states of mind also exist and can be accessed:

As the people cry help
At culture's toxicity
A mindful door opens.

An important question is 'why now for mindfulness?' It is a turn toward health and wellbeing, but also an intuitive turn toward the incarnational and embodied world as a reaction to the virtual disembodied world we live in. I believe it is a turn inspired by God working in culture, as the church was inattentive and focused on information rather than embodied transformation.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 96.

²¹² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965), 309.

²¹³ Denny, 6.

²¹⁴ See the critique of James K.A. Smith in *Desiring the Kingdom*, 43.

My pain brought me into contact with others who were in pain. Writing about my trauma brought others to me crying, 'help!' I am not comparing my trauma of childhood separation to the trauma of the First World War, but I can document the trauma caused by our toxic culture in the twenty-first century. As I look at the grey of Denny's Light 5, I am aware of how dead I was to my senses, how grey was my perceiving of the world – as if colour had fled. It was mindfulness that woke me to my senses, with its incarnational focus on reality and what is, and the perceiving of body, emotions, and thought life in a clearer way. This was a graced response, made possible through the presence of God. As I immersed myself in my physical senses, and the sense of what was going on in my body, and the sense of what I was thinking and feeling, and the sense of what others were thinking and feeling, I became spiritually alive.²¹⁵

There is still breaking and remaking. During lockdown I experienced a blow, a searing assault that set off a traumatic response in me. I broke along the same fracture line I had broken along as a child. There was nothing I could do about it. A wise guide said to me, 'Shaun, with this, there is no defence with which you can defend yourself.' I cannot write it in narrative form, it is too painful. It was my body that showed the trauma, with chest pains, shaking, difficulty breathing. Unable to fight, to flee, to freeze - I just fell.

²¹⁵ See Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain* (W.W. Norton & Co Inc: New York, 2007), 121-123 for his view that we have eight senses not five, the sixth sense knowing what is going on in our body, the seventh sense knowing something of our thoughts and feelings, and the eighth sense picking up other people's thoughts and feelings.

Window 7: Turn & face the shadow



In Denny's Window 7 he draws on a poem by Gurney called 'To God' written in the asylum where the poet spent much of his adult life.²¹⁶ The figure is sitting, grey, bowed, and barefoot.

²¹⁶ Denny, 7.

The line that I identified with, that describes the agony of mental health distress, was, 'Gone out every bright thing from/ my mind.'²¹⁷ The figure of the poet looks like a shadow of his former self. This time the window creates associations for me about facing my shadow.

It was the summer holidays 2008. I was reading Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*. I identified with the main character who must turn and face a shadow he released into the world. His wise master says to him, 'You must hunt the hunter.'²¹⁸ I have felt hunted by anxiety. I realised that I had to turn and face my shadow, which was anxiety. I had been running away from it.

Turn and face and face,
Face, face reality
Turn and face the shadow.

In chapter five I revisit the shadow of my boarding school past in an intentional piece of research. I want to foreshadow some of the pain in this section. I especially want to foreground finding the words for something for which I had had no words.

Finding the words for the emotions

As part of my AE research, I have been reading Joy Schaverien's book about boarding school syndrome.²¹⁹ I had been avoiding and circling around the book for some years since buying it. I bought it as part of my AE research. As I read her first chapter it told my story in words that are empirical, psychological, and exact, but evocative beyond words for me. I had no words of my own for my experience and the depth of my trauma, but she gave me the exact words as if she was there with me.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Denny, 7.

²¹⁸ Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* in *Earthsea: The First Four Books* (Penguin Books, 2016), 120.

²¹⁹ Schaverien, *Boarding school syndrome*.

I give them here in the order they appeared like words written in fire on the page:

'early boarding *ruptured* their primary *attachments*...' ²²⁰

'as children...learn to *hide* their *emotions*.' ²²¹

'*unable* to talk about his *feelings*.' ²²²

'suffered from living *without* their *families* and *without* *love*.' ²²³

'the experience...*literally* *unspeakable*.' ²²⁴

'fostered with strangers.' ²²⁵

'There are times when the *broken attachments* have been so *unbearable* that they have been repressed and the emotions are *beyond conscious recall*.' ²²⁶

'*homesickness* is reframed as *bereavement*.' ²²⁷

'*ashamed* to *complain*.' ²²⁸

'*cut themselves off* from *compassion* for their own predicament.' ²²⁹

'Boarding schools are based on masculine principles.' ²³⁰

,It is the *depth* of the trauma that may be missed.' ²³¹

I realise for the first time how deep the trauma of being sent to boarding school went. The next insight was about how I could both access and represent this trauma which is 'beyond my conscious recall.' I realised that if I genuinely wanted to reclaim my present moments more fully, I not only had to deal with present anxiety but the roots of it as well.

²²⁰ Schaverien, 2. My italics.

²²¹ Schaverien, 2. My italics.

²²² Schaverien 2. My italics.

²²³ Schaverien, 4. My italics.

²²⁴ Schaverien, 6. My italics.

²²⁵ Schaverien, 7. My italics.

²²⁶ Schaverien, 9. My italics.

²²⁷ Schaverien, 9. My italics.

²²⁸ Schaverien, 9. My italics.

²²⁹ Schaverien, 10. My italics.

²³⁰ Schaverien, 10.

²³¹ Schaverien, 11. My italics.

Window 4: Looking for the Light



In Denny's Light 4 the scene is sunset, a figure looks out of the shadows at the River Severn and the willow trees.

Gurney's phrase that inspired Denny is from the poem 'Song (Severn Meadow),' 'And who loves joy as he/ That dwells in shadows?'²³²

In my window the panes are half in shadow, half in light. A small dark figure reaches out to the light from the shadow. I was not looking for joy, in fact I avoided joy and happiness. At boarding school because of the pattern of term and holidays, any joy you felt in the holidays was quickly taken away when you returned to school, and so in the end I did not let myself feel it. I lived on the edge, in shadow but looking for light, afraid to step out:

In the dark looking
For unceasing light
Mindfulness of God.

I have already begun to outline some key elements of mindfulness of God. Trying to understand and practise mindfulness of God became a quest. The genesis of the quest, however, remains childhood trauma of separation. I quote from my journal:

One day my life changed in a blink. A chasm, a great rift valley opened up, too terrible to remember consciously, buried deep, not a treasure, but a radioactive half-life poison that robbed me of half my life. The locusts of separation ate the life of those years and yet I did not know it. I was evacuated from my own life and placed in someone else's script. (Journal 16.10.18).

That day was the day I first got sent to boarding school at the age of six and three quarters. It is part of my biography, my life narrative that cannot be separated from the research. It is the chasm I need to cross. Through boarding school, I lost my body, I lost my emotions, I lost awareness, I lost control of my present moments because of anxiety. My AE evidence that I present later tells me that it is in the present moment that I meet God. Written on my body and the emotions that inhabit it are different texts, personal, familial, boarding school, cultural, evangelical, charismatic – in this sense my body is like a lost palimpsest which I need to find to read

²³² Quoted in Denny, 5.

these different layers of text. However, a new text can be written in and on my embodied wholeness; the text written by the practice of mindfulness of God.

Not only do I need to turn and face the past, but I also need to reclaim my present moments which are so often lost to anxiety. I had an intuitive impulse that an extended piece of walking would help. I have found walking and formal mindful walking meditations enabled me to be embodied and to process emotion. It was a strong impulse and so I followed it. I knew the Camino pilgrimage walk was very popular. I decided to walk a section and record my thought life.

An intuitive impulse and the Camino

I walked for a week in 2017 and realised my impulse was right, I felt restored and refreshed. In 2018 I set out a deliberate research project which I detail fully in chapter four. I briefly summarize here what I did. I recorded samples of my present moment experience walking the Camino on my phone. I wrote up the transcript in the evening after each day's walking, as a sample of my stream of consciousness. I later analysed it using adapted qualitative methods in chapter four. Here it is standing alone as an evocative piece of reality.

Day One Tuesday May 29th, 2018

I spend my first night in historic Santiago, at the Hotel Pazos Alba before setting off early in the morning the next day to Negreira, a walk of some 22 kilometres.

I normally rely on Clare, my wife, to do the directions when we are travelling, so having to take responsibility is both good for me and triggering for my anxiety. I feel self-conscious as I record my first thoughts on the walk. My mood matches the overcast, humid, slightly oppressive morning. I wonder if I can trust the cleanliness of my CamelBak watercarrier I first used last year. I know from last year that drinking so much water leads to needing some wild wee stops, I feel self-conscious about that. I am worried about getting lost.

I am filled with anxious thoughts about my fitness and my back, which is often problematic. I feel stiff and wish I had stretched my muscles. As I walk though, I am swamped by the scent of the eucalyptus trees. As I have this private time, on my own, in silence and solitude I am aware of the shame that is often cast at me as a minister in the public domain. Again, the worry about getting sick from drinking from my water pack intrudes. I know that people who love me do not shame me. The verse from Mark's gospel I have been meditating on intentionally pops into my head, 'Whoever wants to save his life will lose it...' (Mark 8:35).

I keep a look out for any water points that I can also drink from. Fleeting I sense that this pilgrimage walk also offers spiritual water. What am I trying to save myself from through my anxious thoughts? I am trying to save myself from exposure to judgement, to unfair criticisms, to projections, but end up losing my life. I am not exposed here, as I walk, unknown to any fellow travellers, completely anonymous. I get a rush of gratitude that I am here in Spain, physically well and able to walk the Camino. I hope I can walk all day. Every now and then the sun breaks through the cloud, and I can feel hot spots on my back. Little bursts of shame flicker into my

consciousness. Suddenly I place the reason why. I think I have committed a micro-offence with someone, and it triggers a huge wave of shame and anxiety. The birdsong breaks in through my hearing. I think of Clare and Zac, Amy, and Coco the dog at home. I realise that I have forgotten the athlete's foot cream which I might need, I feel self-conscious for recording that. I hear fellow walkers behind me and resent their closeness. I decide to slow down so they can walk past, and I can return to my solitude and silence. I see a dog and smile, Coco would love this walk, all the smells and sights. I want to walk clear not cloudy.

There is an intersection ahead, I see people consulting maps and phones for directions. I begin to doubt myself. I see a yellow arrow and realise I am still on the way. I want to be on the Way, not in my head. I am fed up with being in my head. The birdsong breaks through again. I feel the soles of my feet against the earth. The familiar sound of dogs barking soothes me. I listen to the crunching of my steps on the path. I see so many houses have their own vegetable patch, chickens, dogs sitting in the yard. Flitting across my mind is the thought I'd like a little vegetable patch (and someone to cultivate it). A little piece of productive land I can call my own.

I feel slightly less shame. Does the fire of God burn shame? Again, the scent of the trees wafts through my senses carried by the breeze. The birds are still singing. I notice my breathing; it is deep and steady. Suddenly I pray in tongues. Am I afraid of exposure because I have a monstrous ego, or because I was shamed as a child at boarding school, with no one to turn to? A friend of mine says we have a shame basement, full of the dank water of shame, and that the smell of it pervades our whole being. I feel that. But I wonder if walking like this drains the basement, wicks it away like my shirt wicks away sweat. I see everything through a fence. I pray, 'I let go of the desire to change anything.' I feel peace. I walk past a storehouse for maize, I recognize God has given me storehouses of ancient wisdom in mindfulness and contemplation. My mind travels forward, and I feel excited about going

to speak at Exeter Cathedral. I would like a little house. Like the swallows that flit around me laughing with joy.

I realise that this walk can be part of my spiritual autoethnography, a modern-day confessional tale of trying to ‘follow the footprints of the Invisible One.’²³³ Every hour I have set an alarm to record a little summary review – its ringing catches me by surprise. I must have been in the present moment. I realise I have not thought of coffee. I look around for the swallows, but they have gone for the moment.

Shame is a dip in the ground that catches you unawares, a step that moves on a staircase as you are about to trust it with your weight. I’ve packed my croissant and ham and cheese from the hotel breakfast. In taking it with me is that stealing? I finally stop for coffee and food. I wonder if the little café does goulash. There’s one person who’s sitting at a table of four chairs, there are no other tables available. Can I sit with him, I anxiously ask myself? I make myself sit.

The coffee gives me a high. I start paying attention. I am training my attention and awareness on this walk. After six hours walking, I feel like I’ve got my wind and my legs. The swallows, the path, the weather all speak to me symbolically. I think God uses these created things as natural symbols and speaks to us through them. The joy of the quest and the pilgrimage, how to be mindful of God, floods through me. I’m a symbolist, and each symbol fills me with some self-awareness or awareness of God.²³⁴

This was a walk to clean every room in my head, and heart, and body and soul. This was a walk to cleanse my awareness. The Ananias prayer comes into my head unprompted, ‘May the love of Christ take hold of me. May the

²³³ This is how Diadochus of Photike describes the spiritual life, see Cliff Ermatinger, *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible*, 50.

²³⁴ This is an insight that emerges from my research that I will address later, including some theoretical reflections.

light of Christ shine in my heart. May the love of Christ flow through me like a river.’²³⁵

I’m climbing a hill. Even shame gets left behind on this hill. I think shame and anxiety lead to self-focus. In that way I lose my life if life is with others. My family pop into my mind. I will ring them tonight. It will be nice to see their faces. What is mindful symbolism? Thank You Lord. Thank you, Lord. Gratitude fills my soul. There’s a beautiful old bridge I walk across. Maybe mindfulness is a bridge which you can only walk across physically, you cannot get there technologically. Mindful symbolism is walking in awareness and allowing whatever is around you to speak to you. I’m grateful to the second-person guides I have met in books...like Mark, Diadochus, Evagrius. The secular mindfulness guys. I face the pain. That’s the mindful thing to do. Pain that comes and goes at the end of the walk. It doesn’t stay it moves around. Pain in the sole of my right foot, left knee. Achilles tendons on both ankles hurt. Mindfulness weighs nothing but can hold heavy experience.

Gentle heat of the sun breaking through the clouds, birds still singing, cars in the distance. A stream. Open awareness. I’ve expanded into a bigger space. Elation. Joy. I think I’ve reached Negreira. Relief, happiness. I am no longer fizzing. I lose my ego as I walk. A leaky drain. I probably don’t smell nice either. Anxiety says there’s a 98% chance of rain on a cloudless day. The alarm caught me off guard again. I wasn’t expecting it. I just want to get there. I am there.

²³⁵ This is a prayer of compassion that I created as a spiritual mindful awareness practice.

Day Two Wednesday 30th May, 2018

This morning as I wake up I am both elated and worried. I've got nearly another 20 kms to go. The Galician countryside is so beautiful, I feel tearful. The mist, the green, the rolling hills. A cockerel crows.

I think of the time I didn't turn up for my dad's birthday supper that I'd agreed to go to. I'm still filled with shame at that. A girl had asked me to go out on a date and I didn't want to say no to her, and I didn't want to disappoint my dad, so I did nothing. But I can look back now and see this crippling anxiety that I would be rejected if I said no...that came from boarding school. I feel more compassion toward my younger self. My mum said that my dad kept looking out of the window waiting for me to turn up. That's kind of symbolic. And the person never comes. Shame keeps me in the past and makes me anxious about the future that I would be exposed about something that happened in the past. I left my little iPad in the big bag that is being transferred on. I'm now worried I should have carried it in case it gets stolen en route. My mind is like a phone, pinging constantly with alerts from different apps.

Thank You Lord no injuries, no diarrhoea. Stretching was good this morning. *I let go of the desire to change anything. I let go of the desire for security and control, for affirmation, for happiness.* I'm filled with peace. I let it go. I have italicized above a prayer from my spiritual scaffolding. It's called the Welcoming prayer and comes out of the Centering Prayer tradition.²³⁶ I have found it very helpful. So much energy is tied up in trying to control our security (whoever wants to save their life...), the affirmation we get. I'm back in the present moment looking for the yellow signs. Where does this strange willpower come from, to want to walk for another 20 kms.

²³⁶ A good description of this prayer can be found in Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (London: Cowley Publications, 2004), 135-152.

Public school is presented as a symbol of privilege; it is therefore hard to tell a different narrative. In evangelicalism meditation and mindfulness is often presented as a symbol of the East, a negative symbol. I wish to represent it as a positive Christian symbol of transformation. Meditation is the wrong word really for mindfulness practices because they are all about cultivating mindful awareness of reality. I pray for my friend's daughter and her diabetes. I just love the space out in nature on my own, the great expanse of sky. I know in my head that sometimes I am in a spacious place; I am there briefly right now. I let go of the desire for power and control. Break shame into bite-sized chunks. There's a good feeling in my lungs as they work. 'Bless the Lord O My Soul.' I feel a kind of ecstasy already. Does ecstasy burn up shame? One of the ways to deal with shame is to cultivate something else like joy, like ecstasy, like peace.

I have been walking for an hour I am feeling good. I feel my body is part of myself and I am in tune with it. How can I paint this mist, and this earth, and these seedlings, and these trees, and these colours? I must email some photos to my mum and dad. I was walking on the flat bit without stones and a big guy was walking toward me on the same path. Who was going to step off first? And he did...I feel childishly elated. I record that because these are things that I would self-censor, not share out of shame. This is freedom.

Anxiety is like walking on a stony road. All these little thoughts stab me. But there is a clearer path. First test of my wet weather gear. There's a strong drizzle. Mindfulness is like wet weather gear that helps protect you in a storm. I feel new shoots popping up in my mind...about mindfulness research, about life, about family, about God. Just praying for my supervisor. There's a circle ahead of me where the trees overhang. I feel I am walking through a portal into a mystical place. It has symbolic significance for me.

May she know happiness, may she know health, may she know peace of being.
I have been walking for two hours. I see the sign for a taxi. I am not tempted.

I have lost so much of my life to shame, to anxiety. Trying to save it. I feel a great anger as the birds sing around me. If mindfulness is in part a capacity for self-awareness, and about developing self-awareness then the fact that I realise I'm a symbolist is mindfulness in action.²³⁷ *Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner.*²³⁸ Shame is like an injury that you nurse but nobody can see. Shame is a feeling I have not learnt to tolerate so I try to avoid it. But if I can learn to tolerate it and allow myself to feel it I believe it goes. Surf the wave of shame. *May your healing loving presence flow through me.* Taxi is the sign of experiential avoidance.

The cool weather is great, but I crave the experience of sun on my skin. I pray in tongues. My body is remembering things like how to just keep going. I notice the silence, the birds, the wind, the sound of me walking. The silence. I'd like a coffee now. Close to 10 kms, halfway through. I wonder if mindfulness can be used to uncover our unconscious symbols, symbols out of our awareness, symbols of conformity to culture? There are crosses along the way. 'Take up your cross and follow me,' comes into my head. The Jerusalem cross, the St. Benedict symbol, the patron saint of traveller's symbol around my neck, they're all symbolic. They speak to me.

Mark talks about having a perceptive faith. 'He who has ears to hear let him hear.'²³⁹ Reperceiving is the goal of my mindfulness of God, seeing more clearly. The phrase, another metacognitive proposition from Mark, 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it,' is morphing in my consciousness. Weaving itself into my narrative of anxiety and shame. Where does my shame come from? I realise that I was shamed. That it wasn't originally part of me. Shame was a form of control; like a heavy weight they bound us to at boarding school. Shame cannot keep up with my walking body it is blowing

²³⁷ One of the key insights of this mindful pilgrimage is how much my mind works with the symbolic.

²³⁸ The Jesus Prayer is an ancient Christian contemplative prayer, a good introduction is Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer: A Way to Contemplation* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2011).

²³⁹ Mark 4:9.

away behind me. Shame is a weed. It can be pulled out. Though it is bindweed. Swallows fly as I crave bacon and egg.

The baker delivers in this village by car and beeps his horn to let everyone know he is here. *Clun* lorries are collecting the milk. Mindfulness pasteurises anxiety and shame.

I see a stream. How did a little stream of words, 'fix your eyes on the depths of your heart with an unceasing mindfulness of God,' how did such a little stream become a major river leading to a sea in my life? How did it become woven into the fabric of my being?

The time is 11.53 a.m. the end of my third hour of walking. Things keep popping up symbolically. 'Are you ready to go home?' the poster says. I have seen it twice. I realise I am not running away from home. My body remembers the willpower I built up last time. It's come back to me. The Welcoming prayer emerges into awareness. *I let go of the desire for power and control, for safety, I let go of the desire for safety.* It is how we lose our life, trying to anxiously stay safe. I see a slug, a spider web, a snail. I feel a little burst of joy. It is now 12.30 p.m., and I am doing recording number six. I feel good. I have just had a rest and some food. I found a seat at the top of a big hill. Is cultivating pride in an achievement an antidote to shame? We put skin on feelings, like the peel of a fruit and then we must stay with the feeling for it to be unpeeled and tasted. My mind is slowing down to the pace of walking. My breath feels clear of the asthma of anxiety. I recognise that normally anxiety is there most of the time.

I just got a message from somebody I thought I had offended and was in a pit of shame about. It was a lovely message. My shame was false shame. It is like a cloud has lifted even though the clouds are still there in the sky. I am getting to the bare rock of where the anxiety and shame comes from. Shame makes me think everyone is going to point their finger at me. Nothing but walking is left. Have I emptied my mind? No. It is just turned into still water

from fizzy water. I've entered a different state of mind, one that just is. I am entranced by the swallows flying so low all around me. What do they symbolise? They fill me with joy. The time is 2.13 p.m., it is the end of the fifth hour of walking. I am still entranced by the swallows. I reach the hotel. I have walked 19.6 kilometres, 30,753 steps, over 5 hours and 11 minutes. My body is tired, but my mind is free. The symbolic meaning of the swallows for me still eludes me. Olveiroa and a converted farmhouse awaits.

Window 2: The Lost moments



In Light 2 at the cathedral the scene is a representation of when Gurney remembers a beautiful moment, walking amongst orchards. His reality in Flanders, amidst all the chaos and mud of the First World War is quite different. Denny's window is full of orange, blue, and light. As I look at the

figure walking in his beautiful scene, he seems grey and hunched. His back is turned away from the colour. It is both the colours and the symbolic nature of this figure that inspires my second window.²⁴⁰ My figure is grey, hunched and turned away from the colours my unconscious has chosen, green, blue, and orange, and three trees. I cannot see the natural beauty, or the shelter of the three-in-one God, I am aware of my lost moments. This is the association that comes to mind:

Each present moment
Full of colour and beauty
I lose to anxiety.

²⁴⁰ Denny, 4.

Window 3: The Light was coming



In Denny's Light 3 it is night, and the light is coming from the stars. It is a scene from Gurney's home valley, prior to the pain and darkness of First World War France. It is a window that shows how remembering can bring

light into present moments that are lost to pain and anxiety and fear.²⁴¹

Later in the research, I find symbolic memories that bring light into my present. In my window 3, although I was not aware of it, the light was coming. And so, I have represented my inner landscape in dark blue, black, and red. The dark blue and red bleed through tears, rents in the paper:

The fabric of being
Was night, rent and torn inside
But the light was coming.

The top pane has the light represented as stars, and the light was travelling toward me. In my research process I have this iterative revisiting of key concepts that I do intuitively, but that is also intentional – as a form of spiral process. I revisit here the finding of both secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God, for its symbolic importance to me as a light to my path. The first light that found me, as if searching for me, was secular mindfulness. It helped me face the feelings of anxiety I was avoiding. Because I had first avoided homesickness, anxiety, grief, and the trauma of separation at boarding school as a child, I learnt to avoid my body, because that is where feeling is held. If I was to avoid feelings, and body I had to live an unaware life, on automatic boarding school scripts. The light of understanding that came was that I needed to inhabit my awareness, and through awareness inhabit my whole being. As I came back to awareness and my body, I was able to hold and experience my feelings. As I did this, I became more spiritually alive.

The light that also found me, travelling from a more distant star was the phrase from fifth century pioneer of the Jesus Prayer, Greek Bishop Diadochus of Photike. Olivier Clement translated an original Greek phrase of the Bishop as ‘Let us keep our eyes always fixed on the depths of our heart with an unceasing *mindfulness* of God.’²⁴² In my research process I consistently revisit, circle round this phrase, and meditate (ruminate) on it.

²⁴¹ Denny, 5.

²⁴² My italics, quoted in Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

The translation is important because of the word mindfulness. This phrase was like a star that is just emerging in the night sky as your eyes get their night vision. It pulsed at me as it was emerging. It became the star. In my darkest moments I did not realise the light was coming, but this was the moment which held me and turned me towards this luminous body of contemplation. The light got brighter; the star got bigger in my mind's eye. I was aspiring somehow to a greater awareness. This phrase spoke to me like a speech-act, it had power and I felt compelled to let it take me by the hand.²⁴³ I was addressed by this phrase, and I wanted to ask to what extent could I help this phrase speak to others?

²⁴³ See Louise Lawrence, "Exploring the Sense-scape of the Gospel of Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 4 (2011), 391.

Window 6: The second-person guide



Denny's Light 6 is a rural scene. The autumnal colours of orange, yellow, blue, and white are another remembrance of a better day for the poet. Here a couple walk through a gate that Gurney believes his friend and fellow-poet

F.W. Harvey will never walk through again.²⁴⁴ They walk amongst grazing sheep and seem turned toward one another.

In my window the colours of orange, yellow and blue symbolize the fruitfulness that mindfulness of God has brought me:

The second person
Walking with me as my guide
Contemplative books supplied.

At one level it was books that guided me on this contemplative path. At another level, in that place where one knows without thinking, there was another who guided me. The One who walked everywhere in Galilee and Jerusalem.

This was the second time that books had come to my rescue. The first was at boarding school, when reading became the only place of refuge and sanctuary. They are my colourful haven where I gather myself. I have never questioned their role, but I am filled with gratitude that I have them and was taught to read at such a young age.

My own experience of not having a guide has motivated me to create a second-person guide for others to follow – one that they can identify with. Especially for those who need to reclaim their present moments because of mental health distress.

I have placed a gateway in my painting because books were a gateway into new life. I have represented my second-person guide as wisdom personified, leading me by the hand.

²⁴⁴ Denny, 6.

Window 8: The eighth day



In Denny's Light 8 a figure faces the light streaming toward him. He is reaching out to it with hands raised, transfigured, and transcending the pain in that moment, symbolized by the deep blue of the window.

Denny's inspiration are these words of the poet, 'Out of sorrow have I made/these songs.'²⁴⁵ But the poems are also made from memories – memories of more peaceful moments, epiphanies that change things in the present moment of pain.

My window 8 is called 'The Eighth Day,' to symbolically reflect that there has been a time of transformation and resurrection in my life. It is through mindful awareness that I rediscovered my incarnational being, God-given senses along with self-awareness, and the ability to regulate my emotions and thoughts and to transcend anxiety. Every embodied part of me has learnt to resonate with God's presence, this is a graced response as I collaborate with God. In my window I am much closer to the light, and the light is streaming towards me. I am in a place of deeper awareness. I am bathing in the light. In the second pane there are three figures who are waiting for me to return to them. They symbolize parts of me and my family.

Incarnated streams
Of awareness, eight senses
Becoming spiritual.

I recognize, however, the fragility and ongoing pilgrim nature of my journey.

²⁴⁵ Denny, 7.

Fragments and mending

Like a broken Japanese pot, I have been broken and glued back together.²⁴⁶ In kintsugi ‘the breaks are made *more* visible.’²⁴⁷ In AE I am not hiding my brokenness, or the fact that I have been glued back together. The word fragment occurs intuitively in my research to refer to the broken part of me. Later in my symbolic chapter six I pick up the idea of a broken and fragmented mosaic. However, it was not until my research into shame that I came across the idea of working with theological fragments – something Stephen Pattison does explicitly.²⁴⁸



A broken pot repaired with gold and silver lacquer in my office as a symbolic reminder for me

²⁴⁶ Mary Elizabeth Podles, “A Thousand Words: Kintsugi Bowl,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 34, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2021): 62-63, for an introduction to Kintsugi pottery.

²⁴⁷ Podles, 62.

²⁴⁸ Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 300-301.

This idea of theological fragments is a strand within practical theology which recognizes that other forms of theology are needed alongside systematic theology. I have explored this theological strand further and found it resonates with my work.²⁴⁹ Terry A. Veling takes an image from nature to make the point that we can use fragments, ‘like a bird bravely building its nest. The sticks and twigs, however, do not serve fragmentation. Rather, they create a whole.’²⁵⁰ He argues that we create using ‘bits and pieces,’ and that, ‘only through entering and engaging with the singular and the particular can we gain a sense of the whole.’²⁵¹ I am working with the singular and particular details of my life. With these details I am creating a whole in my work, it might be a fragile whole and must be remade constantly, but it still has coherence and structure. This fragmentation and remaking was underlined during the Covid pandemic when old trauma was triggered and the fracture of boarding school separation once again came into my present, as conflict brought those fractures to my front stage. I come back to this idea of working with fragments.

In my contextual theology I recognize that my work is not systematic, and I have also found McFague’s idea of parabolic or intermediary theology a helpful alternative in working with the detail and lived experience of my life.²⁵² I develop this further in later chapters. I also notice, though, alongside this, that in working with secular mindfulness research, I work with something more systematic and based on empirical research.²⁵³ There

²⁴⁹ See Heather Walton, “A Theopoetics of Practice: Re-forming in Practical Theology: Presidential Address to the International Academy of Practical Theology, Eastertide 2017,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 23, no.1 (2019): 3-23, accessed December 7, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2018-0033>.

²⁵⁰ Terry A., Veling, “Poetic License,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 40, accessed December 7, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2018-0029>.

²⁵¹ Veling, 41.

²⁵² See Sallie McFague, *Speaking In Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1975). I expand on her approach in chapter four.

²⁵³ Brown, Ryan and Cresswell, “Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations,” 213, state ‘the mindful state of mind is inherently empirical...’

is a strand within AE that seeks to hold both the evocative and the analytic, and that is what I am seeking to do.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Barbara Tedlock, "Introduction: Braiding Evocative with Analytic Autoethnography," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams & Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2013), 358-362.

Part Two: The analytic AE

Chapter Three

The Literature that acted as a second-person guide

The lack of a second-person guide to mindfulness of God

As I sought to understand what mindfulness of God is and how I might cultivate it, to redeem my present moments from anxiety and the shadow of the past, and to establish how I could be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self, it was books, articles and texts that guided me. In this chapter I have gathered the key texts that have enabled my quest and pilgrimage to be mindful of God. These include secular mindfulness texts, and spiritual texts. I outline how these texts have been a second-person guide to me. However, other texts emerged in later chapters that were helpful psychologically, spiritually, or theologically, for example, theological texts around the spiritual senses, or embodied trauma theory. For this reason, I do not outline them in this chapter as I have developed and reflected on them in later chapters, within the context of their emergence.

Some of my wider reading has been particularly pertinent to my manuductive strand of reading, and so I weave that into this chapter where appropriate. For example, in the research process questions or problems have emerged, such as, ‘how can I be mindful of God if there is an insurmountable gap between myself and God?’ I have then paused, stepped back, and taken a wider look at what I am doing, and so a further layer of reading has accompanied my manuductive reading. This chapter mirrors that process of pausing and addressing that theological question about the gap between God and myself. In other parts of the research process my wider reading has helped clarify what sort of spirituality I have immersed myself in. For example, Kirk A. Bingaman’s defining of Centering Prayer as a form of mindfulness, enabled me to see more clearly that my spirituality is

kataphatic.²⁵⁵ This is another example of stepping back in the research process and looking at the bigger picture. I address this dialogue with Bingaman in this chapter as well because it helped clarify my emphasis on embodied spirituality. I also take a wider look at the Jesus Prayer and Diadochus of Photike in their historical context, to help me place my use of the Jesus Prayer which I have adapted using secular mindfulness theory. Finally, Mark's gospel has been both a manuductive text and one that has enabled me to examine my research from a wider angle. I have a section on the importance of Mark's gospel to me in this dual role as it fits best in this chapter. This wider reading within the research process has helped to shape my critical transformation.

I can observe my lived contemplative experience, also known as 'phenomenal consciousness.'²⁵⁶ This is called a first-person approach to research.²⁵⁷ I am trying to observe the details of my participation in mindfulness of God. Bingaman says that 'God is in the details of human experience and, more specifically, in the profound details of mind, brain, and human consciousness.'²⁵⁸ I would add to this that God is in the details of our senses, our bodies, our breath, our imagination, our unconscious.

Within first-person approaches there is traditionally a second-person guide who helps you practice your contemplation.²⁵⁹ Early Christian contemplatives acted as second-person guides to others both in person and through their writings.²⁶⁰ When I started to explore mindfulness of God in 2006, I could not find any second-person guides who might help me to

²⁵⁵ Kirk A. Bingaman, "The Promise of Neuroplasticity for Pastoral Care and Counselling," *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2011): 549.

²⁵⁶ Varela, "First-person Methodologies," 8-9.

²⁵⁷ Varela, "First-person Methodologies," 8-9.

²⁵⁸ Kirk A. Bingaman, "The Art of Contemplative and Mindfulness Practice: Incorporating the Findings of Neuroscience into Pastoral Care and Counselling," *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2011): 478.

²⁵⁹ Varela, "First-person Methodologies," 8-9.

²⁶⁰ A.M. Casiday, for example calls Evagrius a guide in A.M. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 36-38.

explore this within my own Christian culture. I, therefore, turned to texts, to books and articles as a second-person guide.

This is, then, also an autoethnographic reading of texts, a participative and manuductive reading, to enable a participation within mindfulness of God, and an observation of that participation. Paradoxically it was the cultivation of mindful awareness through secular mindfulness that provided a pathway to mindfulness of God, with the adaptation of some Christian practices into mindful awareness practices. It is a spiritual AE reading in that my research and participation was set within a Christian framework. It is also a contextual reading in that I am looking to translate mindfulness of God into the language, theory, and practice of secular mindfulness. Out of this reading I have constructed a map that exists in my head that helps guide me.

A map of mindfulness

The Scargill community where I have been living is based on a 90-acre estate. Maps of the paths on the estate, with other key features, like a labyrinth, have been drawn to give to guests. Through mindful repetition and revisiting of the key mindfulness texts, a map of mindfulness has been created in my head following my immersion in those texts. Another analogy for me is the night sky. Scargill is in a dark sky reserve with very little light pollution, and so when the sky is clear there is an amazing view of the starry night sky. One of the constellations I am fascinated by is Orion.²⁶¹ The key navigational points of mindfulness exist in my head like a constellation. I see them as stars as they glow in the dark of my mind and enable me to navigate life and orient myself in my own self and in the world. In chapter

²⁶¹ See Bernadette Brady, "Images in the Heavens: A Cultural Landscape," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 7, no.4 (2013): 461-84, accessed February 14, 2022, <http://dx.doi:10.1558/jsrnc.v7i4.461>, for a survey of the fascination across cultures in creating symbols out of constellations and stars including Orion.

seven and the application of this research into a mindful rule, I will shape these key navigational points around the constellation of Orion as a mnemonic structure, to help others remember. Mindfulness is used as an ‘umbrella term’ and I will draw on some of those related definitions to construct my map as they have steered me.²⁶²

The first definition that has shaped my thinking is that mindfulness ‘in essence,’ is ‘awareness itself, an entirely different and one might say, larger capacity than thought, since any and all thought and emotion can be held in awareness.’²⁶³ This is a simple but profound definition of mindfulness as awareness which can hold our thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations in present moment consciousness. Awareness, and, therefore, mindfulness in this definition, is a universal human capacity. I cannot talk about my capacity for awareness without talking about attention which is where I direct my awareness. Attention is, according to Tim Lomas, ‘awareness stretched *toward* something.’²⁶⁴ This interconnection between awareness and attention is underlined in the definitions provided by Brown and Ryan, ‘*Awareness* is the background “radar” of consciousness’ which scans the environment, and attention ‘is a process of focusing conscious awareness.’²⁶⁵

In my lived experience as I have learnt the language of awareness and attention it has become the centre of my being. As I have found ways of inhabiting this created capacity, I have begun to live life more fully. The mindfulness definitions and ways of working with attention and awareness have been the great discovery of my personal journey. It is the pearl of great price I found in a field or was enabled to find as a graced gift.

²⁶² For the use of the idea of ‘umbrella term’ see Jonathan Gibson, “Mindfulness, Interoception, and the Body: A Contemporary Perspective,” *Frontiers in psychology* 10 (September 2019): 1, accessed November 2, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02012>.

²⁶³ Williams and Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning,” 15.

²⁶⁴ Tim Lomas, *Masculinity, Meditation and Mental Health* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014), 100-101.

²⁶⁵ Kirk Warren Brown, and Richard M. Ryan, “The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and its Role in Psychological Well-being.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 822-848. Accessed September 18, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>.

Interestingly, Brown and Ryan consider mindfulness to be ‘enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience and present reality.’²⁶⁶ Mindfulness, is, therefore, perhaps a shift in the quality of the attention and awareness with which we perceive reality.

Attention itself has a range of capacities. Instead of my attention being held captive, for example, by social media, I can learn to regulate my attention.²⁶⁷ I can focus my attention on scripture, or chocolate, or my breath, or a bird of the air. What happens next, according to the muscle of attention, is that my mind will wander, and that is indeed my experience.²⁶⁸ I have this beautiful capacity called meta-awareness, where I notice that part of my mind has wandered, to a meeting I am worried about tomorrow. Through the self-regulation of my attention, I can switch my attention back to what it is I am focusing on.²⁶⁹ This enables me to sustain my attention.²⁷⁰ With practice I am able to both sustain a focused attention but also inhabit ;an open awareness to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations as they appear in awareness.²⁷¹ This can be described in different ways and has important implications not only for wellbeing by my awareness of God’s presence.

When I was first married, we went to ballroom dancing, but gave up after the first lesson due to my lack of rhythm. Recently as part of the community at Scargill House during an entertainment evening I mentioned this lack of rhythm, and someone offered to teach me some dance moves, which they proceeded to do. I find it helpful to talk about mindfulness as consisting of several moves as in a dance. Mark Williams outlines a helpful concept of how

²⁶⁶ Brown and Ryan, “The Benefits of Being Present,” 822.

²⁶⁷ Scott R. Bishop et al., “Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 232.

²⁶⁸ See Wendy Hasenkamp et al, ‘Mind Wandering and Attention During Focused Meditation: A Fine-grained Temporal Analysis of Fluctuating Cognitive States’, *Neuroimage* 59 (2012), 751, accessed 18th November 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2011.07.008>. Daniel Goleman calls these steps the muscle of attention see, Daniel Goleman, ‘Meditation: A Practical Way to Retrain Attention’, November 2013, accessed 18th November 2015, available at <http://www.mindful.org/meditation-a-practical-way-to-retrain-attention/>.

²⁶⁹ Bishop et al., 232.

²⁷⁰ Bishop et al., 232.

²⁷¹ Bishop et al., 232.

our mind works, principally through two modes, ‘conceptual (language-based) processing versus sensory-perceptual processing.’²⁷² This has also been called our narrative self and experiential self.²⁷³ I will expand on this as I show how I applied this map to my wellbeing and spirituality. Put simply my narrative self is where I live most of the time, telling stories, often negative ones. My experiential self is my body, breath, and senses.

Mark Williams introduces another aspect of our being when he says in a summary statement, ‘Attentional training in mindfulness programs cultivates the ability to shift modes as an essential first step to being able to hold *all* experience (sensory and conceptual) in a wider awareness that is itself neither merely sensory or conceptual.’²⁷⁴ In mindful experience it is essential to shift to this wider more open awareness that holds all our experience in conscious awareness. It is in this place of open awareness, as we expand our bandwidth of conscious experience, that we can also become more aware of God’s presence. In my experience the same attentional capacities are at work in mindfulness of my anxious thoughts that are at work in mindfulness of God. This awareness has also been called the ‘observing self.’²⁷⁵ I also call it the ‘witnessing self,’ as a warmer phrase.²⁷⁶ Having outlined these three aspects of self: narrative, experiential and witnessing, I can then show the moves that I make in mindfulness.

The first move is to navigate from my narrative self, my head, into my experiential self – my body, my senses, my breath. This is important because in doing this I shift into the present moment, my body, breath, and senses

²⁷² J. Mark G. Williams, “Mindfulness and Psychological Process,” *Emotion* Vol. 10, no. 1 (2010): 2.

²⁷³ See Farb et al, “Attending to the present, 313-314. See also D. J. Siegel, “Mindfulness Training and Neural Integration: Differentiation of Distinct Streams of Awareness and the Cultivation of Well-being,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2, no. 4 (2007), 261, accessed March 12, 2022, <http://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsm034>. for a witnessing or observing self that holds the narrative and experiential self.

²⁷⁴ Williams, “Mindfulness and Psychological Process,” 2.

²⁷⁵ See for a full-length exploration of this idea. Arthur J. Deikman, *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy* (Beacon Press, 1982). Siegel, “Mindfulness training and neural integration,” for delineating the witnessing or observing self holding narrative and experiential selves, 261.

²⁷⁶ Shapiro et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 379. Shapiro also uses the term witnessing and says re-perceiving allows an ‘intimate observing or witnessing, not a detached one.’

can never be at any other point of time.²⁷⁷ In my head I can be at any point in time, as I worry about the morning prayer I am doing tomorrow or imagining reactions to the sermon I preached last Sunday. It is a move I can make without conscious awareness through having natural ways to find a calm state of mind when I am stressed, for example, by taking the dog for a walk. If I can learn to make this move intentionally and with conscious awareness, then I move out of mind wandering and my distorted stories. Within this AE I am using my witnessing self to tell a bigger narrative, one that can hold the distorted narratives within me. As a graced response, as God transforms my awareness, I want to rewrite my story, in my mind, and body not just on the written page.

However, there is another move and that is into my witnessing self, where I can hold both my narrative self, and my experiential self in conscious awareness. It is in this place that I learn to relativize my distorted thoughts and stories as just thoughts, not facts.²⁷⁸ But for my purposes it is also in this place of awareness that I can sense God's presence. In this place I am also in the present moment, and here my experience is that I am more likely to find God. The theology of the present moment is also something that I develop further, particularly in chapter four where I intentionally seek to reclaim my present moments from the pull of anxiety.

These definitions make a statement that is anthropological, they raise a central, if neglected, part of our incarnated being – the importance of awareness and attention, and the different aspects of self we can inhabit. Mindfulness definitions also recognize other mindful capacities that we all have. These have been called 'self-awareness,' 'self-regulation,' and 'self-transcendence.'²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Mark Williams and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (London: Piatkus, 2011), 197-198.

²⁷⁸ Williams and Penman, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace*, 87.

²⁷⁹ David, R. Vago, and David A. Silbersweig, "Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Self-Transcendence (S-ART): A Framework for Understanding the Neurobiological Mechanisms of Mindfulness," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6 (2012):4.

Vago defines these three aspects of mindfulness as:

meta-awareness of self (self-awareness), an ability to effectively manage or alter one's responses and impulses (self-regulation), and the development of a positive relationship between self and other that transcends self-focused needs and increases prosocial characteristics (self-transcendence).²⁸⁰

I need to transcend my anxious self, my wounded boarding school self, through self-awareness and the regulation of the anxiety that takes up so much of my inner space. These capacities can be enhanced through mindful awareness practices.

Mindfulness theory distinguishes between mindfulness-based therapies like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-incorporating therapies like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). I also draw on the ideas of experiential avoidance, cognitive fusion and acceptance from ACT in my map of mindfulness.²⁸¹ Experiential avoidance is quite simply 'the process of trying to avoid your own experiences' as a way of regulating them.²⁸² Acceptance is the way to step out of avoidance, we accept the reality we face in the moment, without avoiding it.²⁸³ In cognitive fusion I become the difficult thought or feeling.²⁸⁴ In my experience of anxiety I was trying to avoid the difficult thought, not accepting it and often fused to it.

This map enabled me to understand myself more fully for the first time. It allowed me to make some crucial turns to inhabit the different aspects of my being. There is one more definition that has also helped me steer my course to mindfulness of God. It is this central summary of mindfulness by Jon Kabat-Zinn, "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the

²⁸⁰ Vago and Silbersweig, 2.

²⁸¹ Steven C. Hayes, *Get Out of Your Mind & Into Your Life: The New Acceptance & Commitment Therapy* (New Harbinger Publications, Inc, (2005), 30, 58.

²⁸² Hayes, 30.

²⁸³ Hayes, 45.

²⁸⁴ Hayes, 58.

present moment, and non-judgmentally.”²⁸⁵ Shapiro et al take this definition and break it down into key elements, and here I come back to her theme of reperceiving. These key elements are to intentionally practise mindfulness, training your attention, and changing your attitude. As you do this there is a shift in perspective where you ‘reperceive’ reality.²⁸⁶ Through reperceiving you can ‘*reflectively* choose what has been previously *reflexively* adopted and conditioned.’²⁸⁷ This has implications for wanting to live consciously by my values, ‘Reperceiving may also help people recognize what is meaningful for them and what they truly value.’²⁸⁸ I am wanting to be mindful of my ethical values and live by them. It is for this reason that I am intentionally creating a mindful rule of life. My experience is that, as I have immersed myself in mindfulness of God, a spiritual reperceiving occurred for me.

In the early Christian East, the contemplatives developed a concept called *diorasis*, a clear diagnostic seeing.²⁸⁹ My spiritual reperceiving through mindfulness would be a form of *diorasis* that involves all the senses, with awareness at the heart. I am aware that the language of biblical studies has been critiqued for its ‘eye-centricity’ from the perspective of disability studies, and that using the metaphor of seeing clearly or not clearly is problematic.²⁹⁰ My preferred term is reperceiving, which takes up all the senses, awareness, imagination, body, emotions and thinking. It can also be a spiritual metaphor which is how I develop it.

In summary, I am cultivating a witnessing self through the reading of secular mindfulness texts which outline the theory, map of mindful

²⁸⁵ Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, 375.

²⁸⁶ Shapiro et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 374.

²⁸⁷ Shapiro et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 380.

²⁸⁸ Shapiro et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 380.

²⁸⁹ Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Collegeville, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1986), 77. See also Irene Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, translated by Anthony P. Githiel (Cistercian Publications, 1990), 91-2.

²⁹⁰ Louise J. Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

capacities and practices that enhance mindful awareness, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence. I am reading secular mindfulness texts to develop a daily intention to practise; to train my attention to present-moment awareness. These texts are also guiding me in changing my attitude from self-judgement to compassion, to re-perceive reality and to relativize my thoughts. I am also reading these texts to become aware of my different selves, my narrative self, my experiential self and to hold both in my witnessing self. I am writing this chapter to show how the texts led me by the hand through the theory and practices. I then apply this anthropological map to my spirituality. This immersion in these guiding texts enabled some crucial turns within my wellbeing and spirituality which I develop further below. These turns are central to the manuductive process I underwent.

This map has also enabled me to reflect critically on the cultures I inhabit, to bring them into greater awareness. Another aspect of this attentional training is as an antidote to the shaping of us by culture. I know that my boarding school culture made me unaware through blinkered loyalty, and my church experience was to inhabit activity and service, not awareness. N. Katherine Hayles critiques the wider digital nature of our culture which channels us into ‘hyper-attention, a cognitive mode that has a low threshold for boredom, alternates flexibly between different information streams, and prefers a high level of stimulation.’²⁹¹ I see this in myself when I go on retreat and put my phone away, and experience immediate boredom and the desire to search for the different information streams my phone provides. It may be that the intuitive turn toward mindfulness in the same culture is a form of tacit searching for the antidote to this cultural stream of hyper-attention and digital media. The other phrase that Hayles uses as the opposite of hyper-attention is ‘deep attention.’²⁹² This is the ability to sustain attention.

²⁹¹ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 12.

²⁹² Hayles, 12.

The mindful turns in my life and spirituality

I was not living an aware, embodied, or emotionally full life. Mindfulness enabled some crucial turns: a turn to awareness, a turn to the embodied, a turn to the emotional life, and a turn to incarnational spirituality.²⁹³ As I look back now reflectively and critically, I am aware that I experienced these turns in my life as illuminative turns, and they will frame my outline of this immersion in mindfulness.²⁹⁴ The turns are connected - a turn to awareness out of automaticity, which enabled a turn to the body and senses; the turn to the body and senses enabled a turn to unpleasant and pleasant emotions, a shift in perspective sometimes called re-perceiving, and most unexpectedly a turn to incarnational spirituality. As I outline these turns below, I am primarily focusing on mindful awareness practices, with an application of the theory that lies behind these practices.

The first mindful turn was to awareness. A spiritual dimension to this turn was that it was an ethical mnemonic awareness as outlined in the introduction. In Mark 8:33 I am invited to remember the things of God. Manuductive reading is historically connected to this idea of 'remembrance of God;' manuductive texts lead you by helping you hold the way to God in your memory.²⁹⁵ My emphasis on the importance of remembering the things of God in each moment is one reason that I make use of manuductive reading, with its emphasis on helping one remember. I could also describe this as my reader-response to the text. It is the response that Fowler calls a 'reverent Bible reader,' but also, I hope, an informed reading.²⁹⁶

As I look back at this first crucial illuminative turn to awareness out of automaticity, I am drawing on the concept of 'headnotes' as legitimate data.

²⁹³ The anthropology of mindfulness makes these aspects of our being central to its theory and practice.

²⁹⁴ This is a heuristic term referenced earlier, describing a phase in my research.

²⁹⁵ Candler, 35.

²⁹⁶ Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 4.

Sarah Wall summarizes the legitimacy of using ‘headnotes’, as memories from the field that have been reflected on in AE.²⁹⁷ I have discussed these turns in personal counselling and supervision as a therapist, and so my recollection of what happened has been critically reflected on with others. The first helpful frame was automaticity of my living versus cultivating intentional awareness. I know the experience of going upstairs to get something and by the time I have got to the top of the stairs I have forgotten what it is I went up to get. This is called being on autopilot. An important part of mindfulness training is recognizing the automaticity of much of our lives. In this automatic pilot ‘it is as if the body is doing one thing, while the mind is doing something else.’²⁹⁸ The theme of fragments emerges in this as in ‘automatic pilot, fragments of negative thinking are less likely to be noticed.’²⁹⁹ These can form themselves into dysfunctional scripts.³⁰⁰ In eight-week mindfulness programmes becoming aware of automaticity is often the first lesson. The first practice is usually eating a raisin, or piece of chocolate, because eating is often done mindlessly and on autopilot.³⁰¹ As I practised eating more mindfully, I became aware of my capacity for living on autopilot, but also became aware of my senses, looking at the raisin in the light, what it felt like to touch, the smell and taste of it. This is an embodied experience. I became aware that my senses were ‘streams of awareness,’ and that I had not thought of them like that before.³⁰² Although I am separating out these turns, they are more like an interwoven spiral of insights and practices.

The next key turn as part of the interwoven spiral of change was a turn to my body and senses from living in my head, what had been a disembodied

²⁹⁷ Sarah Wall, “Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7 no. 1 (March 2008), 45-46, accessed March 20, 2022, <http://doi.org/10.1177/160940690800700103>.

²⁹⁸ Zindel V. Segal, J Mark G. Williams, & John D. Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse* (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 2002), 99.

²⁹⁹ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 99.

³⁰⁰ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 99.

³⁰¹ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 99-125.

³⁰² Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, 70-72. In this book Siegel refers to the senses as streams of awareness.

avoidant existence. The central practice I tried which naturally followed on from eating the raisin exercise was the body scan.³⁰³ Listening to the audio meditation I lay down on the bed and breathed intentionally into every part of my body beginning with my toes and ending with my face. The idea was not to think but simply to become aware of the physical sensations in my body. In the body scan I moved from focused attention on parts of my body to an open awareness of my whole body. The meditation would encourage me to notice when my mind wandered, what it had wandered to and to direct it back to my body.³⁰⁴

The body scan has become part of the daily rhythm of my mindfulness practice since 2006 and one of the key exercises that enable me to find a calm state of mind. I use it first thing in the morning as I ice my back and often my body will just relax straight away. In this practice particularly I have learnt to exercise the muscle of attention: focusing my attention, my mind wanders, I notice what it has wandered to and direct it back.³⁰⁵ I move to this place of open awareness I have referenced already where I can hold thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. The practices enabled me to implicitly reinforce the theory behind mindfulness. In particular, the idea that thoughts are not facts, that I am bigger than my thoughts, that thoughts are just passing mental events.³⁰⁶

Segal et al devote a whole chapter to this idea in their book on Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).³⁰⁷ In cognitive therapy I am trying to change my thoughts; in mindfulness one is focusing on a 'change of relationship to one's thoughts.'³⁰⁸ The change of relationship is in having the insight that my thoughts are not facts, that they are just passing mental

³⁰³ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 112-113.

³⁰⁴ See Segal et al, 1 *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 12-3.

³⁰⁵ See Hasenkamp et al, 751, for mind wandering. As referenced already Daniel Goleman calls these steps the muscle of attention see, Daniel Goleman, 'Meditation: A Practical Way to Retrain Attention', November 2013, accessed 18th November 2015, available at <http://www.mindful.org/meditation-a-practical-way-to-retrain-attention/>.

³⁰⁶ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 176.

³⁰⁷ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 244-268.

³⁰⁸ Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*, 248.

events. Mindfulness theory critiques the disembodied nature of our culture, ‘While we get a great deal of training in our education systems in thinking of all kinds, we have almost no exposure to the cultivation of intimacy with that other innate capacity of ours that we call awareness.’³⁰⁹ This is certainly true of my experience of public school. The Christian philosopher James K.A. Smith also critiques the church in the West for its emphasis on information and thinking at the expense of embodied formation.³¹⁰ Instead of living all the time in my narrative self (my head) and its distorted scripts, I turned to my experiential self, my body, senses, and breath. As I learned to inhabit this part of me, I became aware that I am bigger than my thoughts, my thoughts become relativized to some degree, I am less fused to them.³¹¹ My witnessing self which can hold both these other selves, further enabled me to see my thoughts as just passing mental events.

The third turn was to my emotions, unpleasant, aversive ones as well as pleasant ones which I realised I had been running away from and avoiding. I was especially avoiding the shadow of anxiety. By turning toward my body and breath I was able to access emotions held in the body, that I had previously avoided.³¹² I was able to hold them rather than be held by them, be a witness to them not a victim of them.³¹³

Another way I was able to hold my thoughts and feelings, to be a witness of them, not a victim of them, was through the mindful capacities, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence already outlined.³¹⁴ They are part of my map or constellation of key navigational points in mindfulness. I turned intentionally toward these mindful capacities and sought to enhance them. As I enhanced my capacity for self-awareness

³⁰⁹ Williams and Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, 15.

³¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 43.

³¹¹ Cognitive fusion is an idea in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) when I become the anxious thought, see Hayes, 58.

³¹² ACT argues that experiential avoidance, as a way of regulating emotions is at the heart of most psychological difficulty, see Hayes, 30.

³¹³ This is a commonly stated axiom.

³¹⁴ Vago and Silbersweig, 2.

through mindful awareness practices, I was able to become aware of the existence of anxious thoughts and feelings I had previously avoided. I was then able to regulate the emotion of anxiety by holding it and naming it, rather than regulate it by avoiding it.³¹⁵ I had also realised that I avoided feelings of happiness just in case they were taken away – as they had been when I was a child at boarding school.³¹⁶ As I made these steps of self-awareness and self-regulation I was able to transcend my anxious self-focus and reclaim my present moments.

However, it is the fourth turn toward an incarnational spirituality that I want to focus on now. A key season in my life was in 2006, a year of discovery and transformation. As well as finding secular mindfulness I also discovered two contemplative practices. The first was the Jesus Prayer and the second was *Lectio Divina*, a slow meditative reading of scripture. The Jesus Prayer is an ancient Christian prayer that is repetitively meditated on, ‘Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.’³¹⁷ It is implicitly embodied in that you say the first part of the prayer on your inbreath, and the second part on your outbreath. You can also use a prayer rope, where each time you say the prayer, you measure off a knot.³¹⁸ This adds to the embodied nature of the prayer. I had some conversations with Simon Barrington-Ward, the former Bishop of Coventry about the prayer and how to use it, as well as using his book as a guide.³¹⁹ Simon was able to be a true second-person guide for the Jesus Prayer. I intentionally made the Jesus Prayer an embodied, attentional training practice, like the mindful awareness practices of secular mindfulness, using insights about the link

³¹⁵ See also Susan M. Orsillo, Lizabeth Roemer, and Darren W. Holowka, “Acceptance-Based Behavioral Therapies for Anxiety Using Acceptance and Mindfulness to Enhance Traditional Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches,” in *Acceptance and Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Anxiety: Conceptualization and Treatment*, eds. Susan M. Orsillo and Lizabeth Roemer (Springer, 2005), 11-14.

³¹⁶ Paul Gilbert, and Choden, *Mindful Compassion: Using the Power of Mindfulness and Compassion to Transform Our Lives* (London: Robinson, 2013), 158.

³¹⁷ Barrington-Ward, 11.

³¹⁸ Barrington-Ward, 84.

³¹⁹ Barrington-Ward, 83.

between breath and emotion and intentionally using the muscle of attention. This reshaping of the Jesus Prayer is a novel application of it.

As I breathed in and out the meditation, I sought to be aware of any feelings that came into my awareness. As I pay attention to my breath, research says that I can become aware of feelings that might have been out of my awareness, as each emotion I feel has a different breathing pattern.³²⁰ I did not try and control the breath. I used the muscle of attention: I focused my attention on the breath; my mind wandered; I noticed (through meta-awareness) that my mind had wandered, what it had wandered to and directed it back to the prayer. I adopted the sitting posture recommended by mindfulness teachers, holding my back straight, my feet on the ground, not using the back of the chair for support.³²¹ I did not use the prayer as a distraction to keep anxiety at bay, but to face the reality of it. I am using the language of secular mindfulness in all this description. In this spiritual practice I am switching from my narrative self to my experiential self and then to my witnessing self which held my thoughts, my feelings, my bodily sensations, and my sense of God's presence in an open awareness. I realised that this was not about emptying my mind which is physiologically impossible, but about stilling it and shifting into the place of open witnessing.³²² All this is in the service of being in the present moment and not being a victim of automatic mind wandering. My experience is that in both the awareness of my thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, and my awareness of God, I am using the same incarnational capacities. In this witnessing self I am in a place of expanded 'attentional space.'³²³

I followed a similar pattern with *Lectio Divina*. This slow meditative reading of scripture has a long history but the teaching of it does not usually

³²⁰ Paul Grossman, "Mindfulness for Psychologists: Paying Kind Attention to the Perceptible," *Mindfulness* 1, (2010): 92.

³²¹ See Danny Penman, *Mindfulness for Creativity: Adapt, Create and Thrive in a Frantic World* (Piatkus, 2015), 49.

³²² Ruby Wax, *Sane New World: Taming the Mind* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 136.

³²³ Shapiro et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 378.

emphasise how it can be an embodied practice. I first came across this meditative reading of scripture in a book on preaching, but really developed a practice through going to Worth Abbey, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monastery. I found a book called *Finding Sanctuary* by the then Abbot, Christopher Jamison a particular doorway into the contemplative.³²⁴ When I practice it daily, I adopt the same embodied posture as with the Jesus Prayer. I notice my breathing. I use a physical Bible that I can hold in my hands, turning physical pages. I also use the muscle of attention – focusing on scripture, my mind wanders, I notice through meta-awareness that my mind has wandered, I direct it back to scripture. Implicit in the instructions to read, meditate, pray, and find a place of contemplation is the idea that this practice also arrives at an open receptive space to simply contemplate God – which I hypothesize is the same space I find in secular meditative practices.³²⁵ I am using the Christian practices for a different intention – a spiritual one not a therapeutic one. However, this is built on the realisation that I could use secular mindfulness practices for spiritual intention, as they had implicitly led me into a spiritual place incarnationally. The intention would be to re-perceive myself, others, God the world, to perceive as God intends me to perceive. I intentionally made my version of *Lectio Divina* an embodied, attentional training practice, like the mindful awareness practices of secular mindfulness, using insights about the link between breath and emotion and intentionally using the muscle of attention. This reshaping of the *Lectio Divina* is a novel application of it, using secular mindfulness theory.

I have identified the contextual theological desire to translate mindfulness of God into secular language, because I speak the language of mindfulness. I am using secular mindfulness to develop a mindful spirituality, and to translate mindfulness of God into secular mindfulness language that is accessible to others. This is part of my *original* contribution. I have also

³²⁴ Christopher Jamison, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* (London: Phoenix, 2006), 60-66.

³²⁵ Jamison, 63-66.

identified the turns that secular mindfulness enabled me to make that were personally transformative, especially in terms of an incarnational spirituality. In this research I have drawn out much more the embodied nature of how I recontextualized the Jesus Prayer and *Lectio Divina*.

Secular mindfulness and God

I have used secular mindfulness to direct me toward God and translated my understanding of mindfulness of God into accessible secular language. Much Christian engagement with secular mindfulness has been in the other direction, bringing secular mindfulness into the Christian world for therapeutic reasons. A key representative figure is Kirk A. Bingaman who has written extensively and brought mindfulness into pastoral care and counselling. He engages with mindfulness and the concept of neuroplasticity as developed in secular psychology and its implications for pastoral care and counselling.³²⁶ Bingaman argues that neuroscience and its study of spiritual practices has significant implications for pastoral care and counselling. Firstly, the discovery of neuroplasticity, the capacity of the brain to change and learn has important implications, as this ability is accessible to all. Spiritual practices can be used to alter the brain, changing its structure and activity for the better.³²⁷ Bingaman uses the biblical concept of new creation as a theological frame of reference to support his argument (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17), ‘if anyone is living more mindfully and contemplatively in the spirit of Jesus Christ, they will in fact become a different person.’³²⁸ This is the promise of neuroplasticity as engaged through mindful awareness practices.³²⁹

Although Bingaman’s focus is on pastoral care and counselling and the implications of mindfulness practice for mental health, he also recognizes it

³²⁶ Bingaman, “The Art of Contemplative,” 477-489.

³²⁷ Bingaman, “The Art of Contemplative,” 479-480.

³²⁸ Bingaman, “The Art of Contemplative,” 479.

³²⁹ Bingaman, “The Art of Contemplative,” 478-479.

has implications for our spiritual wellbeing. He argues that the Centering Prayer, a Christian contemplative practice is a form of mindfulness, and this is my other point of difference with him.³³⁰ My question is not with a shift on emphasis to practices as more central in a Christian way of life; it is more to ask: is Centering Prayer a form of mindfulness? I am arguing in chapter four that mindfulness opens the door to kataphatic spirituality, which is incarnational and embodied. Ruffing, for example, defines Centering Prayer as apophatic, 'Vague, imageless, sometimes vacuous states of consciousness are preferable to a rich texture of imagery, sacramental experiences of the natural world and relationships, and interpersonal presence and communication.'³³¹ I highlight these two different views on Centering Prayer to make the point that it is more likely that kataphatic forms of prayer are akin to secular mindfulness practices, than apophatic practices. Further research would need to be done on Centering Prayer to see whether it is more apophatic than kataphatic.

Where I do have sympathy with Bingaman is his argument that more emphasis should be placed on contemplative practice and mindfulness in Christian communities – rather than the current emphasis on what is believed.³³² It is interesting that living in community here at Scargill House, the emphasis is first on a rule of life, pathways of living, putting our values into practise before it is about signing up for a statement of faith. I don't know if this is a distinctive of other communities, but it is a helpful emphasis here. It may be that as I create a mindful rule to enable a fresh expression of mindful church based around the value of community, the emphasis will be on how we live before it is on what we believe. However, what we believe influences strongly how we live.

³³⁰ Kirk A. Bingaman, "The Promise of Neuroplasticity," 549.

³³¹ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 233.

³³² Bingaman, "The Art of Contemplative," 481-482.

Tracking mindfulness of God

As noted earlier within this foundational reading and practice to develop mindful awareness there was a key epiphany in my spiritual AE which was the discovery of Diadochus of Photike, a fifth century Greek Bishop and pioneer of the Jesus Prayer and his concept of mindfulness of God. Olivier Clement translated an original Greek phrase from Diadochus as ‘Let us keep our eyes always fixed on the depths of our heart with an unceasing *mindfulness of God*.’³³³ I revisit the idea of mindfulness of God here, as I track the historical arc of which it was a part, since its history helped me place my adaptation of the Jesus Prayer within that arc.³³⁴ I have found fragmentary references to mindfulness or remembrance of God in the Christian contemplative tradition.

For example, this strand of the remembrance of God can be traced within the history of the Jesus Prayer.³³⁵ Johnsén identifies three main authors in which this theme appears in early monastic sources, John Cassian, Diadochus of Photike and John Climacus.³³⁶ Why Clement translated this phrase of Diadochus as ‘mindfulness of God’ would require a speculative answer, but when I read it in 2006 it was for me a culturally resonant translation. It may be that Clement was aware of the use of the Hebrew word in Psalm 8 generally translated ‘attend to’ or ‘mindful of,’ which Megan I.J. Daffern calls a “Remember’-related word’ in the ‘semantic field’ of remembering in the Psalms.³³⁷ She argues that ‘remembrance and attention are closely and poetically linked.’³³⁸ I have linked attention and awareness to remembering in my model of ethical awareness.

³³³ My italics, quoted in Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

³³⁴ Ermatinger, *Following the Footsteps*, 24-35.

³³⁵ Henrik Rydell Johnsén, “The Early Jesus Prayer and Meditation in Greco-Roman Philosophy,” in *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Halvor Eifring (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 93-106.

³³⁶ Johnsén, 94.

³³⁷ Megan I.J. Daffern, “The Semantic Field of ‘Remembering’ in the Psalms,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41, no. 1, (2016): 94.

³³⁸ Daffern, 94.

References to the Jesus Prayer in these early sources are fragmented and as Johnsén points out ‘none of these texts were really a practical handbook on the Jesus Prayer.’³³⁹ As the tradition developed there appeared to be different intentions or aims in addition to the remembrance of God. Ware identifies that for Evagrius the aim is to arrive at ‘non-discursive or “apophatic prayer.”’³⁴⁰ In the sixth century St. Barsanuphius and St. John based in Gaza, do not use the Jesus Prayer in the service of apophatic prayer, but to cultivate an ethical awareness based around ‘humility, obedience and the excision of self-will.’³⁴¹ This is more in the spirit of how I have developed the Jesus Prayer, as a spiritual mindful awareness practice, with an intentional attentional training element.

An important element of the Jesus Prayer for my kataphatic spirituality is that the focus is on the incarnate son of God, not the ‘unknowable God’ of the apophatic tradition.³⁴² My charismatic focus on the human Jesus of Nazareth, who though divine, performed miracles through his humanity in the power of the Holy Spirit, made the incarnation of Jesus very important to me spiritually. It is later in chapter four that I engage with Balthasar’s emphasis on incarnational, kataphatic spirituality which is a helpful theological frame for my mindful spirituality.³⁴³ I am retrieving key elements of the historical Jesus Prayer, whilst recontextualizing them for the twenty-first century through my engagement with mindfulness.

St. John Climacus from the seventh century links the Jesus Prayer to stillness (*hesuchia*).³⁴⁴ His later follower Hesychius emphasises the Jesus

³³⁹ Johnsén, 94.

³⁴⁰ Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer: Diadochus, Gaza, Sinai,” in *The Study of Spirituality* ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold, SJ (London: SPCK, 1986), 177.

³⁴¹ Ware, 179.

³⁴² See Edward Howells, “Apophatic Spirituality,” in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London, SCM Press, 2005), 117-119 for a summary of apophatic spirituality.

³⁴³ See Stephen Fields, SJ, “Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), 224-241 for an introduction to this theme.

³⁴⁴ Ware, 182.

Prayer as a way of cultivating watchfulness (*nepsis*).³⁴⁵ Watchfulness does become a major theme associated with the Jesus Prayer.³⁴⁶ In a collection of contemplative texts from the early Christian tradition the following comment is made about these spiritual writings, “They show the way to awaken and develop attention and consciousness, to attain that state of watchfulness which is the hallmark of sanctity.”³⁴⁷ I interpret watchfulness as a state of prayerful attentiveness, and Ware makes the point that ‘Continual prayer does not mean merely the continual saying of prayers; it may also take the form of an implicit state.’³⁴⁸ Watchfulness is a NT command, which again my research has found to be neglected in twenty-first century evangelical and charismatic discipleship, even though it was the hallmark of sanctity for the early Christian contemplatives. A probable source for the idea of watchfulness in Diadochus and the development of the Jesus Prayer was the gospels, including Mark’s gospel. The Jesus Prayer itself is based in part on the prayer of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:47. The Jesus Prayer’s link to watchfulness, may well also be inspired by a command of Jesus in Mark’s gospel to be watchful (13:37), a command which is present continuous in the Greek. In other words, we are commanded to ‘go on being watchful.’³⁴⁹

The idea of mindfulness or remembrance of God also occurs within the Benedictine tradition of monasticism, which has been very important in my spiritual journey – and may help in part explain my intuitive connection with it. A key summary of this strand is given by Michael Casey. Michael Casey says mindfulness of God is at the heart of the monastic tradition, and the key to personal and community transformation.³⁵⁰ He takes the more

³⁴⁵ Ware, 182.

³⁴⁶ G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard and K. Ware, eds., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 164.

³⁴⁷ Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, 13.

³⁴⁸ Ware, 180.

³⁴⁹ For the influence of the New Testament on the pioneers of the Jesus Prayer see Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer* revised edition (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007), 29-35.

³⁵⁰ Michael Casey, “Mindfulness of God in the Monastic Tradition,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* XVII, no. 2 (1982): 111-126.

traditional term, *memoria Dei*, memory of God, and defines it as a form of mindfulness of God.³⁵¹ He argues that it is a biblical doctrine and practice, tracing it from Deuteronomy and the Psalms, through the early Desert Fathers and Mothers and into the monastic tradition.³⁵² I agree with this reading of scripture and contemplative history. Columba Stewart, another Benedictine scholar puts ‘mindfulness of the divine presence’ as central in Benedictine spirituality.³⁵³ Terrence Kardong in his translation and commentary on Benedict’s Rule highlights that ‘mindfulness and remembrance’ is a ‘favorite theme of Benedict.’³⁵⁴ I highlight the contribution of Benedictine scholars here, in a selective way, to emphasize that others have worked with the idea of mindfulness of God and seen it as central to the Christian life, but also to underline I have only found fragmented references to the concept so far. Why these important Benedictine scholars all work with the same idea is interesting. The foundation of Benedictine life through *Lectio Divina* may have highlighted the scriptural strand of remembering God. Benedict’s rule also takes up this idea. It may be that Christian-Buddhist dialogue, for example, what was called ‘The Gethsemani Encounter’ in July 1996 also contributed to this usage of the term, which dialogue Benedictines attended and played a key role.³⁵⁵ In his outline of the contemplative life in the book entitled *The Gethsemani Encounter* James Wiseman OSB also alludes to the centrality of mindfulness of God. He describes the contemplative life as ‘a fully integrated life, in which *all* our activities, whatever they may be, can be the occasion for, or can grow out of, that mindfulness of God which is the heart

³⁵¹ Casey, 111.

³⁵² Casey, 112.

³⁵³ Columba Stewart OSB, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), 31.

³⁵⁴ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 140.

³⁵⁵ Donald Mitchell and James A. Wiseman OSB, “Introduction,” in *The Gethsemani Encounter* eds. Donald Mitchell and James A. Wiseman OSB (New York: Continuum, 1998), xx.

of contemplation.’³⁵⁶ Within this broad focus on God he emphasizes the centrality of Christ, with the importance of ‘holding him in view.’³⁵⁷

I am seeking to emulate this holistic approach and central focus on Christ in my life. Wiseman references the importance of practices and describes the danger of focusing so much on one thing that ‘the essential symbols and practices of the [contemplative] life are unable to exercise their full power of fostering the mindfulness of God...’³⁵⁸ One section of his chapter is ‘*Being Mindful of God in All Walks of Life*.’³⁵⁹ My attraction to Benedictine spirituality has also been its compatibility with ordinary life. In a beautiful phrase Wiseman’s description of the contemplative life is summarized as ‘one of graced attention to Christ.’³⁶⁰ Here in the Benedictine tradition, grace and awareness go together.

In engaging here briefly with these others strands that reference mindfulness of God I am aware that the quiver of mindfulness is full of arrows. I have tried to follow one arrow in flight, my synthesis of secular mindfulness with mindfulness of God. This necessitates leaving many other strands undeveloped or merely alluded to.

For this reason, in this chapter I mainly engage with the secular and spiritual texts that focus on mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God. I argue that the same attentional capacities are at work in both. These capacities are a common factor between secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God. I have also identified distinctives. For example, there is the question of intention. In secular mindfulness for health the intention might be to shift from being a victim of your thoughts to a witness of them, or to hold anxiety rather than be held by it. In mindfulness of God, I am

³⁵⁶ James A. Wiseman OSB, “The Contemplative Life,” a sub-section of “Prayer and Meditation,” *The Gethsemani Encounter*, eds. Donald Mitchell and James A. Wiseman OSB (New York: Continuum, 1998), 57.

³⁵⁷ Wiseman OSB, “The Contemplative Life,” 55.

³⁵⁸ Wiseman OSB, “The Contemplative Life,” 58, my insertion.

³⁵⁹ Wiseman OSB, “The Contemplative Life,” 59.

³⁶⁰ Ven. Dr. Dhammarakkhita, “Prayer and Meditation,” in *The Gethsemani Encounter* eds. Donald Mitchell and James A. Wiseman OSB (New York: Continuum, 1998),35.

seeking to be continuously aware of the presence of God. I am also looking to cultivate an ethical awareness so that I can choose the concerns of God in each ethical moment of choice rather than the human anxious concerns jostling for my attention. This emphasis on the ground of all mindfulness being our God-given attentional capacities enables me to address the main concern raised by some evangelicals toward mindfulness, that it is solely a Buddhist construct.³⁶¹ This is a central question raised by some of those who have attended the many retreats, seminars and lectures I have given on mindfulness. In answering these suspicions, the texts have also guided me.

Evangelical suspicions of mindfulness

I have had many conversations with other Christians who believe that mindfulness is Buddhist and has no other history. They, therefore, believe that mindfulness is suspect. Through paying careful attention to the mindfulness literature this question about the roots of mindfulness can be addressed. I am looking at these definitions from a theological angle, and so the key question to ask in answer to this concern about the Buddhist roots of mindfulness is, what is the source of mindfulness? I am using here the main definitions to be found in secular mindfulness. However, there is a consensus that we have mindful capacities of awareness and attention, of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence. I have already outlined these terms, and from the perspective of theological anthropology these are God-given capacities. Another common misunderstanding is to narrowly define mindfulness as practices or meditation originating with Buddhism.³⁶² Mindful awareness practices are only effective because there are mindful capacities that can be enhanced. However, one can be mindful without having a meditative practice.³⁶³ That the ground of all mindfulness

³⁶¹ See, Roger Bretherton, "Mindfulness: What's All the Fuss About?" in *Being Mindful, Being Christian: A Guide to Mindful Discipleship*, eds. Roger Bretherton, Joanna Collicutt, and Jennifer Brickman (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2016), 18-20, where this question is addressed.

³⁶² In many conversations with people talking to me about mindfulness they define mindfulness as Buddhist meditative practices.

³⁶³ See the work of Ellen Langer, who writes about mindfulness from a psychological perspective, without practices or a religious element, Ellen J. Langer, *Mindfulness* (Merloyd Lawrence, 1989).

is the existence of these attentional capacities explains why historically there are different forms of mindfulness, including Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, secular and so on.³⁶⁴ Secular mindfulness has produced the most researched map of our attentional capacities.³⁶⁵ In exploring these suspicions, as someone who inhabits this evangelical world, I further developed my independent voice as a researcher.

From a theological perspective, however, there is a problem in asking the question, ‘how can I be mindful of God?’ This question came out of my wider reading, but deeply impacted my manuductive reading. In the research process I paused, took a deep breath, and looked at this question carefully. This was a key moment of stepping back from the manuductive process and taking a wider look at what I was trying to do – discover my part in being mindful of God. This led to some wider reading in spiritual theology. I examine this problem here, as it also helped to direct me in my quest.

A theological problem

Here we touch on a central paradox of the relationship between God and me, the gap between Creator and myself as a created being, ‘Yet of *themselves* not even personal beings are capable of entering into a relationship with God.’³⁶⁶ How can I be mindful of God if there is this insurmountable gap between myself and God? This is a key theological difficulty that needs addressing. The entering into a relationship with God is a graced response through the Holy Spirit. However, another paradox is in play here, and that is ‘God’s transforming grace is *supernatural*; yet it could not transform us unless God has already set in our natures an affinity to

³⁶⁴ I have talked about secular mindfulness, Buddhist mindfulness, Christian mindfulness, but I have also come across Jewish mindfulness in conversation with rabbis.

³⁶⁵ As I have outlined above.

³⁶⁶ Edward Yarnold, “The Theology of Christian Spirituality,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, SJ (London: SPCK, 1986), 11.

himself,' often defined as 'the image of God' within us.³⁶⁷ Here spiritual theology provides guard rails for how I am mindful of God. I play my part, but it is a graced response. I cannot be mindful of God unless God is first mindful of me (Psalm 8). The literature has helped me to frame my experience to see that my God-given attentional capacities are part of the image of God in me, and part of my affinity as a created person to relate to God. I might be able to reclaim my present moments through mindfulness but only God can redeem them. I also pick up on this question of how I relate to God in chapter four, when the importance of relating to the incarnation of Jesus is explored in Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology.

Mark as a manuductive text

Mark's gospel has shaped my mindful spirituality. It has been a manuductive text for me. I have been informed as well by a reading of commentaries, articles, and books on Mark's gospel. I have found narrative criticism particularly helpful in shaping my reading of Mark's gospel. Important elements of this include looking at Mark as a whole, rather than just parts of it – an insight gleaned from studies arguing for its oral origins, and its delivery to its hearers as a whole rather than in parts.³⁶⁸ Textual evidence from Mark's gospel also support it as a deliberately constructed narrative that is worth hearing and reading as a whole.³⁶⁹ My AE reading is in agreement with Rhoad's narrative criticism reading of what he calls the 'rhetoric of contrast' in Mark's gospel.³⁷⁰ This outlines 'two contrasting ways of life.'³⁷¹ I wish to be mindful of God (and the things of God), the way of life, and choose the things of God over the human things jostling for my attention (an anxious way of life). In my church culture and in my

³⁶⁷ Yarnold, 12.

³⁶⁸ See for example, David M. Rhoads, *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel* (Fortress Press, 2004), 3 on treating Mark as a 'whole cloth,' and 177 for its oral origins.

³⁶⁹ Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 3.

³⁷⁰ Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 3.

³⁷¹ Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 45.

ministerial training, it is normative to both apply scripture to my life and draw on new forms of textual analysis as with narrative criticism.

A key transformative verse for me has been Mark 8:33, 'But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but merely human concerns.' As I analyse the impact of this verse on me from an AE perspective it has become an important theological or principle of discipleship for me. I must have in mind the things of God and choose them over the human things jostling for my attention, in each ethical moment of choice. Here Jesus recognizes that Peter does not have in mind the things of God, but merely human things. I have recognized that I do not have in mind the things of God, although I believe I should.

I have then asked myself, 'how do I have in mind the things of God?' I have also asked what are the things of God that are relevant to me, and what human things get in the way for me? In the context of this research one of the human things that gets in the way of my present moment ethical awareness of the things of God is anxiety and its root in boarding school. For example, if something makes me anxious (like public speaking) I might be tempted to experientially avoid the experience rather than doing it (which would be the thing of God).

In terms of how I have in mind the things of God – they are not there automatically they have to be placed there. The way I have done that is through a modified *Lectio Divina*, a slow meditative reading of scripture which creates mnemonic propositions that become part of the ground of my memory, and these become insights that can be recalled, remembered in a graced response as I actively co-operate with the Holy Spirit. As I analyse this personal finding and tentative model later in chapter four, I can ask if there are implications and possibilities for others to also experience transformation through a similar journey and use of *Lectio Divina* as a mindful awareness practice that creates a mnemonic awareness of the things of God.

My reading is that if I take a narrative criticism perspective, then Mark 8:33 is part of a wider pattern where the Markan Jesus models this idea of choosing the thing of God over the human thing, culminating in the Garden of Gethsemane where he chooses to do the will of God over his own desire to let the cup of suffering on the cross pass him by (Mark 14:32-42). Rhoads argues this in a whole chapter, 'A study in standards of judgement shows that the gospel of Mark is a tightly woven narrative reflecting two contrasting ways of life.'³⁷² He sees Mark 8:33 as the summary statement for these two ways of life, '(1) the things of God, that is, what God wills for people and (2) the things of people, that is, what people want for themselves.'³⁷³ In charismatic relation to the text, I have asked the question, 'how do I have in mind the things of God and choose them over the human (usually anxious) things jostling for my attention in each ethical moment of choice?' In Mark's gospel 'remembering' is part of seeing and hearing clearly in a spiritual sense (Mark 8:17) and remembering is central to my ethical model. I also see attentiveness to the things of God as an important component and make an associative link with watchfulness in the gospel.

Watchfulness and living out Mark 8:33 are another way of framing spiritual mindful awareness for me, a form of mindfulness of God. Watchfulness (mindful awareness of the things of God) is how I have become aware in each moment of choice what is the thing of God and what is the automatic script getting in the way. I wish to be an informed reader and have a sustained engagement with scripture that fulfils my AE aim for scripture to guide me in this journey to be mindful of God. This is in the service of lived experience.

I am engaging with the text in an embodied way, and the embodied nature of the culture that Mark wrote in is addressed by Louise Lawrence in her writings. Lawrence takes up this theme in her *Sense and Stigma In the Gospels*.³⁷⁴ She applies sensory criticism to the gospels acknowledging that

³⁷² Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 45.

³⁷³ Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 45.

³⁷⁴ Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, 3.

you can move beyond a rigid and automatic appropriating of ‘Aristotelian five-fold sensory models.’³⁷⁵ Lawrence also examines what she calls the ‘sense-scape’ in Mark’s gospel and points out that NT studies have neglected this area, ‘even a cursory look at New Testament texts reveal “corporeally” inclined cultures, where understanding is formed by sense experience just as much as words.’³⁷⁶ In a mindful approach understanding is also formed by sense experience as well as words.

What has emerged from my immersive AE reading of Mark’s gospel is the importance of watchfulness and having in mind the things of God. To me this is something to do with awareness and attention rather than thinking. This could be an anthropological difference between this historical time and Western focus on thinking. I believe it has emerged from the text but is also my reader-response. The text itself only gives some broad-brush pointers to how I might be watchful, but an examination of some of the history of reception of the idea of watchfulness gives more idea. My own contemporary reception of the idea linking it to insights in secular mindfulness offer further scope for understanding how I might cultivate watchfulness within a biblical spirituality.

Summary

In my research process my context of being a Baptist minister, psychotherapist, mindfulness researcher and contemplative, work together intuitively to create a synthesis between secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God. My felt sense was that this was possible because I am using the same attentional capacities in both, but that in mindfulness of God I am cooperating with the Holy Spirit. I have seen a family resemblance between mindful awareness and the watchfulness commanded by Jesus in

³⁷⁵ Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, 13.

³⁷⁶ Lawrence, “Exploring the Sense-scape,” 387.

Mark's gospel. I have been led to cultivating an ethical mnemonic awareness in the present moment.

I began to move in a way that shifted from self-focus to attending to others, and I began to self-transcend my anxious self and wounded self. All of this is a graced response – but within this grace I can play my part. As I free up my attentional capacities from self-focus and automatic cultural scripts, I can move to this place of mindful or watchful awareness and begin to sense the person and presence of Christ. I begin to develop a mindfully aware self in which I cooperate with the new creation enacted within by the Holy Spirit. I create a further strand of mnemonic awareness through intentional meditation on certain scriptures, which have been 'the things of God' for me to enact in the present moment.

In the research process, alongside my manuductive reading I created some intentional pieces of fieldwork. They form the next section in part two of this thesis. They focus on the iterative insights that emerged out of the research: the reclaiming of my present moments from anxiety, the reclaiming of my present moments from the shadow of the past, and the more fully inhabiting of my whole self in mindfulness of God. They are a response to my research questions.

Chapter Four

Reclaiming the present moment to be more mindful of God

Introduction

In this chapter I outline an intentional piece of fieldwork about reclaiming my present moments from anxiety to be more mindful of God. I have placed it here as, chronologically, it was the next section of the cyclical process in my research. It is here I endeavour to answer my second research question, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?' It is in that mindfulness of God that the divine presence can redeem those moments. I have applied the transcendental model of contextual theology in this chapter, as I examined my own experience.³⁷⁷ As the research developed, I became aware of obstacles to my being mindful of God. One of those obstacles was the inability to remain in the present moment because of anxiety. This is a spiritual obstacle as well as a therapeutic one. I am using mindful awareness as a gaze which enables both intimacy regarding my experience and a critical distance from my experience. I am using the implicit anthropology of mindfulness as a critical gaze when looking at the making of me in boarding school and church cultures.

In 2017 a key intuitive impulse led me to go on pilgrimage walks for mental wellbeing and spiritual transformation. These walks were in northern Spain and followed sections of the pilgrimage walk known as the Camino. These walks were present moment focused. On later reflection this seemed to be a Spirit-led homing instinct to wellbeing, that produced much greater fruit than I anticipated. The initial aim for going on pilgrimage walks was to become more mindful of God in the moment as well as let go of any bitterness, unforgiveness, and anxious thoughts that led to self-focus rather than focus on others. In my role as a Baptist minister, I wanted to be able to

³⁷⁷ Bevans, 97-110.

focus on God and others and move an anxious self-focus to a healthy God-directed one. My narrative on the pilgrimage of my spiritual quest may allow others to identify with that story and seek their own quest. My felt experience was that the pilgrim walk did allow me to lay down some of the burden of ministry.

After that first mindful pilgrimage walk, I decided to set up an intentional pilgrimage walk in 2018 recording all my thoughts and feelings as they occurred in the present moment over a two-day period. This would enable me to track my thoughts and feelings, whilst engaging in mindful practices, to see what happened to the trajectory of my anxiety and other hindrances. The transcripts of the two days walking were placed in chapter two as part of my evocative narrative, as a form of stream of consciousness. The tables in which I have analysed them I have placed in the appendices at the end of this thesis. My hypothesis was that such an extended walk done mindfully and spiritually would enhance my mindfulness of God and facilitate a letting go of everything that was hindering me from being focused on God and others. I wanted to frame an 'if and how' research question, 'would an extended mindful pilgrimage walk enable me to let go of bitterness, unforgiveness, anxious thoughts and become more mindful of God and others, and if so, how?' The key autoethnographic finding from this intentional piece of research was that my present moments were far more overwhelmed by anxious thoughts than I realised, making mindfulness of God and others more difficult. However, the mindful practices did reclaim my present moments on the second day. The key insight was that to be more mindful of God and others I needed to reclaim my present moments from the afflictive thought of anxiety, and I was left with the further question of how to do this daily when not on retreat.

I outline the significance of the present moment to mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God in the next section. I also take a broader look at the use of introspective phenomenology, mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God within my wider framework of AE as it applies in this

chapter. Within this I also outline the method, data collection and data analysis which makes this field work an intentional piece. I then present the results.

The problem of the present moment

There is a universal consensus in secular mindfulness that paying attention in the present moment is a central component of mindfulness, to enable mindful awareness of reality.³⁷⁸ However, staying in the present moment consistently is the ‘problem of the present moment,’ as the narrative self in our head is often preoccupied with mental time travel and rumination which takes one out of present moment reality.³⁷⁹ I knew that anxious ruminations took me out of the present moment, but I did not know the extent to which this happened. When I am in the present moment, I am better able to regulate my anxiety as I cultivate present moment mindful awareness of it. I am also interested in the present moment from a spiritual perspective. In C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*, the senior devil writes to the junior devil about their enemy God:

The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity.³⁸⁰

From this spiritual perspective it is important that I live in the present moment, as the point of intersection with the eternal.

My AE experience is that to live in the present moment is crucial in terms of my mental and spiritual wellbeing. I have been influenced theologically by Lewis’s statement. I have also been influenced by the Christian idea of the

³⁷⁸ A summary statement of the centrality of present-moment awareness as part of mindfulness definitions is presented in Vago, and Silbersweig, 4.

³⁷⁹ Farb et al, “Attending to the present,” 313-322.

³⁸⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Fount, 1991), 76.

‘sacrament of the present moment.’³⁸¹ Every moment is sacred and pregnant with the possibility of meeting God. As I knew my ability to be in the present moment was limited through anxiety, I needed to cultivate a present-moment mindful awareness that was both therapeutic and spiritual, to relativize my anxious thoughts and be more mindful of God’s presence. In this sense I am interested in the present moment from my psychological and spiritual experience, whilst reflecting on it theologically. I am using the word redemptive, in that secular mindfulness is sacramental, it works for good together with God-given capacities, but it is not redemptive. It is only the turn to mindfulness of God that enables redemption.

I am aware that in secular mindfulness there is an implicit mnemonic element to present moment mindful awareness that is being cultivated – remembering key values and propositions in the present moment is central.³⁸² Memory, in this sense, helps to reclaim the present moment. It was an historical idea, ‘mindfulness of God,’ that led me to the idea of reclaiming my present moments, and how to do it. In reclaiming my present moments, I am also changing my view of the future, namely a future less overshadowed by anxious thoughts. I recognize that I will also have to reclaim elements of the past mindfully to also free my present moments, since the genesis of my anxiety is rooted in the past. This is the focus of chapter five. From a spiritual perspective a further problem is how to remain continuously in the present moment to be open to moments of meeting with God that become explicit rather than implicit.

In helping me answer this problem I have taken some theoretical inspiration from secular psychology. The idea of implicit relational knowing developed by the Boston Change Study Process Group argues that as human beings we are in implicit relationship with each other, with much of our relational interaction out of our awareness. However, there can be moments

³⁸¹ The sacrament of the present moment is emphasized in Jean-Pierre de Caussade’s *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence*, trans. Alger Thorold (London: Collins, 1977), 7.

³⁸² Teasdale, “Metacognition,” 146-155.

of charged meeting'. I have applied this as an analogy for the human-divine relationship.³⁸³ At this point I will elaborate on this conceptual framework further. Besides our conscious experience, this theory argues there is an underground stream of relational knowing, that is implicit since it is 'a process that is conducted out of awareness most of the time.'³⁸⁴ Another way of describing this process could be the "unthought known."³⁸⁵ This hidden stream carries 'hidden or potential now moments.'³⁸⁶

A 'now' moment is a present moment that 'gets lit up subjectively and affectively, pulling one more into the present moment,' and moving the "shared implicit relationship" into the open.³⁸⁷ This unthought known now moves into conscious awareness and there are two possible responses to this now moment. There can be a 'therapeutic reorganisation or derailment,' of the relationship.³⁸⁸ Both parties in the relationship 'recognize' that 'a window of opportunity' has opened to them.³⁸⁹ It is interesting that the word 'recognition' is used as an important part of this moment, considering recognition theory, and that it is 'mutual.'³⁹⁰

Lying behind the Boston Change Study Group's interest in 'now moments' and 'implicit relational knowing' is an attempt to identify when positive therapeutic change happens.³⁹¹ Their argument is that a 'now moment that is therapeutically seized and mutually realized is a "moment of meeting."³⁹² This is when change happens.³⁹³ They call this entering a 'real

³⁸³ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 5-7, 10-24.

³⁸⁴ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 14.

³⁸⁵ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 15, a term developed by C. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

³⁸⁶ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 17.

³⁸⁷ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 16.

³⁸⁸ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 17.

³⁸⁹ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 17.

³⁹⁰ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 8.

³⁹¹ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 1-5.

³⁹² Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 18.

³⁹³ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 19.

relationship.³⁹⁴ Now moments can also be ‘missed’ or ‘failed.’³⁹⁵ Let me further develop how I apply this as an analogy to my relationship with God.

I am aware that I am in an implicit relationship with God. God’s presence is always there, but it is implicit, because most of the time it is out of my conscious awareness. However, as I become more mindfully aware and present to reality in my own self, through a graced response, it is possible to have some charged ‘now’ moments, magnetised through the Holy Spirit that become ‘moments of meeting’ with God. It is a graced response because I cannot find God, unless God first finds me, but I can play my part in being open to a response. These moments of meeting are transformational, and I am looking to both participate in them, and observe them for the purposes of my research. These moments can lead to the ideal contemplative state, which is a continuous awareness of God’s presence.³⁹⁶

Introspective phenomenology and mindfulness

As I draw on introspective phenomenology in this piece of intentional research, I want to briefly highlight its connection with what has gone previously. Within the broad methodology of AE I have explored the phenomenology of my religious experience in previous chapters. I have sought to be continuously aware of the presence of God, and in the wider research have identified obstacles to this, and ways to overcome these obstacles. My method of directly contemplating God, whilst ‘*in obliquo*’ observing my contemplative participation follows the historic Christian contemplative path of first-person research for the benefit of others.³⁹⁷ My positionality here is as a contextual theologian, minister, psychotherapist and contemplative teacher, and my interpretative stance is experiential.

³⁹⁴ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 33.

³⁹⁵ Boston Change Process Study Group, *Change in Psychotherapy*: 22-23.

³⁹⁶ See Diadochus above, ‘Let us keep our eyes *always* fixed...’ (my italics).

³⁹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 117.

Out of this broader strand of my research I am now, in this chapter, looking to focus on reclaiming my present moments from anxious overload through spiritual practices that cultivate my mindfulness of God. The spiritual practices were mindful pilgrimage walking and the turning of a new verse from Mark into a metacognitive proposition ('whoever wants to save their life will lose it...' (Mark 8:35)). I outlined this process of working with verses as metacognitive propositions earlier in the research.

I have taken Mark 8:35, as another key verse because my reader-response to this phrase was to hear it in my context of anxiety, that 'if I try to save my life through anxiety I will lose it through the experiential avoidance that was my anxious reaction.'³⁹⁸ I have intentionally turned this verse into a metacognitive proposition for my mindfulness of God. Through intentionally meditating on it as a proposition for my life, the aim is for it to become an insight, that enables me to catch anxious experiential avoidance in the moment. I do this by holding in mnemonic awareness the insight that if I try to save my life through anxiety, I will lose it. I have highlighted earlier my original hypothesis and key insight and now outline the method, data collection and data analysis in more depth.

Method, data collection and data analysis

I created a distinctive analytic process to underpin the intentional two-day pilgrimage walk in northern Spain based on adaptations of tried and tested methods. The overall methodology in my research is autoethnography (AE). Different writing strategies and ways of representing research are encouraged within AE and in this piece of research I am using introspective phenomenology that can sit within the boundaries of AE. Introspective phenomenology is simply 'observing and reporting on one's own

³⁹⁸ See Hayes, 30, for concept of experiential avoidance.

subjectivity with as much accuracy as possible.³⁹⁹ Lomas researched his own experience of boredom using introspective phenomenology, and I have adapted his approach to examine my spiritual experience. The research was to record via my iPhone whatever thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations came into my awareness over a day's walking, breaking the recording into individual hours but recording in real-time. This collection of present moment data is a variation of Lomas's adaptation of Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1987) Experiencing Sampling Method.⁴⁰⁰ This use of introspective phenomenology was to enable me to carry out this fieldwork, it was not part of my manuductive reading and so I do not include it in chapter three. I collected the present moment data by recording on my phone whatever popped into my awareness as I walked. I also set an alarm on my phone every hour to remember to stop and record what I was feeling in that moment, and to start a new recording for the next hour. I collected data for two days of walking. The idea was to record whatever appeared in my awareness, non-judgementally and without self-censorship. I typed up the data on the evening of the day I walked. This is shown in Table One (all the tables mentioned are in the appendices).⁴⁰¹ I was, therefore, collecting data from my experience in the present moment. As well as walking I followed my normal scaffolding of mindful and spiritual practices in the early morning and added an intentional meditation on Mark 8:35, turning it into a metacognitive proposition.

On the following two days of the walk, I then rested and analysed the data recorded. This is shown in Table Two. The data I recorded was analysed for thematic content using Lomas's adaptation of Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).⁴⁰² With Lomas I followed the IPA procedures but like him I applied them to my own individual self as a form

³⁹⁹ Tim Lomas, "A Meditation on Boredom: Re-Appraising Its Value through Introspective Phenomenology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2017): 6, accessed March 18, 2018, <http://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1205695>.

⁴⁰⁰ Lomas, 7-9.

⁴⁰¹ The tables are situated in the appendices at the end of the thesis.

⁴⁰² Lomas, 7-9.

of introspective phenomenology. In close analysis of the data, I was looking for themes, categories, and meta-categories. I have shown the meta-categories in Table Three. I am particularly focusing on the data around anxiety and shame on day one and day two, and what replaced the anxiety and shame in day two in the more detailed analysis in Table Three.

Overview of results

The first day I walked for 5 hours and 33 minutes covering 22.1 kilometres and taking 32735 steps. The second day I walked for 5 hours and 11 minutes covering 19.6 kilometres and walking 30,753 steps. I cite these actual figures, not to be quantitative, but because they have symbolic value for me, they represent the desire to walk all day as a pilgrim. I collected the raw data in Table One. I then examined this data for themes and placed them into categories in Table Two. I then further placed this data in two meta-categories, concerns of God, and human concerns in Table Three. There are two main themes in the data: a high level of anxiety and shame on day one; and a substantial reduction in those negative feelings on day two and the emergence of a spiritual theme. This analysis emerges from the collection of raw data from the two days walking. This analysis raised a further research question: what was the anxiety and shame replaced with in the second day? This data that emerged in day two was around spiritual themes and I am placing it in the meta-category I have called 'the concerns of God' (Mark 8:33). I compare the prevalence of 'the concerns of God' in day one with similar data in day two.

Reflections

I write and rewrite these reflections in the present moment as a form of AE analytic reflection. I will at times intentionally write in the present tense to emphasize a key point in this section, especially when I am in a moment of present moment awareness, on the Camino, or in the moment now. I want

to pick up on the main themes of anxiety and shame. My own psychotherapy training was integrative and relational, drawing on cognitive-behavioural (CBT), person-centred and psychodynamic theories. I am aware that there are different ways of handling shame and anxiety within these approaches, for example, CBT would seek to change your thoughts. I am using mindful theory which does not try to change your thoughts, but your relationships to your thoughts.⁴⁰³ It may be that I always have anxious thoughts but in mindful theory thoughts are not facts they are just passing mental events. I notice them and let them go, like watching leaves on a stream go by. It was secular mindfulness that first freed me from the grip of anxiety, allowing space for mindfulness of God to emerge. On the first day there were 11 pieces of data signalling anxiety, and 5 pieces of data signalling shame. Again, I cite the actual figures, not to slide into quantitative research, but because counting them hit me emotionally. I became aware how prevalent shame and anxiety were. Most of the first day I was in my head and not in the present moment. I was involved in mental time travel between the past and the future. Right at the beginning of the walk my anxiety was looking forward, 'Shall I carry the water bottle tomorrow?', 'Will I find somewhere to do a wee?', 'Will I find the way or get lost?' I also look back in time, 'Should I have stretched?' The data on shame illustrates my mental time travel, this time to the past, 'I feel huge shame and anxiety with a micro-offence I've done or imagining I've done.' This 'hot spot' of shame keeps dragging me back into rumination and rerunning the offence. On day one I am finding it difficult to be in the present moment, which is my goal. As I became present to the present moment, I was more aware of God's presence. It was toward the end of the day from hour five of the walk that as I was more in the present moment, the concerns of God emerged in the space formerly dominated by anxiety and shame

In day two there was a shift out of anxiety and shame; there is one piece of data signalling anxiety and one piece of data signalling shame. I have shifted

⁴⁰³ See Brown, Ryan and Cresswell, "Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations," 213.

more into the present moment, and this brings freedom from my anxious thoughts. This led to the next research question: what was this category of afflictive thoughts and feelings jostling for my attention (human concerns) replaced with in day two? In day two I counted 22 items I have labelled as spiritual (concerns of God) most of which were prayer, which replaced the anxiety. This is a new spiritual narrative that now has space to emerge. Through an immersion in mindful walking, and meditative practice I step not only into my body and senses and breath which are always in the present moment, but also into a more open inner space which can hold the other aspects of myself and in which self-awareness, and awareness of the concerns of God, and God's presence can emerge. As I enter more into my body, senses, awareness, and feelings my spiritual self emerges. I am calling this a mindful spirituality – where the theory, practice, and insights of secular mindfulness with its emphasis on aware and embodied (incarnational) living opens the door to the spiritual in my life which has been back-stage, whilst anxiety has been front-stage.

The self-awareness is a form of meta-awareness in which I was observing my state of being, for example I said, 'I feel like a bottle of fizzy water, all shook up,' and 'I want to walk clear not cloudy.' In this theme of meta-awareness spiritual meta-reflections emerged, such as, 'I think shame and anxiety lead to self-focus. In that way I lose my life if life is with others.' My aim is to live life in relationship with God and with others, and I define this as finding my life. Here the scriptural metacognitive proposition from Mark's gospel that 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it' becomes a value in my mind, it has become a metacognitive insight. I am aware in the moment that anxiety tries to get me to save my life by avoiding difficulty. However, I end up losing my life through experiential avoidance not saving it. Through the metacognitive insight I do not give in to experiential avoidance but turn and face the difficulty.

The shame data was also significant. Shame seeped into my consciousness like damp. In the past I have likened shame to being the deepest layer

within my psyche and one I have avoided experiencing, and yet I know I need to face. What brought it to the fore on this trip was that I thought I had offended someone; a micro-offence and it was causing me deep shame and anxiety. Perhaps the anxiety came from the shame, or fear of being exposed. I realised I was carrying shame around in the basement of my own self. Whilst on the Camino I had an incredibly positive message from the person I thought I had offended. I had a moment of meta-awareness that many of my reasons for feeling shame are not rooted in reality. I realise that I was not born with shame but at some point, was shamed.

My sense is that I was shamed at boarding school which had a shame culture. I remember that if something was stolen from the dormitory, I would be in terror of being accused and shamed, even though I did not steal anything. I am not trying here to change the shame, but as part of mindful theory change my relationship to shame. As I shift into mindful awareness I disentangle my sense of self from the shame (cognitive defusion). I realise that shame, like anxiety, is just a passing event not reality – I have not shifted it I have relativized it. As I do this, in the same way my shirt wicks moisture, it seems I can wick this emotion. In mindful awareness there is space now for the concerns of God to emerge.

On day one from the fourth hour, I began to engage symbolically with natural objects around me. There was an associative logic at work, as I made spiritual connections with streams and fountains on this first day. I was aware that mindfulness is a fountain of wisdom I have been drinking from. I associated the physical walking across a bridge with the embodied way I must access mindfulness. Later in the day I prayed in tongues spontaneously. I seem to have been in my body, senses, and the present moment as I did so, not in my head. I felt myself letting go of anxiety and stress, in this more spacious symbolic and spiritual space. I prayed prayers of gratitude, and asked to be filled with God's presence. The swallows were symbolically important to me, but trying to catch the meaning in the

moment, was like trying to grasp them in flight, it eluded me. This was kataphatic spirituality.

As I look at the data for day two, I see the emergence of spiritual themes such as 'concerns of God.' It appears that these spiritual strands, for example prayers, emerged into awareness as there was now space in my mind because the anxiety of the day before had been breathed away. In day two I am also aware as I analyse the data that I was not held by the shame, but I held the shame. I was in a place of meta-awareness from the first hour in day two. I made a meta-reflection on shame which enabled me to defuse from it, 'Shame keeps me in the past and makes me anxious about the future, that I would be exposed about something that happened in the past.' I became aware that shame also kept me out of the present moment. It seems shame cannot live with a new embodied ecstasy I felt in the moment. I was aware that as ecstasy expanded; shame decreased. I knew that I walked a stony path of anxious thoughts, but that I was bigger than my anxious thoughts. I felt and feel a great desire not to lose any more of my life to anxiety. Feelings I normally dampened down were emerging uninhibited and freely. I became aware of the expansive space of silence as I walked, inner and outer silence. I slowed down inside. My breath was not anxious it was slow and calm. The cloud of shame lifted.

As my attention shifted away from self, I became more aware of nature around me. My intuitive unconscious made associative links between further natural symbols and my life. There was a circle ahead made by overhanging branches which felt like a portal into the mystical. The signs for taxis popped up, symbolic temptations to take the easy path, I ignored them. They were frequent and became a symbol for the experiential avoidance of pain. There were many roadside crosses on the walk. I was taking up my cross. I was suddenly aware that I have around my neck several symbols: a Jerusalem cross, a St. Christopher's medallion, a St. Benedict medallion, and a St. James Camino medallion. They remind me of different aspects of my spirituality. I am interested in the four corners of the

earth. When separated from my parents in Kenya I had a St. Christopher's medallion to keep me safe as a traveller. I follow Benedictine spirituality, taking vows of stability, Christ-like change and listening obedience to God. I am on a pilgrim quest.

I was aware in my own story historically that I painted symbolic paintings, and that was an important way I represented my reality, but I had not reflected on it to any degree. It was in this intentional research on the walk that it hit me with real force, that symbolic representation of my reality is a stream of being within me. I realised, as an epiphany, 'I am a symbolist!' I discovered that there was a strong associative logic at work within me making connections between natural symbols and my life and God. I see this as a sign of mindful self-awareness. This impacts the representation of my work. I try to make theological sense of this within the research process, through my wider reading. There is a strand of symbolic theology within the contemplative tradition, exemplified by Denys the Areopagite. Symbolic theology is the 'conversion of what is taken from the realm of the senses to the service of the divine.'⁴⁰⁴ My AE experience is embodied and through the senses, and yet I experience a conversion of what I sense into a symbolic spiritual experience. The representation of this in more poetic and personal form is congruent in this research because of the creative nature of symbolic language. At the time of this walk I had a sense that the swallows have an important connection with my life, but I could not place them fully in my personal symbolic landscape. I revisit the importance of swallows symbolically in the next chapter. Here there is a deepening of my unitary transformation within the research process, inhabiting more fully my 'imaginal processes.'

I am also aware that there is another layer to the walking that is symbolic and for a different purpose. Mark Cazelat wrote an article on Tom Denny the stained-glass artist who walks an area in a contemplative, prayerful

⁴⁰⁴ Quoted in Andrew Louth, "Denys the Areopagite," in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, SJ (London: SPCK, 1986), 187.

manner to fully inhabit it. Out of this immersion Denny then represents the landscape in his artwork. Cazelat argues that this is part of a wider tradition within British art of walking for inspiration.⁴⁰⁵ My inkling is that I am walking intuitively to find space for my creative self. I am aware that my poetic imagination is looking to surface and find a place in this research.

Prayers that I have intentionally practised daily emerged without conscious intention, such as the Welcoming prayer, the Jesus Prayer, other prayers like the Ananias prayer and speaking in tongues. These were embodied prayers, using my breath and seem to be about awareness and emotions not thinking. In the Jesus Prayer I asked for mercy. In the Ananias prayer I asked to experience self-compassion, compassion for others, to experience God's compassion. I began to experience self-compassion, compassion for others and God's compassion for me. God's compassion did not contain shame. A key part of my mindful spirituality is to let go of things I cannot control (the Welcoming prayer), 'I let go of the desire for security and control, for affirmation, for happiness.' I became aware of other people's pain and prayed for them. The daily scaffolding of prayers and practices emerged here as graced memory. There was space for others within, as my awareness became front-stage and mirrored the space around me. I was aware that I stepped into silence and solitude which acted as a portal to stillness and God. I was aware that in the moment I inhabited my body and senses, my awareness, my emotions, my imagination, my symbolic unconscious. My ability to transcend self-focus and allow others to emerge into my mindful awareness was enhanced.

I am asking how I crossed an invisible border out of anxiety into freedom in day two of my walk. This is symbolized by the swallows flying free around me. They filled me with joy, the ecstasy of their flight is still mirrored within me. I felt joy. I sense this joy comes out of freedom, being held by God's compassion and mercy which does not shame. As they fly now in my mind,

⁴⁰⁵ Mark Cazalet, "Walking Man: The Art of Thomas Denny," *Image Journal* 86, accessed October 18 2019, <http://imagejournal.org/article/walking-man-art-thomas-denny/>.

they write in the sky for me, 'enjoy freedom and joy in this ordinary world around you.'

The metaphor that has come to mind out of the symbolism of my walking clothes, which are breathable and wick sweat away, is that I have emotionally and spiritually wicked away much of my anxiety and shame. My interpretation of this is that the mindful walking, and meditation on a scriptural phrase designed to reframe my anxiety has enabled this. This phrase of Jesus 'whoever wants to save their life will lose it,' which has magnetic appeal for me emerged in my awareness, and then began to morph into what feels like a wise reframing of the anxiety and shame I felt. I do not experience this phrase of Jesus as a shaming statement but as a wise compassionate proposition spoken in love. This reframing mirrors the way secular metacognitive propositions have wisely reframed my relationship to my automatic reactions (I have realised that I am not an anxious person, but that I do have anxious thoughts – which are not facts). For example, in shame I am trying to save myself from exposure but end up losing my life. Shame and anxiety have led to excessive self-focus; in this way I lose my life if life is about others. These secular metacognitive propositions are also spoken in wise compassion.

I can also conceptualize the presence of God in awareness as an increasing light. Nature writer J.A. Baker describes a wood as 'essentially a field of light overgrown by trees.'⁴⁰⁶ Through the mysterious and alchemical process of mindfulness I have cleared some of the trees from the wood of my mind. In this mysteriously transformative process, the cunning willows of anxiety become their true size or are seen as unreal. The light already there (from God) is no longer overgrown and materializes into my awareness in the form of prayers, symbols, and ecstatic feelings. It was a compassionate light. Here my human part in clearing the trees (still a graced response), my mindfulness of God, enable me to become more aware of God's mindful

⁴⁰⁶ Quoted in Julian Hoffman, *Irreplaceable: The Fight to Save Our Wild Places* (Hamish Hamilton: 2019), 47.

care and remembrance of me, which freed me to mindfully remember others. I have been able to answer the ‘if’ question (would an extended mindful pilgrimage walk enable me to let go of bitterness, unforgiveness, anxious thoughts and become more mindful of God and others, and if so, how?), I now want to look at the data from the perspective of mindful theory and my analogical use of implicit relational knowing and moments of meeting, which illuminate this shift out of anxiety and shame into freedom – and the ‘how’ it has happened.

Mindful and implicit relational knowing theories – an analysis of the data

I have already outlined my use of mindful theory and implicit relational knowing theory. In this chapter I use them to analyse my data. This is an important revisiting of the theory as related to this new data. It is an intentional mindful repetition. Although I am researching my mindfulness of God, my AE experience is that as I practised secular mindfulness, I became more mindful of God and others. My secular mindfulness practice and theoretical understanding have been foundational in transforming me spiritually. Although I originally immersed myself in secular mindfulness for therapeutic reasons, I soon became aware that it cultivated good soil for my mindfulness of God practice, and that I could integrate both secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God in a new mindful spirituality with missional significance.

I have already outlined the theory of narrative, experiential and observing selves. I now apply it to my quest to reclaim my present moments. I am aware of some repetition here, but it is intentional and mindful as I apply the theory in the context of a mindful walk. The anxious thoughts and stories come from my narrative self, where I live most of the time.⁴⁰⁷ I can

⁴⁰⁷ See Farb et al, “Attending to the present,” 313-322.

track my ruminative narrative self in the transcripts through the data on anxiety and shame. Through switching to my experiential self (the body, senses and breath) during the pilgrimage walk I was able to come out of my head and into the present moment.⁴⁰⁸ I believe this partially explains the journey out of anxiety in day two. This shift to my experiential self helped me to relativize my anxious thoughts, I was more than my thoughts. Occasionally on the walk I was able to shift into another, rarely inhabited aspect of myself, an open awareness, sometimes called the witnessing self – where I could hold both narrative and experiential selves.⁴⁰⁹ In the research process I am writing as an autoethnographer from this witnessing, perceiving self. This enables me to re-perceive my story.

I also applied the previously discussed theory that I have mindful capacities of self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence. This includes the regulation of our emotions and our attentional capacities. One of the unhelpful ways we regulate our emotions (through not paying attention to them) is to avoid them. I was avoiding the embodied feelings of anxiety. As I made the move out of my head into my body, senses and awareness I was able to hold and then let go of the anxiety and shame.

Mindfulness is also intentional, present moment focused, embodied, and inhabiting the senses, non-judgemental as well as cultivating this wider awareness which can hold both experiential and narrative selves.⁴¹⁰ This helped me re-perceive my lived experience on the walk, to see more clearly. Alister McGrath defines mindfulness along these lines, ‘the disciplined habit of developing ways of seeing or envisaging reality.’⁴¹¹ Brown, Ryan, and Creswell state that mindfulness ‘permit the individual to “be present” to reality as it is rather than to react to it or habitually process it through

⁴⁰⁸ Farb et al, “Attending to the present,” 313-322.

⁴⁰⁹ Arthur J. Deikman, *The observing self: Mysticism and psychotherapy* (Beacon Press, 1982).
Farb et al, “Attending to the present,” 313-322.

⁴¹⁰ See Shapiro, et al, *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*, 373-386.

⁴¹¹ Alister E. McGrath, “The Cultivation of Theological Vision: Theological Attentiveness and the Practice of Ministry,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 111.

conceptual filters.⁴¹² In this piece of research I began to re-perceive my anxiety and shame, and my relationship with others. I became aware of God as generous, compassionate, and mindful of me, and as a presence that does not shame – this is a form of spiritual re-perceiving, and another possible example of a natural capacity becoming a spiritual capacity through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

My AE experience is that to live in the present moment is crucial in terms of my mental and spiritual wellbeing. As I made this transition a mindful spirituality emerged into awareness. The intentional use of memory through the meditation on a scriptural verse became a metacognitive insight that enabled me to allow the automatic reaction of avoidance to come into the light and be transcended. It gave me a frame to cultivate through biblical insight a life that was not 'lost' through anxiety. For example, normally I would avoid going somewhere new on my own in case I got lost. Going somewhere new would raise a great deal of anxiety in me. This is an example of experiential avoidance and choosing the human concern jostling for my attention. My anxiety says the safe thing to do would be not to go somewhere new. Intentionally doing the Camino on my own, somewhere new, which requires a lot of navigation was an intentional turn to face reality, which I conceptualize as a concern of God for my life. Although I am working on my human part, my mindfulness of God, I became more aware of the God I am seeking to be mindful of – and have been able to say something of how I experienced the nature and being of God.

This constant mental time travel in my head can be represented in other ways, as a series of feeder streams appearing and reappearing, crossing over each other, disappearing, popping into awareness, disappearing out of awareness, or even taking me off on the stream automatically. I am at the

⁴¹² Brown, Ryan and Cresswell, "Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations," 212.

power of these anxious streams because, according to mindfulness much of what is happening in my mind is automatic and out of my awareness.⁴¹³

Through mindful awareness I can become aware of my automatic reactions and hold them. Through the intentional cultivation of scriptural metacognitive propositions, I can remember in the moment a wiser Christian response. There is evidence for this at work in this research, when I become aware that in the moment anxiety might cause me to lose my life by choosing experiential avoidance, (a reference to Mark 8:35. This recognition in mindfulness research of the automaticity of my reactions, and that these can be deautomatised through mindful awareness is a key insight that I have applied to my mindfulness of God. Through the cultivation of an open awareness in which these automatic reactions become visible to me I can also exercise a more focused ethical awareness.

The reduction in anxious moments and the emergence of spiritual moments over the two days, can be seen as ‘moments of meeting’ with God. For these moments of meeting to emerge there I needed to be in the spacious place of awareness, and to be in the process of wicking away my anxious thoughts and feelings, and my shame. This present moment awareness became inhabited by God’s Holy Spirit, and moments were ‘converted’ into moments of meeting with God. These included the prayers in the moment, the interaction with symbols in the moment, like the swallows, thinking of others and ecstatic feelings. Other feelings that were touched by God’s presence were self-compassion, and the sense that I was feeling God’s compassion for me. In awareness I was also able to make meta reflections, and my metacognitive proposition about anxiety morphed in the present moment into a phrase of wise theological creativity, ‘in trying to save my life through anxiety, I will lose it.’ In a positive sense I know, that ‘I find freedom and space as I wick anxiety away.’ This idea that I am an implicit

⁴¹³ Vidyamala Burch talks about being on autopilot as one of the main characteristics of unaware living in Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness For Health: A Practical Guide to Relieving Pain, Reducing Stress and Restoring Wellbeing* (Piatkus, 2013), 83.

relationship of knowing with God also means that I can begin to look for more moments of meeting. I am also aware that the range of potential moments of meeting does not need to be limited but can draw on all of creation around me and every aspect of my being.

Toward two tentative models

Within this AE exploration of my spiritual experience through mindful analysis is the shape of a tentative model of how to cultivate ethical mnemonic awareness, through an adaptation of Teasdale's Interacting Cognitive Subsystems theory and model, as outlined in the introduction.⁴¹⁴ I apply it here with a new metacognitive proposition that if I try to save my life through anxiety, I will lose my life (my adaptation of Mark 8:35). Through meditating on this proposition, I can hold it in mnemonic awareness. As I do so anxious thoughts come into my mind, triggering an automatic reaction to avoid a difficulty. I catch that thought in mindful awareness and recognize that if I give in to experiential avoidance, I will lose my life. I turn toward the difficulty which is the wiser spiritual response. This process has enabled me to choose the thing of God (turning toward the difficulty) over the human thing jostling for my attention (avoidance). Through mindful repetition the proposition becomes a metacognitive insight. I can use the model with different propositions and teach others to find and adapt scriptural verses as metacognitive propositions that through meditating on them can also become insights held in ethical mnemonic awareness. As I use this model, I am further able to reclaim my present moments.

I outlined the implicit relational knowing theory I am using as an analogy earlier in this chapter. Through this chapter I can see that I can use my analogy as a tentative analogical conceptual model of the psychological and

⁴¹⁴ Teasdale, "Metacognition," 146-155.

spiritual time within my lived experience of God's presence. This conceptual model enables me to make sense of my spiritual life. I can call this model 'the analogical implicit relationship with God.' Through conceptualizing my relationship with God as one that is implicit, and still a form of knowing I am able, for example, to trust God when I do not sense the divine presence. I can also learn not to limit what might be a 'moment of meeting,' I can consider every moment a possible moment of meeting. I can find moments of meeting when I inhabit my *spacious*, open, and non-judgmental awareness. It is a model that could be taught to others. This model is also part of my original contribution. It is also a form of theological wisdom about how the spaciousness of awareness allows moments of meeting, and about how these moments of meeting continue to inhabit awareness.

I have learnt to pay attention to the 'markings,' 'colour,' and 'shape' of the moments of meeting in the same way I have learnt to be attentive to butterflies on the Scargill estate. I have helped to record sightings of butterflies and other species on the estate. These are checked by experts against photos we submit as evidence. Initially I misrecognized the butterflies through not paying enough attention to their markings, colour, and shape. In the same way I have paid more attention to moments of meeting. I have noticed that while writing I sometimes have a moment of meeting where I notice ecstasy, enhanced creativity, and a sense of oneness with the world. This was an awakened moment with words. Other moments have different markings, shape, or colour.

As I use my first model to reclaim my present moments, my hypothesis is that I will experience more moments of meeting with God that I am aware of. This happened on day two, when my anxious thoughts and feelings of shame were replaced by spiritual experiences, 'the concerns of God.' I have collected these in Table Three under the themes of: meta-awareness, metacognitive propositions, the symbolic, gratitude, the spiritual (including the emergence of prayers around mercy, compassion, and letting go, from my scaffolding of practices. I suggest these are examples of moments of meeting, where my awareness converges with God's presence.

When I am in a place of open awareness, then, I would further suggest I am most open to God's presence, promptings, and revelation. I can remember the concerns of God. This is a pattern that fits my wider personal journey, recognizing God's continuous mindfulness of me, which most of the time I am unaware of, and occasional moments of meeting. As I work with both models, the aim is to move toward a more continuous awareness of God which is a key aim of mindfulness of God. These models could be used by others as a second-person guide in their own journey toward mindfulness of God.

This implicit relationship with moments of meeting can also be evidenced at a wider level. For example, I see the providential occurrence of being on pilgrimage in Spain as evidence of an implicit relationship with God, its resemblance in part to Africa recalls my childhood to me. The coming together in my life of the emergence of secular mindfulness and the hidden mindfulness of God strand is also, to me, a sign of God's implicit relationship with me, emerging explicitly in a profound moment of meeting. I see that God appears to be at work in my imaginative unconscious using symbols, symbolic language, and associative logic. In my mind (perhaps through a graced response) a Desert Father story of the monk who trailed sand behind him to illustrate his sin, led me to associate this with me leaving anxious thoughts and feelings trailing behind me through a pilgrimage walk.⁴¹⁵ I read these convergences as graced responses. Another way of describing these experiences of hidden grace is to describe my personal narrative as parabolic.

Sally McFague says, 'In the parabolic tradition people are not asked to be "religious" nor are they taken out of this world, rather, the transcendent comes to ordinary reality and disrupts it.'⁴¹⁶ In the non-dualist interpretation of my personal narrative the transcendent came to my

⁴¹⁵ Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (Penguin Books, 2003), 86.

⁴¹⁶ McFague. "Parable, 630.

ordinary reality and disrupted it. McFague argues for parabolic theological reflection that is confessional and autobiographical, and poetic, what she calls intermediary theology.⁴¹⁷ This leads Bevans to describe McFague as a theologian practising transcendental contextual theology.⁴¹⁸ It is my AE experience that the kingdom of God works in this parabolic fashion, and that secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God, came into my ordinary reality as disruptive and healing kingdom gifts. McFague describes three different worlds. The first is a mystical world ‘where we are encouraged to leave behind all that is secular, temporal, human, political, fleshly.’⁴¹⁹ This is a tradition I have turned away from. The second world is the secular world which is ‘flat’ and ‘nothing other than the human and historical...’⁴²⁰ The third is the parabolic world, ‘We are not taken out of this world...but we find ourselves in a world that is two-dimensional, a world in which the “religious” dimension comes to the ‘secular’ and reforms it.’⁴²¹ I am enabled through God’s grace, to re-perceive the ordinary world and see God’s mindfulness of me. There is a different form of knowing unfolding in these moments of re-perceiving.

This is a relational knowing that there appears to be another person with me, who is transcendent and immanent, who knows me as beloved.⁴²² This personal God has awakened me, my body, my awareness, my emotions, my soul, my senses, and has awakened a new language and way of seeing within me that is bigger than me but transforms me.⁴²³ I am also aware as I re-inhabit the data that I reference silence and solitude and that I chose to go on pilgrimage on my own, to embrace solitude. These are two important practices, alongside the pilgrimage walking, and meditating on scripture

⁴¹⁷ McFague, “Parable,” 636.

⁴¹⁸ Bevans, 103-106.

⁴¹⁹ McFague, *Speaking*, xvii.

⁴²⁰ McFague, *Speaking*, xvii.

⁴²¹ McFague, *Speaking*, xvii.

⁴²² Brandon L. Rickabaugh, “Eternal Life as Knowledge of God: An Epistemology of Knowledge by Acquaintance and Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 2(2013): 219, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F193979091300600205>.

⁴²³ Heaney, 10.

that seem to awaken the soul in me. I had forgotten that I had deliberately chosen to go on my own to experience both silence and solitude. These ancient practices provide a form of further scaffolding that enables the spiritual to emerge – enabling gateways to God’s presence to open. I am also aware that walking for me feels like a gift, a miracle. In November 2016 I suffered an annular tear in one of my discs getting out of bed. I could not walk without help and only with agonising spasms for two weeks. When I walk now, especially on pilgrimage the journey symbolizes freedom, a gracious gift from God.

My AE data and Balthasar’s doctrine of spiritual senses

I have retrieved the idea of mindfulness of God from Christian contemplative history. I have recontextualized this strand in creative synthesis with secular mindfulness. I am inhabiting a mindful spirituality, which is a turn to incarnational living. In embodied awareness I hold feelings, bodily sensations and thoughts in a witnessing self, that as a graced response through the Holy Spirit, enables me to become aware of God’s compassionate presence, and dwell within that compassionate presence. The idea is that this mindful spirituality is accessible to all.

In a more speculative turn, I would also like to suggest that my AE experience where my senses, body, emotions, and awareness become aware of God can be tentatively seen as evidence for natural senses becoming spiritual senses. My experience is that God has communed with me through my natural God-given senses, that they are transformed into spiritual senses, whilst remaining natural senses. That is through them I can, as a graced response, also perceive the presence of God. Hans Urs von Balthasar is one theologian who has returned to the link between natural senses and spiritual senses. This is in reaction to what he calls an ‘anti-incarnational’ apophatic strand in Christian contemplation, where the Platonic influence

encourages an ascent 'from all incarnate forms.'⁴²⁴ De Maeseneer summarizes Balthasar's doctrine of the spiritual senses.⁴²⁵ Ignatian spirituality is one theological precedent for his argument, but according to Maeseneer Balthasar also takes up the patristic idea of assumption and exchange of states, 'God participated in our life to let us share in the divine life. In the process of incarnation, cross and resurrection the human senses are assumed, and opened to a redeeming transformation.'⁴²⁶ Balthasar argues for this non-dualistic incarnational spirituality against the dominant paradigm of apophatic spirituality.

Stephen Fields summarizes Apophatic spirituality as stating 'that pure religion can be experienced only in "naked faith," a knowledge that entails negating both the intuitions of sensation and the formal judgments of the intellect.'⁴²⁷ Balthasar argues that Platonic influence is responsible 'for the dualism between sensation and spirit that apophaticism presupposes.'⁴²⁸ The reason for highlighting this dominant apophatic tradition is that Balthasar's incarnational spirituality could be described as kataphatic. Janet K. Ruffing in her exploration of kataphatic experience through qualitative research methods also highlights that 'a strong bias in favour of apophatic styles in mystical experience has been dominant since the Counter-Reformation.'⁴²⁹ In an expanded definition she defines kataphatic experience as incarnational and embodied:

kataphatic refers to experiences of God which are mediated through one of God's creatures, either something external to the person such as nature, art, language, sound, ritual, another person, etc. or through a content of the person's consciousness such as visions, prophetic words or locutions.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord a Theological Aesthetics: Seeing the Form*, eds. Joseph Fessio S.J and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 307.

⁴²⁵ See Yves, De Maeseneer, "Retrieving the Spiritual Senses in the Wake of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio Viatorum* 55 (2013): 276-290.

⁴²⁶ De Maeseneer, 281.

⁴²⁷ Fields, 225.

⁴²⁸ Fields, 226.

⁴²⁹ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 232.

⁴³⁰ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 232.

She also highlights dreams, bodily experiences and the symbolic as kataphatic in nature.⁴³¹ These overlap with the nature of my mindful spirituality and so I can describe my mindful spirituality as kataphatic.

Why is this significant? Ruffing highlights that Christians presenting with kataphatic religious experience are often discouraged by spiritual directors from exploring them.⁴³² She concludes that 'kataphatic experience is relegated to the beginning of the spiritual journey and excluded by definition from mature mystical development.'⁴³³ She argues for kataphatic spirituality to be treated as of equal value to apophatic spirituality.⁴³⁴ My AE experience is that mindfulness opens a window to kataphatic religious experience, as evidenced in this chapter, with embodied ecstasy, natural symbols taking on spiritual significance, and mnemonic awareness of God's Word. This integration of secular mindfulness with mindfulness of God is an original pathway into kataphatic spirituality. I see kataphatic spirituality as more accessible than apophatic spirituality and a missional opportunity in our postmodern culture, because of the turn toward mindfulness in culture.

It is also significant that I am seeing my mindful spirituality as kataphatic and that in my spirituality I am seeking to reclaim my present moments. In my mindful spirituality with its emphasis on the body, senses, breath, and natural world I am taken into the present moment because the body, breath and senses are always in the present moment. I am, therefore, arguing from this evidence that present moment focus, as well as being an important part of my spirituality should be an important part of kataphatic spirituality more generally, as kataphatic spirituality also has the body and senses at its

⁴³¹ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 238-245.

⁴³² Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 232.

⁴³³ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 232.

⁴³⁴ Ruffing, "The World Transfigured," 233.

heart. This mindful emphasis on the present moment may be a fresh emphasis in kataphatic spirituality.

Conclusion

In this piece of intentional research, I put into practice a tentative model for creating ethical mindful awareness of the concerns of God in the present moment. This model helped reclaim my present moments from anxious thoughts that like an overgrown forest block my ability to see the light of God's presence. I have been able to find an answer to my second research question, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?' In clearing space in my mind this enabled me to be opened to perceive, as a graced response, moments of meeting with God. Through the creation of another tentative model of my lived experience of time as being in an implicit relationship with God, mostly out of my awareness, the more I create ethical mindful awareness the more I am opened to the possibility of moments of meeting with God. This ethical mindful awareness will be essential in the creation of a mindful rule of life.

A primary element of this ethical awareness is remembering, it is mnemonic awareness. The self-help mindfulness texts I have drawn on are very much designed to help you remember their instruction, in this sense they are manuductive. Manuductive texts are designed to help the memory remember God, that is you can remember in the end without recourse to the text.⁴³⁵ The application of my research that appears in part three will also have an emphasis on helping those who engage with it to remember how to be mindful of God, and to memorize the mindful rule and mindfulness map I have created. My intention is to create an application which can be remembered, in the end, after constant repetition of theory and practice, without recourse to the text.

⁴³⁵ Candler, 18.

The God I experienced was compassionate and did not shame me. I experienced a conversion of natural symbols into a spiritual symbolic experience on the pilgrimage walk. I can also conceptualize my experience of God on the pilgrimage walk as parabolic, with spiritual experiences breaking into my ordinary reality. I do not draw on dualistic mainstream apophatic spirituality, and my integration of mindfulness of God with secular mindfulness is an original pathway into embodied, incarnational, kataphatic spirituality. The emphasis in my mindful spirituality is on reclaiming my present moments to allow God to redeem them, and I suggest that a focus on the present moment should also be made more explicit in more general kataphatic spirituality.

Ellen Langer says that 'Living in a mindful state may be likened to living in a transparent house.'⁴³⁶ The more analytic and critical work I carried out after the walk enabled me, almost for the first time, to have some transparent awareness of my whole house. When I was fused to anxiety, I was living in one small dark room, often a room from the past, or an imagined future room. I could now see the main obstacle to mindful awareness of God and others in the present moment was anxiety, and I saw this from a place of open witnessing awareness, an awareness of the whole house became transparent to me. I was aware that I was not yet able to inhabit the whole house. My anxiety had its roots in the past, through the trauma of boarding school separation. To further reclaim my present moments, I needed to fully inhabit this past experience, to make it transparent to my awareness. I had also learnt on this Camino walk that I needed to explore my symbolic self, that room which I was reinhabiting and making more transparent.

I realised that anxiety was not an uncontrollable monster in my mind (although it appeared that way) but something that could be wicked away, in the way my shirt or socks wicked sweat away. When I was fused to anxiety it was like wearing a plastic bubble over me that did not have the

⁴³⁶ Langer, *Mindfulness*, 201.

capacity to wick, and the anxiety condensed beneath it like toxic moisture. The walking, and the practices (including the breathing required in walking) made me permeable, I cultivated a breathable relationship with anxiety, and it began to be wicked away. As I did that, I became more permeable to God's presence implicitly there, I became more breathable to God's compassionate, non-shaming presence. Anxiety itself was vulnerable to mindfulness practices. A mindful spirituality cultivates this inner transparency to become mindfully aware of my own inner life, and the life of God within me in the present moment. This mindful spirituality enables a turn to others. The sense I had, that brought freedom and embodied ecstasy was that I had been graciously allowed to mindfully inhabit God's compassion. It was not just an absence of shame in God's presence it was a sense of compassion and mercy. I was able to hold compassion toward the pain of others as this shift occurred. I was left with a sense that God could be known, and that I was directed to know God's compassion. God made divine compassionate presence known to me.

In this chapter I make progress with one of my main research questions. What is mindfulness of God, and how do I cultivate it? My part in mindfulness of God is to cultivate a continuous awareness of God's presence, but to move in that direction by making myself available for moments of meeting with God. How I cultivate these graced possibilities is to reclaim my present moments through two tentative models, the first using metacognitive propositions that become insights to relativize my anxious thoughts, and the second is to recognize I am in an implicit relationship with God where there is an underground stream of knowing, and the unthought known, out of which can emerge moments of meeting that are transformational. This is supported by practices like mindful walking and meditative reflection on metacognitive propositions from scripture that help me to be embodied, aware and inhabit my emotions – this embodied incarnational spirituality keeps me in the present moment, because the body is always in the present.

This chapter has also helped me answer my second research question, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?' Through this research I was made aware of the limitations of just dealing with present moment anxiety. To cultivate mindfulness of God more fully I needed to deal with the roots of my anxiety in my boarding school past and begin to access the underground stream of symbolic knowing, running through my life. The stream that for me redresses the balance between boarding school pain and sacramental goodness that constituted my childhood. This became the third deeper research question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self to further reclaim my present moments?'

Within the chronological arc of this research process, I then intentionally set up a piece of fieldwork to enter the room of the past, my boarding school experience. In the next chapter I outline this fieldwork and analysis. I research how I can reclaim my narrative self, distorted by my experience at boarding school. I have asked the question, 'where was God?' in that experience. My intuitive answer is that God was present as creator in the African symbols of home that sustained my imagination and were a silver thread linking me still to Kenya and my family. The desert of term-time was always followed by the oasis of holidays in a landscape I experienced as paradise. In this chapter I have looked at reclaiming my experiential self and have become more fully aware of a symbolic self that is re-emerging. In chapter six I examine this symbolic self and its appearing. Both chapters emerge out of the research in chapter four.

Chapter Five

Reclaiming the past to reclaim the present

I am aware from my AE research that the past influences my present. Sheldrake expands on this, 'Every moment contains not only the presence of the past but also the hope of the future.'⁴³⁷ My own integrative and relational training as a therapist, which included psychodynamic theory and the realization of how the past impacts the present, has also influenced me theoretically.⁴³⁸ As part of my central theme of reclaiming the present moment, I also need to reclaim my here and now from the shadow of the past, especially the trauma of being sent to boarding school. Mindfulness theory argues that reality and wellbeing are found by being in the present moment.⁴³⁹ My sense is that my anxious thoughts are a symptom of deep, unconscious scripts, schemas and narratives from my traumatic boarding school past.⁴⁴⁰ It is in these next two chapters that I try to answer my deeper and third research question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self, to further reclaim my present moments?'

In this chapter I spiral around the experience of boarding school trauma. I have adapted a specific method of qualitative research called the *Listening Guide* to analyse two self-interviews about my boarding school experience. These interviews revolve around my internal dialogue with two books written about the impact of boarding school on children from a psychotherapeutic perspective. I have then used the idea of a narrative self from mindfulness theory. I am aware that I have been living with a distorted narrative self, this distortion originated in the past. The aim is to be able to recognize the distorted narrative and scripts and rewrite them, so that I can

⁴³⁷ Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010): 30.

⁴³⁸ See Linda Finlay, *Relational Integrative Psychotherapy: Engaging Process and Theory in Practice* (Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

⁴³⁹ Vago, and Silbersweig, 4.

⁴⁴⁰ Nick Duffell, 240-241 talks about sub-personalities.

further reclaim my present moments. I also want to use this chapter to hold my boarding school self in a mindful and self-compassionate awareness. In this chapter I am, therefore, following this emergent insight about the shadow of the past influencing my present. Following an initial analysis of my self-interviews based on the *Listening Guide* I revisit the data in the light of embodied and sociological trauma theory. After a traumatic blow in July 2020, that seemed to have elements that mirrored my boarding school experience, I followed an intuitive sense that I needed to circle back to the earlier boarding school trauma and this chapter, reviewing it with the different but related lens of embodied and sociological trauma theory.

The impact of boarding school

In 2006 a counsellor highlighted how my boarding school experience may have contributed to my mental health distress. After this insight I began reading about therapeutic work with boarding school survivors in a psychological book by Nick Duffell.⁴⁴¹ In this chapter I pick up on the insights from my initial reading of this book. I also draw further on his theoretical stance as I analyse my self-interviews. I realised, as part of this AE research that the distorted narrative self I became aware of was also a spiritual issue. If I was to be more mindful of God, I needed to transform the boarding school past which was impacting my present. It was not enough to relativize the anxious thoughts I had in the present, I needed to deal with their roots.

I had ordered another book on boarding school experience, which became particularly evocative for me. This was Joy Schaverien's book about boarding school syndrome (BSS).⁴⁴² I had been avoiding it and circling around it for some years since buying it in May 2016. I did not begin reading

⁴⁴¹ Duffell, 2010.

⁴⁴² Schaverien, *Boarding school syndrome*.

it until 2018 as part of my research. Mindful theory argues that therapeutically it is important to turn and face reality, and I argue this is a mindfulness of God principle as well.⁴⁴³ I, therefore, finally turned toward the book and revisited the experience of boarding school from her perspective. As I read Schaverien's first chapter it told my story in words that were empirical, psychological, and exact, but evocative beyond words for me. It was only after I had read the book that I realized up to that moment I had no words of my own for my experience or the depth of my trauma, but Schaverien gave me the exact words as if she had been there with me.

As I began to listen to what had not previously been heard I took the words from Schaverien's book and I owned them in a series of connected Haiku-like poems, as an 'I' poem that evocatively named my trauma.⁴⁴⁴ This past trauma which produced present moment anxiety, also had a spiritual impact, choking the word of God within me as an adult (Mark 4:1-9).

I was torn _____ away
From the golden cords attaching
My seven-year-old self

To my family
I had to hide homesickness
Bereavement and loss

I was unable
to talk about how I felt
Without my family

I was without their love
It was unspeakable, unspoken
I had no power

The rupture was so
Unbearable I repressed
Beyond conscious recall

⁴⁴³ Brown, Ryan, and Cresswell, "Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations," 213, discuss facing reality in mindfulness and the facing of difficulties through acceptance and non-judgement. They also talk about exposure as part of mindfulness practice which helps us deal with difficult reality, see page 226.

⁴⁴⁴ Schaverien, 2-11.

I was told I was
Privileged, I was shamed not to
Complain my loss

I cut myself off
From self-compassion I shamed
Myself for being homesick

I had a stiff upper
Lip and I did not cry
I was emotionally

Inexpressive, and
Loyally silent I hid
The depth of trauma.

Today the hooked thorns
Of anxiety hold me down
I cannot look Up.

As I return to Duffell's book for some theoretical insight, my recognition of needing to own the trauma resonated with his 'five stages of healing' for a boarding school survivor, which includes 'acknowledging being wounded' and accepting our own survival instincts.⁴⁴⁵ In writing about my boarding school experience my autoethnographic aim was to be both evocative and analytic. The key question is: how can I access and heal this dissociated part of myself? I can do it in an integrative way, drawing on therapeutic, contemplative, and theological insights – to become self-aware. This is part of my mindful stance, but Duffell also argues that self-awareness is the way out of the survival personality boarding school survivors create.⁴⁴⁶

I wish to cultivate this self-awareness in the service of reclaiming my present moments to be mindful of God, so that I am not overwhelmed with anxious thoughts whose origin lie in this childhood trauma. I am aware that as I am more mindful of God, I may become less anxious, however my intention here is a spiritual one, not a therapeutic one. I am entering the realm of the psychodynamic, the contemplative and the symbolic as I explore this wordless experience I have dissociated from. As outlined earlier

⁴⁴⁵ Duffell, 220-221.

⁴⁴⁶ Duffell, xii.

I require a different form of representation, which is more poetic, symbolic, and expressive as such trauma is harder to access through logical, propositional language.

My personal crisis of representation

In my introduction to this thesis, I outlined the crisis of representation that led to autoethnography. This subjective turn, and crisis in culture was mirrored in the process of my own research journey. Right at the beginning of thinking about doing a PhD, I knew I wanted to enter this complex world of research. As I stood on the other side of that river, I grappled with how I could be creative, poetic, and accessible within that academic world. Representation was something I wrestled with, and AE was the messenger that brought the blessing I was seeking, a way to be both poetic and analytic. This was part of the cultivation of my independent voice and the inhabiting of my imaginal processes as a researcher, as well as a critical stance.

As the research process developed, I found other congruent reasons for creative forms of representation. My anxious thoughts have a source, in maladaptive scripts from my boarding school experience. My boarding school trauma in the form of these scripts is like an unladen ghost. It is hidden, unspoken, I have dissociated from it. How can I access and represent it, and yet also bring it into the light so that it may be laid down in peace? A particular method in qualitative research that draws on psychodynamic theory and the use of poetic and creative language to access the unconscious and dissociated is Gilligan's *Listening Guide*.⁴⁴⁷ I have adapted this for AE, by creating two self-interviews examining the influence

⁴⁴⁷ Gilligan and Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 76-81.

of the past on my present through reflecting on the impact two psychological texts about boarding school had on me when I read them.

Introducing the *Listening Guide*

Another link between the *Listening Guide* and AE is that both are forms of discovery research.⁴⁴⁸ AE is a form of discovery research, a methodology within which other methods can be used. Gilligan's *Listening Guide* has been used in AE, where an AE researcher interacted with a small group of research participants in a 'researcher-*and*-researched' AE approach.⁴⁴⁹ I am adapting it for a 'researcher-*is*-researched' AE approach as a form of self-interview, since my work involves researching the immersion of my personal consciousness in the culturally emergent phenomenon of mindfulness.⁴⁵⁰ My adapted IPA research in chapter four has shown that my mind is strongly associative and symbolic in its workings. This also led me to resonate with Gilligan's work who has made free association a key part of her research. A section of an interview she did on the *Listening Guide* is worth quoting in full:

The radical potential that inheres in psychological research lies in this recognition: that the logic of the psyche is an associative logic, the logic of dreams and poetry and memory...Instead of following a deductive logic (how one thought implies another) you follow the stream of associations...When I ask myself, why artists are often the best psychologists – why, as Freud noted, poets are often light years ahead – it's because of their use of associative methods. This allows them to break through dissociation, to see the cultural framework, which is why artists often are the ones who speak the unspoken and reveal what is hidden.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ Gilligan and Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 76-81.

⁴⁴⁹ Genevieve R.C. Kalnins, "A Journey with Self-Compassion: exploring Self-Compassion within the context of the Christian Faith," (master's thesis, Trinity Western University, 2015), 54, accessed June 5, 2020, https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/kalnins_g.pdf.

⁴⁵⁰ Kalnins, 54.

⁴⁵¹ Kiegelmann, 13.

In my use of the research method the aim is to break free from the dissociated and false narratives of boarding school experience in order to transform the distorted narrative self. I want to bring into the light of awareness what I had dissociated from using free association. The *Listening Guide* is informed by an emphasis on narrative, relationship, and the recognition that the human voice is an evocative expression of your life and self, as well as something that can be critically analysed – which resonates with the key tenets of AE.⁴⁵² In the application of the *Listening Guide* research questions are formulated and put to the interviewee. These were the questions my researcher self asked my participant self in the first self-interview:

- What is my story of immersion in mindfulness?
- Why did I have a breakdown?
- What helped?
- Why did my existing Christian ecosphere not help?
- Why did I have to go out of this ecosphere to mindfulness to get help?'

Within my research process I had identified my immersion in mindfulness, my breakdown, what helped, and having to go outside my existing Christian world as some of the key nexus points in my story. In line with the *Listening Guide* method, I then recorded the reply and made a transcript of that recording. A key assumption of the *Listening Guide* is that there are clues in the spoken voice of the participant, clues from the inner world and the shaping narratives and relationships of family and culture that are imprinted in our breathed-out, actual voice – this includes conscious and unconscious or dissociated processes.⁴⁵³ There is an 'associative logic' to our speech that links the conscious, unconscious, and dissociated in our lives.⁴⁵⁴ The method recognizes the complex layers to our psyche, that there are multiple internal voices.⁴⁵⁵ My own research reveals the complexity of my

⁴⁵² Carol Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide: A Voice-Centered Relational Method," in *Emergent Methods in Social Research*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber & Patricia Leavy (London: Sage, 2006), 253.

⁴⁵³ Gilligan and Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 76, and Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 253.

⁴⁵⁴ Gilligan and Eddy, "Listening as a Path," 79, Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 254.

⁴⁵⁵ Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 253.

inner life necessitating an exploration of my distorted narrative self, my experientially avoidant self, the emergence of my witnessing self, and the discovery of my spiritually symbolic self.⁴⁵⁶

The *Listening Guide* is carefully structured without being prescriptive and consists of three 'listenings' to the recorded voice transcript. The transcript is verbatim and includes the pauses, sniffs, breathing, speech fillers and so on as also revealing of self within the voice. The first listening is called 'Listening for the Plot.'⁴⁵⁷ This analysis forms Table Two (interview one) in the appendix for this chapter at the end of the thesis. All the tables for this chapter are in the appendices. Listening for the plot identifies the story, the contexts, recurring images, and themes.⁴⁵⁸ It also records the researcher's response to the story and the voice.⁴⁵⁹ In this AE use of the *Listening Guide*, where the 'researcher is researched,' I am using mindful awareness, as in previous chapters, to both allow intimacy with my lived experience but also a critical distance. Another reason for adapting Gilligan's method is that I can gather data from the present moment in the form of self-interviews. In this listening as researcher of 'myself as participant' I note a theme of stress and distress; a moment of insight or a metaphorical 'meeting'; a possible hotspot of feeling; my response of compassion.⁴⁶⁰ In each listening I place my analysis within the body of the transcript in italics.

The second listening is 'Listening for the "I"' (to be found in the appendix, interview one, Table Three).⁴⁶¹ Each strand of listening can happen multiple times and I also incorporate an AE present moment listening as I compose the final analysis, which I signal by writing in the present tense. In listening for the "I" I have, following the guidelines of the *Listening Guide*,

⁴⁵⁶ See Farb et al, "Attending to the present," 313-322. My experience of my own self as a symbolist, as similar to the idea of each of us having a metaphoric landscape see James Lawley and Penny Tompkins, *Metaphors in Mind: transformation through symbolic modelling* (London: The Developing Company Press, 2003), 35-39.

⁴⁵⁷ Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 78.

⁴⁵⁸ Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 257-259.

⁴⁵⁹ Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 257-259.

⁴⁶⁰ See Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 78, Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 257.

⁴⁶¹ Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 78.

highlighting each 'I' phrase in the narrative, pulling out the subject and verb (plus object or important related word) of each phrase and placed them sequentially in the form of a poem. Each natural pause or break is signalled by a line break to create stanzas.⁴⁶² The purpose of the 'I' poem is to 'listen to what this person knows of her – or himself.'⁴⁶³ This resonates with mindful theory which is about cultivating self-awareness. The 'I' poem also reveals 'an associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice.'⁴⁶⁴ For example, my 'I' Poem picks up a repeated theme of being 'shaped' and 'made' by boarding school.

Here is an illustrative example from my second listening:

I realised
I'd been shaped
I did
I read a book
I'm going back now

I would say
I had realising
I realised
I was
I had been shaped
I'd been shaped
I'd been made

I'd been made
I was taught
I thought
I had to solve everything
I couldn't express
I mustn't
I shouldn't

This is also a listening that pays attention to the associative logic that can uncover the unconscious and dissociated imprinted in the voice.⁴⁶⁵ For

⁴⁶² Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 78.

⁴⁶³ Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 259.

⁴⁶⁴ Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 260.

⁴⁶⁵ Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 79.

example, in my script I have italicized the hidden story and processes that have emerged in the statements, *'I couldn't express, I mustn't, I shouldn't.'*

The third listening is called 'Listening for Contrapuntal Voices' (Table Four, interview one, in the appendix for this chapter).⁴⁶⁶ This uses a musical analogy of how the voice can be layered in a way a piece of music can be. It recognizes there are different voices within the voice and within us, that might be in tension. In the sample above I can express some things and yet feel I cannot express other things. These can be different voices.⁴⁶⁷ Different voices can be identified, and the researcher can choose to work with all of them or some of them (see Table Four in the appendix for chapter five). I repeat the analytical process for the second self-interview and place the tables for the listenings in the appendix for chapter five at the end of the thesis (second interview).

The final step in using the method of the *Listening Guide* is that of critically analysing the data or evidence gathered and then 'composing' an analysis, to extend the musical analogy, by taking the notes that have been identified and interpreting them.⁴⁶⁸ This final analysis follows the transcripts in this chapter as a creative synthesis of the first three listenings. This composition is also another further layer of listening which may amend the notes of the earlier listenings. It is both the structured process and the final analysis that drew me to the *Listening Guide*. My second research question is, 'how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?' I am aware that my anxious thought patterns overwhelm and block my sense(s) of my own self. Boarding school was instrumental in blocking key aspects of my self-expression. I was not in touch with my feelings; I did not express them. I avoided my experiential self. I did not cultivate self-awareness. My AE experience is that when I inhabit my senses of my own self, I am more able to sense the presence of God, because the presence of

⁴⁶⁶ Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 79.

⁴⁶⁷ See Gilligan et al, "On the Listening Guide," 263.

⁴⁶⁸ Gilligan and Eddy, "On the Listening Path," 79.

God is within me. The *Listening Guide*, drawing as it does on psychodynamic theory, offers a way of accessing what is blocked, dissociated, out of awareness.⁴⁶⁹ I am also aware from my earlier research that my mind has a strong associative logic, and this method of research enables me to utilize this to uncover the hidden self that boarding school shaped. Finally, the *Listening Guide* researcher is called to be ‘fully attentive and present in the moment.’⁴⁷⁰ This is an essential part of mindfulness and my mindful approach and is another example of the congruence of this method with my own. The aim was also to in part answer my third research question, ‘how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self to further reclaim my present moments?’

I wish to further adapt Gilligan’s method by adding an explicitly spiritual listening, a mindfulness of God listening – listening for moments of meeting, seemings, appearings, evidence for a pre-existing implicit relationship. This reading is embedded within this chapter. I am, to use the words of Diadochus of Photike, seeking, as a graced response, to track ‘the footprints of the Invisible One.’⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Gilligan et al, “On the Listening Guide, 254.

⁴⁷⁰ Gilligan and Eddy, “On the Listening Path,” 80.

⁴⁷¹ Ermatinger, *Following the Footsteps*, 69.

Transcripts and summary

After introducing the *Listening Guide*, I now provide the transcripts of my two self-interviews, before adding an analysis.

Reclaiming the past to reclaim the present

It is the 18th February 2019.

What is your story of immersion in mindfulness?

‘And so, the story I want to tell is a story that hasn’t been told before. *Aah...*⁴⁷²and it is how my *ah* distress and lack of wellbeing brought me into this research. It all began back in 2006 when I was incredibly stressed, very anxious, awfully close to breakdown to burnout. And to help with this distress we were having some couple counselling... and it is the only counsellor who’s made this point *er* in all the counselling I’ve had in my counselling training *er* she said no wonder you are feeling like you are feeling because you went to boarding school... And that was an ‘aha’ moment, a moment of meeting where I realised something that maybe this wasn’t all my fault, maybe I’d been shaped *er* in a particular way.

So, what I did I read a book called *The Making of Them* by Nick Duffell all about boarding school experience and I’m going back now... I picked up three insights. Which are, I would say, these are cold insights now, the initial feeling I had realising these things has gone but... Three things that I realised that I was, I had been shaped, I’d been shaped, I’d been made *Aah* to be self-sufficient, to not ask for help... Because as a child there wasn’t anybody who could help, there was nobody you could say, ‘help me...!’

⁴⁷² The dots represent pauses not missing text.

Why did I have a breakdown?

‘So I’d been made... self-sufficient, fashioned in that way (*sniffs*)... also I was taught, learnt, I learnt that there was no point in expressing (*sighs*) my emotions of homesickness, sadness or anything else, because again there was nobody to talk to, (*inbreath*) nobody who could help with that... And um... (*laughs, swallows*), that’s what got me into trouble... that I thought I had to solve everything myself, that I couldn’t express these more difficult emotions because I thought that I mustn’t, that I shouldn’t... it wasn’t allowed. It wasn’t right...

It wasn’t what a man did (*sucks in a breath*), and I think the third thing I learnt was to be loyal... I was loyal. (*Sucks in a breath*) And perhaps overly loyal, so (*sucks in breath*) I couldn’t up to this point say anything about boarding school and that would have been disloyal, and I wasn’t even aware that that’s what I was thinking, and that’s why I’ve never looked at this or addressed this... (*swallows*).’

What helped?

‘And then at the same time in my psychotherapy training at Roehampton in 2006 I came across secular mindfulness and its practices (*breathes in*), which I found really helpful (*breathes, sucks teeth*). These practices and the mindful theory began to glue me back together (*swallows*). Especially realising that I was not an anxious person... I did have anxious thoughts, but these were not facts (*sniffs*). These were just passing mental events. Difficult ones *ahh um*.

But at the same time I came across a book called *The Jesus Prayer* by somebody called Simon Barrington-Ward, former Bishop of Coventry... and I met him... and he helped teach me about the Jesus Prayer. Which I also found really helpful. And sort of you took the gold and silver of God’s kingdom and helped glue me back *aah* together.

And as I was researching the Jesus Prayer, I came across the fifth century Greek Bishop Diadochus of Photike and a phrase of his translated by Olivier Clement (*swallows*) *ah* 'Fix your eyes on the depths of your heart with an unceasing mindfulness of God' (*sniffs*). And this phrase, this idea of mindfulness of God, rang me like a bell (*breathes through nose*). And I knew it wasn't part of secular psychology, you wouldn't have this idea of mindfulness of God... I knew from my research Buddhists wouldn't generally talk about mindfulness of God but here was a Christian Bishop talking about mindfulness of God *um...*'

Why did my existing Christian ecosphere not help?

'But I also knew that in my Christian culture, modern day culture, evangelical, charismatic, the idea of meditations or mindfulness was something you weren't supposed to talk about (*pause*). It was taboo almost, *ah*, to be considered suspicious, and *um...* I've been looking back, as part of *um* the data I've collected for this research, to an article I wrote for the Baptist Times on Thursday July 24th 2008 (*rustle of paper*)... it was called 'Mindful of Our Lives,' and I was talking about mindfulness and *er* talking about its links *er* within the Christian traditions... And I say, 'Instead of doing the evangelical swoon the minute words like meditation and mindfulness are used we need to start exploring and practising contemplative prayer in all its rich variety.' That's the first time I (*breathes through nose*) WROTE about it publicly.

And then *um* I did a dissertation called *Why Now for Mindfulness?* as part of my MA in psychotherapy, and it was published in 2010. And I'm very careful there *ah* in the way I talk about mindfulness, and I say 'there is some evidence that mindfulness is a universal human capacity' and that was really *ah* and so as to not rock the boat, to not attract criticism, to be tentative *ah* in what I thought and felt. And looking back now I would be a lot more confident in what I say that mindfulness is our universal human capacity for attention and awareness...and I would say much more than that.'

Why did I have to go out of this ecosphere to mindfulness to get help?

'Um and at the same time I started writing about contemplative prayer, like the Jesus Prayer, like slow meditative reading of scripture, *Lectio Divina*... and these two things were not part of my Christian culture, nor was secular mindfulness and so I had to go outside my own culture, my Christian ecosphere...to find something that helped... um... and I hadn't found the answers, or the insights I needed, up to that point within this expression of my Christian faith... and that's something I will come back to when I'm interviewed again (door opens)...

I interview myself a second time. I'm reading Joy Schaverien's book on boarding school syndrome.⁴⁷³

In this second interview, as I am much more aware of the trauma and feelings having read Schaverien's book, I ask myself questions that reflect the emergence of related but deeper themes. The question about writing a letter to myself, is to let me younger self know I believe the story of trauma. The questions I asked myself were:

- What has emerged from the reading?
- If I wanted to write a letter to someone about my experience, who would I write it to?
- What has the impact been on me in the present moment, in the right here, in the right now?
- How do I feel right now?'

⁴⁷³ Schaverien, 1-94.

Tuesday 30th April 2019.

What has emerged from the reading?

'Having read the introduction and the case study of the man (Theo) whose story sounds very like mine; I am aware that this has given me words for my story... so I didn't have the words to describe it. It has also shown me how deep the trauma (*breathes*) was... strong words... abandoned, without love, without family... or even worse intermittently. Ten weeks without, four weeks with, ten weeks without, four weeks with... so you can never quite trust those times, moments of happiness with your family, because it's just going to be taken away again. And there was nobody (*ironic chuckle*) you could ask for help in the sense of how you were feeling. So, I remember *aah* being sent to boarding school at six and three quarters to Manor House in Kenya for a term. I had my brother... but I just remember how lonely I felt, how I did not understand why I was there, what I had done, why I had to go for a term... and prior to that it had been idyllic in the Kenyan highlands, running around, freedom... and here suddenly who could you speak to, I did not know who to ask what to do (*um*)...

'I literally felt like I had been silenced. My memory is being a very chatty child up to that point and after that being much quieter, finding it much more difficult to speak, say what I thought or felt. (*Breathes in...*) I think I have always been hard on myself and dismissed, had no understanding of how traumatic boarding school was. But now I can see that the person I became was understandable. So, this self-sufficiency, no point asking for help, not expressing emotions, there was no point.

I remember one evening at the prep school I went to later in England, someone being homesick. And triggering an asthma attack and how it was dismissed and how they'd also tried to run away and they were brought back by the police, and I just realised how pointless it was to try and escape

because there was no escape, you were a prisoner, a captive, I was a prisoner, I was captive.

(*Swallows*) and there wasn't intimacy... it was an all-male environment apart from the matron and at the prep school we had a matron who was very tough (*sniffs*), and we had a younger matron who was 18 and was very kind... and at half term, because I was in England and my family lived in Kenya and there was nowhere to go (*sigh*) home, so often you had to stay at school (*sigh*), you might get invited home to another boy's family... but she invited me and another boy to her family farm, and we stayed there for a week. I remember that kindness...

I'm sitting here at Scargill House in a walled garden, because it feels safe here...and that's what I did, I walled myself in, built a wall of protection around myself, with gates, doors but difficult to let people in... And in the walled garden I would bring books where I could (*breathes*) escape...'

If I wanted to write a letter to someone about my experience, who would I write it to?

'And in Joy Schaverien's book the client thinks about writing to his mother, and actually that's not what I feel, what I feel is I want to write to my younger self...and that having read these books I feel much more compassion, much more understanding (*aah*) to that part of me... and so that's something I may do as well as part of this research.'

What has the impact been on me in the present moment, in the right here, in the right now?

'And I think one of the reasons I'm drawn to watchfulness and mindfulness (*sighs*) is that I am extremely vigilant and anxiously watching all the time in order to keep myself safe which is a product of the boarding school experience... What I am intuitively looking for is a kind of more gracious,

more spacious watchfulness (*sucks his teeth*) that is different to what I've lived with for so long...(*swallows*)... with this idea that I'm always on the edge of (*breathes*) happiness, I can't quite fully allow myself to experience it, to enter into it, (*sniffs*) just in case it is taken away again. (*Swallows*) And I think as an adult there has been a fear that I can't quite trust people, they will (*swallows*) abandon me, and I think in the past I have withdrawn from people when I've not felt safe... and that again intuitively (*swallows*) through Benedictine spirituality, being in the same church for 22 years I am trying to live in a place of stability and not withdraw (*swallows*) so, although I am aware that is what I've done to the people I love and have loved at times. (*silent pause*)'

How do I feel right now?

'And I feel very emotional... I feel it in my body welling up, within my heart, I feel the closeness of tears... it is less intense than the first time I read it... I captured that elsewhere and will use that as part of this research. And I guess what I'm trying to do is bring into awareness what has been dissociated, what I am trying to do is get to the primary wound. And that is not just about the anxiety but also about the shame... that this was a shaming culture... You had to be constantly vigilant to obey the rules in order not to be shamed... And still now today I want to obey the rules so I am not shamed. I want to be free from this, free from the gravitational pull of this. I've just had an operation for Quinsy where they lanced, drew out pus from a very swollen throat wall and tonsil (*aah*). And just the sense that deep down, somewhere deep inside, there's still this pus (*swallows*) of trauma that still infects me, and I'm trying to draw this pus out of this abscess within me. Constantly leaking anxiety and shame, and in this process, I want to draw it out, to lance it. To be healed completely.'

The analysis of the first self-interview

In this brief self-interview, I tell the story of the making of me at boarding school (a deformation), the unmaking of me through stress, burnout and breakdown, and the remaking of me through secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God (a reformation). I speculate that I am drawn intuitively to AE, which tells stories that have not been told before, precisely because that is my experience, 'I want to tell a story that hasn't been told before.' There are moments of turning and insight through people or texts. In many years of personal counselling only one counsellor identified the root of my mental health distress, 'no wonder you are feeling what you are feeling because you went to boarding school.' AE is also about focusing on epiphanies, what I am calling moments of meeting. I recall this 'throwaway' comment about boarding school from the counsellor, 'And that was an aha moment, a moment of meeting where I realised something that maybe this wasn't all my fault.' Mindfulness theory stresses the importance of being non-judgemental and is often used with self-compassion.⁴⁷⁴ And this is where my autobiographical insight converges with the ethnographic moment of mindfulness and my desire to live by the ethics laid out by Jesus in scripture. I desire to cultivate a less judgemental self that is attuned with Jesus' call to not judge, and to love our neighbour and our own self (Matthew 7:1, Mark 12:31).

In a repeated theme I turn to texts, to books for help, 'So what I did I read a book called *The Making of Them* by Nick Duffell all about boarding school experience.' I picked up three key insights about my old self that had been made and shaped by the powerful deforming culture of boarding school. Although in the interview I spoke them out without the emotional force they first hit me, 'I would say these are cold insights now the initial feeling I

⁴⁷⁴ See Vago and Silbersweig, 1, for emphasis on a non-judgmental attitude and Dr Elisha Goldstein, *Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression through Mindfulness and Self-Compassion* (London: Simon & Schuster) 2015 for the way mindfulness and compassion theories overlap and interact, see introduction xvi-xvii.

had realising these things has gone...' As I read the words again the response of my researcher self in the moment is to feel tearful. Reading this book was a key turning point in self-awareness. I learnt some key insights about my old self.

The first insight was that I had been made to be self-sufficient, shaped to not ask for help. The theme of self-reliance runs through Duffell's book.⁴⁷⁵ One insight of Duffell's that is particularly helpful as I relook at his theoretical stance on this is that in choosing to be self-reliant the boarding school survivors 'make a script-decision not to be needy.'⁴⁷⁶ This self-reliance is chosen as a way to survive, and it includes the decision not to have needs. That boarding school children create an adapted survival personality is one of Duffell's most helpful observations.⁴⁷⁷ The script or schema that operates out of my awareness could be, 'I cannot ask for help.' The second insight was that I was also shaped not to be emotionally expressive.⁴⁷⁸ In fact, as I remember the experience now in the moment of writing, I remember avoiding expressions of homesickness or sadness so that I was not shamed. It was taboo. Another distorted script is, 'it is not safe for me to express my emotions.' I learnt to express feelings indirectly through poetry. I pick up that within me still there is a well of sadness I have avoided (perhaps frozen). I remember trees in Kenya with sap that had trapped insects on the bark, becoming amber. It is as if that happened to my feelings. The final insight was that I had been made to be loyal, to not question. It was an unthinking loyalty.⁴⁷⁹ The narrative of boarding school was that I was privileged to be there.⁴⁸⁰ I was, therefore, both silent and unaware. However, the times I 'swallow,' 'suck in my breath,' in my physical voice shows the embodied, emotional nature of AE research, which the

⁴⁷⁵ Duffell, 53, 72, 237, 238, 239, 244,246, 248.

⁴⁷⁶ Duffell, 244.

⁴⁷⁷ See Duffell, chapter 12 on Surviving and chapter 13 on Needs and the Masks of Survival, 219-249.

⁴⁷⁸ Duffell, 7 – although the theme of emotional suppression runs through his book as a main coping mechanism.

⁴⁷⁹ Duffell, 129-131.

⁴⁸⁰ The subtitle of Schaverien's book on Boarding School Syndrome is 'The psychological trauma of the "privileged" child.'

Listening Guide's emphasis on the voice as bearing the imprint of life and culture facilitates.

At the end of the interview, I come back to two more moments of meeting and encounters with texts and practices. I came across secular mindfulness and its practices, that 'began to glue me back together.' I realised that I am bigger than my thoughts and feelings; I can defuse from them. In terms of a hidden plot, I wonder if in God's providence I met a Christian counsellor who understood about the trauma of boarding school, and whether finding the Jesus Prayer was also part of God's hidden providence. Certainly, here I have a moment of meeting with God when I read about mindfulness of God, a Christian distinctive, which 'rang me like a bell.' As I think about that moment again right now, I am aware that the energy of that moment is still with me.

I recognize, in a sort of parallel process, that there is pressure on me as a minister to stay silent about mindfulness and meditation, just as I was pressured to be silent about the shadow side of boarding school.⁴⁸¹ However, I do tell the story of discovering mindfulness in a public forum. As I begin to research mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God, I began cautiously recognizing that 'there is some evidence that mindfulness is a universal human capacity.' However, since 2010 when I first produced a substantial piece of research on mindfulness, I am much more confident that mindfulness is our universal capacity for attention and awareness. I am also aware that I am having to go outside my immediate Christian culture for help. There is something in secular mindfulness, and something in Christian contemplation I am not getting in my immediate local church experience within the evangelical and charismatic movement.

⁴⁸¹ See Schaverien, 9.

The 'I' Poem – The second listening

In the 'I' poem I am looking for what I know about myself; I practise self-awareness. The creation of the poem also helps me to be more self-aware of my hidden, dissociated self through the patterns of 'I' statements. I notice the repetition of the words shaped and made:

I realised
I'd been shaped...

I realised
I was
I had been shaped
I'd been shaped
I'd been made

I'd been made

This is part of the plot I have outlined, the 'making of me,' but this repetition, almost like banging a drum, hammers home the power of this deformation of my narrative self.

How had I been shaped? Part of this shaping and making of me was that I was made silent:

I couldn't express
I mustn't
I shouldn't

I connect this silencing with the recognition that 'I was shaped to be loyal,' unthinkingly and unquestioningly. This led to a lack of awareness, an inability to observe myself:

I wasn't even aware
I was thinking
I've never looked

As I listened to myself from the perspective of mindful awareness and the critical gaze of mindful theory, I realised that the anthropology of boarding

school was a disembodied, emotionally uninhabited, unaware life. This lack of awareness is followed by a new knowing:

I knew it wasn't
I knew
I also knew

I move from not knowing to knowing. Mindful theory shows me that this old narrative self needed to turn from being unaware to awareness, from an experientially and embodied avoidance to an indwelling of my body and emotions. I know that in a new scriptural narrative I can ask for help. Perhaps the turn to mindfulness and mindfulness of God, where 'I had to go outside,' is learning to ask for help.

The third listening – Listening for contrapuntal voices

As I begin to tell the story that has not been told before, I notice that there are two voices in counterpoint, a voice that has chosen to speak, and a voice that was silenced. As I had the moment of meeting with the counsellor, the emerging voice of self-compassion contrasted with the recognition of a pre-existing inner critic, a judgemental voice, 'I realised something that maybe this wasn't all my fault.' In a study of depressed women using Gilligan's *Listening Guide*, Dana Jack identifies a voice she calls the 'over-eye,' which is 'the part of the self that observed, judged, shamed the self.'⁴⁸² This symbol resonated with me, and I am taken back to the experience of boarding school, and I realise I never had any privacy. I lived in a dormitory with other boys, one of whom was a prefect whose job was to keep a constant eye on us. I worked in a study room with others when we did homework. I ate with many others in the refectory. It was not until 'O' level year that I was allowed, with others, to go into the town not wearing school uniform. Always wearing school uniform meant you were visible. Very often if someone did something wrong in your class, or year group, or dormitory, we were all shamed – and so we became part of the 'over-eye' of boarding

⁴⁸² Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (Harper Perennial, 1993), 94-95.

school, which kept us in line by shaming us with exposure, whether we had done something wrong or not. The ‘over-eye’ of God, which I pick up on later in the interview in talking about mindfulness of God, is not one I associate with shame, but with compassion and care and grace. There is a divine counterpoint at work here in my life.

As I talk about the insights I learnt from Nick Duffell’s book, my spoken voice is stoical (cold), but my researcher self’s voice is warm, emotional, and tearful. The silenced voice emerges again, ‘there was no point in expressing (sighs) my emotions of homesickness, sadness or anything else...’ I also recall that ‘there was nobody to talk to.’ I learnt to rely on myself, to be self-sufficient. The ‘over-eye’ re-emerges in the words ‘I mustn’t, that I shouldn’t... it wasn’t allowed.’ The over-eye of boarding school has become internalised. This over-eye that mandates silent loyalty, ‘I couldn’t up to this point say anything about boarding school and that would have been disloyal,’ would judge my speaking up now as disloyal. As mindfulness enters my narrative, I move from not being aware, ‘I wasn’t even aware that that’s what I was thinking,’ to being aware. The voice of my mindful witnessing self which has developed through mindful theory and mindful awareness practices says, ‘Especially realising that I was not an anxious person... I did have anxious thoughts, but these were not facts...(sniffs.)’

I recognize listening again to the moment my life changed, as I read the words of Diadochus, ‘Let us keep our eyes always fixed on the depths of our heart with an unceasing mindfulness of God,’ that although I did not hear the words as a spoken voice, God’s presence brought the words alive, and they spoke to me. They did not just speak to me, they passed through the locked doors of my old narrative self, my experientially avoidant self. They entered with divine energy into my body, my emotions, my imagination. My intuitive voice freely turned toward mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God, and I followed that voice even though I did not hear it in conscious awareness. Perhaps, God also rang that intuitive voice like a bell so that it

reverberated in conscious awareness. As I write this in the present moment, I am aware of associative logic at work.

My tentative public comments about mindfulness at the beginning of my research are signs of a cautious voice, one that resonates with a careful self from boarding school. I begin to resist this careful self; a voice of resistance develops. As my research develops, a more confident voice is heard. The voice of my researcher self also emerges in critical analysis, in contrast with the voice that is unquestioningly loyal, 'I had to go outside my own culture, my Christian ecosphere.'

The Fourth listening

I have added a fourth mindfulness of God listening. A related question is, where was God in my boarding school experience? There was a religious tradition in the school, with chapel every morning and on a Sunday. However, I have no recollection of any transcendent experience. It might be the self-sufficiency ingrained into me, and the impossibility of asking for help meant that I did not consider God as a possible source of salvation. I know from my immersion in the paradise that was Kenya that I believed in a creator; what I did not have was any sense of Jesus as Saviour or Lord. In faith I believe that the Holy Spirit would have been at work in me and my life, but I had no awareness of it. The seeds of awareness, were sown in Kenya - noticing the flick of a lion's ear, the pink yawn of a leopard in a tree, along with a wider sense of awareness of nature as creation. There is a hint here of the importance of symbols in my life, which will emerge in the next chapter, with the recognition of my childhood in Kenya being a paradise. Both this chapter and the next chapter, where I take up exploring how to transform my experientially avoidant self, also signpost the significance of symbols to me, and particularly symbols from my East African childhood. I explore this 'symbolic self' further in chapter six.

Conclusion

I can see in these multiple listenings both a clear expression of my old narrative self and experientially avoidant self. I can also begin to see the emergence of a new narrative self, with a new mindful spirituality. Boarding school did not teach the inhabiting of emotions or the body, merely the mind. Perhaps this is also true of my experience of evangelical church culture. It was a contemplative turn that brought healing and transformation – secular mindful theory and practices integrated into my quest to be mindful of God.

The second listening, the 'I' poem, reveals the rigidity of the boarding school self and its fracturing as old ways of coping no longer work. The flow of association unveils dissociated and unconscious processes that have been hidden and silenced – 'I couldn't express, I mustn't, I shouldn't... I wasn't even aware, I wasn't looking.' I am aware here as I write this that something is missing from the narrative which I feel now, and that is the physical pains that have been with me since boarding school – lower back ache, stiff neck, knots in my shoulder muscles. This is where the emotions I have been avoiding have been held. As I inhabit my body in a new aware way the emotions begin to unfreeze, and my body becomes less rigid. There is a movement from not knowing to knowing, from never looking to looking, from not telling to telling. There is a necessity here, I *had* to go outside my culture.

In the third listening, there are different voices held in tension: a voice that wants to speak, a voice that has been silenced; the voice of judgement that has been imprinted by boarding school culture, and a new voice of compassion grown by mindfulness theory and practice. I feel the internal brakes producing an inhibited voice that speaks of 'cold insights.' There is a stoic voice that has simply accepted the learned reality; a loyal voice that is silent and a disloyal voice that speaks up. The voice of the witnessing self

has been able to open the door to freedom. Here there is the clearest counterpoint of old self and new mindful self: the new mindful self seeks to relativize the old self through realising my thoughts are just passing mental events, and through the cultivation of self-compassion and a non-judgmental stance. This is the beginning of a new narrative. I move from a cautious self to a more confident self. I move from not being aware of God to being aware of God's presence, particularly in a key moment of meeting.

In the fourth listening a key insight about the importance of symbols to me emerges. From a theological stance I believe that even as a child unaware of God as friend I was in an implicit relationship with God. I can sense now that God used symbols in this implicit relationship that could emerge later or sustain me at boarding school. It is here as well as my lived experience that theology and theory have helped me – and I develop this in chapter six.

I am also aware of distorted scripts, such as, 'I cannot ask for help,' and 'it is not safe for me to express my emotions.' I can rewrite these as positive metacognitive propositions (to draw on the work in chapter four) such as, 'I can ask for help,' and 'I can find safe places to express my emotions.' I can meditate on these until they become values held in mnemonic awareness that can emerge as 'things of God' in ethical moments of choice. They become part of a new narrative self.

Self-Interview Two – The *Listening Guide*

In this second self-interview using Gilligan's *Listening Guide*, I am paying attention to my reactions and response to reading Joy Schaverien's book on boarding school experience. I asked myself questions in the self-interview and recorded my answers.

The analysis of this second self-interview

The narrative of this second self-interview builds on many of the themes of the first interview but goes much deeper with the felt experience of the trauma. I was beginning to tell my story in the first narrative, but here I am aware that another man's story of boarding school experience as told by his therapist gave words to my trauma for the first time, 'I am aware that this has given me words for my story... so I didn't have the words to describe it.' The words that describe the trauma such as, 'abandoned, without love, without family,' are very evocative for me and become another 'aha' moment as I realise the depth of the trauma. This story cannot be dismissed or swept under the carpet.

The pattern of term-time followed by holiday time, of a long sadness followed by a brief happiness meant I withdrew from both feelings. I acknowledge there were moments, periods of happiness within the holidays. I recognize in the moment that I have stayed on the edge of happiness as an adult ever since, just in case happiness was taken away again. This is the past influencing the present. The old narrative self believes happiness will always be taken away and cannot be trusted or enjoyed. The script might be, 'push happiness away because it will be taken away from you.' The depth of trauma is also because of the idyllic nature of my childhood that I was torn from, 'I just remember how lonely I felt, how I did not understand why I was there, what I had done, why I had to go for a term... and prior to that it had been idyllic in the Kenyan highlands, running

around, freedom...’ In my response to the recognition of the idyllic nature of my early childhood, I wrote a response in the moment, *‘The words that come to mind as I hear my voice and read these words again are, thrown out of Eden, paradise lost, a forbidding angel with a fiery sword blocking the way back to the place of innocence.’*⁴⁸³ These symbols are powerful and evocative and encouraged me to explore further what other symbols are hidden away in me. Mindfulness theory recognizes we have a negativity bias. Because of this am I blanking out symbols from my childhood that could sustain me?⁴⁸⁴

There is another theme in the plot which is clearer in this second narrative. As a child before I went to boarding school I had a voice, ‘My memory is being a very chatty child up to that point and after that being much quieter.’ After boarding school, I found it ‘much more difficult to speak, say what I thought or felt.’ I am now finding my voice again. In the moment as I wrote my response to this first listening, another childhood memory emerges, connected to my very chatty young self:

I remember being called ‘egghead’ by my parents because I had white-blond hair and large round face. In the car I would call myself ‘Emperor Egg’ and regale my family with stories of how I was going to rule the world. This would have been at the age of 4 and 5. As I remember this the story of Humpty Dumpty comes to mind. I had a great fall. I did not realise that I needed putting back together.

I consistently talk about how mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God have glued me back together; perhaps this is an intuitive use of the word ‘glued’ in the light of this image of needing ‘putting back together.’ As I recall the story of the boy who tried to run away from my school and who expressed his homesickness, I realise that I stepped away from the edge, I decided to survive, to adapt. I tell the story of a splash of kindness from a young matron. This highlights for me a hidden theme, already alluded to, about possibly forgetting good experiences. I pick up on this when I focus on the location for the recording of this second self-interview, the walled

⁴⁸³ Table Two, the first listening, interview one, appendix.

⁴⁸⁴ Vago and Silbersweig, 6 on the negativity bias.

garden at Scargill House. My sense is that I have intuitively chosen this space to record a vulnerable experience. The walled garden as a symbol speaks to me. I survived and adapted by building a walled garden within me. It was books that enabled me to escape into this walled garden. But perhaps they enabled more than escape.

I have already identified the theme of a turn away from my old judgemental self, toward a new compassionate self, 'I feel I want to write to my younger self...and that having read these books I feel much more compassionate, much more understanding (aah) to that part of me...' This emphasis on being non-judgmental and self-compassionate is part of mindful theory and practice but is also part of the Christian tradition. I have written a prayer of self-compassion called the Ananias Prayer, and here secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God converge. This judgmental self is linked to what I have previously called the internalised 'over-eye.' In the next section of the interview, I conceptualise this as a hyper-vigilance and anxious form of watchfulness, 'I am extremely vigilant and anxiously watching all the time to keep myself safe which is a product of the boarding school experience.' I speculate that I am drawn to mindfulness because I am looking for a different form of watchfulness, 'what I am intuitively looking for is a kind of more gracious, more spacious watchfulness (sucks his teeth) that is different to what I've lived with for so long...' There is a convergence here between my intuitive self and the symbolic appeal of biblical mindfulness and watchfulness as part of a new narrative that can lead me out of an anxious self-focus, seeking to keep me safe.

As I come back to this idea of living on the edge of happiness, my spoken voice gets very staccato and broken up with non-verbal cues of swallowing, sniffing and a change in breathing. This mirrors the stop-start nature of boarding school and holidays. I make a spiritual connection here to Benedictine spirituality and its vow of stability, which mirrors the stability

of God.⁴⁸⁵ Once more my intuitive self seems to be drawn to what will help me, or is perhaps guided by God, or co-operates with God's grace. It is at this point I ask the last research question, 'How do I feel right now?'

My researcher self feels very emotional, I feel the emotions in an embodied way, including the welling up of tears. I have got close to the original felt sense of the trauma and found the words that evoke the repressed emotions. I speculate that the shaming culture of boarding school made me anxiously watchful, 'And that is not just about the anxiety but also about the shame... that this was a shaming culture... You had to be constantly vigilant to obey the rules in order not to be shamed... and still now today I want to obey the rules so I am not shamed.' This recognition of shame is a recurring theme in my research. I engage with it here in more theoretical depth.

A resonant conversation partner has been Stephen Pattison's autoethnographic and practical theological book, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*.⁴⁸⁶ Written some twenty years ago, it shows the power and importance of autoethnography and is an early use of AE in practical theology. Pattison holds a pessimistic view about whether any of the theory and therapy he summarizes helps to lift people out of shame.⁴⁸⁷ The book is written before the mindfulness and compassion-based therapies expanded in relation to shame. The aim in my work in terms of dealing with my shame is not therapeutic but spiritual; how can I stop shame taking me out of the present moment into mental time travel so that I can be more mindful of God? The approach I am taking, as with anxiety, which also takes me out of the present moment, is not to try and eradicate shame but change my relationship to shame. This is the approach of mindfulness. I relativize shame by recognizing it is just thoughts, just feelings, not facts. There are

⁴⁸⁵ See Stewart OSB, 71-77.

⁴⁸⁶ Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸⁷ Pattison *Shame*, 166.

other reasons mindfulness and compassion-based therapies are posited to work with mindfulness.⁴⁸⁸

Written in 2019, an article exploring the relationship between mindfulness, self-compassion, and shame supports Pattison's assertion that psychology has made little progress in helping those with chronic shame, 'Although researchers have been exploring shame, the methods by which it could be managed or lessened have received little consideration.'⁴⁸⁹ However, there are promising signs that mindfulness and compassion-based therapies can enable those experiencing shame to hold it rather than be held by it.⁴⁹⁰ The physical experience of having had an abscess lanced in my throat wall reflects the emotional experience of lancing the trauma. I feel my new self, my mindful spirituality, is coming out of the gravitational pull of the old self, with its hold on my present.

The 'I' poem begins with a deep experience of awareness, 'I am aware that this has given me words for my story – so I didn't have the words.' 'This' is reading the story of someone else's boarding school experience as revealed by a therapist's wisdom, and I become aware how deep the trauma of separation from my parents and home was, and how unaware of that trauma I was, 'I did not understand,' and 'I did not know.' Awareness is a great gift to me. I become aware 'I was a prisoner,' 'I was captive,' but I also realise that 'I walled myself in.' Into that secret, walled garden I brought books, and 'I could (breathes) escape.'

Reading Schaverien's book pulled memories out of my unconscious through the gravitational pull of the truth of her description and analysis. I remember the first time I went to boarding school at six and three quarters

⁴⁸⁸ Neda Sedighimornani, Katherine A. Rimes, and Bas Verplanken, "Exploring the Relationship Between Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, and Shame," *Sage Open* (July-September 2019):1-9, accessed December 7, 2021, <http://doi:10.1177/2158244019866294>.

⁴⁸⁹ Sedighimornani, Rimes and Verplanken, 1.

⁴⁹⁰ Sedighimornani, Rimes and Verplanken, 1-9.

and that 'I just remember how lonely I felt.' I remember a story of someone trying to run away from the boarding school in England and them having an asthma attack, 'I just realised how pointless it was to try and escape.' I also remember splashes of kindness. There is an internal tension. There is part of me that says, 'I want to obey,' and a part of me that says, 'I want to be free.' The 'I' poem ends with the repetition of, 'I'm trying to do, I'm trying to do... I'm trying to draw, I want to draw it out.' Even in the present I want to obey 'the rules so I am not shamed.' But I want to be free 'from the gravitational pull of this,' the trauma, the anxiety and shame. Just as the pus from the abscess in my throat had to be lanced, I am trying to draw out the pus of the trauma that keeps re-infecting me. It is a painful process. I am aware I need to choose freedom over security. I realise that the sense of security that following the rules gives me is an illusion.

In the third listening I am aware of the different voices within. My voice was silenced and now I am finding my voice, but I had to borrow words from another so dissociated was I from was my story of trauma. The pattern of holiday and term-time that I recall, 'Ten weeks without, four weeks with, ten weeks without, four weeks with...', seems like a fracture and repair pattern until the fracture is calcified and my voice is calcified. I am aware listening to my physical voice that the emotion in it has been overlaid with the drip, drip, drip of this pattern. I need to find my real voice. I say, 'My memory is being a very chatty child up to that point and after that being much quieter, finding it much more difficult to speak, say what I thought or felt.' My real voice would be able to do self-expression. My real voice would be able to express emotion. I would know that I had found my real voice when I could hear emotion and self-expression in my physical voice. I recognize in my notes that 'If there is no one to speak to, there is no point in speaking.' I learnt self-sufficiency, but I will find my real voice when I am able to express myself to others, to ask for help, to express emotion and vulnerability. I go on to say, 'So this self-sufficiency, no point asking for help, not expressing emotions, there was no point.' I have had to learn there is a point to asking for help and expressing emotions.

There is a strongly implicit critical voice that I became aware of, 'I think I have always been hard on myself and dismissed, had no understanding of how traumatic boarding school was.' But now a new compassionate voice has emerged, compassionate toward my younger self, 'But now I can see that the person I became was understandable.'

I have not done a fourth mindfulness of God reading for this interview as I already have the sense of the importance of the symbolic interaction between myself and God. I come back to this symbolic interaction in chapter six. I do, however, have some autoethnographic associations to reflect on before I move on to the importance of symbols in my spiritual life.

I have signposted my third research question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self to further reclaim my present moments?' I now return to it considering this chapter. My main strand of theoretical and practical help in this quest has been mindfulness. The development of my self-awareness has brought what was hidden, the trauma of my boarding school past, into the light. Mindfulness has been able to help relativize the distorted scripts from boarding school, just as they have helped to relativize the anxious thoughts that overwhelmed my present moments in chapter four. However, in terms of a more critical reflection on mindfulness, I have realised I need something more than mindfulness to reclaim my past. It is embodied and sociological trauma theory that has enabled me to inhabit and make transparent the room of my past – and live in it with some measure of peace. I outline this in the next section. In fairness to mindfulness, however, embodied trauma theory acknowledges that mindfulness can be incorporated into the treatment of trauma to enable healing.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2014), 208-210.

Emergent associations and reflections

Whilst I am focusing on this specific self-interview and the process and boundaries of the *Listening Guide* approach I have adapted, at a wider autoethnographic level I am aware of memories and dreams that float like blocks of ice towards my ship. I share some of Schaverien's words here because the experience for me was literally unspeakable, and yet they name my experience. I realise in the past that to access what has been repressed and dissociated from, I have had to deliberately write creatively, symbolically, to try and represent the horror and the terror in a sort of fairy story or fantasy. These are some of the phrases that enable me to own and name the depth of trauma:

'deprived of love and appropriate physical contact.'⁴⁹²

'For the boy, if he is not to be burdened with the epithet "cissy," he must feign independence...'⁴⁹³

'Too painful to bear, such traumatic memories may be repressed and so remain unconscious into adult life.'⁴⁹⁴

I want to bring in here some of the intuitive ways I have written in the past that might be unconscious ways of processing what my gut instinct knew was there. In 2013 I wrote a children's fantasy novel from the perspective of my inner vulnerable child. Both the hero and the heroine were parts of me. In the novel, as with all good fairy tales, the parents were absent, dead, cruel or possessed. I wrote it intuitively and from my unconscious, and I believe it contains the experience of boarding school that I couldn't express any other way.

I sensed that it could be analysed symbolically for the unconscious material I had repressed and that was literally unspeakable:

⁴⁹² Schaverien, 41.

⁴⁹³ Schaverien, 41.

⁴⁹⁴ Schaverien, 50.

The Boarding School Syndrome is created as a necessary defence against unbearable experiences. The dismantling of such defences is not a process lightly undertaken.⁴⁹⁵

A key word for my research is that it is crystalizing and crystalizing slowly. I have placed a line of awareness into my unconscious, and the research pilgrimage has crystalized around that line. However, it is a slow process, and some elements can only crystalize at the right moment. Only now does it seem the right moment to listen to the unspoken voice of my boarding school childhood. I sense that as I have become more self-aware, I can hold the pain more easily, and there is a necessity for some resolution of the shadow of my boarding school past.

A response to Schaverien's narrative

I have been implicitly working on the past since 1997 when I started my counselling and psychotherapy training. I journaled the impact of reading the first few chapters of Schaverien's book on Wednesday October 25th 2018:

I had a disturbed night and Clare told me I was shouting in my sleep. I woke up early with a splitting headache, feeling sick and as if I had a temperature. My neck, shoulders and lower back were tight like armour, and this tension had brought on the headache. It was as if I had re-experienced the trauma as I slept. I was able to use a mindfulness practice called the body scan to relax my body in the moment. What I wanted to do was to use mindfulness to find a place of open awareness where I could allow the past to emerge in safety.

Before I went to sleep, all these memories had surfaced from boarding school; I wrote them in my journal:

A dream of a great dam that I had built. Always hungry. Not allowed to ever wear 'civvies' always school uniform. Stole bread. On exeat when 6 and 3/4s would talk to my parents early on but as the day went on, I would stop talking, my eyes would fill with tears but I wouldn't cry. On the first day of the holidays in Kenya I would wake full of dread, but then the sunlight of home would filter through the

⁴⁹⁵ Schaverien, 61.

curtains and the dread would leave and I would briefly feel happy. When it was the first night back at boarding school, I would wake up feeling happy until I realised where I was, and then the happiness would seep out, and dread replaced it. I was very moved by one phrase from Schaverien's client Theo, 'How do you ask for something when no one is there?'⁴⁹⁶ The word that bubbled into my mind as I read it, for me, what I was asking for...'HELP!'

In Schaverien's book about working with boarding school survivors, I have mentioned the impact of one of her patients, Theo, whom she helped to tell his story. I was also moved by the pictures that Theo drew for Schaverien. Pictures have helped me and form part of this AE research. In one picture Theo had killed part of himself ('soul murder').⁴⁹⁷ Immediately I was reminded of the soul-eaters in my fantasy novel. I realised I had managed to put some of the unspeakable horror in this book by writing it in an intuitive way from my unconscious. Other parts of the book came to mind as I thought about this. The bad person in my fantasy novel is called the Fowler, from the Bible and the phrase 'the fowler's snare.' (Psalm 91:3) Perhaps the Fowler was symbolic of boarding school, and I was trying to escape the fowler's snare like a small bird frantically flapping its wings in vain. Where is my real self? The answer lies above, in a place where dragons live. A place, that Schaverien says took 'tremendous courage' for Theo to enter.⁴⁹⁸ I am entering that place of hidden trauma, step by step. One way I revisit this place is through trauma theory. Before I do so I want to briefly reflect on my engagement with narrative.

My engagement with narrative

In the research process I have chosen to use autoethnography, a narrative form of research. I have told the story of my Camino walk through a stream

⁴⁹⁶ Schaverien, 78.

⁴⁹⁷ Schaverien, 73-75.

⁴⁹⁸ Schaverien, 61.

of consciousness. I am critical of the development of a distorted narrative self through boarding school and am rewriting those narratives. I am aware that this story of my boarding school experience has been the most difficult to write. Trauma theory which I return to helps explain this, but Schaverien also makes a crucial point. This insight has been working its way out of my unconscious into my awareness like a splinter. She recognizes that ‘what is lost in boarding school is the narrative function for emotional experience.’⁴⁹⁹ My sense is that I am drawn to AE, the evocative and the poetic to find a way of expressing emotion that I have not been able to express. She adds that the ‘unspeakable loss causes a psychological freezing: the child is literally “lost for words.”’⁵⁰⁰ It is through this AE writing that I have been able to experience my unfreezing.

Embodied trauma theory and me

Following the emergence of old trauma in July 2020 I began to read embodied trauma theory in more depth. The reading created a sympathetic resonance with this chapter. As I revisited this chapter in the light of embodied trauma theory I realized that it is possible, that the process of the *Listening Guide* is congruent with trauma theory as developed by pioneers such as Bessel van der Kolk, and Peter Levine.⁵⁰¹ The *Listening Guide* could in my experience be a way of getting in touch with the ‘felt sense,’ which ‘is our capacity to tune into what our bodies know.’⁵⁰² This works because it is in the body where trauma is stored.⁵⁰³ The *Listening Guide* also enabled me to name aspects of the trauma which is a key aspect in the resolution of

⁴⁹⁹ Schaverien, 117.

⁵⁰⁰ Schaverien, 141.

⁵⁰¹ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2014), and Peter A. Levine, *Healing Trauma* (Boulder Colorado: Sounds True, 2008).

⁵⁰² Carla A. Grosch Miller, *Trauma and Pastoral Care* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2021), 19.

⁵⁰³ Ison, 47-63. See also Grosch Miller, *Trauma*, 20.

trauma.⁵⁰⁴ I also went back to Schaverien's book to what she says about BSS and trauma to see if I had missed any insights.

Let me briefly outline the key aspects of trauma theory as summarized by Ison, and Grosch-Miller, and drawing on Bessel van der Kolk and Peter Levine. This strand of embodied trauma theory suggests that my training in talking therapy is unable to help me with my trauma because trauma is not stored in narrative form.⁵⁰⁵ This resonates with my experience that I had no words for my boarding school trauma. The trauma is stored in my emotional brain, and the energy of 'rage and terror' associated with trauma is frozen and trapped there.⁵⁰⁶ This resonated with me, because I had felt rage and terror, frozen and trapped, in a traumatic incident during lockdown.

I went back to read Schaverien and found that rage and terror emerged in her work with Theo, a boarding school survivor.⁵⁰⁷ I return to this insight later in the section. Through re-reading Schaverien I can now own and name that rage and terror, and the sense of being frozen. In another element of overlap, it is practices like mindfulness that enable the frozen emotions to be 'titrated' safely and unfrozen because mindfulness enhances our capacity for self-regulation of difficult thoughts, feelings, and sensations.⁵⁰⁸ As Levine points out, because there is no coherent narrative to work with, 'you don't have to consciously remember an event to heal from it.'⁵⁰⁹ As I read Levine's theory, I could feel the edges of the rage and terror shifting and had a sense of how I have held myself stiffly ever since – and that I could move into a free running state full of fluid energy. This includes the awareness of how my body has been set like concrete and needs loosening up, with back pain, stiff neck, and tight shoulders. This

⁵⁰⁴ Ison, 59.

⁵⁰⁵ van der Kolk, 47.

⁵⁰⁶ Levine, *Healing Trauma*, 29.

⁵⁰⁷ Schaverien, 49-53.

⁵⁰⁸ Ison summarizes why mindfulness is helpful in enhancing self-regulation of difficult thoughts, feelings and sensations, 57. She talks about titration on page 58.

⁵⁰⁹ Levine, *Healing Trauma*, 31.

profound model of trauma theory can work alongside my uncovering of the schemas and distorted narrative self.

Frozen rage and terror

I picked up from Levine's trauma theory about the significance of frozen rage and terror in trauma.⁵¹⁰ I froze at boarding school. Schaverien refers to rage and terror, and this is something I had not picked up in my earlier readings. The story of Theo in Schaverien's book which so helped me when I first read it now unveiled another level, one of rage and terror.⁵¹¹ My interpretation is that when I first read Schaverien I unconsciously blanked these two words. However, as I write this, they now vibrate within me – I can own the edges of them in my psyche as the warming water of truth washes over them. My sense is that I need to unfreeze them in a safe way. Another piece of evidence that supports this felt sense is that Schaverien notes Theo's 'extreme self-control,' to contain the rage and terror.⁵¹² My self-control, especially at times of conflict is very strong, I remain calm and do not express anger, even though sometimes I should. This has been both helpful and unhelpful, leading to times when I have not defended myself when it was appropriate to do so.

Trauma past and present

I am drawn back to the trauma theory I have accessed so far, as I focus again at my own story of childhood and present-day trauma during the Covid-19 pandemic, in this spiral process of revisiting key aspects of my research. I believe these past and present experiences to be connected. It may also help me reclaim my present moments to some extent from the past. There appears to be a growing consensus in embodied trauma theory about the

⁵¹⁰ Levine, *Healing Trauma*, 29.

⁵¹¹ Schaverien, 49-53.

⁵¹² Schaverien, 86.

origin of trauma and how to deal with it. I have briefly outlined some key elements already that relate to my research. Here I present a short summary of further salient points for my research. Grosch-Miller defines trauma as ‘the response generated when our capacity to adapt is overwhelmed.’⁵¹³ In addition, and this is an important aspect of embodied trauma theory:

It is now clear that trauma is not an external event. Rather it is a specific and automatic collection of physiological responses to an event, which are triggered when an individual’s or community’s adaptive capacity is overwhelmed.⁵¹⁴

When the focus is on an event assumed not to have traumatic capability, for example, boarding school, then the traumatic responses of children can be overlooked, as in the case with boarding school. In my case the trauma relates to my childhood, so how does past trauma relate to the present? In this expression of trauma theory, it is suggested the past can overshadow the present.⁵¹⁵ Trauma when it invades the present can overwhelm us, and I have experienced that, when something reminds in the present of the experience of the past. This is especially possible when the trauma is unrecognized and unresolved as was the case for me.⁵¹⁶

One of the key insights from trauma theory is that for trauma ‘the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality.’⁵¹⁷ This is because, according to a growing consensus, the trauma is stored in the body and emotional brain, but not as a coherent accessible story.⁵¹⁸ Because in trauma we often dissociate from it, as in my experience, the trauma remains unresolved and can overwhelm the present. I believe this happened in 2006 when I was very anxious, stressed, and close to breakdown. I also believe the trauma for me was re-triggered during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in a new way, where shaming and scapegoating language was aimed at me and others, and I felt overwhelmed,

⁵¹³ Grosch Miller, *Trauma*, 4.

⁵¹⁴ Megan Warner et al., “Introduction,” in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, eds. Megan Warner et al (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 1.

⁵¹⁵ Grosch Miller, *Trauma*, 12.

⁵¹⁶ See Ison, 59.

⁵¹⁷ van der Kolk, 47.

⁵¹⁸ Ison, 49.

and powerless to do anything about it. I experienced it as a severe traumatic blow. I saw the negative impact on my mental health and the mental health of others, ending up in A & E and requiring six weeks off work for possible angina and stress. I foreshadow this here because sometimes out of the blue, 'Bad things happen – things that knock the wind out of us, that bring us to our knees, that shatter the world as we know it.'⁵¹⁹ It was as if I was back at boarding school, feeling helpless and powerless. This shattering of the world I knew had a profound impact on the immediate direction of my life.

One of the strongest non-negotiable values that came out of my boarding school experience is to be very careful what I say to people, having seen the destructive impact of critical language on children and young people away from home. I realised as well how easily community fragments under pressure – and the lack of a 'rule of life' in a local church means anything goes in terms of covert and overt exercise of power. This led to a leap of faith into a new world of intentional community living and the exploration of the application of this research, a mindful rule of life. This further iterative dimension to my research is taken up in chapter seven, which is the application of mindfulness and ethical awareness in relationship to a mindful rule of life. As well as a further development of my research it is also in continuity with it. This is where my emphasis on self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence has real practical value in relationship with others.

So, if I do not talk through the trauma what do I do? This is where the trauma theory overlaps very much with mindfulness theory. We work with what has been called our 'felt sense,' listening to what our body and gut tells us – for this we need mindful self-awareness.⁵²⁰ A key element of this is allowing ourselves to experience what we are feeling and 'name' it.⁵²¹ This brings a resolution to the trauma that enables better regulation of our

⁵¹⁹ Warner et al., "Introduction," 1.

⁵²⁰ Ison, 58.

⁵²¹ Ison, 59.

emotions in the present.⁵²² Having used the *Listening Guide* for two self-interviews, I was able to own and name the trauma in an intentional, and safe process. This may be a new application of the *Listening Guide* to the resolution of trauma.

Trauma and poetics

I have recognized that my story of trauma and accessing it required poetic representation, what Walton calls ‘poetics.’⁵²³ Walton expands the meaning of the term ‘poetics’ beyond ‘writing as a creative act.’⁵²⁴ I am asking the question, does what I am doing here with boarding school trauma resonate with any of the wider cultural and theological strands Walton outlines? One of the meeting points between poetics and practical theology is the work of Rebecca Chopp on ‘metaphor, trauma and testimony.’⁵²⁵ Chopp brings together poetics and testimony, ‘The poetics of testimony is my way of naming the discursive practices and various voices that seek to describe or name that which rational discourse will not or cannot reveal.’⁵²⁶ This is especially true of writings that ‘speak of the unspeakable and tell of the suffering and hope of particular communities who have not been authorized to speak.’⁵²⁷ My story of boarding school trauma which was literally unspeakable is a form of testimony, and sits within the poetics of testimony as outlined by Chopp. As Schaverien underlines, ‘I came to realise that there is a cultural taboo on noticing that there is a problem with this socially condoned abandonment of the very young.’⁵²⁸ She adds that her book ‘breaks a cultural taboo and tells stories that many of my clients have feared

⁵²² Ison, 57-58.

⁵²³ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 135-136.

⁵²⁴ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 133, 134-136.

⁵²⁵ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 145.

⁵²⁶ Rebecca S. Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogues with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, eds. D. Brown, S.G. Davaney and K. Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 56.

⁵²⁷ Chopp, 61.

⁵²⁸ Schaverien, xi.

that, if voiced, would not be believed.⁵²⁹ I am aware of the power of that taboo, and in telling my story also break that taboo, and yet I still fear that the pain of the trauma of abandonment and separation will not be believed. I add my voice to the ‘minor testament’ of voices, of those who have told their story of boarding school trauma. The fractures that I have lived with since then remain with me. I will return to the wider perspective Walton outlines for poetics in chapter seven when I consider the ethical model of awareness in my mindful rule of life from another angle.⁵³⁰

Trauma and trust

I feel the weight of two statements about trust in my self-interviews that I haven’t explored, ‘so you can never quite trust those times, moments of happiness with your family because it’s just going to be taken away again.’ It is not just about moments of happiness but also about people, ‘I think as an adult there has been a fear that I can’t quite trust people, they will (swallows) abandon me.’ I know this goes back to my childhood experience of separation at boarding school, where I was left watchful in a ‘keep me safe’ way. I first came across Kai Erikson’s sociological theory of trauma in Kate Wiebe’s reflections on collective trauma.⁵³¹ In a more allusive style of writing Erikson highlights that a central traumatic response for individuals and communities is the fracturing of trust:

The mortar bonding human communities together is made up at least in part of trust and respect and decency and, in moments of crisis, of charity and concern. It is profoundly disturbing to people when these expectations are not met...They have already been made vulnerable by a sharp trick of fate, and now they must face the future

⁵²⁹ Schaverien, xi.

⁵³⁰ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 133-185.

⁵³¹ Kate Wiebe, “Toward a Faith-Based Approach to Healing after Collective Trauma,” in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, eds. Megan Warner et al (London: Routledge, 2020), 64-78. Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).

without those layers of emotional insulation that only a trusted communal surround can provide.⁵³²

Wiebe puts it more starkly, 'trauma breaks your sense of trust in yourself, your relationships, and the world.'⁵³³ This was another sharp fragment of truth that pierced my consciousness. Following the event that I experienced as a traumatic blow during lockdown my ability to trust myself, some others, and even the local church was broken. I know as I write this in a different part of the country, with a significant length of time separating me from that blow that I have begun to heal. My subsequent experience of intentional community life has begun to restore my sense of trust. I revisit my analogical conceptual model of being in an implicit relationship with God in light of this insight about trust and realise it has enabled me to continue to trust in God in difficult times when I cannot perceive God's providential care or presence. In this it can function as a model to help cultivate and sustain trust. The clear reality, as Grosch-Miller puts it, that 'We have no choice about whether to be traumatized or what specific trauma response happens,' has enabled me to examine myself compassionately and begin to trust myself again.⁵³⁴ This fragment of truth about trust can also be part of my mindful rule of life in chapter seven.

⁵³² Erikson, 239.

⁵³³ Wiebe, 68.

⁵³⁴ Grosch-Miller, *Trauma*, 8.

Chapter Six

The reclaiming of my symbolic self

Introduction

A growing realisation during my research, which I have described in previous chapters, is the sense that I am a symbolist, that God speaks to me through natural symbols. I now want to examine and describe this symbolic interaction in more detail. I have a sense that through these symbols I can reclaim my past to some degree. In redressing the balance of my past between negative memories and positive memories, I can further reclaim my present moments through the magnetic pull of these symbols. Again, I am working with fragments of insight, and I need to develop a way of exploring the inner life of my symbolic world in more depth. This symbolic self is part of the 'house of my being' that I need to make more transparent and inhabit more clearly – also enabling me to answer my third research question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self to further reclaim my present moments?'⁵³⁵ I need to improvise further. I am looking to reclaim from the past the natural symbols that fed me with sacramental goodness as well as represent the trauma symbolically, which cannot be represented in narrative form.⁵³⁶

In this chapter I wish to revisit the enigmatic lure of swallows as a symbol for me, that emerged in chapter four. I do this by an act of retrieval – going back in my time when between 1986-1987, and in 2009 I had an outpouring of symbolic imagining, writing, and painting. I go back to these poems, lyrical stories, and paintings as a source of autoethnographic data. There are two symbolic paintings I present, a kingfisher, and a small sailing boat leaving the safety of harbour. In this section exploring my earlier AE data I braid together the poems, paintings, and lyrical stories, with reflection.

⁵³⁵ Langer, *Mindfulness*, 201.

⁵³⁶ van der Kolk, 47.

After this retrieval from the past, I then outline and examine the construction of an intentional piece of research in Rome, using free association around symbols that ‘beckoned me to perceive them’ followed by further reflection.⁵³⁷ This reflection includes an evocative piece that emerged from one potent symbol that took me back to my childhood, a Saluki dog outside a café. I model this piece of intentional research on heuristic principles and process.

Fragments and bricolage

The theme of fragmented experience reoccurs in this data through the symbol of a broken mosaic. I, therefore, intentionally use the method of bricolage to try and make a whole from the fragments I am working with. I first came across the idea of bricolage or being a bricoleur in counselling research.⁵³⁸ According to McLeod, bricolage is about improvisation, drawing from different methods flexibly as ‘need emerges in response to the task of conducting a study.’⁵³⁹ I have done this intuitively in the research process through adapting methods in chapters four and five to enable present moment research. I wish to have continuity with the previous research chapters and so will draw on mindful theory, and implicit relational knowing theory from chapter four. I also draw on the *Listening Guide* (as used in chapter five), adapting the third listening through the creation of an ‘I’ poem from the raw data in this chapter. In this way I am a bricoleur, weaving together some earlier research methods for continuity, but improvising when working with the needs of the symbolic – for example, using free association. I later came across the idea of the researcher as bricoleur from a theological perspective through the work of Heather

⁵³⁷ The quote is an adaptation of some lines from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke quoted in Julian Hoffman’s *The Small Heart of Things: Being at Home in a Beckoning World* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 41. The exact quote is, ‘Everything beckons us to perceive it, /murmurs at every turn...’

⁵³⁸ John McLeod, *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 117-129.

⁵³⁹ McLeod, 119.

Walton.⁵⁴⁰ She reviews the emergence of bricolage and argues for the use of theo poetic writing and for practical theologians to be ‘bricoleurs, makers and remakers’ rather than those embracing ‘an encompassing theory of everything.’⁵⁴¹ It is bricolage because we draw on traditions ‘that are fragmented and yet re-forming.’⁵⁴² I am aware of my own fragmentation and re-forming. These are words that describe my journey.

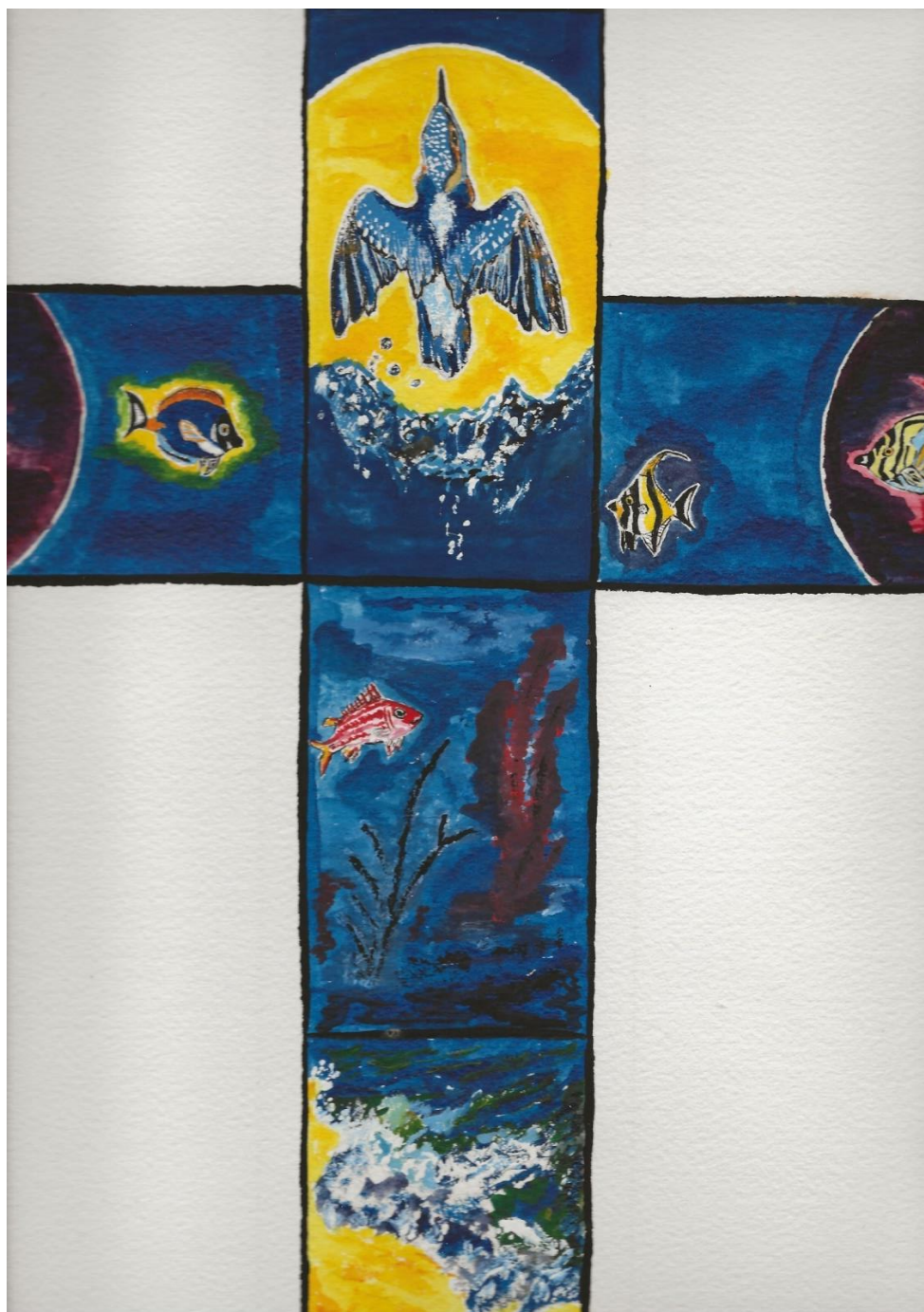
An act of retrieval – earlier AE writings

One of the symbols from the Camino walk in chapter four that I engaged with was the swallows flying on the way I walked. I want to begin with the swallows and the magnetic call they seem to represent for me. They were writing a message in the sky that I have not fully interpreted so far. I decided to go back to even earlier writings when my creative symbolic self also surfaced to see if swallows appeared in those writings. This was the period 1986-87 when I was working in the desert of a high street bank but experiencing a spiritual awakening that triggered a release of creative language and symbolic painting. For example, on the day I became a Christian I felt God gave me a symbolic picture to paint of the cross and resurrection, with Jesus shown as a kingfisher, the king and fisher of people.

⁵⁴⁰ Heather Walton, “A Theopoetics of Practice: Re-forming in Practical Theology: Presidential Address to the International Academy of Practical Theology, Eastertide 2017,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 3-23, accessed December 7, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2018-0033>.

⁵⁴¹ Walton, “A Theopoetics of Practice,” 22.

⁵⁴² Walton, “A Theopoetics of Practice,” 22.



The imagery in the painting is all drawn from my African childhood. I wrote a poem that went with the painting on the 1st June 1987. The red of the fish and the coral represent the wound in Jesus side. The black coral represents the spear that entered the side of Jesus.

As the Kingfisher rising
 From a dark sea into Son light
 So delivered into newness
 From death's night

An exalted awakening
 By a perfect giving
 May his healing gift
 Your heart lift
 To its wholeness.

This is a prayer for myself, whose meaning I do not fully understand but, looking back, now encapsulates my research – to be mindful of the One who awakens us and lifts us to wholeness. I am perhaps always emerging, never arriving. As I also went through the creative writing from 1986-1987, seeing it as autoethnographic data, I found a poem about swallows.

And where I meet with you
 You take away the chains
 The world appears in bright garment
 I walk through the rains
 the swallows
 And what is sent
 Flight of swallows
 Messengers
 of a holy place
 We shall meet like children there
 In bright garments of love
 There.

In the present moment of reading that poem I have an epiphany. Where I will meet my friend is Africa which was a shared childhood connection. I suddenly realise why the swallows are symbolically important to me. They symbolize Africa, Kenya, the Great Rift Valley, my home. They flew home to Kenya, when as a child I could not. I suddenly realise whenever I see them, I am haunted with a longing – and now I realise that longing is from my childhood, wanting to go home, to fly as the swallows fly with a homing instinct that cannot be denied. Kenya was my holy place. The swallows take me home in my memory. As I write this I am reminded of a recurring dream. In that dream, which consistently visited me in my boarding school days, I do fly home, in a jet plane. I am filled with joy. As the plane lands, the door opens, and the stairs appear, I walk down onto the runway. At Nairobi airport you walked directly from the plane onto the runway. I am

hit by the sunshine, the dry heat, the shimmering air, the scent of jacaranda. I fall to the ground and kiss it. In another poem called 'A Swallow's Flight' with drawings of swallows circling the words, I write:

A swallow's flight in summer, where does it go?
 In Africa in the desert when there is thunder and lightning in the air
 All the animals make for the music and light of the skies
 For they know rain will fall there.⁵⁴³

The swallows know where the rain is, where new life is, and I want to follow them. Those rains, that bring new life, are for me in my childhood memories.

Through this act of retrieval, I remember further fragments. I now recognize where my symbolic self was made, which re-emerged on the Camino walk. My symbolic self was born in my African childhood and sustained me at boarding school, and later working in the bank. As I re-immense myself in the symbolic awakening that occurred in 1986-7, I can see now that my writings and drawings are inhabited by childhood symbols from Africa. This deep sacramental connection to this lost home, a sacred place in my heart, is picked up in another poem from this period called 'Absent Without Leaving.'

Jadini, Kilindini, Malindi
 Franjipani
 Of Acacia memory,

Old Nandi man beneath the tree-
 'The road you will no longer see
 To living stone.'
 From within me
 Cutting the bone.

Only the rift valley
 Running in my heart...
 And through the curtains flying
 Birds humming
 Depart.

⁵⁴³ At the time I read a number of books about Africa, including Laurens Van Der Post, *A Far-Off Place* (Penguin Books, 1984), where the idea of animals following thunder and lightning to rain appeared, on page 313.

My body was at boarding school, but my heart and soul never left Kenya. At this time of spiritual awakening in 1986-7 when I started to go to church and became a Christian, these natural symbols began to speak to me in my new spirituality. Jadini is a beach near the town of Malindi. Kilindini is the harbour for the port of Mombasa. Franjipani is a flowering bush, and Acacias are the famous thorn trees of the African plain, their evocative silhouette is unmistakable. Acacia thorns are both beautiful and sharp. The Nandi Hills is where I was born, amongst the Nandi tribe. The poem suggests that I have been frozen since my experience at boarding school because of being separated from family and place, but I live beneath the surface, cut to the bone. The marrow of my existence is this sacramental connection that feeds me goodness. The Great Rift Valley where I was born in the province of Uasin Gishu is mirrored in my heart. The swallows have departed from my soul. It is the remembrance of the symbols and the recognition of meaning they make for me that begins to unfreeze me in the present moment. I come alive in the present moment as I retrieve them.

If I apply my tentative mindful model of valuing moments of meeting with God that are redemptive and sacramental, then I can reclaim this past, by not just acknowledging the trauma but by remembering the moments of created goodness. I remember as a child diving for silver shillings in a bright aquamarine sparkling pool. They shone and moved at the bottom of the pool, beckoning me to dive in. I realise that I have been beckoned by God to dive again and retrieve the silver shillings of memory that also lie in my boarding school past, which relate to the time I spent in Kenya as a child. Such transcendent moments have value, weight, and depth beyond their duration. In my reclaiming of these moments, I give space to God to redeem them. They also create moments of sacramental goodness in the present.

Perhaps I am intuitively drawn to the evocative aspect of AE because of these lost coins that lie like precious 'unclaimed experience' in my African

childhood, which I have only accessed intermittently.⁵⁴⁴ I am aware of the well of sadness within, but I am becoming aware of this stream of incarnated goodness from my childhood that feeds me still. It is often out of awareness, but it is part of my implicit relationship with God. As I look back to more of this period of writing which accesses my childhood memories in Africa, I came across a piece of creative writing called, 'Beneath the Medicine Tree.' I realised how close my connection to the land was.

Mist paths floated close to the warming back of the earth. I would be part of the earth. Close against it to see the spider spinning closer. Crouched with the frog. Making his big-eyed sounds. Until I was as red as the ground.

As I looked at these extracts from the perspective of mindful theory, I realised that as a child I had a highly developed experiential self. In the story, I meet Olamol, the soul of the bush.⁵⁴⁵

She put birds in my hands. Throats fluttering. Wings still. Eyes of life that said do not take my life. Then away with soft clear songs. As the bush filled with shadows protecting from the sun, she would sit with me beneath the Medicine tree.

I see the Medicine Tree as symbolic for the healing and sacramental memories of Africa that sustained me at boarding school. In the story Olamol went missing looking for the bright moon. There is a Maasai proverb I placed at the front of the story, 'children are the bright moon.' I am looking now for the bright moon of my childhood which has gone missing. I can find it in evocative narrative and a reflective gaze at my symbolic writings from 1986-7. In another story Olamol gave me a gift.

⁵⁴⁴ Cathy Caruth uses the phrase unclaimed experience as at the heart of trauma, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 20th anniversary edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016), chapter two especially.

⁵⁴⁵ I do not remember the origin of the name Olamol.

Before dawn the Pied Kingfisher sang like water running to wake us and lead us to his river. She said I have finished my waist band. There is one small shell left as small as the nail on your hand. Take it for me when you go into the world of outside. It contains what you can lose, what you might no longer hear. It is a magic shell. We watched the sun rise in the river.

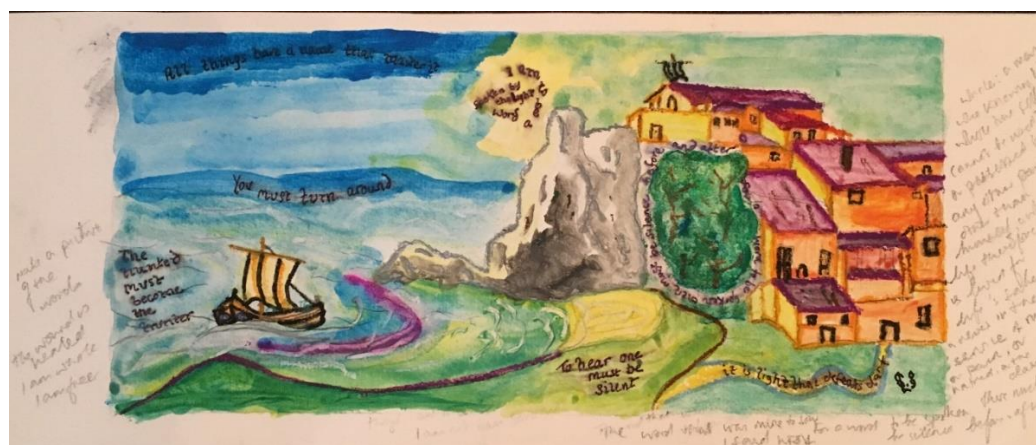
This gift of Olamol are the symbols I carry with me of my childhood so that I might not lose them, so that I might still hear their story. Through associative logic I make another connection to the Camino, and why I might unconsciously be drawn to walk in northern Spain. Northern Spain reminds me of elements of Africa. In fact, on the 2018 walk I went as far as Finisterre, usually translated as the 'end of the world,' with the next stop Africa. It was as if I were following a magnetic trail to get as close as I could to the place of my birth. Spain has beautiful jacaranda trees which transported me back to our garden in Nairobi, where we had a huge elemental jacaranda, which carpeted the ground with its luminous purple-blue flowers. It is in the symbols that I believe I can begin to answer the question, where was God in the boarding school years?

At boarding school I had no explicit relationship with God expressed in Christian trinitarian terms. The insight I have received in reflecting critically on my symbolic self is that the Creator God sustained me through the symbols of my childhood. This insight came in part also from a theological perspective. What kind of God am I encountering in this journey? I have already talked about the compassionate, non-shaming presence of God, but I have also been influenced by the idea of the generous God as outlined by David Brown. David Brown says something akin to my idea of an implicit relationship between myself and God in that God uses symbols to mediate the interaction between human beings and the divine presence because through symbols 'God can act upon us, without destroying our freedom,' and this is in the realm of the subconscious.⁵⁴⁶ In this sense of the importance of divine action preserving human freedom, my

⁵⁴⁶ Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action', 116.

AE evidence supports Brown's argument. Another aspect of Brown's argument is that God communicates with us through natural symbols, and this resonates deeply with my experience.⁵⁴⁷ God has communicated with me through a whole range of symbols from the created world, and I have felt the divine presence in every dimension of my being. Brown argues this is the intermingling of God's generosity and human creativity.⁵⁴⁸

I have an inkling that the symbols do not act in an isolated way but form patterns. For example, the symbols from childhood form a pattern, a constellation of stars, that guide me in my deep unconscious, my intuitive self. This has been called a 'metaphoric landscape.'⁵⁴⁹ I find this language of a metaphoric landscape very helpful, that the symbols are connected and for me can represent the symbolic self I have discovered. Looking back at my AE data I realise that at least one of my paintings (see below) is a metaphoric landscape of my own self. This is from a later date and was painted in summer 2009. The symbols in this painting emerge from a classic story by Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, that I have referenced already.



This painting summarizes the symbolic influence of the book but is also an intuitive representation of my metaphoric landscape. I am in the harbour of

⁵⁴⁷ Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action,' 113-122.

⁵⁴⁸ Brown, *Divine Generosity*, 4-5.

⁵⁴⁹ Lawley and Tompkins, 17-18.

imagined safety and security. However, I must set sail out of the harbour in the boat, I must turn and face my shadow of anxiety. I must leave the imagined security of the harbour, which is experiential avoidance. This symbolic journey is emphasized again with the figure of me on top of one of the houses. My clothes match the sail, and I am ready to fly. There are two written references from Le Guin's book about the importance of silence in this journey, 'To hear one must be silent,' and 'for a word to be spoken there must be silence before and after.'⁵⁵⁰ I know it is contemplation that will lead me to master anxiety, I believe intuitively, as the book says, 'All things have a name that master it.'⁵⁵¹ This idea that naming can master a feeling gives me hope. In fact, trauma theory recognizes that naming a feeling, an emotion, allows that feeling to dissolve.⁵⁵²

I also believe that my life has a God-given plan and purpose, 'I am to be a word spoken by the light.'⁵⁵³ In Le Guin's book, the actual quote is 'spoken by the sunlight.' In my mind I read it as 'light,' it became a new phrase for me because of my Christian symbolism. It is through God that I will find a way, 'it is light that defeats darkness.'⁵⁵⁴ To me this echoes an Eastern Orthodox idea developed particularly by Maximus the Confessor that each of us is a word, 'its own "logos,"' spoken by God.⁵⁵⁵ It is this painting, this metaphoric landscape, that is pulling me out of the harbour of experiential avoidance toward a place where my present moments are not dominated by the fear of anxiety.

Rowan Williams takes up this idea of the little *logos* within, not only for our own life but for the life of others, 'finding a way to speak to them that resonates with the creative word working in their depths.'⁵⁵⁶ This is an

⁵⁵⁰ Le Guin, *A Wizard*, 2016, 26, 152.

⁵⁵¹ Le Guin, *A Wizard*, 2016, 119.

⁵⁵² Ison, 59.

⁵⁵³ Le Guin, *A Wizard*, 2016, 41.

⁵⁵⁴ Le Guin, *A Wizard*, 2016, 112, and the original quote has 'the dark.'

⁵⁵⁵ Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes* (Oxford: Lion, 2003), 72. See also his footnote on page 121 referencing Maximus the Confessor as the main source of this idea.

⁵⁵⁶ Rowan Williams, *Silence*, 73.

example of awakened language, awakening language in another, which is an aspect of the mindful spirituality I wish to embody. This calling out the God-given word in each other is a type of kingdom language. I say more about awakened kingdom language in the section on the mindful rule. This idea resonates with me because I think the making of me at boarding school was a reducing of me. As a minister I have often had people see me in a distorted way, and in doing so they disengaged from my humanity, believing they could say whatever they liked to me – normally something that was aimed to reduce me further.⁵⁵⁷

One of the findings and realizations from my introspective phenomenology research on the Camino in chapter four is that my mind works in symbols. This symbolic self has re-emerged following my immersion in mindfulness, enabling me to access my symbolic childhood. This is another room in my house I am now living in that has become more ‘transparent’ to me. This also enables me to further reclaim my present moments as I realise my childhood was not all pain and trauma but another sacramental strand. This helps me to answer my third research question as I more fully inhabit my whole self.

I am also aware from the impact of boarding school that I have a hidden self that I cannot access through my conscious, rational self. I can use psychodynamic techniques such as free association and the interpretation of symbols to try and access this dissociated self.⁵⁵⁸ Unless this hidden self can be ‘assumed,’ it cannot be healed. Its shadow is looming over the present and is the origin of my anxiety. As I reduce its power as a shadow, I further reclaim my present moments. I position the boat of my life in a

⁵⁵⁷ Carrie Doehring, *Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 13-19. In this book, drawing on psychodynamic theory, Doehring has this theme of disengagement from the humanity of another as a running theme.

⁵⁵⁸ This is a psychodynamic idea, see for example, Carl G. Jung et al, *Man and His Symbols* (Dell Publishing, 1968). I have already used the idea of free association in adapting Gilligan’s Listening Guide in chapter five. I have also referenced Schaverien’s sense of the dissociated traumatic experience in boarding school survivors.

better place for the wind of the Spirit. I decided to do a further piece of intentional research around the free association of symbols.

A symbolic journey using free association and heuristic process

I was planning to go on a family holiday to Rome after the 2018 Camino walk. I decided to free associate around any symbols that sprung into my awareness whilst in Rome. I see Rome as a city full of symbols. In my research I have been looking for research methods that I can use within the overall methodology of AE, either through amendment, or because of a congruence or overlap between AE and the method. One such method that overlaps with AE is heuristic research. It also overlaps with my immersion in mindfulness and the *in obliquo* observation of my contemplation of God.

Heuristic research is about lived experience and includes the use of and cultivation of self-awareness.⁵⁵⁹ Self-awareness is a mindful capacity given to us by God that I am looking to cultivate within my research.⁵⁶⁰ Heuristic research uses biographical, autobiographical data and recognizes the importance of the lyrical and poetic in the representation of that data.⁵⁶¹ It is a search, a quest, an ‘odyssey’ that is introspective, attentive, and meditative.⁵⁶² In such research I need to be personally involved and impacted by the phenomenon I am researching.⁵⁶³ That personal involvement is intense, deep, curious and ‘infused in the researcher’s being.’⁵⁶⁴ In this way my whole research could be described as heuristic, as I have lived and breathed mindfulness with every aspect of my being since

⁵⁵⁹ Moustakas, 9.

⁵⁶⁰ Vago and Silbersweig, 2.

⁵⁶¹ Moustakas, 10.

⁵⁶² Moustakas, 13.

⁵⁶³ Moustakas, 11, 14.

⁵⁶⁴ Moustakas, 40-43.

2006. Moustakas quotes Polanyi in support of the emphasis in heuristic research on immersion, "To be able to swim one must enter the water."⁵⁶⁵

To be able to enter mindfulness one must enter one's mindful capacities, and that is what I am doing. Heuristic research, like AE, argues that personal research questions also have a wider, social significance.⁵⁶⁶ I am an intuitive researcher moving towards the critical, reflective, and thinking researcher, and am working with tacit and intuitive knowledge reflecting on it critically and analytically. The tacit and intuitive aspects of knowledge are recognized and given central significance within heuristic research.⁵⁶⁷ Other key heuristic words that resonate with my research are 'indwelling,' 'immersion', 'focusing' as an open attentive awareness to what is presenting itself to conscious presence.⁵⁶⁸

Heuristic research has clear phases which help shape the form in which the data and findings are presented. There is an *initial engagement* with a key issue, which for this piece of iterative research is the importance of my symbolic mind, and how that relates to my mindfulness of God.⁵⁶⁹

Attending to the symbolic and free association are also ways to access what is hidden within me. There follows a period of *immersion* in the research.⁵⁷⁰

I have been immersed in mindfulness and mindfulness of God since 2006, but the significance of the symbolic is a more recent insight. I decided to immerse myself for a period of days in the symbolic, and the way it triggers the logic of association in my own mind and spirit.⁵⁷¹ There follows a period of *incubation*, where thinking can crystalize quietly in the background.⁵⁷²

Out of these processes comes illumination, insight, awareness, and

⁵⁶⁵ The quote is from Polanyi's 1962 book *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), it is on page 43 of Moustakas's book, but he doesn't give a page number for Polanyi.

⁵⁶⁶ Moustakas, 15.

⁵⁶⁷ Moustakas draws heavily on Polanyi's work, see 20-23.

⁵⁶⁸ Moustakas draws on Gendlin's therapeutic strategy of focusing here, which has resonances with mindful awareness, see, 24, 25 and 28.

⁵⁶⁹ Moustakas, 27.

⁵⁷⁰ Moustakas, 28.

⁵⁷¹ Kiegelmann, 13.

⁵⁷² Moustakas, 28-29.

realizations, where the tacit and intuitive can work with critical analysis.⁵⁷³ Finally, findings and realizations are drawn out of the data, and a creative synthesis of the all of the above brings the piece of research to a conclusion.⁵⁷⁴ As with my other pieces of iterative research I am adding a mindfulness of God reading of, and listening to the data especially as my sense is that God speaks through the symbolic to me, and not just the symbolic in scripture, but from the whole of the created world.

Method

Whilst in Rome between the 4th July and the 6th July 2018, if anything presented itself to my consciousness as symbolic (going with my felt sense in the moment) I stopped and immediately wrote whatever associations came to mind in the present moment. This was the raw data. I then represented the raw data in different forms, including quasi-poetic narrative forms. As part of the research, I have also searched for theory and practice, psychological, and theological, that might enable further reflection. The question I asked was, 'through free association around symbols that resonate with me, can I access this hidden part of me that was traumatised at boarding school?' I now present the raw data taken from my fieldnotes.

⁵⁷³ Moustakas, 29-30.

⁵⁷⁴ Moustakas, 30-32.

Free Association data

Day 1: 4.7.2018

Butterfly

I saw a large butterfly flitting from flower to flower.

The butterfly is my intuitive, symbolic self, flying from symbol to symbol, drinking the nectar they hide.

The river Tiber with no boats

We are walking by the river Tiber and there are no boats.

When anxiety broke the banks and dam that contained it inside me, I was swept down the river, waving and drowning. I had no internal boat that could help me navigate this tidal wave. By grace I landed on the shore of a sabbatical, in a brief respite. Through mindfulness I dragged myself from the shore, beaten and weak. Through mindfulness I built a sailing boat that could navigate the channels of my anxiety.

A spider with a sac of baby spiders

I saw a spider with a sac of baby spiders.

I wanted to see if hundreds of spider babies swarmed from the mother spider, but she ran off. The mother spider for me was boarding school and it spawned a swarm of anxious thoughts. But at the time I did not know I was anxious. I avoided social situations, parties, speaking up in classrooms. I hated having to travel to the airport for holidays on my own, overwhelmed and lost by the terminals and instructions. And then there was the day when the spider thoughts of anxiety all swarmed at once and my body shook, and I had to sit and tremble and fall apart as the spiders span me into a web of trembling confusion.

A series of broken benches

I walked past a series of benches by the river Tiber, each one of them was broken.

I realise that I had no rest places built into my life, nowhere to stop. I was always busy, one step ahead of the spiders hurrying behind me, casting a big shadow over me.

A cloud in a blue sky

It is 33 degrees, and a completely blue sky offers no shelter. Suddenly a small cloud blocks out the sun and provides welcome relief.

I suddenly see the cloud as a positive thing. I think of the cloud of anxiety in my life and how I see it as negative. But it has brought me to mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God. It has made me more empathic to those suffering from mental health distress.

Broken mosaic

There is a Roman mosaic with large sections missing.

I am missing large fragments from the mosaic of my life. What is missing might be more important than what I can see. An embodied life has been missing. Instead of an experientially vibrant life which I had as a child in Kenya my life had become experientially avoidant. An emotionally expressed life has been missing. Awareness has been missing. The symbols may be a way back to access the past that was traumatic, but I am also recognizing that there are happy sections of my life I have not been accessing and the symbols lead to this place.

Christ emerging from a church door



Perhaps I am emerging into wholeness, and I am moving through the door of anxiety, forcing my way through its bronze imprisonment, still caught, partly free. If I am clothed with the Whole One, then I am walking into wholeness. I identify with the man in the holy door.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵ My field notes say that this door is part of the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore and the sculptor was Igor Mitoraj. It is my photo.

Day 2: 5.7.18**Vinyl records (LPs) on the wall of a café**

Seeing an LP on a wall of a café takes me straight back to our veranda in Nairobi, sitting beneath pepper trees and Jacarandas listening to Paul McCartney. The patio doors are wide open and the music mixes with the breeze and the shade in a poignant memory. These were idyllic moments, paradise, making the separation, not just from my parents, brother, and sister, but from this place, a double cruelty. As I write, a dream that keeps reappearing comes to mind. I am in a car as a child. We drive down a murrum road, I know the road and that just round the corner is home. But we never leave the road, there is always another corner and I never arrive home. As I remember this right now in the present moment, I remember the intense longing in the dream, so bitter-sweet – to return home.

In a flow of associative logic another memory comes to mind. I would wake up that first morning of the holidays in Kenya having flown from England with a sense of dread believing myself still at boarding school. The friendly light coming through the curtains would tell me that I was home in Kenya. The dread seeps away and I am again filled with joy and a feeling of safety. The first day back at boarding school I would wake up feeling safe and happy... and then as the grey light seeped in through the windows and I looked round at the sleeping boys I would deflate, and sadness would fill me. The feeling of safety seeped away like sand in a timer. As I write this, I am reminded that I have lived on the edge of happiness because of these experiences. I recall an article I wrote about this:

The Boy on the edge of Happiness

The Boy on the Edge of Happiness is the title of a book of poetry by Matthew Hollis.⁵⁷⁶ I have not read the book, or what I am imagining to be a poem of the same name. Although I would like to. I came across a tweet by the Poetry Society saying that Matthew Hollis was a ‘terribly good poet’, so I looked him up. That is when the title, ‘The Boy on the Edge of Happiness’ resonated deeply. It brought into my

⁵⁷⁶ Matthew Hollis, *The Boy on the Edge of Happiness* (Smith/Doorstep Books, 1996).

awareness something that was on the edge of awareness. As a boy and a man, I have lived on the edge of happiness. Why would you do that? I have known happiness and at crucial times in my life it felt like it was taken away. I never quite trusted that I would get it back again.⁵⁷⁷

This is a big hole in the mosaic of my life – happiness has been missing. I can fill it one small fragment of mosaic at a time, each moment of happiness that I can recall. In doing so I create a new landscape, which holds together the darkness, with lines of light that hold my fragments together.

The Spark of Life

In the Sistine Chapel there is the famous painting of the spark of life passing between God and Adam.

The spark of life for my research was ‘mindfulness of God.’ Something jumped across to me, like a spark of life and sent me on a quest.

Silence

In the Sistine Chapel the guards constantly ask for silence, but no one is silent. I have never silenced my anxious thoughts until recently through mindfulness.

Day 3: 6.7.18

A man and a Saluki in a café

I saw a man with a white Saluki in the Piazza di S. Cosimato.

Immediately I was surrounded with ghost hounds as my dead grandmother used to breed Salukis. I was taken straight back to my childhood. I especially remembered the sense that I should be seen and not heard, and that decisions like going to boarding school were made for me, without my involvement. This remembrance of things past triggered by the man and his Saluki triggered a burst of writing as I allowed this encounter to incubate.

⁵⁷⁷ Shaun Lambert, “The Boy on the Edge of Happiness,” *The Free Running Mind Blog*, June 6, 2013 accessed March 22, 2022, <https://shaunlambert.co.uk/2013/06/06/the-boy-on-the-edge-of-happiness-matthew-holliss-poem-and-a-mindful-insight/>.

This is a stage further than the free association in the raw data I have collected. Before I move on to the findings and realisations, I place these writings as an evocative response to this beautiful dog that brought its ghostly brothers and sisters out of my childhood into my present.

Beyond free association – an evocative response

Suddenly, at once, look, see, there! Ghost hounds, white and feathery throng around me, pushing, nudging, wagging, licking. They are taller than me. They only pay me partial attention, just to be courteous. All their eyes are on her, their mistress. The one who can freeze you with a look. The one silent and silencing, absent to children, but fully present to dogs.

And there are ghost adults having conversations over my head, about me, about boarding school. I escape to the kennels where the dogs board at night to hide from feelings I have no words for but are full of the silence of sadness. For sadness must not be spoken of, nor absence. Silences and absences in the beginning, now and forever, Amen.

As I sit in the bar *Picchiotto*, with its golden Brazilian coffee, an inkling floats into my awareness. I realise my anxious thoughts are ghosts from the past trauma of separation, silence, and absence, of the unspoken sadness. They are repetitive compulsions, psychic fragments that touch the present. I realise in that moment, with an electric force running through me that I am running from sadness. I do not ever want to feel as sad as I felt as a child torn from home. I feel the sadness now like a well I was dropped in and have clambered out of, but never live far from. It took a symbolic Saluki in the present to raise the ghost hounds of my childhood that led me to the well of sadness that lies within. Anxiety I have named, and shame I circle around, but sadness, sadness is the one that nearly drowned me and can drown me still.

I then represented the story as a fairy tale.

John was taken by his parents to a gingerbread house. 'Don't worry,' said the master of the house, 'we always catch the child that runs away.' The more he smiled the smaller John's voice became until he could say nothing at all that was true for him. John's parents did not look inside the gingerbread house, it seemed so nice. They left John

there. He was six and three quarters. The inside did not look like the outside. John slept in a dormitory with twenty other boys. There was ice on the inside of the windows in the mornings. In the middle of the dormitory was a well, a well that collected all the sadness of the boys. It reflected no light. A thread ran from each of them to the well. It did not just draw their sadness, it fed them back everyone's sadness.

Each night they would hold tight to their mattresses which had deep boy-shaped holes in their middle. Holding on to avoid being pulled into the well. Each night John watched Tim being pulled closer and closer to the well. He did not get out of bed to help him. It was against the rules. One night Tim was pulled in and did not come out again as Tim. One day John was given a chance to leave the gingerbread house. He ran as fast as he could away from the well of sadness that was going to drown him. He did not know he took the well with him.'

I now represent this data, the ghost dogs in an extended haiku-like poetic form, as a string of pearls:

Ghost dogs fearing separation
Anxious haunt my every moment
Hounding every thought

At the doorway and
At the window they crowd
My soul with their whining

Their anxious eyes follow me
Everywhere and give
Worry to my every move

Like a pack my thoughts
Follow me hunting every
Twist and turn I make

They wait outside the door
I try to shut against them
I feel their nudge and push

They sniff out every path
Of worry pointing for me
Marking them with fear

Anxious thoughts ghost
The patterns of my mind
Their nails clicking my awareness

Psychic fragments nosing
 The present from the past
 Laying down cold spots

Triggering in alarm
 My control and regulation
 They knock me down

Fallen and breaking I
 Am left with pieces, fragments
 That mindfulness glues again

Their quiet barking
 Hides the howling deep within
 I follow false trails

And jump at shadows
 That I must turn and face
 The well of sadness.

Findings

The data affirms the symbolic nature of my mind. As I establish the ontology of my being, as symbolic, I am better able to express it in the language that represents that aspect of me, through this piece of research that is largely creative-expressive and quasi-poetic. As in chapter four to provide continuity in my research, I use the gaze of mindful awareness, drawn from mindful theory, to both intimately inhabit my experience but also observe it compassionately and clearly from a distance. I also use implicit relational knowing theory to identify any key moments of meeting, of heightened insight in the raw data.

What beckoned me to perceive it as I began my walk in Rome is the fragile hope offered by the butterfly. It is significant that what draws me next are symbols that speak into my story of brokenness. There were no boats in the river Tiber, and I realised that I had no internal buoyancy when anxiety hit me in 2006. A spider with a sac of babies recalls a particular moment when I felt I was falling apart in 2006, my first experience of conscious brokenness. I see a series of broken benches, which continues this theme of what is

missing – in this case no safe place to stop, rest and be. I must keep moving. I cannot stop. I recognize through a cloud providing relief from relentless sunshine that the cloud of anxiety although primarily negative, has a silver lining in that I found mindfulness through it and am a more empathetic person because of anxiety.

The symbol of the fragmented mosaic is significant. I am working with fragments. I am gluing together fragments of my own life, especially as it relates to the trauma of separation at boarding school. The method of bricolage is congruent with my lived experience here. I am also made aware that pieces of my life are missing, which I can seek to retrieve. Finding what is missing is an important part of the quest. This includes awareness, embodiment, healthy emotional expression, happiness, and the symbols that speak to me and bring freedom.

As well as fragility and hope in the present, and brokenness and fragmentation from the past, memories emerged from my childhood in Africa that are poignant and triggered by the sight of vinyl records. The vinyl records also recall a childhood dream of being driven home in a car but never arriving. The free association has enabled memories from the liminal space of transitioning from holiday in Kenya back to boarding school to emerge. In that transitional morning I am either transported to happiness by the African light or transported to despair by the grey light of an English autumn. I am reminded of another insight that because of this experience of consistently having happiness snatched from me I have lived ‘on the edge of happiness’ not trusting myself to enter that feeling. Using mindful theory, I am aware that this experiential avoidance is as much applied to positive feelings as it is to negative ones.⁵⁷⁸ Avoiding the positive feeling of happiness is a way of regulating my emotions and avoiding the crash of disappointment.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁸ Gilbert, and Choden, *Mindful Compassion*, 158.

⁵⁷⁹ Gilbert and Choden, *Mindful Compassion*, 158.

The famous painting in the Sistine Chapel of the spark of life passing from God to Adam is a reminder of how one moment of meeting can change your life. For me it was the reading of the phrase by Diadochus of Photike, translated by Olivier Clement as ‘mindfulness of God.’⁵⁸⁰ This has sparked other moments of new life and transformation, and the process continues in my life now. Although there was no silence in the Sistine Chapel, though the guards asked for it, it is that practice of mindfulness that has begun to silence my anxiety.

The most evocative moment, unexpected and unsought, was when I saw a man with a white Saluki in the Piazza di S. Cosimato. I only realise as I write this that it was probably the colour that also triggered such a strong association as most of my grandmother’s Salukis were white, and as a family we had a white Saluki called Ty growing up.

Although my anxious thoughts nose me like ghost hounds from the past and are not silent, I became aware of the silence around being sent to boarding school – it was not to be questioned by me as a child. I am aware of my sadness as a child, but again, there is a silence around the sadness, it is not to be spoken of. I am not to speak of the obvious absences from home either. I write, ‘I realise my anxious thoughts are ghosts from the past trauma of separation, silence, and absence, of the unspoken sadness.’ Perhaps in the present moment when I am reminded of or fear separation, silence, and absence, the sadness I avoid, my anxious thoughts are triggered. The unexpected, deep, and terrifying insight is that I am running from the sadness that nearly drowned me as a child. My hope is, drawing on trauma theory, that it is in the naming of it that I can be set free from it. It is significant that the symbol I have intuitively chosen for it is a well of sadness. I have contained it safely, and the well has a lid so that I do not fall in again.

⁵⁸⁰ Diadochus of Photike, *Gnostic Chapters*, 56 (SC 5 bis. p. 117), quoted in Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

I write about this deep well and what Schaverien calls a 'threshold moment,' the moment you realise you are 'alone and in an unsafe place.'⁵⁸¹ This is a different moment of meeting, a moment of dreadful awareness. This was a searing experience of utter aloneness, where all I had was my own self to make a home in. This sense of absolute aloneness has never left me. As I reflect now in the present moment, reliving this threshold moment, I am aware that loneliness has accompanied me ever since. I am aware that I haven't examined this loneliness, perhaps unconsciously avoided it. Beneath the well of sadness lies loneliness.

The pack of hounds became a metaphor for the anxious thoughts that crowd me. I do not have a doorway to shut them out; I cannot close their anxious eyes. They do what anxious thoughts are supposed to do, but in a heightened way, sniffing out every path of worry. I recognize the quiet whining and barking hide a howling from the past. Perhaps, like the original hounds, I can befriend them and name them.

The image of hope I am left with is the door from which Christ is emerging, a cross like a rift across his chest. He is in an in-between place. I feel I have lived much of life in such a place and will continue to do so – and living lies in the struggle to emerge. Although the idea of a quest is helpful, my journey does not arrive in triumph and victory, but perhaps a new wisdom, living in all the reclaimed parts of me.

This technique of free association around symbols works for my dissociated self that carries so much pain. I am aware that God is speaking to me through the symbols, and not just the obviously Christian symbols, but from the architecture, natural and urban world around me.

⁵⁸¹ Schaverien, 52-53.

Realizations

From my previous research I knew that I was running from my anxiety, and that I circled around shame. I have been made newly aware of the well of sadness that nearly drowned me at boarding school and that hasn't been drained, and that perhaps its deeper source is loneliness. I am afraid to approach that sadness and loneliness. This symbol of the well of sadness has spoken powerfully to me and emerged from my unconscious. This symbol, along with the other symbols, act as a bridge between my unconscious, dissociated self, and my conscious awareness. Aspects of my boarding school trauma have emerged into the light. My felt sense is that God has been involved in this process as part of the implicit relationship I have identified. In the emergence of these symbols and the associative logic they triggered, there are moments of meeting with God. However, I am aware of how negative thoughts have dominated my mind, and to balance this I can recall moments and symbols of happiness.

A mindfulness of God reading

The holy door with Christ emerging perfectly represents my struggle to burst through the anxiety that holds me tight. However, the door gives me hope, that I am breaking through with God's help. I am also aware that there have been large parts of the mosaic of self that I have been unaware of: body, emotions, awareness itself, which can hold the symbolic. If I cannot sense and hold in awareness these elements of being, which God inhabits through Christ in me, then I cannot be aware of God's presence either.

As I begin to reclaim these aspects of self and self-expression, I become more aware of God. In this sense it is as if I am imaginatively part of Mark 9:15, 'As soon as all the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with

wonder and ran to greet him.’ My manuductive reading of this verse, which I have memorized and meditated on, is that God transformed their physical sense of sight into a spiritual sense. The crowd sees something (the recently transfigured Jesus) and the Holy Spirit touches their emotions which become wonder, and their bodies are taken up in this wonder and run to Jesus. My reading here is that God can touch our minds, our emotions, our awareness, our senses, and our bodies so that we experience the divine presence in a truly incarnated way.

I have found that God has touched all these dimensions in my experience, especially as I have begun to re-inhabit them through mindful awareness. In this way, through my AE experience there is no sacred/secular divide – God has communicated with me through a whole range of symbols from the created world, and I have felt the divine presence in every dimension of my being. Here there is a virtuous spiral - my mindfulness reduces my anxiety making me more mindful of God, and mindfulness of God reduces my anxiety by making me more aware of the divine generosity in my life. My own sense of tacit knowing of God is that I was directed as part of the divine/human interaction in my life to secular mindfulness in order that I might reclaim my body, my awareness, my emotions, my senses, in a way that my existing Christian culture could not enable.

I am going to continue to reclaim the symbols that represent and contain the happiness from my childhood. The metaphoric landscape represented in my painting of leaving the harbour of safety remains with me as my inspiration and motivation. Somehow the symbolic and poetic nature of this painting and its words move me in a way that something more prosaic would not. It gives meaning to my odyssey. I have examined the earlier quasi-poetic and lyrical writings, and the fragments and symbols that emerged from my intentional piece of research. I want to see if I can create a whole piece from the data I have collected. To do this, I take one aspect of Gilligan’s *Listening Guide*, the ‘I’ poem, creating one poetic piece from all of the data.

An adapted listening – the ‘I’ poem

Here I improvise further and use the ‘I’ poem listening technique from Carol Gilligan’s *Listening Guide* for its congruence with working with symbols and the past. Normally the ‘I’ poem works with the spoken voice, but here I am using it for its congruence with the written poetic voice. I draw on all the poems, lyrical stories and raw data presented earlier in this chapter. I have, following the guidelines of the *Listening Guide* highlighted each ‘I’ phrase in the narrative, pulling out the subject, the verb (and object or important related word) of each phrase and placed them sequentially in the form of a poem. Each natural pause or break is signalled by a line break to create stanzas.⁵⁸² The purpose of the ‘I’ poem is to ‘listen to what this person knows of her – or himself.’⁵⁸³ This resonates with mindful theory which is about cultivating self-awareness. The ‘I’ poem also reveals ‘an associative stream of consciousness carried’ by the first-person voice.⁵⁸⁴

I meet with you
I walk through the rains
The swallows

I would be part of the earth
I was as red as the ground

I am to be a word spoken by the light
I saw a large butterfly
I am developing
I believe my butterfly

I was swept down the river
I had no internal boat
I landed on the shore
I dragged myself
I built a sailing boat

I saw a spider
I wanted to see
I did not know

⁵⁸² Gilligan and Eddy, “On the Listening Path,” 78.

⁵⁸³ Gilligan et al, “On the Listening Guide,” 259.

⁵⁸⁴ Gilligan et al, “On the Listening Guide,” 260.

I avoided
I had to sit and tremble
I was a boarding school puppet

I walked past
I realise
I had no rest places
I was always busy
I suddenly see
I think of the cloud
I see it as negative

I am missing large fragments
I can see
I have a distorted narrative
I had as a child
I am also recognizing
I have not been accessing

I am whole
I am emerging
I am clothed
I am walking
I identify

I write a dream
I am in a car
I know the road
I never arrive home
I remember this
I remember
I would wake up
I was home
I am again
I would wake up
I looked around
I would deflate
I am reminded
I have lived
I recall

I wrote

I have never silenced
I saw a man
I was surrounded
I was taken straight back
I especially remembered
I should be seen and not heard

I allowed
 I move on
 I place these writings

The Listening

For the first time this story is being listened to. I hear the strong negative absolute statements, 'I was always busy,' 'I never arrive home,' 'I have never silenced,' 'I should be seen and not heard.' I practice mindful theory and tell myself these are just thoughts. I try to relativize them. These statements have emerged without conscious thought but come into awareness through the process of creating an 'I' poem.

I am also aware of the physical and emotional impact of the anxiety, 'I was swept down the river,' 'I dragged myself,' 'I avoided,' 'I had to sit and tremble,' 'I would deflate.' These show that at times I was overwhelmed and had no agency. I found some agency through mindfulness and was able to 'drag' myself to shore. I was able to build myself a boat that could navigate the swells of anxiety. This is in contrast with the experiential self of my childhood where I write, 'I would be part of the earth, I was as red as the ground.'

There are several references to seeing and wanting to see. In this repeated theme I notice, 'I saw a large butterfly,' 'I saw a spider,' 'I wanted to see,' 'I suddenly see,' 'I see it as negative,' 'I can see,' 'I saw a man.' There are related words to seeing, 'I realise,' 'I am also recognizing,' 'I looked around,' 'I should be seen and not heard.' There is the physical seeing of objects which become symbols through associative logic. There is seeing as perceiving. The visual sight seems to be dominant in this 'I' poem. Perhaps this is a sign that I need to intentionally draw on my other senses as a way of further exploring my emerging symbolic self.

There are some strong 'I am' statements, 'I am: to be a word spoken by the light, developing, missing large fragments, also recognizing, whole,

emerging, clothed, walking, in a car, again, reminded.’ There is both a sense of positivity and growth, as well as fragility and brokenness. The ‘I am’ is perhaps a reflection of growing self-awareness.

Some of the main themes of my research appear here. The idea of recognition surfaces here, ‘I am also recognizing.’ The idea of remembering rises here, ‘I remember this, I remember, I especially remembered.’ There is also a hint at redemption, ‘I am whole, I am emerging, I am clothed, I am walking.’ I will reflect on these themes in the final chapter in constructing a mindful rule. I am aware that in this research I recognize my younger self with more compassion, that mindfulness has helped me to recognize my true self – and that a lack of recognition has contributed to the suffering and anxiety I have experienced. I engage with recognition theory to reflect on this and make recognition of myself, others, and God part of my ethical awareness.

The reclaiming of my symbolic life also enables me to re-perceive my life, to add the weight of sacramental goodness to the scales as I weigh my past and realise, perhaps, that the negative experiences have had too much weight. Paradoxically, this reweighing of the past makes me more balanced in the present. By reclaiming my symbolic self with its roots in my sacramental childhood I gain a different sense of identity, I am not the abandoned, rejected one – I have been in a place of paradise, I have been blessed to live in a garden of Eden, even though I was torn from it. By inhabiting the symbolic room in my house, which is perhaps the top-most room, with a roof of glass, I can more fully inhabit my whole being and further reclaim my present moments. The symbolic self does not just exist in the past, it is looking out in the here and now and anchors me in the present. My symbolic self can also imagine a different future as I set sail in my mystical boat. Here my ‘unitary transformation,’ the development of my moral and poetic imagination impacts not only my research but my life.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁵ Willis, “Mentorship, Transformative Learning and Nurture,” 324.

Conclusion

In this chapter constructed in heuristic terms and as bricolage I also draw on mindful theory and implicit relational knowing theory. I retrieve earlier writings, quasi-poetic pieces, lyrical narrative, and paintings and use them as AE data.

The African symbols from my childhood have sustained me in times of aridity and anxiety, and emerged in times of creative and spiritual awakening. Their surfacing enabled me to see that there has been a narrative of sacramental goodness in my life, which had been hidden because the trauma of boarding school life had been the foreground. As I reflect on this from my sense of being in an implicit relationship with God, I can intuit that God used these symbols to sustain me.

Throughout this chapter I refer to my childhood experiences in Africa as full of sacramental goodness. That is my intuitive sense of them, and my immersion in Roman Catholic monastic life at Worth Abbey and the reading of contemplative texts has also introduced me to the theology of creation as sacramental. Aristotle Papanikolaou makes this point that both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions ‘affirm that all of creation is sacramental – that is, it has the power to convey the presence of God.’⁵⁸⁶ He extends the sacramental even further to include conversations between one person and another, as he explores the sacrament of confession.⁵⁸⁷ It is not just conversation or confession with priests that is sacramental; he goes on to say ‘conversations with friends, parents, and therapists...are all potentially sacramental – that is, potential mediators of the presence of God.’⁵⁸⁸ This has implications for the mindful rule, where my desire is that

⁵⁸⁶ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 125, accessed December 11, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23561500>.

⁵⁸⁷ Papanikolaou, 125.

⁵⁸⁸ Papanikolaou, 125.

we talk well to each other. I long to have conversations that are sacramental. I will come back to this in chapter seven.

In a later reading of the fantasy novel *A Wizard of Earthsea* a metaphoric landscape in written and painted form materializes. This symbolic landscape, where I set sail out of the harbour of imagined security to the open sea to face the shadow of anxiety, has great motivational power for me and still provides guidance for my life. Again, I can see the magnetic tracing of God's presence in this epiphany as I write, 'I am to be a word spoken by the light;' the original phrase in the book spoken by Ged says 'sunlight' rather than light. I have linked this to the theological idea taken up by Rowan Williams that there is a creative word of God at work within me – I am spoken by God. I am to draw out this word in my life and in the lives of others.⁵⁸⁹ In the misrecognition projected on to me I have often felt reduced and seen the impact of such negative projections on others. In my mindful rule I wish to create awakened language that resurrects the language of creativity and recognition in others.

The intentional free association around symbols in Rome enabled me to see the fragmented mosaic of my life and what was missing. According to embodied trauma theory the naming of elements of trauma including the existence of the well of sadness, lessens the shadow of the past on my present moments. I am further able to reclaim my present moments. The discovery of a hidden stream of sacramental goodness feeding me through African symbols from my childhood also further enable me to reclaim my present moments. As I reflect further on the autoethnographic data I have collected around these symbols, I can perhaps go a step further and say that they created what James K.A. Smith calls a 'sacramental imagination' in me.⁵⁹⁰

I return to my key research questions. In the reclamation of my symbolic past and my symbolic self I further free up my present moments from the

⁵⁸⁹ Rowan Williams, *Silence*, 73

⁵⁹⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 148.

grip of anxiety by redressing the balance between the negative experience of boarding school and the sacramental goodness of my African childhood. I can hold my story more lightly and savour what I experienced as a child in Kenya; it sustains and directs me now to live in nature. This chapter also enabled me to add another strand to my idea of mindfulness of God. Part of being mindful of God for me is to be aware of this underground stream of implicit relational knowing, where natural symbols travel as potential moments of meeting, waiting to emerge by God's grace into my conscious awareness. This 'unthought known' is always there and enables me to know that I have not been abandoned or rejected by God and that God's divine presence is always there. In the here and now I can be open to its presence within me and allow it to sustain me in the present. I also recognize that there was always an implicit relationship with my parents, which emerged and became explicit in the holidays when I could travel home.

Part Three: Application, creative synthesis and conclusion

Chapter Seven

The application

A Mindful Rule

As a contextual, missional, and practical piece of research one of the questions I have been asking about the tentative models I have created for ethical mindful awareness is 'so what?' As well as leading to a second-person guide for others seeking a mindful spirituality, it is a further creative synthesis of the research so far that will offer a pathway for being mindful of God. I see the importance of creating a mindful rule of life as a congruent application for mindful ethical awareness. This ethical awareness is relational and in the service of creating community. The mindful rule is to be a framework for a common life together. In this chapter I explore this motivation and the foundation for such a rule before laying out a provisional framework for a common life, including a confession and a short rule.

The motivation for the application of this research came out of the lived experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, where dysfunctional forms of conflict aimed at myself and others made me ill and placed a chisel in one of the trauma cracks of boarding school. I experienced a traumatic reaction I had no control over and was left feeling broken, helpless, powerless, and overwhelmed. I ended up in Accident & Emergency (A&E) with suspected angina, chest pains, trembling, and numbness down my left arm. I was signed off work for six weeks. However, the threads for this idea run back to my childhood and my experience of words used as weapons to harm others at boarding school.

My life fractures again

The journey at a time of collective trauma can be framed by an initial 'heroic' phase as everyone pulled together with the sudden lockdown in March 2020 but followed by conflict and what has been defined as 'a period of Molasses and Minefields.'⁵⁹¹ This period fragments the community as 'people tire, stressors accumulate, offence is easily taken and the once united community begins to fragment into smaller groups for safety.'⁵⁹² This is a good description of what happened in our community. As the minister, I became the lightning rod for the disconnection people felt from normality. In the end I was struck too many times by distorted bolts of projection and transference to be able to continue in my role. In the face of self-justification, blame, anger, hatred, and scapegoating from others I did not want to be drawn into this dysfunctional narrative. There did not seem to be another way of dealing with the conflict and so I chose silence. I chose not to defend myself. The desire for this mindful rule lies in the deeply felt sense there should be a third way for people, between self-justification and blame, and silence.

With the world shattered as I knew it, I was led by God to live in intentional community with my family to seek to glue back together our life and find wisdom to live by my values of awakened language, releasing the creative word in others, and living by a rule of life that recognized others as persons worthy of respect with gracious language in our communication. This direction has been implicit in my life as I have lived in both the world of the local church and the world of contemplation, retreat houses, and communities since 2012 when I wrote my first book. The application of mindful ethical awareness to relational living has also been there from the beginning of the research.

⁵⁹¹ Grosch Miller, *Trauma*, 74-75.

⁵⁹² Grosch Miller, *Trauma*, 74.

I had built a life around the rule of St. Benedict and the commitment to stability, change, and the conversion of one's whole life, and listening obedience to God.⁵⁹³ However, as the ground began to shift beneath my feet, I realised I needed other strands of wisdom. I registered that I needed another thread that could help with the more provisional world that was suddenly upon us with the Covid-19 pandemic. I began to read Ignatian spirituality as I needed to expand beyond the principle of stability into the area of taking more risks for God. I was especially inspired by Ignatius' emphasis on establishing what deep desire God had placed on my heart and to follow it.⁵⁹⁴ I realised that the deep desire of my heart was to pioneer mindful church and mindful community especially for young people who were suffering from mental ill-health whilst simultaneously asking spiritual questions. Viewed this way, my desire was to pursue mindfulness in all its depth and move out of the breadth of activities I was involved in as a minister.

As well as navigating the pandemic, I had to negotiate the conflict I found myself in more locally. Psychodynamic theory with its recognition of the distorted dimension of relationships through transference and projection was very helpful in understanding this experience. I expand on this theory later in this chapter. The reaction to me as a minister at a time of crisis from some, drawing on psychodynamic theory and the ethics of recognition, can also be seen as those people disengaging from my humanity, as misrecognizing me as a threat, someone to be feared, and the projected fantasy image of me to be destroyed.⁵⁹⁵ The mindful rule and recognition theory as I apply them are the subversive resistance to all such distortions in relationship.

⁵⁹³ Jamison, *Finding Sanctuary*, 116-118, for a short summary of these vows.

⁵⁹⁴ Bernadette Miles, "Ignatian Spirituality, Apostolic Creativity and Leadership in Times of Change," *The Way*, 50, no. 4 (October 2011): 37.

⁵⁹⁵ See Doehring, *Taking Care*, 13-19.

The foundation of the mindful rule

The rule is based on the tentative models I have created for holding values in present moment mnemonic awareness, and for being open to a continuous awareness of God's presence that allows charged and transformative moments of meeting with God. In this model of ethical awareness scriptural verses that reflect core values can be turned into metacognitive propositions to be meditated on and held in mnemonic awareness – so that the mindful rule becomes a living memory. I have exemplified this earlier in the research with verses from Mark's gospel, but additional verses can be added, for example, a key principle of disagreeing well in conflict is going to talk to someone face to face (Matthew 18:15). As many people dislike conflict and seek to avoid dealing with it directly, this is an indispensable principle. One of the first things I did when I started as a minister was to have some training in conflict resolution with the former London Mennonite Centre and their Bridge Builders team.⁵⁹⁶ Their emphasis on the importance of immediate and face-to-face handling of conflict has been the most important principle I have used in reconciling people.

The importance of simple practices like this in conflict is underlined through an analogy made by John Paul Lederach in his book *The Moral Imagination*. Studies have shown that a murmuration of starlings which appears complex is created out of simple moves which the birds all follow.⁵⁹⁷ In the same way Lederach argues that in conflict 'simplicity precedes complexity;' if simple rules are followed then conflict can be resolved, if they are not, then conflict gets very complicated.⁵⁹⁸ I will come on to the confessional aspect of this mindful rule, but the 'confessional' is

⁵⁹⁶ I understand this has now closed, but the work continues through Alastair Mackay and his charity Reconciliation Initiatives, <http://reconciliation-initiatives.org>.

⁵⁹⁷ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32-33.

⁵⁹⁸ Lederach, 33.

also a key element of peace-making.⁵⁹⁹ The simplicity of building peace lies in two simple ideas, ‘While the justification of violent response has many tributaries, the moral imagination that rises beyond violence has but two: taking personal responsibility and acknowledging relational mutuality.’⁶⁰⁰ One of the reasons I am drawn to mindfulness is that it enables us to take personal responsibility. The God-given mindful capacities that were given us enable agency in our ethical behaviour. I am also drawn to mindfulness because it recognizes our relational mutuality, these mindful capacities of self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence are relational.

Lederach adds one other crucial ingredient to peace making, ‘the art of the creative process,’ which has been ‘overshadowed, underestimated, and in too many instances forgotten.’⁶⁰¹ He calls this the ‘moral imagination,’ which is the ‘*capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist.*’⁶⁰² This overlaps with my model of ethical awareness in this mindful rule, where I imagine the awakening of the God-given creative word in each person to enable a recognition and re-perceiving of them as persons made in the image of God. I return to this idea of creativity, imagination, and the moral way of life later in this chapter.

The rule is influenced by Benedictine spirituality, and Ignatian spirituality with its emphasis on imagination. I draw on the lived experience of being in community at Scargill House and living by their rule of life or pathways. I perceive a gap as I do this for a rule that draws on the wisdom of community and mindfulness – especially in utilizing mindfulness theory and practice. I make use of the wisdom of other communities that have influenced Scargill like Iona, Northumbria, and Taizé, influences that have emerged in the oral wisdom of the community. I also recognize that this rule is just a beginning; it needs to be lived out to fully emerge.

⁵⁹⁹ Lederach, 35.

⁶⁰⁰ Lederach, 35.

⁶⁰¹ Lederach, ix.

⁶⁰² Lederach, ix.

The wisdom of intentional community

The recognition of the provisional nature of what I am creating here in a mindful rule is influenced by Brother Roger the founder of the Taizé community. This community did not start ‘with a blueprint for their life’ but grew ‘organically.’⁶⁰³ Brother Roger himself said, ‘Only by living the dynamics of the provisional can we discover, how, time after time, to keep on gaining new momentum.’⁶⁰⁴ This requires a mindful focus on the present moment. Certainly, in Taizé there appears to be an ethic that could be viewed in recognition terms; Balado says, ‘The meetings in Taizé challenge those taking part to enter into a dialogue in which the main thing is to be attentive to one another’s essential reality.’⁶⁰⁵ This is expanded in a Christian distinctive, ‘Christians are bearers in theory of a unique awareness, that every person in the world is the object of infinite Love.’⁶⁰⁶ I believe it is mindfulness of God that can help us cultivate this unique awareness and attentiveness to the other.

I am following another fragment of monastic wisdom that has helped me live with the provisional nature of what I am doing. Fred Bahnson in an essay for *Image Journal* writes, ‘You put your body where the question is. Then you walk the question.’⁶⁰⁷ I wish to experience the wisdom of intentional community, and so I have placed my body where the question is and walked the question. When it comes to creating mindful community as church, I don’t know what it will look like; it exists as a question. How can I collaborate with others to create mindful community? I need to put my

⁶⁰³ Susan Rakoczy, “The Witness of Community Life: Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* and the Taizé Community,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 127 (March 2007): 55, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001590655&site=eds-live>.

⁶⁰⁴ Quoted in J.L.G. Balado, *The Story of Taizé*, (London, Oxford: Mowbray, 1980), 17.

⁶⁰⁵ Balado, 16.

⁶⁰⁶ Balado, 17.

⁶⁰⁷ Fred Bahnson, “The Underground Life of Prayer,” *Image* 77, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://imagejournal.org/article/underground-life-prayer/>.

body where that question is and walk the question. There is an implicit assumption in me still, about my leading of it, that I need to wrestle with, especially as I am drawn to the idea of collaboration and not hierarchical leadership. I need to be aware of how I have been shaped to lead and subvert and change this element within me.

Part of that lived experience at Scargill draws on the oral wisdom that forms the implicit heart of community life. One of the wisdom phrases that is repeated especially by the Director of the community is that every community if it is to transcend self-focus needs a ‘demanding common task.’ The phrase originates with George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community who stated, ‘only a demanding common task can create community.’⁶⁰⁸ The demanding common task at Scargill is hospitality. The demanding common task for mindful community would be the task of awakening kingdom language within in order to be the words spoken by the Light. The words spoken by the Light will always be light in the world. The language of the kingdom encourages, builds up, and seeks to recognize the creative God-given word in each person and awaken it.

I am aware, with regard to the idea of the creative God-given word in each person as introduced in chapter six, that I am working with another theological fragment. I return to this idea in my intentional spiral process. Sylvie Avakian develops this idea in dialogue with her context, drawing on the theology of Maximus the Confessor, one of the main pioneers of this theology. At the centre of what she calls *Logos* (the Word) theology is that ‘the divine *Logos*, or Word, is the ontological reality of every created existence, since it is through the *Logos* that everything has been made.’⁶⁰⁹ This enabled me to make sense of the phrase that ‘spoke’ to me that I was a word spoken by the Light. This *Logos* theology is drawn from John’s gospel

⁶⁰⁸ Phyllis Rodgeron Pleasants, “He Was Ancientfuture Before Ancientfuture Was Cool,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 31, no.1 (2004): 91, accessed <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001445679&site=eds-live>. See also online: <http://www.iona.org.uk>.

⁶⁰⁹ Sylvie Avakian, “Christian Spirituality: Maximus the Confessor A Challenge to the 21st Century,” *International Congregational Journal*, 14, no.2 (winter 2015): 72.

and, in particular, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made' (John 1:1-3). I am 'spoken' into being by this Word. This also means that everyone else is spoken into being by this Word, and this is another reason to recognize them as persons.

As the theology is developed, it is recognized that 'every human being has his/her "purpose" or "meaning" in God, namely every human being has (or is) a word or a *logos*.'⁶¹⁰ However, it is only together as the '*logoi*' or 'the words' that we 'form the one *Logos*, the Christ.'⁶¹¹ In the mindful rule we need each other; we are incomplete without each other. To see this completeness, we need to keep helping others find their purpose or meaning in God. I am also arguing that the creative word in each of us is awakened through gracious kingdom language. I raised the possibility of sacramental conversations earlier in the research. It is my felt sense that it is sacramental conversations, mediating the presence of God that awaken the creative word in each of us. This includes, in mindfulness terms, our self-language – how we talk to our own being.

Ironically, one of the problems of working in a Baptist church that theoretically believes in the priesthood of all believers, namely that everyone is a minister, is living with the projection that as the minister you should do everything (one-person ministry) and be at every event. I never successfully subverted that projection although I involved many others in ministry. My experience of living in intentional community at Scargill is much more that it is not about one person but about the whole community ministering to others through hospitality. The spirituality of the community also shapes the morning and other prayers, which are led by members of the community. Every member of the community takes it in turn to lead morning prayers. This offers me a different model going forward for mindful

⁶¹⁰ Avakian, 72.

⁶¹¹ Avakian, 72.

community as church which will look at everyone participating in the ministry.

In her article on George MacLeod, the founder of Iona Community, Phyllis Rodgers Pleasants draws on the writings of Leonard Sweet to categorize MacLeod as a man before his time, who foreshadowed many of Sweet's concepts in the creation of Iona Community.⁶¹² Quoting Sweet in describing MacLeod's own participatory approach, she argues, 'A participatory Christian community will be one where everyone is recognized as a minister expecting their "leaders to mobilize and release ministry through them. All "participants" are full partners."⁶¹³ The question I am wrestling with is, can I create a mindful community in which every participant is a full partner? This leads to a related insight that has deeply moved me and that is the power of meeting daily.

After twenty-three years of running a church and now living in community some differences have emerged which are helpful and challenging for looking at a new form of mindful community. The church setting was very much based on a weekly rhythm. The community life at Scargill is based on a daily rhythm. I am drawing on my field-notes, journal, and other reflections here. The community eats together daily, often three times a day. The community prays together daily, morning, lunchtime, and evening. These include experiences of silence. The community has daily morning meetings after breakfast. There is also the rhythm of tea and coffee at 11 am and tea, coffee, and cake at 4 p.m. every day. The community also works together every day in teams. In the lunchtime prayer the community is reminded each day of one of the pathways (rule of life) they seek to follow. This daily rhythm very quickly enables people to work together; it enables a real connection as persons, and an awareness of vulnerability and individual quirks. I have seen that people can show their vulnerability and that vulnerability can be held. The power of the community comes from this

⁶¹² Pleasants, 84.

⁶¹³ Pleasants, 84, and quotes from Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims; First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 72.

daily rhythm as well as having a demanding common task of hospitality to guests.

I am left with the question, could a mindful community that is not living together intentionally have a daily rhythm to distinguish it from the weekly church rhythm I know so well? If this is where the transformative power of community lies, what do I have to give up making this part of the way of life?

That you must ‘give something up’ to be part of an intentional community is also one of the strands of oral wisdom at Scargill. Recognition theory works from the premise that freedom ‘in the sense of independence from others’ is illusory.⁶¹⁴ One part of recognition theory that I am also trying to walk is the idea that freedom comes from ‘knowing oneself in otherness.’⁶¹⁵ It is in community with others that I find true freedom. I must also cultivate self-awareness, an ability to regulate my emotions and my words, and transcend my automatic self-focus. I think that is one of the challenges I face – I have been shaped by boarding school to be independent from others.⁶¹⁶ In becoming a minister and pastoring a congregation I have subverted that individualism, and in moving to an intentional community I am more radically resisting that pressure to be independent.

Resistance and recognition

This mindful rule draws on the sacramental goodness of secular mindfulness and the redemptive heart of mindfulness of God. It can be applied to intentional community life, local church life, and an individual’s walk with God. It subverts and resists the rise of critical and shaming discourse in culture. Seamus Heaney talks about the redress of poetry, how

⁶¹⁴ Heikki Ikaheimo, “Causes for Lack of Recognition: From the Secular to the Non-Secular,” 59, in *Recognition and Religion: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* eds. Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen & Rita Palmen, (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁶¹⁵ Ikaheimo, 59.

⁶¹⁶ Ikaheimo, 59.

it can tilt ‘the scales of reality’ in a more ‘transcendent’ direction.⁶¹⁷ My sense is that this idea of awakened language can be democratized and is something many could experience. Awakened language does not have to be poetry or poetic. I hold that God’s Spirit can play a part in awakening the language of encouragement in us, the language of our true self, the language of the God-given creative word in us. Such awakened kingdom language can act as a redress to cultural forces that are inimical to wellbeing; it too can be a ‘counter-reality.’⁶¹⁸ As I look to help people to consider the spiritual dimension of mindfulness, the mindful rule will play an important role.

This awakening requires the recognition of the creative word in one’s own self, in others, and the recognition of God as the one who interlaces and transforms us. A key intuitively occurring word in my writing is recognition. I recognize my context. I recognize the unconscious elements of my story, I recognize I have mindful states of mind, I recognize I need to own my trauma, I recognize I was shaped to be loyal, that I had an inner critic. I recognize the importance of my early idyllic life in Kenya that acts as a counterbalance to the trauma of boarding school. I recognize shame as a recurring theme alongside anxiety. This is perhaps why recognition theory resounded in my mind when I encountered it.

I first came across the ethics of recognition as a ‘theological fragment’ in a partly autoethnographic book on shame by Stephen Pattison. His argument is that those who have been shamed need to go on a journey of recognition about their own part in sustaining submission and oppression. Once this is recognized, the shamed person can resist this aspect of culture.⁶¹⁹ Here Pattison draws on the writings of Richard Sennett on authority.⁶²⁰ This idea that as a shamed person I have agency resonated with me. Shame is also seen in recognition theory as the ‘misrecognition’ of someone.⁶²¹ I am in my

⁶¹⁷ Heaney, 3.

⁶¹⁸ Heaney, 3

⁶¹⁹ Pattison, *Shame*, 178.

⁶²⁰ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1, for a brief summary of recognition theory around recognizing the other as a person through respect, esteem and friendship.

⁶²¹ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 10.

spiritual journey trying to relativize anxiety, shame, and shame-anxiety and so need to go on a journey of recognition about my agency and the part culture has played in shaming me.

I am also aware that as a minister, I was deliberately shamed by some during lockdown. I am vulnerable to shame, and I experienced a sense of helplessness, which I believe was in part the early trauma of feeling helpless at boarding school re-emerging. It is possible that a sense of shame was connected to that feeling of helplessness, 'Shame is seen by some as originating in early childhood experiences, particularly related to helplessness.'⁶²² It may be that part of my motivation to withdraw from a toxic situation was due to a sense of shame. The wider cultural context of the lockdown and pandemic may well have made me more vulnerable to this possibility. In my mindful rule I want to create a non-shaming environment. I have also had the insight that a traumatic response by individuals and communities to difficult events can be the shattering of trust. My hope is that this mindful rule will also enable the rebuilding of trust for people. I believe that utilizing recognition theory, as I further outline it below, will enable a future mindful community to do this.

Recognition as a theory is simply and profoundly relational, 'to recognize someone is to grant another human being a positive normative status based on her personhood.'⁶²³ That this theory recognizes the centrality of relationship in our shaping as human beings resonates with me as a Christian. This summary statement can be broken down into further dimensions. This granting of the status of personhood also has an active element in that 'an act of recognition means taking and *treating* the other *as a person*.'⁶²⁴ What does it mean to treat another as a person? The other person is treated with 'respect,' recognizing others as 'rational autonomous

⁶²² Sally Nash, "Landscapes of Shame in the Church: A Typology to inform Ministerial Praxis," (PhD Diss., Birmingham University, 2015, accessed December 24, 2021, <http://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/33528885.pdf>. She is referencing D. Nathanson, *Shame and Pride* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992), 214, and M.C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity, Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 183-184.

⁶²³ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1.

⁶²⁴ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1, treating is in my italics.

beings,' which is 'based on the equal dignity of all peoples.'⁶²⁵ In recognition theory respect is not earned but given.⁶²⁶ As a Christian I believe all people are made in the image of God and are persons who should be recognized as such (Genesis 1:26).

The second dimension is 'esteem,' where one's unique context is recognized, including 'personal, cultural, ethnic, or religious identities.'⁶²⁷ I worked in one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse boroughs in London for 23 years and recognized that the context of each person was central to my approach. Finally, recognition theory appreciates that the 'unique individual personhood' in another can elicit 'love and friendship' from another.⁶²⁸ The more general respect and esteem to all is balanced by a more focused love and friendship for some. As a Christian I am called to go beyond respect and esteem for all others and recognize that I am to love even my enemies (Matthew 5:44).

I made an associative link between recognition theory and mindfulness, whose change of perspective of re-perceiving can be conceptualized as a form of recognition. Through mindful awareness, I recognize reality more clearly. Through self-awareness I recognize myself more clearly. Through a mindful gaze directed towards others, I recognize others more clearly. In mindfulness of God, I am looking to recognize God more clearly (through God's own self-revelation to me). As I recognize God, God helps me to recognize myself. As I do this, I can change the way I perceive myself, this may help address the way shame distorts this view. As Sally Nash argues, in part 'shame is addressed by changing our thinking about ourselves.'⁶²⁹ This is where recognition theory put into practice can be transformative for myself and others. Through a God-given recognition of the other as a person, someone to be esteemed and honoured, as someone who could be a

⁶²⁵ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1.

⁶²⁶ See Richard Sennett, *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 63-64 where he points out the major thrust of our culture on having to 'earn' respect.

⁶²⁷ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 1.

⁶²⁸ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 2.

⁶²⁹ Nash, 14.

friend, I can speak in a way that builds them up and does not pull them down. I place this mindful recognition at the centre of my mindful rule.

One of the questions contemporary recognition theory asks, is why is recognition so difficult for us when it is ‘ontologically foundational’ to our flourishing?⁶³⁰ Recognition appears not to be automatic but requires ‘capacities or skills’ that may not have been cultivated.⁶³¹ It may also be that an individual realises that there are ‘costs’ to recognition, which ‘leads to reluctance to grant it.’⁶³² In recognition theory there is then both a conscious awareness of recognition and a choosing not to do it because as an individual one might have to give something up in recognizing the other, and for some an inability to recognize through lack of capacity. This is a brief summary; however, I would also argue that mindful theory with its emphasis on our inability to see clearly, its recognition of our distorted perceptive capacities, also helps explain why recognizing each other as persons is difficult.⁶³³ It is also a possibility that mindfulness with its capacity to help us to perceive ourselves, God, and others more clearly can help us recognize the other as a person worthy of respect and esteem.

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

I return to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in my life and more widely. This research has been partly conducted during the Covid-19 lockdown and pandemic, which has been marked by deep uncertainty and constant change. In my experience, unhelpful forms of conflict have been amplified. A mindful rule can act as a trellis, a scaffolding, to enable stability within the uncertainty. It can also help us to keep our attention focused on what is important and openly aware of what is happening around us and in us,

⁶³⁰ Ikaheimo, 51.

⁶³¹ Ikaheimo, 51.

⁶³² Ikaheimo, 51.

⁶³³ See Vago and Silbersweig, 2 for our distorted perceiving, and how mindfulness reduces such bias.

living by risk-taking values not fear-based safety. Mindfulness helps me to recognize the provisional nature of my own thought life, as well as life around me. One aspect that I would like to highlight is the further turn to the virtual world because of lockdown and social distancing.

I was already aware of the impact of the virtual world on our capacity to attend deeply prior to the pandemic, as well as how so many in our culture are leading disembodied lives because of digital living.⁶³⁴ The even more extreme turn to virtual living necessitated by lockdown and pandemic, whilst having obvious benefits, has amplified the digital distortions of the virtual life, including 'online disinhibition.'⁶³⁵ Online people also wear masks and curate their identities 'with the psychological process of creating imaginary characters.'⁶³⁶ In this mindful rule the emphasis will be on being who we truly are, not curating images of our own self. I have seen narcissism rife on Facebook, and Twitter riddled with anger. This narcissism and anger expressed on social media has expanded into other areas of life, and public and community discourse has become far more bitter and angry. This is true of local churches as well. This has led to an inattention to the present moment in our lives, and this mindful rule will focus on the present moment with its ethical choices in everyday life.

I have in earlier chapters shared some examples of verses I have been in tune with (Mark 8:33, 35) that I have turned into metacognitive propositions. These exemplars show that a more systematic ethical scaffolding can be created in the form of a mindful rule.

⁶³⁴ Hayles, 12, I have already referenced her work on hyper-attention.

⁶³⁵ John Suler, "The Online Disinhibition Effect," *CyberPsychology & Behaviour*, 7, no.3 (2004): 321, accessed December 1, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295>.

⁶³⁶ Suler, 323.

Applying the map of mindfulness

This mindful rule uses the groundwork already laid in terms of cultivating a mindful spirituality and ethical awareness of the concerns of God in the present moment. I use the map of mindfulness already outlined as psycho-spiritual education to enable people to understand their whole being and inhabit it. Both secular and spiritual mindful awareness practices are built into the rule, and the rule asks its followers to intentionally train their attention in the present moment through mindful practices. This subverts and resists the capturing and fragmentation of our attentional capacities by the virtual world. In these practices I am looking to become aware of judgemental attitudes which I would seek to replace with self-compassion and compassion for others. The aim of this is to re-perceive God, myself, and others. I take the log out of my own eye before I try to take the speck of dust out of someone else's eye (Matthew 7:5). I am aware of repetition in the use of each of these definitions of mindfulness, as they reoccur in different settings. However, in each chapter I am attempting to apply them differently. In another way, mindfulness is learnt through repetition, and so this is a mindful intentional repetition. I also add more theory from the research into mindfulness and ethical awareness.

In this central strand of theory and practice of the mindful rule, I am enhancing self-awareness and self-regulation. This is significant because I am aware that I have a negativity bias, that many of my thoughts are negative, and that my perceptions of others are often biased. I take seriously the commands in scripture to self-examination and to allow the Holy Spirit to examine me (Romans 8:27). I take seriously the commands to self-regulate my afflictive thoughts, for example, 'In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry' (Ephesians 4:26). This might be recognized as a wider form of self-control, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). As I enhance self-awareness and self-regulation in relationship with others, I can transcend my self-focus – in

that moment I can recognize others as persons. Mindfulness theory enables that self-awareness and self-examination and regulation through mindful awareness, not only through practices that will be part of this mindful rule, but also through a well-researched theory of our mindful capacities and sense of self.

As outlined earlier in the research, mindfulness works with three aspects of self: narrative, experiential and witnessing. I will introduce participants in the mindful rule to these aspects. I will ask participants in the mindful rule to try and identify their own relationship to these three aspects of self. The rule would introduce people to the problem of the present moment. I will introduce them to mindfulness practices like the body scan and breath practices.

Secular mindfulness shows that not only are we often not in the present moment, but we are frequently on autopilot, living life out of automaticity – this includes living by automatic cultural, family, and religious scripts. I wish to add to this map of mindfulness the construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Mindfulness is an important element in CQ and is used to help people become aware of what David C. Thomas calls ‘cultural cruise control.’ Cultural cruise control is ‘running your life on the basis of your built-in cultural assumptions’.⁶³⁷ If as a mindful community we are to be multi-ethnic, then such awareness is very important to cultivate. We are usually not aware that we are not aware and living on autopilot. The mindful rule will help people to become aware of the things they say that come out of these automatic cultural scripts and to discern whether they need to be not spoken out or need rewriting.

Mindfulness is also employed in secular ethical decision models. This is because ‘awareness’ is an important precursor to making an ethical

⁶³⁷ David C. Thomas & Kerr Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally*, 2nd ed. (Williston: Berrett: Koehler Publishers, 2009), 45-46.

decision.⁶³⁸ Ruedy argues that ‘Mindfulness promotes self-awareness, and greater self-awareness curtails unethical behavior.’⁶³⁹ The language we use to talk to each other is part of our ethical behaviour and often we say things in unaware ways, not realising the hurt they can cause. I am using mindful awareness as ethical awareness through the intentional cultivation of the things of God, and I am choosing them over the human things jostling for my attention. I have recognized the importance of mindful awareness for my ethical decision-making and built a model around the wisdom of scripture to enable me to make ethical decisions based on my Christian values.

As already outlined, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence are God-given mindful capacities that can be enhanced. These will be explored in the rule through both secular mindfulness and scriptural overlap. In scripture and contemplative history, we are asked to regulate our afflictive thoughts, such as anger, pride, envy, lust, greed, bitterness, and malice.⁶⁴⁰ These afflictive thoughts do not just manifest in harmful actions but harmful words. We are also commanded to regulate our tongues and the words that come out of our mouth. Having experienced over a quarter of a century of church ministry how damaging it is to church and community life when people do not regulate their speech, controlling our tongues is a central aspect of the rule. There is no rule of life in local Baptist churches.⁶⁴¹ This idea of how we speak also has a positive side, not just regulating our shadow side. I have already introduced the idea that mindful spirituality is in part about awakened language. One strand of that is to awaken kingdom language. In kingdom language we encourage, we build up, we find the God-given creative word in the other and call it out. This

⁶³⁸ N.E. Ruedy and M. Schweitzer, “In the Moment: The Effect of Mindfulness on Ethical Decision Making,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 95, no. 1 (2010), 73, accessed December 13, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0796-y>.

⁶³⁹ Ruedy and Schweitzer, 81.

⁶⁴⁰ Evagrius of Pontus was the first to fully develop the idea of eight afflictive thoughts, later to become the seven deadly sins, see Simon Tugwell, “Evagrius and Macarius,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold SJ (London: SPCK, 1986), 171.

⁶⁴¹ There has been some work on a code of practice by John Claydon, acknowledged in a private email correspondence.

leads to the wider principle about how to disagree well and biblical ways of working through conflict. This also necessitates spelling out dysfunctional forms of behaviour that are destructive. It also involves working with archetypal dimensions to relationships, including the distorted dimension of transference and projection. I use the word distorted in a non-technical sense, as my way of signalling how transference distorts the way we see the other.

From a theological perspective I have argued that these mindful capacities of awareness and attention, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence have their origin in God – they are part of our anthropological createdness. This means we can reclaim them and in doing so enable God to redeem them as a graced response. They have a purpose in being created capacities. That purpose is to enable us to focus on God, others, creation, and our own self with deep attention.

Transference, projection, and other dimensions of relationship

If I am to help others to live together in a mindful rule, then it is important that together we know something about how relationships work. I have outlined the reality that there is a distorted aspect to all relationships where we project and transfer onto others unreal judgements, sometimes idealistic, often negative, which make working and real aspects of the relationship difficult.⁶⁴² Clarkson recognizes that there are a ‘multiplicity of relationships’ in counselling and psychotherapy.⁶⁴³ I sketch them briefly, as having them in awareness, has enabled me to be self-aware and steer a path with others. I outline the aspects of theory that have guided me as a minister and psychotherapist, I recognize it is a complex area and more

⁶⁴² For a brief summary see Petruska Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship* (London: Whurr Publishers Ltd, 1995), 9-11.

⁶⁴³ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, 3, 3-21.

could be said. I have mentioned the working relationship, sometimes called the 'working alliance,' which is the 'necessary cooperation' to work together.⁶⁴⁴ The real or person-to-person relationship is, says Clarkson, the 'psychotherapeutic relationship most similar to ordinary human relationships.'⁶⁴⁵ In moments of meeting that I have drawn on already, it is the real relationship that has emerged. This could be conceptualized as a form of mutual recognition.⁶⁴⁶ In my experience these relationships are at play in ordinary relationships; the difference is that in psychotherapy you are working with them in awareness and intentionally.⁶⁴⁷ The person-centred counselling approach has 'the realness, or genuineness, or congruence of the counsellor' as one of its core conditions.⁶⁴⁸

Relationship with God, self, and other is integral to the mindful rule. Mindful awareness, as a form of relational radar, monitors this multiplicity of relationships which are archetypal, by which I mean they are 'potentially present in any psychotherapeutic encounter,' as well as in ordinary relationships.⁶⁴⁹ In building relationship and community, I would want to be aware of these dimensions. In counselling, as in life and community, I would want to work on the working relationship. I have found this is usually where the first stresses of conflict in relationships are revealed.

The second aspect is our real relationship which enables visible trust and vulnerability with each other. We do not have to be friends, but there needs to be a real aspect to each relationship. There may be external circumstances that stress our relationships, but more commonly we need to look inward. For example, boarding school taught me that being vulnerable was weakness and would get you bullied. Through counselling I have learnt that being vulnerable is to be real.

⁶⁴⁴ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, 8.

⁶⁴⁵ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, 14.

⁶⁴⁶ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, 15.

⁶⁴⁷ See Jan Grant and Jim Crawley, *Transference and Projection* (Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2002), xvi, 3, for an acknowledgement of this in relation to transference and projection.

⁶⁴⁸ Dave Mearns and Brian Thorne, *Person-Centred Counselling in Action* 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 15.

⁶⁴⁹ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, xii.

As well as acknowledging the reality of our negativity bias and distorted ways of perceiving, all of us are wounded, and we look at others through the lens of our wounding. Clarkson calls this the ‘reparative’ or developmentally needed relationship.⁶⁵⁰ In the moment of conflict, we must catch our automatic reactions and see if they are dysfunctional and come out of our wounded self. When I was sent to boarding school, I felt rejected, although this was not the intention or reality behind my family’s decision. I still fear rejection. This is my wound. Even when I sleep, I still have dreams of significant others walking away from me. Because of this, I sometimes keep my distance from others. Only through awareness of this can I allow myself to come closer to others.

Because of our life history and experience, we can all enter distortions of relationship – through projection and transference. I have often looked at the gospels through this lens. As I read and respond to the gospels, I see in the conflict stories Jesus himself experienced projection and transference. The Pharisees and teachers of the law saw him in a distorted way, as someone who would bring the wrath of the Romans down on them (John 11:50). They also saw Jesus as a rival for the support of the crowds – they were envious of him (Matthew 27:18). The disciples possibly believed that Jesus would be the triumphant Messiah who would drive out the Romans, as some other groups at the time commonly believed about the coming Messiah. For example, in Mark 8:31-33 Peter rebukes Jesus when he talks about dying on a cross; the way of suffering was not the path he saw for Jesus.

Transference can be defined as ‘the client’s experience of the therapist that is shaped by his or her own psychological structures and past, and involves displacement onto the therapist, of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors belonging rightfully in earlier significant relationships.’⁶⁵¹ As a minister, whenever I have experienced a person reacting to me negatively, I often

⁶⁵⁰ Clarkson, *The Therapeutic Relationship*, 11-13.

⁶⁵¹ C.J. Gelso and J.A. Hayes, *The Psychotherapy Relationship* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 11, as cited in Grant and Crawley, 4.

looked for the projection and transference. In recognition theory terms I am being misrecognized. This transference is usually outside of someone's awareness; it is 'largely an unconscious process.'⁶⁵² This makes it difficult to work with as I am not being seen as I really am, and the other person is unaware of their distorted perceptions. The main way I have tried to work with transference is to move the person out of a distorted relationship with myself into a real relationship – where they see me as I really am.⁶⁵³ During the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown this was very difficult as you could not see people face-to-face, which was the main way I created real relationships. Often the clue to transference is when the working relationship is problematic, and it is recognized in psychodynamic theory that transference can 'threaten to disrupt the "working alliance."⁶⁵⁴

Although transference is projected, Grant and Crawley also further define projection, which can be helpful in further sifting the distortions experienced in relationship. They define projection as 'a psychological process that involves the attribution of unacceptable thoughts, feelings, traits or behaviours to others that are characteristic of oneself.'⁶⁵⁵ This relieves the one projecting from 'intolerable' internal 'anxiety and conflict.'⁶⁵⁶ In my experience this has a different feel to transference and can be very intense. I was accused of being the 'cuckoo in the nest,' dominating the centre when I had expanded the centre. This was a projection, where the person wanted to be the only person in the centre of the church and to push everyone else out of the nest.

There is a body of work that acknowledges the pastoral relationship attracts transference and projection.⁶⁵⁷ I have also worked with the realisation that I can be sucked into a countertransference towards the member of my

⁶⁵² Grant and Crawley, 5.

⁶⁵³ Dave Mearns, *Developing Person-Centred Counselling* 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 57.

⁶⁵⁴ Grant and Crawley, 7.

⁶⁵⁵ Grant and Crawley, 18.

⁶⁵⁶ Grant and Crawley, 18.

⁶⁵⁷ See Richard S., Schwartz, "A Psychiatrist's View of Transference and Countertransference in the Pastoral Relationship," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 43, no. 1 (March 1989): 41–46, accessed December 8, 2021, <http://doi.org/10.1177/002234098904300107>.

congregation. I have generally worked with the definition that Schwartz uses, 'A second important use of the word countertransference is to describe the responses in the therapist evoked by the patient's transference to him or her; that is to say, your own response to the ways in which a patient insists on mis-perceiving you.'⁶⁵⁸ If someone sees me as a punitive authoritative figure projecting someone from the past, I can get drawn into behaving in that way. In my time as a pastor, I have worked with a supervisor with whom I could discuss any conflict to examine possible transference and countertransference reactions. In my experience, this transference and countertransference when it is outside of awareness can be one of the most destructive aspects in relationship. Schwartz recognizes the stressful weight of transference, 'Most simply put, to be loved, to be hated, to be worshipped, to be despised evokes powerful feelings even in the healthiest of us.'⁶⁵⁹ The main reactions are to attack or withdraw when the transference is negative or lap up the adulation when it is positive.⁶⁶⁰

One piece of advice I was given by my tutor in pastoral care and counselling when I was training as a minister (1994-1997) was to stay in difficult relationships if possible. I am attracted to Benedictine spirituality and its emphasis on stability and staying with one community, and these two pieces of wisdom have helped me. However, in the conflict I experienced in lockdown I realised another piece of wisdom. In this situation I had to withdraw. In envisioning a mindful rule, I must consider the responses that are possible, including when withdrawal is the only option. A mindful rule is, therefore, also about healthy boundaries. One challenge I face is what to do about the reality that the ministerial role attracts a significant burden of transference. This makes a real relationship difficult. One possibility is to create a mindful community where I have given up the title and status of being an accredited minister with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. It may

⁶⁵⁸ Schwartz, 42.

⁶⁵⁹ Schwartz, 43.

⁶⁶⁰ Schwartz, 43.

be if I want to create relationships of mutuality, the title 'minister' simply gets in the way.

In the mindful rule there would be a seeking of a continuous awareness of the presence of God; we can only be mindful of ourselves, others, and creation when we are mindful of God. As we seek this awareness as a graced response, we also become aware of God's mindfulness (remembrance) of us (Psalm 8). This compassionate presence which we are invited into enables us to be more compassionate, more Christ-like. Although we play our part in living out a mindful rule, we cannot do it on our own self-direction. Under God's direction we are looking to know ourselves.

There is one reality, but we face both the material reality and the reality of God who is present in that reality. Our temptation is to avoid that reality and any difficulties it contains, including our own inner conflicts and conflicts with others. In the mindful rule we turn toward the difficulties immediately. Living in the present moment is, therefore, central to the mindful rule. This will include handling our afflictive thoughts so that our present moments are not overwhelmed with anxiety, or self-justification, or other distress. I will teach the two tentative models I have developed to enable this.

Other dimensions to the mindful rule

I want to teach the mindful rule in an accessible, participatory, and dialogic way, to be congruent with the values of this research. Mindfulness has enabled me to find agency in regulating my mental health, and in playing my part in being mindful of God. To adapt an analogy used by Martin Laird, and one that resonates with my symbolic interest in sailing boats – I am the sailing boat, the sail, the rudder, and the keel. I can learn to inhabit every part of the boat and develop the skills to sail in life, but I 'cannot produce the necessary wind that moves the boat.'⁶⁶¹ The wind of the Spirit is the

⁶⁶¹ Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006), 4.

graced response of God toward me. I can help others find their agency, both for wellbeing and in mindful spirituality. This clear outline of how I play my part through mindfulness can also be seen as part of my original contribution.

This analogy is an example of an approach that I will adopt in the mindful rule. I have consistently used narrative and the poetic in this spiritual AE. Stories, metaphors, poetry, and riddles are also used to teach mindfulness. In a note in their book *Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, Mark Williams and Danny Penman state that, ‘sometimes poetry captures the soul of an idea more than any number of explanations.’⁶⁶² The intentional use of metaphors, stories and poetry is also a central part of Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT).⁶⁶³ I will draw on these metaphors, poems, and stories and use stories from my own life. I will encourage those exploring the mindful rule to write their own stories. I will also introduce the idea of listening for the emergence of personal symbols from the underground stream of implicit relational knowing with God, how the ‘unthought known’ can be a rich source of interaction with God as moments of meeting emerge from it.

One of the important things I have learnt in teaching mindfulness to others is to help them find the motivation to do it. The motivation is the fuel that enables the daily intention. For example, to illustrate the cost of inattentiveness, I often tell the story of how I nearly killed Coco our dog one Christmas morning. Within AE Dubisch talks about ‘confessional tales,’ and such stories within the mindful rule and this research are confessional tales.⁶⁶⁴

We had our Christmas service at 10.15 am on Christmas day. We always have a member of congregation who comes for Christmas lunch. It had been a busy festive period and I had led several services,

⁶⁶² Williams and Penman, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace*, 262-263.

⁶⁶³ See Hayes, 36, 37, 66, 96.

⁶⁶⁴ Dubisch, 119, and she takes the phrase from John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), ix, 3.

including the late service running past midnight on Christmas Eve. After our lunch it was my turn to do the washing up. Because of anxiety I always like to make sure the sink in the kitchen is clean, so I began to fill it slowly with hot water and bleach. I decided to sit down in the living room for 10 seconds just to rest. After a while Coco ran in shaking his paws and rubbing his face on the carpet. I realised I had left the tap running. I ran into the kitchen where the floor was awash with hot bleachy water. I quickly turned the tap off and ran back to check on Coco. Fortunately, the bleach was so diluted he had suffered no harm, but before mopping the floor I ran him upstairs to give him a bath.

I don't want to be on autopilot and so this story motivates me to practice daily. I would then ask, 'what might your intention be in practising mindfulness daily?'

Humour will be an important part of the participatory dialogue and storytelling. The autoethnographic element of this research will continue in the presentation of the mindful rule. Stories can also help bring alive the more technical elements of the mindfulness map as well as distinctives. I am emphasising that mindfulness is not just about personal wellbeing, although I believe it is an important intention to want to move out of anxiety into a place of wellbeing through mindfulness. Another story I often tell is about the relational side of mindfulness as I experienced it first. In this sense the mindful rule is evocative and analytic in its use of mindfulness research and narrative.

Back in 2006 I was very stressed, anxious, and close to burnout. Alongside being a minister, I was studying counselling and psychotherapy part-time at Roehampton University. One particular day I was on the Tube, and I felt as if I was going to fall apart, and there was nothing I could do about it. It was such an overwhelming feeling that I felt I couldn't ask for help. I reverted to my self-sufficiency. I felt ashamed, that I shouldn't feel like this – that I

should be able to cope. One of the lecturers mindfully noticed there was something wrong and took me into her study. She was able to hold me psychically and enabled me to hold myself. She spoke out what was on my heart, even before I knew it was on my heart. I have never forgotten the power of mindful awareness directed to another person. Or that in a busy day of lecturing she lived by her value of putting a student's wellbeing first.

The *Logos* theology can also be illustrated with a story. In Matthew chapter sixteen (verses 13-20) Jesus asks his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' The disciples name different prophets, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. He then asks them, 'But what about you? Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replies by calling him 'Simon son of Jonah,' commends him for his insight which he says was revealed to Simon by 'my Father in heaven.' Jesus then says quite deliberately, 'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.' Here Simon is given a new name, Peter, 'the rock' which can be reframed as the *logos* inside him. In this way Simon, now Peter can be an archetypal disciple for all of us in having the God-given creative word inside him revealed by Christ.

Balthasar seems to say something like *Logos* theology in relation to this story of Simon Peter. Each of us is given a mission and 'the mission itself is christoform, exhibiting the character of the Word, the *Logos*.'⁶⁶⁵ Balthasar develops this idea to say, 'In obeying his calling a person fulfils his essence, although he would never have been able to discover this, his own archetype and ideal within himself' through 'studying his predispositions, yearnings, talents, his potential.'⁶⁶⁶ This 'archetype' could be seen as his own God-given creative *logos*. What is important as well is the point Balthasar goes on to make of our dependency on God, not only for that inner archetype or *logos* but that we also need God to help us find it, 'Simon the fisherman could

⁶⁶⁵ Balthasar, *Prayer*, 60.

⁶⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Prayer*, 60.

have explored every region of his ego prior to his encounter with Christ, but he would not have found “Peter” there.⁶⁶⁷ The reason for this is that ‘the “form” summed up in the name “Peter”, the particular mission reserved for him alone, is hidden in the mystery of Christ’s soul.’⁶⁶⁸ I can play my part in preparing good soil for the creative word inside me, but I still need Christ’s prior grace to reveal my inner *logos*, or archetype, as Balthasar also calls it, my ‘authentic reality.’⁶⁶⁹ In this story I see that the theoretical *logos* inside Simon has become an actualized event in his life, when he became Peter. This gives me hope.

The creation of the mindful rule will also be a participatory and collaborative work. I can draw on the idea of AE as a way of life and one that can be collaborative.⁶⁷⁰ As those who are living the mindful rule immerse themselves in it, they can observe their participation and help to shape communal life. Just as the phrase ‘seeing clearly’ can be critiqued from a disability consciousness perspective, so ‘participant observer’ can be critiqued from the perspective of sensory ethnography.⁶⁷¹ The participation in sensory ethnography is sensed through the wider idea of perception, drawing on all the senses.⁶⁷² This is a good fit with mindful awareness. We would be participant perceivers of our common life together.

From the perspective of interpersonal neurobiology within the field of mindfulness, there is both self-awareness, self-regulation, and awareness of others’ thoughts and feelings through Daniel Siegel’s concept that as human beings we have eight senses. Our sixth sense is our ability to sense some of what we are thinking. Our seventh sense is that we can be aware of some of what we are feeling, and our eighth sense is that we can pick up others’

⁶⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Prayer*, 60.

⁶⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Prayer*, 60.

⁶⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Prayer*, 59.

⁶⁷⁰ Carolyn Ellis, “Carrying the Torch for Autoethnography,” in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2013), 9.

⁶⁷¹ Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2015), 95-96.

⁶⁷² Pink, 95-96.

thoughts and feelings.⁶⁷³ This insight can be used in the service of creating healthy relationships within a community.

Finally, before I outline the mindful rule, I want to come back to the importance of remembering. My experience of the Benedictine rule is that it is designed to help you remember how to live a form of mindfulness of God. As I have reflected on living in intentional community at Scargill through its daily rhythms and repetitions, I have learned to remember its rule of life, its pathways, without recourse to a written text. Secular mindfulness is taught in such a way that you remember how to be mindful without recourse to the self-help texts that you started with. The aim with the mindful rule and its intention to create a mindful spirituality that lives in healthy life-giving relationship with others is to enable it to be constructed in such a way that it can be remembered without constant returning to a text. I will draw on the mnemonic element of manuductive texts which lead us through ‘manuductive signs.’⁶⁷⁴

Another person who has researched the premodern use of memory is Mary Carruthers, and she distinguishes between ‘memory understood as the ability to reproduce something exactly (“rote”) and memory as recollection.’⁶⁷⁵ This is a significant distinction for the mnemonic awareness at the core of my mindfulness of God. She defines recollection as the ‘ability to reconstruct such information whether logically, or by a mnemonic scheme.’⁶⁷⁶ The repetition and careful construction of mindfulness theory to make it memorable is an implicit form of mnemonic scheme. Siegel goes further and creates mnemonic schemes through acronyms to help people remember theory and practice.⁶⁷⁷ Carruthers adds that ‘recollection occurs consciously through association.’⁶⁷⁸ This is another important dimension to association. The mnemonic scheme is created through associative links and

⁶⁷³ Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, 121-123, as already referenced.

⁶⁷⁴ Candler, 43.

⁶⁷⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22.

⁶⁷⁶ Carruthers, 22.

⁶⁷⁷ Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, 332-336.

⁶⁷⁸ Carruthers, 23.

can be recollected as part of our mnemonic awareness in the present moment. Mindfulness enables intentional recollection.

In an overlap with mindfulness, just as *memoria*, the art and craft of memory is made of designed memories. Therefore, mindfulness with its metacognitive propositions, such as ‘thoughts are not facts,’ is also facilitated by such ‘*designed*’ memories.⁶⁷⁹ God-designed memories through scriptural propositions are a key part of my ethical mnemonic awareness. I draw on the pre-modern insights of *memoria* to create some ‘architectural places of memory’ within the mindful rule.⁶⁸⁰ These could also be called ‘conscious mnemonic systems’ within the mindful rule to help participants hold the rule in attentive recollection.⁶⁸¹ What is called the ‘architectural mnemonic’ based on houses that are easily recollected is an ancient practice, where you place an image in different parts of the house that can be consciously recollected.⁶⁸² These images are ‘sensorily derived and emotionally charged’ so that they are more easily recalled through association.⁶⁸³

In an aside, Carruthers makes an application of this idea of recollection in discussing monastic *memoria*, especially through *Lectio Divina*. She adds that ‘Monastic *memoria* is more like what is now called “mindfulness,” which is ‘a discipline of attentive recollection.’⁶⁸⁴ That is, *Lectio Divina* is akin to a discipline of attentive recollection, and this is like mindfulness as described by modern psychologists. The mindful awareness of the things of God I am trying to create through the collection of and meditation on scriptural (and other) propositions can be described as a form of attentive recollection rather than remembering by rote. The revisiting of mindfulness theory in this research is not repetition by rote but an intentional form of attentive recollection in different settings. I wish to make this an explicit

⁶⁷⁹ Carruthers, 40.

⁶⁸⁰ Carruthers, 44.

⁶⁸¹ Carruthers, 88.

⁶⁸² Carruthers, 89-90.

⁶⁸³ Carruthers, 75.

⁶⁸⁴ Carruthers, 154.

part of my theory and practice of mindfulness of God, rather than an implicit part. For this I can draw on the mnemonic structures and ways this attentive recollection was cultivated in the premodern age.

Another way of talking about this linked to manuductive texts, which help you remember, is what Candler calls the ‘grammar of participation,’ where through reading a manuductive text you are led to ‘participate’ in the reality of God the book is leading you toward.⁶⁸⁵ Mindfulness and mindful spirituality are participatory, and the self-help and spiritual texts of mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God help you participate in mindful awareness of self, other, or God. This mindful rule is, therefore, participatory in this sense. There is a theological stance here which is premodern, and Candler outlines it like this:

The grammar of theological texts prior to the sixteenth century is, by and large, a grammar of participation insofar as it is understood that creatures partake of the divine life of God, by virtue of the plenitude of charity which is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶⁸⁶

I can describe my spiritual experience as participating in the life of God in this way.

However, this participation extends to texts, ‘it becomes impossible to separate the writing, reading, and commenting on such theological texts as the *Confessions* or the *Summa Theologiae* from the ontological participation of beings in the divine creativity of the Trinity.’⁶⁸⁷ That my creativity is taken up in the divine creativity is part of my theological stance. As Candler concludes, ‘This act of production (whether in reading or writing) is itself a form of this participation, in that nothing is made by human hands or minds but which shares in the divine activity of creation *ex nihilo*.’⁶⁸⁸ This is

⁶⁸⁵ Candler, 5, 35.

⁶⁸⁶ Candler, 17.

⁶⁸⁷ Candler, 17.

⁶⁸⁸ Candler, 17, meaning ‘out of nothing.’

another theological fragment I am working with, but a significant addition to my understanding of the participatory nature of mindful spirituality.

My part in mindfulness of God is taken up in the divine creativity and transformed. However, Candler makes a further important point about such participation, both historically and as it could be applied to my spirituality. This participation 'is never finished, but always underway.'⁶⁸⁹ I do not have the truth but I can have 'a sacramental participation, though imperfect, in Truth.'⁶⁹⁰ In this sense my mindful rule is 'ever incomplete and ever in need of further commentary.'⁶⁹¹ This resonates with my ontological position of critical realism, I write in pencil and need to be constantly crossing out, rubbing out what I write, and rewriting it. I can also relate this participation to my analogy of being in a relationship of implicit relational knowing with God. This stream of the unthought known that runs beneath my conscious awareness participates in the life of God, since God holds my life and sustains it. The idea of participation theologically adapts this analogy to recognize the primacy of God in this knowing. It can also support my use of David Brown's idea that God speaks to us through symbols in our subconscious, or what could be called the unthought known, to preserve our freedom of response.⁶⁹²

I want to draw some strands together here. This mindful rule based on mindful recognition and re-perceiving of the other is made possible by being taken up in the divine creativity of God; it is a creative act. It is also a moral and imaginative act, a work of the 'moral imagination.' It can develop in unexpected directions, like a murmuration of starlings, because it seeks to awaken the God-given creative word in each person. In the imagining of such a mindful rule, are there wider cultural and theological connections I can draw on? Walton in her work on poetics outlines the link between *phronesis* and poetics or *poesis* as developed by John Wall.⁶⁹³ She defines

⁶⁸⁹ Candler, 39.

⁶⁹⁰ Candler, 39.

⁶⁹¹ Candler, 39.

⁶⁹² Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action', 115-116.

⁶⁹³ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 143.

phronesis as the ‘capacity to reflect and act well in accordance with a virtuous apprehension of what constitutes the ethical life.’⁶⁹⁴ Walton acknowledges the significance of this link when historically philosophy has seen ‘creative activity... as fundamentally different from the ethical project of living a good life.’⁶⁹⁵ Wall takes up the idea of the possibility of moral imagination and says, ‘it seems to me that we ought to be capable of *imagining* each other ever more profoundly, particularly, lovingly, compassionately.’⁶⁹⁶ He argues that this is a created capacity, and that ‘despite its impossibility in history, we are ultimately created capable of sympathetic mutuality with others precisely in their otherness.’⁶⁹⁷ In my recent experience I have known the seeming ‘impossibility’ of making peace with a small number of people, and yet with all my heart I can imagine an alternative way to peace through a mindful rule. I can add a new strand to this moral imagining through a further application of mindfulness.

Susan F. Parsons in her article on the practice of Christian faith and mindfulness argues that ‘*Phronesis*... may be translated as mindfulness.’⁶⁹⁸ What she means by this is that *phronesis* ‘is the way of being mindful, of being prudent, of thinking carefully about what lies ahead.’⁶⁹⁹ Mindfulness is used in secular ethical decision models, and so this is a congruent link between *phronesis* and mindfulness. Parsons adds that *phronesis*, or this ethical mindful awareness, is a way of ‘letting oneself become aware that the next step to be taken matters, and of understanding *why* this is so.’⁷⁰⁰ I am saying something similar in my desire to have in mind the things of God and choose them over the human things jostling for my attention – I want to know what matters and why in each present moment. So, mindfulness

⁶⁹⁴ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 143.

⁶⁹⁵ Walton, *Writing Methods*, 143.

⁶⁹⁶ John Wall, “The Creative Imperative: Religious Ethics and the Formation of Life in Common,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 no. 1, (2005): 55, accessed December 21, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0384-9694.2005.00182.x>.

⁶⁹⁷ Wall, “Creative Imperative,” 56.

⁶⁹⁸ Susan F. Parsons, “The Practice of Christian Ethics: Mindfulness and Faith,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 25, no. 4 (November 2012): 443.

⁶⁹⁹ Parsons, 444.

⁷⁰⁰ Parsons, 444.

has a connection to ethical awareness, but it also has a connection to enhancing creativity.

As Danny Penman summarizes, research shows that ‘practising certain forms of mindfulness meditation for ten to twenty minutes a day can enhance creativity, problem solving and decision making.’⁷⁰¹ It is my experience that since I have practised mindfulness, my creativity has budded, blossomed, and flourished. My hypothesis is that mindfulness can help me enhance my ‘moral creativity’ in the making of a mindful rule with others.⁷⁰² This adding of a mindfulness strand to the ‘yes but how do I cultivate my moral imagination,’ may also be a novel application of this theory.

A final point before I outline the mindful rule comes out of the recognition that I am using different aspects of mindfulness theory which I may be able to connect. I am thinking of narrative, experiential, and witnessing selves; mindful capacities as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence; the importance of intention in training our attention and attitudes non-judgementally so we can re-perceive and so on. There is overlap and connection between all these which I would like to find a shape for.

The idea for this came from a mindful walk at night in Wharfedale. There was no light pollution, and the stars were shining like pinpricks of light in a dark velvet expanse of infinity. I could make out constellations which formed part of larger patterns. I see the different aspects of mindfulness I am working with as constellations that are part of a larger pattern or way. I create a metaphoric landscape or map or star chart that holds these different patterns together. I also extend the idea of pilgrimage into the mindful rule to provide shape and direction. I fashion the mindful rule as a pilgrimage, using the elements I have outlined earlier in the research:

⁷⁰¹ Danny Penman, *Mindfulness for Creativity: Adapt, Create and Thrive in a Frantic World* (Piatkus, 2015), 4.

⁷⁰² Wall, “The Creative Imperative,” 60.

journey, spiritual magnetism, places, people, practices, pain, the breaking through of healing and transformation into the present. This will not be a franchised pilgrimage but one that can be personally shaped within the patterns and wisdom of mindfulness of God.

Beginning with confession

The rule begins with metacognitive propositions about living mindfully together which may not be understood fully at the beginning. The aim is for these propositions to become metacognitive insights. Behind each of these propositions lies carefully considered wisdom from mindfulness and the Christian tradition. The rule does not use a rhetoric of persuasion but seeks to help people re-perceive their own self, others, and God. The desire at the centre of the rule is to enable sacramental conversations that mediate the presence of God, awakening the God-given creative word in each other. The wisdom I have gathered on this pilgrimage toward mindfulness of God is as near to reality and truth as I can get it now – speaking from a perspective of critical realism. It will need constant revision.

In his article on confession as sacramental conversation, Papanikolaou more specifically defines confession as ‘speaking truthfully that which one fears most to speak.’⁷⁰³ In this mindful journey I have been learning to face the reality of who I am and what the world is. What do I fear most to speak out? Because of the shaping of boarding school into self-sufficiency, emotional inexpression, and silent unquestioning loyalty, it is to acknowledge that I have needs. It is to recognize that I am not invulnerable, that it is extremely painful to be misrecognized by others and that I need to be recognized as I am. I would like to see this emphasis on speaking what one fears most to

⁷⁰³ Papanikolaou, 115.

speak at the beginning of the rule. It may be that people can add their own variants to the rule to take in their own context.

One question I have asked myself is, why am I drawn to the idea of recognition as a value? In Mark's gospel there is a pattern of Jesus 'seeing' others (Mark 1:16, 1:19, 2:5, 2:14). This is a form of recognition. Joel Marcus in his commentary on Mark puts it like this, "This seeing is not to be interpreted as passive observation but as an active, "possessive gaze" by means of which Jesus lays claim to something through a thorough inspection of it."⁷⁰⁴ This idea seized me when I read it, that Jesus had seen me, recognized me, and called me into ministry back in 1993. This idea has sustained me. Marcus expands on this by saying that the disciples follow Jesus because of 'his perception of *them*, his prophetic vision of what they will become under the impact of his presence.'⁷⁰⁵

I can reframe this as Jesus calling out the God-given creative word, the little *logos*, in each of them. However, it was its resonance with me that I particularly want to highlight here. As I apply it here, the sense I have of it relating to the mindful rule is that all our seeing is first predicated on Jesus' seeing of us – that to have sacramental conversations we need to see and recognize as Jesus sees and recognizes. This idea of Jesus seeing and recognizing his disciples I can appropriate for my life and is another manuductive moment with a scriptural text.

This dependency on God's prior workings of grace is echoed in Taizé, where the word 'engagement' is used by community rather than 'vow.'⁷⁰⁶ The word engagement suggests instead "the response made to the call of God", rather than the community member's personal commitment that is implied in 'vow.'⁷⁰⁷ In the same way I can reclaim my present moments through mindfulness, but only God can redeem them. To come back to the power of

⁷⁰⁴ Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible Mark 1-8: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Newhaven, London: Yale University Press, 2000), 183.

⁷⁰⁵ Marcus, 2000, 183.

⁷⁰⁶ Rakoczy, 55.

⁷⁰⁷ Rakoczy, 55.

telling the truth as far as we can about reality, I begin the mindful rule with such statements. These statements are for us to say and to seek to grasp the reality of them. In the same way participation in Alcoholics Anonymous requires a confession ‘that one is a recovering alcoholic,’ so in the rule we can acknowledge we have a negativity bias, distorted perceptions, and we don’t see each other clearly.⁷⁰⁸ In ACT you must make sense of difficult concepts, such as, ‘Psychological pain is normal, it is important, and everyone has it.’⁷⁰⁹ We begin, therefore, with a form of mindful confession. This confession also recognizes our God-given mindful capacities. The research ends as it began with the strand of the confessional narrative and the idea of confessional theology. I am confessing my own ‘personal responsibility’ for relationship and the ‘relational mutuality’ I am part of. The confessional language of responsibility says, “I am part of this pattern. My choices and behaviors affect it.”⁷¹⁰

As I move to this mindful confession, the symbol of boats, as it relates to this rule came back to mind. The first is a memory of being in Paris with my wife for a few days at a friend’s flat. I had bought a ticket to a rare Odilon Redon exhibition as one of his paintings *The Mystical Boat* was one of my favourite pieces of art.⁷¹¹ As I walked around and was drawn into the paintings, I was moved to tears. I once had a dream of the painting about the mystical boat, that there were a flotilla of such boats travelling together. I think each person as a mystical boat underlines our essential aloneness and mystery as a human being made in God’s image. However, in my experience we also need each other. A flotilla of boats if it is to sail together needs rules and boundaries so as not to crash into each other. They need to learn how to tack and catch the wind of the Spirit, not just separately, but

⁷⁰⁸ See Papanikolaou, 117, for the confessional element in Alcoholics Anonymous.

⁷⁰⁹ Hayes, 2.

⁷¹⁰ Lederach, 35.

⁷¹¹ This was in 2011, and a first opportunity to see such a collection since 1956, see Phillippe Dagen, “Odilon Redon: Prince de Rêve,” *The Guardian*, April 12, 2011, accessed March 16 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/apr/12/painting-art>.

together. It is an image of the community that could emerge through a mindful rule.

The second fragment that is magnetically drawn into my memory is that of a 'skin boat.' It is part of the title of a book of poetry by John Terpstra, *Skin Boat: Acts of Faith and Other Navigations*, which I cannot afford to buy.⁷¹² Apparently a 'skin boat' is a 'currach,' a boat 'made from ox-hide tanned in oak bark and stretched over a rib cage of ash wood.'⁷¹³ The term skin boat conveys the fragility of this ancient craft, but for me the association is that I am a fragile skin boat, made for unimaginable voyages. These images help me picture the frailty of a mindful community, made of individual 'skin boats,' and yet the possibility of sailing together.

A mindful confession

I list below the key metacognitive propositions that begin the mindful rule.

I recognize I am on a pilgrimage journey and never arrive.

This journey will centre around Jesus Christ.

I will seek to fully know myself and others so that I may have sacramental conversations with them.

I aspire to use the wisdom of the mindful rule to map my self-understanding.

I recognize I have a capacity for self-awareness that can be enhanced. Self-awareness is essential in living in community.

I recognize I have a capacity for attention and awareness which is a God-given mindful capacity.

⁷¹² John Terpstra, *Skin Boat: Acts of Faith and Other Navigations* (Gaspereau Press, 2009).

⁷¹³ Samuel Thomas Merton, "Skin Boat," in *Dark Art Café Blog*, July 7, 2010, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://samuelthomasmartin.wordpress.com/2010/07/07/skin-boat-by-john-terpstra/>.

I will work with others.

I recognize I am wounded.

I recognize I have a negativity bias and distorted perceptions.

I realise I can misrecognize other people through projection and transference.

I recognize I have a story-telling self, which is the source of many distorted perceptions of my own self and others.

I recognize I have an embodied, experiential self, and as I step into my body, senses, and breath, I can relativize my narrative self and its automatic hold on the centre of my life.

As I make this move, I can more fully inhabit the present moment which is reality.

I recognize I have a witnessing self that can witness my thoughts and feelings, rather than be a victim of them.

I recognize I have a capacity for self-regulation that can be enhanced. Self-regulation is essential in living in community.

I recognize I have a capacity for self-transcendence; this is essential for living in community.

I aim daily to intentionally practise being in the present moment, in mindful awareness.

On this pilgrim journey I plan to use secular mindfulness practices and spiritual mindful awareness practices, such as the Jesus Prayer, and *Lectio Divina* to enhance my mindful capacities.

I will train my capacity for attention and awareness.

I aim to recognize and lay down negative critical judgements about my own self, and others and cultivate a compassionate re-perceiving.

In conflict with others, I would try to talk to them face-to-face, and use a mediator when necessary. I will work hard to regulate my language. I shall endeavour not to triangulate with others, talking about someone to others rather than talking to them.

I recognize I have a God-given creative word within me that, when awakened enables me to live life in all its fullness.

I recognize others have a God-given creative word within them.

I hope to create with others a place of spiritual magnetism for those in pain on this pilgrim journey.

The common demanding task of this community is to awaken these words and live them out, being led to other people of peace to help them find their creative word.

In this way the power of the future can break through into our present to bring healing and transformation.

This rule will incorporate both mindfulness for health from secular psychology and mindfulness of God from the Christian tradition.

It is open to those seeking wellbeing and a mindful spirituality.

There will be a forty-day introduction to the rule for those considering following it for a longer period.

I will use the maps of the mindful rule to understand myself and others.

I recognize the importance of creating a working relationship with others, seeking to be real and authentic in those relationships.

I will work to become aware of my negativity bias and distorted perceptions. I will use mindfulness practices to enhance my self-awareness so that I understand my wounded places, the distorted projections and transference I may put on others.

In summary then, as part of our confession and as a mindful community our demanding common task is to recognize the God-given creative word in our own self and in others. In the community, respect does not have to be earned but is given, because each of us is made in the image of God, we have equal dignity. As words spoken by the Light to be light to the world, we will always be looking for people of peace to awaken their creative Word. In this we will be led by God's Holy Spirit, and fully respect the person's freedom. I recognize the sacramental goodness of my mindful capacities. I also recognize the gift of the earth, nature, creation.

I recognize that nature is sacramental and is a book that can lead me to God.

I will seek to have sacramental conversations with others, perceiving their essential reality, and will seek that each person I meet is loved with the infinite Love of God.

A star chart of my mindful rule

I have created a short architectural place of memory, a mnemonic structure, that summarizes my mindful rule as a star chart. I have drawn on the pattern and mythology of the Orion constellation.

One of the mythological representations of Orion is as a hunter, and in one version he is an archer.⁷¹⁴ I work with this symbol of the archer. I have sketched the constellation of Orion and taken some of the standard features and made them my own symbols. I place the drawing here.

⁷¹⁴ Andy Oppenheimer, *Stars of Orion: An Astronomy Special* (2021), 15, Kindle.



This represents a way of representing and remembering a short version of my mindful rule. Orion also traditionally has a belt and a sword.⁷¹⁵ Orion as a constellation 'straddles the celestial equator, meaning the constellation is visible, or partly visible, from almost every inhabited region on Earth.'⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁵ Oppenheimer, 15.

⁷¹⁶ Oppenheimer, 2.

The mindful rule:

On my pilgrim journey I will watch for the tracings of God's presence all around me as a hunter tracks a deer.

I live within the arc of awareness, openly aware of God, myself, others, and creation. Through practices I will sustain, switch, and cultivate deep attention.

This arc of attention, like the constellation of Orion, is accessible to most other people; they too can learn to live within it.

My intention is to follow the flight of graced attention. Through that graced attention I will focus on being a word spoken by the Light, shining with others in a community constellation.

In this pilgrimage, I wish this community constellation to be a place of spiritual magnetism for those in pain, seeking healing and transformation.

The belt of 'art' holds me together with others. The three points of light that illumine mindful awareness of self are awareness, regulation, and transcendence. I take the log out of my own eye; I do not let the sun go down on my anger, and I transcend the anxious and wounded parts of my self.

Through this 'art' I tell undistorted stories, live an embodied life, fully inhabiting my emotions and witnessing every aspect of my being.

I cultivate ethical mnemonic awareness through meditating on scriptural propositions until they become insights.

I am aware that I am in an implicit relationship of knowing with God, with moments of meeting; this helps me to cultivate an attitude of trust when I am not aware of God. I walk in the dark and trust the stars that guide me.

Mindfulness is my coat and umbrella in the storms of life.

The sword that hangs from the belt is that of wisdom and truth drawn from the wisdom of mindfulness of God.

Within my symbolic self and poetic imagination there is a nebula, a stellar nursery, where creativity, dreams, and symbols grow.

I play my part in reclaiming my present moments and remember to come home to God in the present moment. These are the ankles that keep me standing.

I come home to God in the present moment to re-perceive God, myself, others, and creation. Through re-perceiving as a graced response, I mindfully recognize our essential reality and connectedness. Re-perceiving and recognition are the shoulders of my archer, enabling me to hold the bow of awareness.

This pilgrimage is a way of wholeness in the here and now.

Chapter Eight

Creative Synthesis and conclusion

In this creative synthesis and conclusion, this chapter is a final crystallization as I step back and look at the patterns and shapes of the whole. I use a heuristic term, 'creative synthesis,' to weave together the 'core components' and 'essences' of the research which form heuristic creative synthesis.⁷¹⁷ I want this conclusion to be autoethnographic in the sense that I step back from the detail and look at it through a wide-angle cultural lens. Or from a mindful perspective, I want to review the whole piece from a place of open awareness, allowing the threads and weavings to emerge. I also bring together the original contribution and novel applications in a summary.

In this research I am aware of the different cultural contexts I inhabit and how the past still influences the present. I am a cultural palimpsest, and I have read and interpreted some of the texts written on me and written new texts. In the voyage to reclaim my present moments I discovered that the anxiety that holds me to ransom in the present has its genesis in my boarding school past and the trauma of separation from my family and beloved Africa. I have critically examined this powerful 'making' of me to be self-sufficient, emotionally inexpressive, and loyal. I have been able to go further back and name the trauma that went with this separation. As I have focused on epiphanies and key moments, I have only touched on my university experience and the time working for a high street bank as they were not times of pressure and stress.

The pressure of boarding school happened out of my awareness. As I began my ministry running a Baptist church, I gradually became more aware of the intense stresses of ministry. As the result of an intuitive impulse, I began part-time counselling and psychotherapy training. This integrative and

⁷¹⁷ Moustakas, 31-32.

relational training in working with real and distorted relationships remade me, along with the pressures of church life. Here I was immersed in two cultures that were powerfully formative.

It was in 2006 that the pressure of church life to be at every event and do all the work began to reveal the fault lines in my boarding school self, as I tried also to spend time with my young family. The 'ethno' in autoethnography, an examination of the cultures I inhabited, is a key aspect of this research. A timely sabbatical, and discovering mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God, led me into the culture of attention and awareness, of contemplation, both secular and spiritual. This was the turning point. I learnt the language of attention and awareness and how to inhabit it. This went against the culture of boarding school, banking, and to a large extent church life. In immersing myself in mindfulness I was going against the flow.

As well as introducing autoethnography as my methodology, evocative, analytic, and spiritual, I place right at the beginning of the research an evocative narrative written to speak for itself. The eight windows placed within it provide early echoes of the main themes. I detail the books, texts, and articles, which have been a second-person guide to me in chapter three, as well as some wider reading related to my manuductive reading. Chapters four, five, and six are intentional, and led to discoveries that developed the research. They also stand on their own and have their own essences, whether it is the importance of reclaiming my present moments, how the shadow of the past also needs reclaiming to further free up my present moments, or the importance of natural symbols in my interaction with God. I then interact with these two parts of my research to create a congruent application in a mindful rule designed to enable community that can hold sacramental conversations.

Remembrance, re-perceiving, reclaiming, redeeming, and recognition

I have noticed five main connected themes in this research. The first, is the idea of the remembrance or mindfulness of God. I have retrieved this strand of contemplative history and recontextualised it for the twenty-first century. How to remember in a culture where I do not need to remember has led to a tentative model for remembering the things of God in each ethical moment of choice and choosing them over the anxious human things jostling for my attention. It is remembering in the present moment that is central to my being mindful of God. The intention to help others remember the key tenets of mindful spirituality is also at the centre of the construction of the mindful rule. This is a participative spirituality, and the remembering at its heart comes through repetition and intentional mnemonic practice.

Secondly, as I cultivate this mindfulness of God, I begin to re-perceive God, myself, and others. This is the work of God, as my part of being mindful is taken up in the life of God. Secular mindfulness enables a re-perceiving in a narrower sense, as a 'shift in perspective' through being able to 'disidentify' from my thoughts.⁷¹⁸ I am talking here about my wider use of the word, a spiritual re-perceiving through the same capacities that are used in secular mindfulness, but capacities transformed and inhabited by the divine presence. I liken this re-perceiving to the *diorasis*, the clear seeing in the early church that was cultivated through contemplative practices.⁷¹⁹ Through the influence of disability studies I move away from the idea of clear seeing to 're-perceiving' which includes the perceiving of all my senses, my body, awareness, imagination, emotions and thinking. In this re-perceiving I recognize others as made in the image of God. This is made possible by the graced awakening of the God-given creative word within me.

⁷¹⁸ Shapiro, et al, "Mechanisms of Mindfulness," 377.

⁷¹⁹ Spidlik, 77. See also Hausherr, 91-2.

This re-perceiving is, therefore, ethical, mnemonic, and aware. It enables the exercise of my moral and creative imagination.

This awareness is also crucial to my anthropology. Only as I cultivate this awareness, and it is taken up and inhabited by the divine presence, is it possible for me to inhabit every aspect of my being more fully, and for those aspects to become transparent to me. As I do this, I am better able to reclaim my present moments, so that there is the graced possibility for God to redeem them. Before I participated in mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God I was working with a reduced capacity for awareness. Through participating in mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God I have expanded my capacity for awareness.

The third main theme is the need to reclaim my present moments from the anxiety, which overwhelmed my present moments. This is the key insight of chapter four. I have found a way to reclaim my present moments through mindfulness, and I have developed an incarnational mindful spirituality drawing on the wisdom of secular mindfulness and Christian contemplation. This is an original pathway to kataphatic spirituality. I suggest that this pathway, as with kataphatic spirituality generally, is more accessible right now with the cultural interest in mindfulness. I also suggest a fresh emphasis is needed on making a focus on the present moment more explicit generally in kataphatic spirituality. As well as an ethical mnemonic awareness, there is an awareness of moments of meeting with God that are transformative. This is based on a tentative conceptual model that I am in an implicit relationship with God. Most of that relationship happens out of my awareness; it can play out in my unconscious, in dreams, using symbols. In cultivating a more continuous present moment awareness I am open to the graced offering of moments of meeting with God. The influence of such moments lasts a lifetime.

The key moment of meeting with God was reading the Olivier Clement translation of Diadochus of Photike, 'Let us keep our eyes always fixed on

the depths of our heart with an unceasing *mindfulness* of God.⁷²⁰ I circle around it again here. A doorway opened in that moment that I could not have opened, and I stepped through. The doorway has never closed, and even when my mind and body are tired, and I have felt cleft by conflict, the energy of this moment has never left me. This moment is why this research has happened. It is sacramental. It was another threshold moment, the moment I began to come home.

I have used the word sacramental to describe the natural symbols of my African childhood that have redressed the balance of trauma in my memory. I recognize that all of creation is sacramental. Papanikolaou adds that ‘Although all of creation is sacramental, not all of creation is sacramental to the same degree.’⁷²¹ James K.A. Smith takes this idea to illustrate the difference between the sacramental and what have been called the sacraments in the history of the church. He develops this further by saying, ‘While the whole world is a sacrament, we might say that *the* sacraments and the liturgy are unique “hot spots” where God’s formative, illuminating presence is particularly “intense.”’⁷²² In this sense, I can say that my moment of meeting with God through the phrase ‘mindfulness of God’ is sacramental. Whilst not having the status of a sacrament, I can also use the analogy of intensity and hot spots to say that it has been the intense hot spot of God’s presence in my life. This moment of meeting spoke to me, gave me direction cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, physically and imaginatively. This moment of meeting still thrums in my life like a divine heartbeat, a pulsing star of light in my heart and mind that guides me. In mindfulness of God, I have learnt to value moments, to treasure them in my heart, and ponder them as Mary did (Luke 2:19).

I am also aware I needed to reclaim my past from the shadow of boarding school trauma, trauma caused by separation from my parents and the home I loved in Kenya. In turning to face the shadow of anxiety and my boarding

⁷²⁰ My italics. Quoted in Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 204.

⁷²¹ Papanikolaou, 2006, 126.

⁷²² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 148.

school past, I have found a measure of healing through mindfulness and its affinity with trauma theory. I have been able to name it as trauma and find a voice to speak it out. This has helped further free up the grip of anxiety on my present moment consciousness. I was a talkative child who became silent through the trauma of boarding school. I have found a voice and been able to piece together a narrative of the past from fragments and the story of another boarding school witness, who with the help of a therapist was able to tell his story. This enabled me to become more compassionate to my younger self and to let go of some of my negative judgements about myself.

I learnt that the traumatic responses I have experienced at boarding school and during the pandemic were out of my control. This knowledge helps me to be more self-compassionate. In the trauma of boarding school, I had a threshold moment, a searing recognition that I was utterly alone, that I could only rely on myself. I understood that I needed to make my home in my own self. From Kai Erikson's sociological theory of trauma, I became aware that this damaged my ability to trust. This made me even more self-sufficient. The blow that triggered a traumatic response in me during the Covid-19 pandemic, a blistering personal assault, also damaged my ability to trust. However, I came full circle and intuitively returned to the walled garden of intentional community for healing.

In using the precise word 'reclaim' as my part in being mindful of God, I am aware theologically that only God can redeem those present moments.

What does it mean for those moments to be redeemed by God? The redemption of my present moments means I am enabled to be fully present to my whole incarnated being, the world, others, and God's presence by the grace of God. This is coming home. I am aware that I cannot be fully free in the present moment in my own effort. I am dependent on 'something more' coming from God. I am aware that redeeming can be further defined as the releasing of the God-given creative word within me, my little *logos*, the awakening of that word in the now and not yet of my life's experience. This redeeming goes beyond me to the calling together, by God, of others into that redemption.

In distinguishing between my part, which is reclaiming my present moments through my God-given mindful capacities, and the redeeming that is God's graced response I answer the theological problem, of the 'gap between the Creator and myself as a created being.'⁷²³ The entering into a relationship with God is a graced response through the Holy Spirit. However, I have acknowledged that 'God's transforming grace is *supernatural*; yet it could not transform us unless God has already set in our natures an affinity to himself,' often defined as 'the image of God' within us.⁷²⁴ These mindful capacities have a *telos*, a purpose, to re-perceive, and God redeems this purpose.

I began this research with the ideas of remembrance (mindfulness), re-perceiving and redeeming, and in the process of the research understood that I can reclaim my present moments but not redeem them myself. Perhaps the most surprising word that I didn't expect as the last major theme is the idea of recognition. It is a word I used intuitively in my research, but found a resonance with recognition theory, or the ethics of recognition. Recognition theory is a mainly secular approach, but which has been used more recently within a spiritual framework.⁷²⁵ Principally it is about recognizing others as persons, giving them respect and esteem simply for being human, without having to earn that recognition. From my Christian perspective, the equal dignity of all human beings is conferred on them through being made in the image of God. In my own personal experience, there is great power in being recognized for my true self, and great pain when I have been misrecognized. All these themes overlap and converge into a central stream.

In mindfulness of God, through graced attention, I remember to come home to the present moment to re-perceive God, myself, and others; in re-perceiving I recognize our essential relational reality.

⁷²³ Yarnold, 11.

⁷²⁴ Yarnold, 12.

⁷²⁵ Kahlos, Koskinen and Palmen, 8.

In this novel application of mindfulness and recognition with its ethical mnemonic awareness, I cultivate a moral imagination; I allow moral creativity to emerge as I recognize the God-given creative word in others, the little *logos* within them. I also reclaim my symbolic self which anchors me in the present moment and rebalances my past.

I have had a niggling intuition that there is perhaps one theme that underlies and connects all these themes. The word that is crystalizing in my heart is 'reality.' Without being drawn into a philosophical exploration of this, and staying within my paradigm of critical realism, an emphasis on reality runs through this research. There is the questioning of reality, 'thoughts are not facts.' Mindfulness is a way of getting close to what is real, seeing clearly, re-perceiving. I talk about hiding from difficult reality. I need to accept the reality of difficulty. I recognize mindfulness as revealing reality as incarnational. Reality is found in the present moment. I talk about reality as complex, evocative, ordinary, mystical, transcendent, God-given. I talk about that God-given reality, the *logos* within as part of our ontological being. This relational reality is 'real' when it is vulnerable. I am trying to represent reality through awakened language and say that the symbolic has tipped the scales of reality for me. I believe there is one reality, the material world in which I live but in which I can also inhabit the spiritual dimension through the material.

There were two things that gave me the clues to this. The first is around trust. Wiebe says, 'Trust in what is sensed physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually forms the undercurrent of what humans perceive as real.'⁷²⁶ My sense of trust as a boarding school child was broken. I think I have been asking ever since, 'what is real? What can I trust in?' Wiebe adds 'Human beings begin forming critical senses of *realness* in themselves, their relationships, and their world from birth.'⁷²⁷ It was the word 'realness' that made me track this strand of 'what is real?' 'Realness' as a word in the

⁷²⁶ Wiebe, 68.

⁷²⁷ Wiebe, 68.

moment meant a felt sense of what is real for me. This led me back to Schaverien's text as I sensed that she might have something important to say about this. The quest for what is real has something to do with knowing boarding school is wrong but feeling like you are the only one who believes this:

The child knows that his or her parents pay a lot of money for this "very special" education and this makes it difficult to complain. The paradox at the heart of this problem is that child who hates or fears the school doubts his or her own perception and thinks she or he has got it wrong.⁷²⁸

Like the representative child in Schaverien's text I was left doubting my own ability to perceive reality. I also know that the home I was taken away from in Kenya was filled with 'realness' for me. England seemed less real, grey, cold, and small. There is an existential, inchoate reaching out of my heart to find this 'realness' again. The irony is, as Schaverien points out, the child who lives overseas and is sent to boarding school in England is told that they are being 'sent home.'⁷²⁹

I can see why remembering is important to me, remembering is connected to my sense of what is real. The re-perceiving I am seeking through mindfulness is about seeing reality as it is, in a fresh and not distorted way. When I recognize someone else, I even say, I am perceiving their 'essential reality.' I want to reclaim my present moments because I have found the nearest thing to reality in those present moments. I recognize I need God, the ultimate in realness to redeem those present moments. Home was most real for me and that is what I lost. I am aware in the moment now, I remember that home, before I lost it, felt real, it was real, I was very happy. My eyes fill with tears as I remember this. My heart aches.

⁷²⁸ Schaverien, 143.

⁷²⁹ Schaverien, 154.

An overriding directional image

As I lay out this summary of these themes one question I want to ask from a wider cultural perspective, is whether there is a 'directional image' that also lies within the work.⁷³⁰ As Leigh examined wider cultural patterns in ten spiritual autobiographies in the twentieth century, he identified that these narratives have a directional image often encapsulated in the title, for example, Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness*.⁷³¹

One such possible directional image is that of loss, which is a reoccurring motif. I have lost my present moments to anxiety. To personally appropriate the words of Jesus, in anxiously trying to save my life, I lose it. At boarding school, I lost my body, my emotions, my awareness. I lost my parents because of boarding school; I lost my childhood. I lost my voice and became a silent child. I lost part of myself, dissociated from the traumatised part of me. If I have lost all of this, what am I trying to find on this journey? Is the directional image about lost and found? Is there an image that holds all these losses together? Did I lose my sense of home and have been pursuing a sense of home ever since?

I have been homesick. Homesickness is a form of loss, a form of bereavement. I am still homesick. Schaverien makes the point that homesickness is a 'totally inadequate description.'⁷³² It is, she adds, 'actually a symptom of undiagnosed trauma.'⁷³³ I link this feeling of homesickness to the threshold moment already alluded to, where I realised, I was completely alone in an unsafe place. As I circle back to this moment, I believe I can add another layer of understanding for me around this directional image of seeking home. Schaverien makes the point that 'it is the premature death of the child-self that is the most significant loss.'⁷³⁴ This is the unhealed

⁷³⁰ Leigh, 1, Introduction.

⁷³¹ Leigh, 1, Introduction.

⁷³² Schaverien, 141.

⁷³³ Schaverien, 141.

⁷³⁴ Schaverien, 141.

wound. I do not know if there is anywhere, I can land where this death is transfigured. I do not know if there is a harbour where I find a home. Perhaps I will always be looking.

I have reclaimed the African symbols of my childhood that are home for me. My perception is that as a child I fully inhabited the present moment, lived an embodied emotional, imaginative life, immersed in an East African paradise, and all of this was lost. Everything I was at home in was on the other side of the world. I feel like the wandering swallow, or even like the swift we see here at Scargill, which hardly ever lands or nests. Is that another reason these birds are so symbolic for me? I constantly call Kenya my home, but I cannot go back. It is lost forever, that world. Home was sunshine, but I never arrive home.

Integral to this quest is that I am trying to find my present moments, which have been lost. There are pragmatic reasons for doing this which mindfulness lists, including finding wellbeing. There are theological reasons for this, the present moment is the point where 'time touches eternity.'⁷³⁵ I do not picture this quest in order to fully inhabit my present moments as a purely pragmatic one. I recognize that as a child I experienced beautiful, sacramental moments that I have been able to recall. I have used the word mystical very sparingly, as it is so weighted, but perhaps these moments filled with sacramental goodness, like sunshine, hold a *mystical* charge for me, like Redon's painting, the mystical boat. These were moments of meeting with a mysterious reality that beckoned me to perceive something more. I think my quest casts about to find more such moments of meeting. Because in those moments of meeting, I felt at home. I lost the sense of home and am seeking to find it again, but this time in what is eternal, the presence of God. But the presence of God mediated in the now through my

⁷³⁵ Lewis, 76.

fully inhabited incarnational being, not in a future hope of ‘death as “eternal home,”’ as with Augustine.⁷³⁶

This directional image of trying to come home resonates with the wider cultural pattern Leigh explores. For example, Thomas Merton’s narrative has a ‘repeated image of his life as a journey... a journey in search of a permanent “home.”’⁷³⁷ Nelson Mandela’s autobiography is given direction ‘by the vision of a harmonious society modelled on the tribal unity of his childhood villages.’⁷³⁸ This was his experience of home as a child. Leigh identifies in the autobiography of Dan Wakefield, a ‘returning home’ motif in order to find redemption.⁷³⁹

Other cultural resonances

There are other resonances with Merton; as a child he drew “pictures of boats.”⁷⁴⁰ They represent “Travel, adventure, the wide sea, and unlimited possibilities of human heroism, with myself as the hero.”⁷⁴¹ Merton is drawn to this ‘quest’ image through archetypal stories of Jason or Theseus.⁷⁴² I too am drawn to an archetypal quest story, that of Ged, a Wizard of Earthsea. However, I think the appeal for me of sailing boats in which I am sailing, is that I have had to be my own home. Within the pattern of boarding school self-sufficiency, not asking for help, not able to express emotions to others, it was within my own being I had to make a home. When I was shipwrecked and washed up on shore in burnout and breakdown, my old boat no longer working, I rebuilt my boat using mindfulness. I am a mystical boat, and that boat is my home. I find the

⁷³⁶ Leigh, 14.

⁷³⁷ Leigh, 1, Introduction. Leigh is referring to Merton’s autobiography, Thomas Merton, *The Seven Story Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, 1948).

⁷³⁸ Leigh, 2.

⁷³⁹ Leigh, 215, 217.

⁷⁴⁰ Leigh, 34, quoting Merton p. 9.

⁷⁴¹ Leigh, 34 and he quotes from page 13 of Merton’s autobiography.

⁷⁴² Leigh, 34.

phrase 'skin boat' very evocative. I am a 'skin boat,' and my home within is fragile and easily breached.

Another overlapping theme with this wider cultural picture is with books. Leigh observes that Augustine is obsessed with the "books" of his childhood.⁷⁴³ Leigh also notes that 'the transforming influence of books in the lives of Merton, Day, Lewis, Malcolm X, Gandhi, and Wakefield,' is a recurrent theme.⁷⁴⁴ In Kenya we had no TV, no computer, no phones. Books were my first love and have been my constant companion since then. English was my favourite subject as I grew up. I went to Leeds university because Tolkien had been a lecturer there. Books became part of my internal home, where I could escape in my imagination, as I could not escape in my body. A constant focus of my attention since 1986 when I became a Christian was being in charismatic relationship with the trinitarian God of my faith. This led to a valuing of scripture as a source of wisdom for my life. That I would be led to study the Book is no surprise to me. This focus on scripture, but as a living Word, and reading, along with my interest in mindfulness, brought me into contact with biblical commentaries, theological books, and articles and different theologies that helped shape the direction of my life and research. I have mainly focused on those elements that led me by the hand to God, but also drawn on my wider reading. In many cases these were theological fragments out of which I have woven together a provisional whole.

Books are the *cantus firmus* of my life, the dominant tune, although there are many people who have come alongside and helped me. However, at key moments in my life, as a child at boarding school, finding mindfulness for health and mindfulness of God, I had to help myself through books, through texts. There were people who could have helped with secular mindfulness, but not in my Christian world, and I knew no one who could

⁷⁴³ Leigh, 6.

⁷⁴⁴ Leigh, 6.

be a second-person guide to lead me into mindfulness of God. I am instantly and deeply attentive with the right book.

I revisit here the work of N. Katherine Hayles who links the idea of ‘deep attention,’ which I examined earlier, to books. Deep attention is cultivated through ‘close reading’ of books.⁷⁴⁵ However, with the rise of digital technologies there is continued ‘technogenesis,’ our capacities for attention and awareness change.⁷⁴⁶ Different forms of reading evolve, particularly ‘hyper-reading,’ involving ‘skimming, scanning, fragmenting, and juxtaposing texts.’⁷⁴⁷ Hayles argues that hyper reading is linked to ‘hyper-attention,’ where there is a ‘low threshold of boredom,’ where ‘different information streams’ come at us with a ‘high level of stimulation.’⁷⁴⁸ From my personal perspective I am aware that this necessary inhabiting of a virtual world exacerbates my tendency to live in my head and not my body. The question I am left with is, do we lose the capacity for deep attention? From my experience mindfulness offers an alternative, where you can both have a close focused attention on one thing whilst being openly aware of other things in your environment. I am left with the sense that the childhood I had which fostered deep attention is an increasingly rare phenomenon. This has shaped my research significantly. I have been able to sustain my quest with deep attention despite the pull of the virtual world.

This means I have stayed with the research questions for a long time. When I first encountered mindfulness of God back in 2006, the personal question that became a research question was, ‘what is mindfulness of God, and how might I cultivate it?’ As the research developed, I realised I needed to ask another question which helped answer the first, ‘how can I reclaim my present moments from anxious rumination to be mindful of God?’ I discovered that it was not just anxiety that overwhelmed my present moments, it was also the shadow of the past. This led to the third research

⁷⁴⁵ Hayles, 11.

⁷⁴⁶ Hayles, 10-11.

⁷⁴⁷ Hayles, 12.

⁷⁴⁸ Hayles, 12.

question, 'how could I be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self, to further reclaim my present moments?' I needed to reclaim my past self. My whole self also included the underground stream of my symbolic self, the 'unthought known,' which carried symbols of sacramental goodness that also reclaimed my present moments. I realised that to be mindful of God I needed to be in the present moment; this was where life in all its fullness was (John 10:10). Life in all its fullness for me is coming home to the present moment. I have played with different titles for this piece of work, but the final title has emerged around this directional image of coming home: *The Present Moment as Home in Mindfulness of God*. To come home is the cry of my heart. It was the inchoate cry for home that began my research.

I am able here to bring together my main research questions in a creative synthesis, in relation to mindfulness, as they enabled me to reclaim my present moments to be more mindful of God. Mindful awareness enabled me to relativize my anxious thoughts. This was through my general mindfulness practice and the cultivation of ethical mnemonic awareness through my tentative model established in chapter four. Through my analogical conceptual model of being in a knowing implicit relationship with God I was able to cultivate trust in God's providential care even when I was not aware of God's presence. This kept me calm in the present moment.

In the moment I was able to be mindful of God as a graced response. Through this graced response I was able to re-perceive God, myself, others, and creation. In that re-perceiving I was able to recognize our essential relational reality. To further reclaim my present moments, I needed to be fully aware of and at home in my whole embodied self. Paradoxically, to be in the present moment where God is, I needed to reclaim my boarding school past. Through mindfulness I was able to relativize the distorted scripts of that past (the root of my anxious thoughts). I am cultivating new scripts through scriptural propositions that function as personal values. Interestingly, for the healing and accepting of the past I needed more than mindfulness. It was embodied and sociological trauma theory that brought

healing although mindfulness is incorporated into embodied trauma theory. So, I do not leave mindfulness behind in this wider strand of help.

Mindfulness also rekindled my creative symbolic self and my poetic imagination. The rediscovery and inhabiting of my symbolic self, which originated in the sacramental strand of my childhood, redressed the balance of my narrative. This reduced the anxiety I felt about the past and anchored me in the present moment through a renewed focus on the sacramental world around me.

It is plausible that this directional image of coming home but never fully arriving is linked to another insight of Leigh's, where he finds the trait of 'alienation' in the modern autobiographies he analysed. This is 'religious alienation' which 'expresses the decline of religious mediation through a visible church.'⁷⁴⁹ Although I was at the centre of a visible church as a minister, I had to go outside the church to find a focus on attention and awareness. I had to go outside my Protestant, non-conformist Baptist church to access contemplation rather than activism. I first had to find wisdom on attention and awareness, mindfulness, in secular psychology for health before I found it in Christian contemplation. Finally in lockdown and during the Covid-19 pandemic I realised that as a minister the local church was not my home, I was not allowed to be 'real,' people wanted a distortion of a person. In the end I became the scapegoat, the one to blame for everyone else's sense of disconnection, the one sent out of the city. It was church as home, a sense of community that was lost. I had to look outside the visible church to a different Christian expression, a rarer Christian expression, that of intentional community to rediscover community and a sense of home beyond myself and my nuclear family. Not owning our own home, and living in a 'borrowed' house, a manse, a tied house, a church house, added to this sense of alienation. It was difficult to call this house, home.

⁷⁴⁹ Leigh, 3.

In the cultures I have inhabited, whether boarding school, the bank, or church I have been alienated from awareness, my body, and emotions. Mindfulness has enabled me to find a home in my awareness, body, emotions, and senses, to find a home in God in each present moment. It is in this reinhabiting that I have felt most fully alive, physically, and spiritually. It is in this new awareness, a form of re-perceiving, that I have felt gratitude for the gift of the skin boat I have been given.

Finding a home in particular theologies

I also notice that I have found a home in particular theologies, contextual, contemplative, intermediate or parabolic, practical, lived, incarnational, sacramental, symbolic, relational, wise, and creative.⁷⁵⁰ I have asked, as I review the whole thesis, whether there are any implicit theologies in my lived experience. I also asked myself if there was a pattern connecting these theologies. One possible implicit theology to emerge is a theology of attention and awareness.

My lived experience suggests, and this is speculative, that awareness is the God-given capacity that bridges and holds together the material and spiritual in the one reality I inhabit. That is why I have been able to say that the same attentional capacities are at work within secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God. The mindful awareness I have cultivated enables me to set up home in the present moment. It is through both a spacious awareness and living in the present moment that I position myself to be in the right place to be aware of God, as God allows by grace. As I become more fully aware of the different aspects of self, as the rooms of the 'house of my being' become more fully transparent, I am more able to sense God at work in all those rooms. It is then the house of my being becomes a home.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁵⁰ Ford, xi.

⁷⁵¹ Langer, *Mindfulness*, 201.

Grace is another implicit theology in my work which I will pick up in this section.

However, in terms of any connecting pattern between the theologies that I have interacted with, awareness has also given me a clue. In a sort of analogical mirroring, I can see a similar process and pattern in the theologies that I have intuitively gathered from. In some sense they could be reframed as aware theologies, they are spacious in their consideration of God and the world. They are mindful in that they can hold different levels of experience in the same theological space. Contextual theology is aware of multiple contexts, that can be synthesized. I see its overlap with practical theology. Another frame has been David Ford's four-fold model of retrieval, bringing up-to-date, accessibility and wisdom, which he calls 'wise creativity.'⁷⁵² In this theological space there is room for the past and the future; the non-academic world is accommodated through accessibility and wisdom. I have kept these four points as guiding principles throughout the research. As I search for a pattern, I have been struck in this moment that I need to revisit David Ford's model, to spiral back to it in a deeper way.⁷⁵³ Contemplative or spiritual theology has shown me what my place is in the space of God, what is possible for me to do and what only God can do. It has shown me that my spiritual home is in my God-given body, it is in mindful spirituality, a form of kataphatic spirituality, that I come fully alive. Along with mindfulness it has enabled me to examine my other spaces, the past, boarding school, church, and see the limitations and enclosed nature of these spaces.

I have acknowledged that my theological approach has not been systematic, but it is open and spacious. It also clears the way for the ordinary and for the transcendent to break through into the ordinary, as with McFague's intermediate or parabolic theology. My theology is confessional, incarnational, and poetic, as McFague's is. Her theology can also be seen as

⁷⁵² Ford, 12.

⁷⁵³ Ford, 13-22.

a form of transcendental contextual theology, as mine can.⁷⁵⁴ I examine my own spiritual experience. In this theology the transcendent breaks through into ordinary reality and requires a re-perceiving of the ordinary in the light of this parabolic experience. The parabolic has hidden, mysterious, symbolic elements that need awareness and imagination and not just thinking. My open and spacious theology has also cleared the way for me to see the fragments of my life and work with theological fragments to try and make a whole. I have found the idea of bricolage and being a bricoleur to be crucial in creating a fragile centre from which I can live and work.

There is an incarnational strand running through all these theologies that have magnetised them for me; all of me, body, senses, awareness, imagination, spirit, mind can participate in the knowing of God. This is also an open and spacious stance. This strand is also sacramental and symbolic. I have drawn on David Brown's idea of the generous God who speaks to us through natural symbols, often subconsciously to preserve our human freedom. I have drawn on sacramental theology with the whole world being sacramental, moments of meeting with God being sacramental, and the possibility of sacramental conversations. This clears the way for the swallow, and the swift, the stream, the stars, pathways, and walking to be woven into my theological reflections. What I perceive with my senses, that is natural symbols, are somehow 'converted' into the service of the divine.

In my theology of relationships, I have room for multiple dimensions of relationships: working, real, wounded, spiritual, distorted. I allow into the space myself, others, God, creation. Although I have had an experience of complete aloneness, and betrayal, and the breaking of trust, I have found that knowing I am in an implicit relationship with God has enabled me to build trust and sustain trust in God. I have made room for a different form of knowing, the unthought known, that is relational. My relational theology

⁷⁵⁴ McFague, "Parable," 636.

allowed me to draw into my space secular mindfulness and integrative and relational counselling and psychotherapy, the wisdom of the world.

My view on things is often small and limited and distorted. In my theological space, however, because I am in an implicit relationship with God, and even though most of the time I am unaware of this relationship, I still participate in a bigger space. As Candler observes, 'nothing is made by human hands or minds but which shares in the divine activity of creation *ex nihilo*.'⁷⁵⁵ As I reflect critically on my life in this research, I can see that God has always been there; I have participated in God's life but been unaware of it much of the time. It is only as I look back and see the providential meetings and moments I have written about that I can see this weaving of my life into God's life. The 'unthought known' has become a stream of knowing that sustains me in the present moment as I practise awareness of it.

I can use an analogy with walking. I have walked every day on the Scargill Estate for a few months. It is 90 acres of woodland and limestone terraces that climbs up to a ridge. The paths covered in leaves can be slippery as can be the limestone steps. In walking daily, the paths become an unthought known to my body. My steps move from being tentative and stiff to loose-limbed, confident, and well-balanced. When I do slip, I slide with it. When I descend it is with relaxed awareness, stepping lightly. When I have had a period of not walking the estate, I lose that state of unthought knowing, and the paths become strangers again. It is the same with the stream of unthought known within me. I can inhabit it more fully with practice, or it can be a stranger to me.

I can also use an analogy from the dark night skies above Scargill. I have often walked in the dark here; it is much more a common occurrence than when I was in London with its streetlights. At first it was a strange, even fearful experience but then it felt normal, and I began to feel at home in the

⁷⁵⁵ Candler, 17.

dark. My eyes have become more 'dark adapted.'⁷⁵⁶ In the dark 'your eyes automatically adapt to try and compensate for the lack of light by dilating the pupil, effectively increasing its aperture. This results in greater light grasp.'⁷⁵⁷ My moment of epiphany out of this is that I am much more in the dark with God than I ever realised. There is so much that is out of my awareness, that I cannot perceive. However, if I accept this and allow myself to become 'dark adapted,' my spiritual perceiving can much more pick up the faintest of traces in my spiritual night sky. My 'Light grasp' grows in the dark. This also helps me to trust as I walk down an almost imperceptible path with God, just as my feet trust my night vision as I walk the paths that take me home. This is a form of creative wisdom.

I draw on early contemplative history, which is anthropological in insight, through the idea of *Logos* theology developed by Maximus the Confessor and others. I am attracted to the idea that I am a little *logos* spoken into being by the *Logos*, Christ. I am a word spoken by the Light to be light, and I recognize that every person is a *logos*. This little *logos* has a capacity that can expand and stretch; it is not limited in nature. It can become a cathedral, a world within me. It has space for others, God, and creation. All these theologies enable me to be open, spacious, give meaning to my life and enable me to make sense of it and create a fragile whole within.

Another crucial element is the theology of the present moment. I see the present moment as a sacrament, as the point at which 'time touches eternity,' and the possibility of moments of meeting with God that are transformative, those moments of meeting being able to stay in my timeline and not fade away into nothing.⁷⁵⁸ Here the present moment expands and grows and is pregnant with possibility. It is here I have found my home with

⁷⁵⁶ Radmila Topalovic and Tom Kerss, *Stargazing: Beginners Guide to Astronomy* (Glasgow: Collins, 2016), 50.

⁷⁵⁷ Topalovic and Kerss, 50.

⁷⁵⁸ Lewis, 76.

God. As I find my home with God, I find my place with others and with creation.

I return now to the implicit theology of grace. I begin with how I have used the word and will then relate it to a wider understanding of grace within my understanding of the Protestant church tradition I am part of. The main term I use throughout the research is 'graced response.' Principally, this is in relation to the idea that there is a gap between myself and God that I cannot cross. I cannot find God unless God finds me. I cannot enter a relationship with God until God enters a relationship with me. I cannot be mindful of God unless God is first mindful of me. I draw on contemplative theology for this insight. That this relationship becomes possible is a graced response through the work of the Holy Spirit. For me, it is grace because God does something for me that I cannot do for myself.

I then apply this concept of a graced response to every aspect of my relationship with God: my remembering of God, my spiritual re-perceiving, the enabling of my physical senses to perceive spiritually, the possibility of moments of meeting with God, the seeing and transforming of distorted inner narratives, becoming aware of God and God's compassionate presence, the possibility of my playing a part in being mindful of God, my cooperation with God – all these things are graced responses in which I play my part.

I also apply the concept of graced response to God's providential care, the convergences between myself, secular mindfulness, and mindfulness of God, that brought healing and transformation. In this sense grace has often been hidden, and I have found it in the symbolic interaction between myself and God, the 'unthought known.' This grace is patient, and the swallows keep returning to me until I catch up with them. The underground stream that brings natural symbols to me in my intuitive self keeps flowing regardless of whether I am aware of it or not. This links to the idea of the sacramental nature of creation as an act of God's grace, 'that the physical, material stuff of creation and embodiment is the means by which God's

grace meets us and gets hold of us.⁷⁵⁹ This grace, as I have experienced it, is also spacious and open and generous.

What I don't spell out but is implicit for me, is that this grace is also undeserved. I use the Jesus Prayer, asking for the Lord Jesus Christ to show me mercy and grace, owning that I am a sinner and that it is undeserved. In my experience the idea of the grace of God as undeserved is central in traditional Protestant theology. James K.A. Smith explores this idea arguing that we 'have an unwitting sense that we deserve it,' namely grace.⁷⁶⁰ I neither want to imply that we deserve grace, nor do I want to overemphasize our sinfulness. I have found that mindfulness has enabled me to have a realistic sense of my negativity bias and distorted perceiving, and my absolute need for God's transforming grace, recognizing that need, even though I have some agency to reclaim my life from anxiety. I repeatedly argue I cannot redeem my own life, only God can do that. I ask myself why then there is the reticence to explicitly state that I don't deserve God's grace.

I come back to my childhood and ministerial experiences of how critical words wrongly spoken, shatter and fragment trust, identity, and life itself. I do not wish to manipulate anyone into belief in God or use a rhetoric of persuasion. I am to be a word spoken by the Light that can, as a graced response, enable others to freely re-perceive their life in relationship to God. My mindful rule is based on a realistic sense of how both myself and others need transforming, how we can take personal responsibility for our part in creating a common life, always recognizing we live in relational mutuality. I have learnt about the need for boundaries and assertiveness, but I find myself, at the end of this research, in a non-negotiable stance when it comes to deliberately using words to harm or to hurt. I know I can do this unintentionally or out of transference feelings, but I am always seeking to

⁷⁵⁹ James K.A. Smith *Desiring the Kingdom*, 141.

⁷⁶⁰ James K.A. Smith, "The Scandal of Sheer Grace: When Mercy Offends," *Calvin Theological Journal* 56 no. 2(2021): 310, accessed February 14, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAI5IE21112900004&site=eds.live>.

show grace, as I have been shown grace. It is perhaps in this desire to show grace that I am most fully aware of how I have not deserved God's grace. I am also aware that it is gratitude for God's grace that motivates me to seek the divine presence rather than guilt or shame.

I have found these theologies, or they have found me. These theologies have mediated God's presence to me. Leigh argues that the 'modern seeker has found little help from official mediators.'⁷⁶¹ This modern 'alienated seeker,' however, 'becomes a sort of mediator for others by telling the story of his or her frantic search for the ultimate.'⁷⁶² My research is one more 'spiritual journal' that desires to be a second-person guide for others seeking to be mindful of God.⁷⁶³ If I look to summarize the theology that has emerged from this research, then perhaps it is lived theology, transcendent and contextual, aware and spacious, seeking to be accessible, wise and creative, made out the 'dark adapted' lived experience of my journey.

I recognize that as a piece of research it needs adapting to be a second-person guide. However, here the contextual theology and idea of a second-person guide converge. I can now ask what that second-person guide might look like. It will have the accessible language drawn from secular mindfulness, but I will also trust in the theology of being in an implicit relationship with God. I would argue that all human beings are in this implicit relationship and that through the generosity of God natural symbols are at work in the 'unthought known' of all people, which symbols they can in their human freedom choose to respond to or not. The mindful rule is designed to hold any who believe or who do not believe in God and can hold both groups of people using mindful recognition theory.

⁷⁶¹ Leigh, 3.

⁷⁶² Leigh, 3.

⁷⁶³ Leigh, 3, says there has been an 'outburst of spiritual journals since 1650.'

Adapting the research as a second-person guide

I can use the autoethnographic structure of the research to help others to be autoethnographic, to be participant perceivers of their own participation in mindfulness of God and the context of their culture. I can encourage them to create their own spiritual journal that is both evocative and analytic. The methods I used can be simplified further. People can take their own pilgrimage walks of any length, literal or metaphorical. They can establish how present they are to the here and now as they walk, and what their mind wanders to. I can create an exercise where they carry out a self-interview asking themselves intuitive questions, seeking to be discovery-based in orientation. These interviews can help show if they too have a shadow from the past blocking the light in the present. These interviews could be a simple form of examen.⁷⁶⁴ Simple exercises for noticing the symbolic, what beckons one to perceive it, can be created. I can help them find a directional image in their story.

The tentative models within this piece of research can be simplified and given an adaptability for others. I can ask what pieces of wisdom can become metacognitive propositions that would help someone live by their values in their context. Using the idea of being in an implicit relationship with God, the reader can examine her own life for moments of meeting with God and cultivate an attentiveness and awareness of the graced possibility of other such moments.

In this research, but also in its future adaptation as a second-person guide, I have used and will use the language of secular mindfulness. I have and will translate my gospel understanding of mindfulness of God into secular language that is accessible to those who are seeking God but have not yet found God. I will hold the tension that gives them access to mindfulness for

⁷⁶⁴ In Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Examen I examine my life through the Holy Spirit to sense God at work, to see the light and the shadow in my life. See Mark E. Thibodeaux SJ, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2015), ix-x.

health and mindfulness of God, allowing them to trace one path or both paths. I have also sought to be culturally contextual by using autoethnography within the transcendental model of contextual theology – examining my own religious experience.

Another aspect of Leigh's analysis that I want to draw attention to is that 'what makes the conversion sequence of most modern autobiographers notably different from that of Augustine is that they explicitly include a societal dimension to their moral and religious conversions.'⁷⁶⁵ The application of my research is a societal application, how we dialogue with each other with awakened language, how we can release the God-given creative word in others, to facilitate dialogue and a sense of community between those who are different. The essential centre of this application is a novel application of recognition theory actualised through mindfulness and the theology of the *logos*, the creative word in each of us that is our true identity. It is a mindful recognition of myself, God, and others. My societal application is a mindful rule as outlined in chapter seven. In this I draw on the praxis model of contextual theology, how this research can be applied in the world. My spirituality within this framework is contemplation in action. It is doing out of being, and its foundation is awareness.

I am calling this mindful spirituality kataphatic spirituality. My AE experience is that the same embodied senses are at work in a secular mindfulness exercise that are at work in mindfulness of God. Here I find Balthasar's theological rationale for this a plausible explanation for my experience. Balthasar takes up the patristic idea of assumption and exchange of states, 'God participated in our life to let us share in the divine life. In the process of incarnation, cross and resurrection the human senses are assumed, and opened to a redeeming transformation.'⁷⁶⁶ As it was for Jesus, so it becomes possible for me that my human senses are also assumed, taken up into the divine life of the indwelling Holy Spirit,

⁷⁶⁵ Leigh, 17.

⁷⁶⁶ De Maeseneer, 281.

becoming spiritual senses but always mediated through my body as 'something more.' There is an exchange. It is not just my senses that are assumed, but my mindful capacities for attention and awareness, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence. It is not just my mindful capacities that are assumed but my imagination and creative capacity. Those parts of me that I dissociated from, the traumatised parts can also be assumed and healed. All this is in the service of enabling me to live out as fully as possible, the God-given creative word within me, that only I can inhabit and manifest in the world. This is a non-dualistic incarnational spirituality.

Another symbolic pattern that Leigh identifies is the theme of 'returning.' He draws this from Dan Wakefield's autobiography.⁷⁶⁷ Wakefield draws on the image of the Prodigal Son who comes to his senses and 'returns' home.⁷⁶⁸ This is a return out of alcoholism to the religious roots of his childhood.⁷⁶⁹ I do not have a religious home to return to; I did not become a Christian until after I left university. I cannot return to my childhood home in Kenya. I have walked round my old boarding school as an adult. I do return to the experience of boarding school in a therapeutic and spiritual way, to free myself from the shadow of the past. What I discover there is a story of trauma experienced that enables me to be more compassionate to my own self. I have returned to the symbols that have stayed with me from my African childhood in the intermittent poems and writings about these sacramental memories. Rather than casting me into despair, they have been as swallows to me, harbingers of freedom and hinting at the possibility of a home in the distance. In returning to both the trauma and sacramental goodness of my childhood, I have found an unexpected freedom. This returning is perhaps a reclaiming and a re-perceiving of old narratives that bound me.

⁷⁶⁷ Leigh, 215.

⁷⁶⁸ Leigh, 217.

⁷⁶⁹ Leigh, 217.

In writing a spiritual autoethnography and detailing moments of meeting with God and my encounters with secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God as divinely providential, I offer two analogies that help me discern where I sense God at work. The first is the idea of 'hot spots,' that I borrow from sacramental theology.⁷⁷⁰ Some moments have a greater intensity, are 'hot spots,' which enable me to discern God's presence without claiming them in certainty but in humble faith. The second is the idea of my life as a tapestry that is being stitched in each moment in time.

As I reflect on this research, I seem to live in a world that is unpredictable and provisional, where circumstances like Covid-19 and conflict have unpicked many stitches in my life all at once. I question whether I should lay down the role of minister that has been a major part of my working life. I recognize that the wounded, dissociated parts of me unconsciously unpick the helpful patterns I try to stitch, and this is a daily process of restitching what has been unstitched.

But there are threads that have not been unpicked, that have been like gold and silver strands of the kingdom running through my life. It seems to me that mindfulness for health and God have been such threads. This is how I distinguish between my stitching, the stitching of circumstance, and the stitching of God. It may be that I want my life to be made up of stitches of peace but as I look back at the symbolic patterns of this research, I must accept that much of my life is cross-stitches, the motif of the cross of pain is the repeated figure, darned into my tapestry. It is this stitching, paradoxically, that holds my skin boat together, that I need to accept and hold. In this I do not hope for a happy ending, but a wiser one.

⁷⁷⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 148.

The original contribution

This creative path home to God in the present moment is a retrieval of a strand of historic mindfulness of God in the Christian contemplative tradition, recontextualized with the theory, practice, and language of secular mindfulness. This summarizes an overarching original contribution. I draw together here the other contributions and novel or fresh applications that are in the research.

In my experience the general direction of Christian mindfulness is about importing secular mindfulness into a Christian worldview for therapeutic reasons. As a practitioner and researcher of mindfulness of God and secular mindfulness, my aim is to move in the other direction and translate mindfulness of God into accessible secular mindfulness language, theory, and practice, so that mindfulness of God features in our cultural marketplace as a transformational option, which also makes this a piece of original contextual theology. The autoethnographic focus is placed within the transcendental model of contextual theology with the focus on personal experience; and the desire to create models which resonate with others also draws on the praxis model of contextual theology.

Although mindfulness of God is a historical concept in Christian contemplation, I have identified a gap in 'how to' cultivate and recontextualize mindfulness of God through translating it into the language of secular mindfulness theory and practice. The Christian distinctives I draw out include the intentional focus on God and the cultivation of ethical mindful awareness, culminating in the creation of an original mindful rule of life.

My original AE evidence is that my immersion in secular mindfulness led to the creation of an aware and embodied mindful spirituality more deeply attuned to the presence of God. In this tentative and original model of mindful spirituality my God-given mindful capacities of awareness,

embodied self, physical senses, emotions, and imagination, play a central role as I open myself to the grace of the Holy Spirit at work in the integral unity of my being. This brings an ethical dimension to this mindful spirituality that seeks to create a present moment ethical awareness, to have in mind the concerns of God and choose them over the human concerns jostling for my attention.

I have also created an original method for cultivating this continuous ethical awareness. Secular mindfulness depends on holding key metacognitive propositions in present-moment awareness to re-perceive thoughts as passing mental events rather than facts. With practice these propositions become insights – I re-perceive my thoughts in the present moment as passing mental events and can let them go. I have turned scriptural verses that I have identified with, such as Mark 8:35, ‘whoever wants to save their life will lose it,’ into metacognitive propositions. Because present moment awareness has this ability to remember these propositions at ethical points of choice, I can notice when anxiety wants me to experientially avoid a situation. Using my re-sculpted scriptural proposition, which becomes an insight, I hold that automatic reaction of avoidance and choose a wiser more biblical response – facing the situation with God. In this way, instead of my present moments being overwhelmed by anxiety, through this form of mindfulness of God I can redeem my present moments and in the moment be more mindful of God. This basic practice and tentative model can be placed at the centre of a mindful rule of life.

I have drawn on the secular concept of implicit relational knowing to create an original tentative analogical conceptual model for psychological and spiritual experience of God in the present moment. The Boston Change Process Study Group presents evidence that a therapist and client are in an implicit relationship out of which emerge missed moments, and moments of meeting where change and transformation happen. By way of analogy, I am saying that I am in an implicit relationship with God (God is always present). Most of the time I am not present, but when I (as a graced

response that I cooperate with) am present then I have the graced possibility of moments of meeting with God which are also transformational. As I cultivate mindfulness of God, my hypothesis is that I will experience more moments of meeting with God, thus redeeming my present moments. I also can use this conceptual model to sustain and cultivate my trust in God.

I have not drawn on mainstream apophatic Christian contemplative tradition, which has been seen as elitist, inaccessible, and anti-incarnational with its Platonic roots. I have discovered that secular mindfulness theory and practice in the service of mindfulness of God is an original gateway to embodied, incarnational kataphatic spirituality. In a more speculative turn, I would also like to suggest that my AE experience where my senses, body, emotions, and awareness become aware of God can be tentatively seen as evidence for natural senses becoming spiritual senses through the grace of the Holy Spirit. My experience is that the same God-given mindful capacities are at work in secular mindfulness and mindfulness of God.

This pattern of mindful spirituality with its core of ethical awareness lies at the centre of a mindful rule of life I have created that involves the intentional cultivation of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence through mindful awareness practices to have in mind the concerns of God and choose them over the human things jostling for my attention. This mindful rule of life has mindful awareness practices at its centre and can be a second-person guide for others seeking a similar incarnational spirituality. I have amended the Jesus Prayer and *Lectio Divina* to make them mindful awareness practices. I have also combined mindfulness and recognition theory to suggest that mindful recognition enables us to re-perceive others in their essential God-given reality. This includes an awareness of the God-given creative word at the centre of their being, which is to be awakened. This is a novel application of mindfulness and recognition theory with *Logos* theology to enable moral creativity and the release of moral imagination. Through the idea of reclaiming my

present moments, which as a graced response God can redeem, I offer a solution to what is my part in mindfulness of God.

A 'Holway'

The pilgrimage of mindfulness continues for me. I am fascinated by holloways, literally a 'hollow way,' a 'sunken path, a deep and shady lane. A route that centuries of foot-fall, hoof-hit, wheel-roll & rain-run have harrowed into the land.'⁷⁷¹ I have been harrowed by falls, and hits, and rolls, but in this I have been reshaped into something mysterious, like a holloway. A holloway seems to me a portal to new awareness, and this is where I find myself. These holloways in the land are 'old ways,' where one might find new things, 'rifts' which allow one to '*slip back out of this world.*'⁷⁷² The old ways I have retrieved have helped me find new things and slip back into the world, into a new level of awareness, mindful of God, myself, others, and creation. An earlier rendering of the word holloway is 'Holway.'⁷⁷³ When I say this word, I hear 'whole-way.' Mindfulness for me has been a path, a holway, a way to wholeness. It is the path where I can slip out of my head and the weight of my thoughts into my body, senses, and breath, and then slip again into an open, witnessing awareness where I hold all of me, and sense the presence of God holding all of me. Holloways have been shaped by walking, and walking has been a key practice for me, and walking has led to the poetic. It is also symbolically important to me that some holloways have been made by pilgrims.⁷⁷⁴ This holway is a path that is a here-path, a here and now path. Mindfulness like the holloway is 'a way amongst ways.'⁷⁷⁵ Mindfulness has been a whole way that has led me by a path to the here and now Way.

⁷⁷¹ Robert Macfarlane, Stanley Donwood, and Dan Richards, *Holloway*, paperback ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2013, 2014), 3.

⁷⁷² Macfarlane, Donwood, Richards, 4.

⁷⁷³ Macfarlane, Donwood, Richards, 2.

⁷⁷⁴ Macfarlane, Donwood, Richards, 36.

⁷⁷⁵ Macfarlane, Donwood, Richards, 36.

'An angel touched me...
And still I limp.'
And yet I am made like a honey dipper,
Turned like wood,
To bear the viscous presence of God.
And still I limp,
On the holway home,
Here and now is the Way.'

Appendices: Appendix for chapter four

Tables 1, 2, 3

Table 1. Results from the data collection days

Day One 29.5.18

Hour	Verbatim recording
1	
1.i	Will anybody overhear me as I record this?
1.ii	Shall I carry the water bottle tomorrow or have it in my CamelBak in my rucksack?
1.iii	Will I find somewhere to do a wee without somebody seeing?
1.iv	Will I find the way or get lost?
2	
2.i	Should I have stretched?
2.ii	I have a shame basement.
2.iii	Is my back beginning to hurt?
2.iv	I am overwhelmed by the smell of the eucalyptus.
3	
3.i	I feel like a bottle of fizzy water, all shook up.
3.ii	Did I clean the CamelBak bladder properly, will I get sick?
3.iii	People who love me will not shame me.
3.iv	Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.
4	
4.i	Take water where you can find it.
4.ii	In shame I'm trying to save myself from exposure but end up losing my life.
4.iii	I am so grateful I am well and hear walking the Camino.
4.iv	I hope I can walk all day.
4.v	Hotspots of shame.
4.vi	I feel huge anxiety and shame with a micro-offence I've done or I'm imagining I've done.
4.vii	I hear the birdsong.
4.viii	I wonder how the family are doing.
4.ix	I hear voices behind me, do I walk faster or slow down a bit and let them past?
4.x	Stupid me I forgot the athlete's foot cream. I shouldn't mention that.
4.xi	There's a dog. Coco would enjoy this walk.
4.xii	I want to walk clear not cloudy.
5	
5.i	People are consulting maps and phones at an intersection. I begin to doubt myself but I see a yellow arrow.
5.ii	I'm fed up with being in my head. I hear the birdsong again. I feel the soles of my feet. The dogs are barking.
5.iii	My feet are crunching on the tarmac.

5.iv	I'd like a little vegetable patch and someone to tend it for me.
5.v	I feel slightly less shame.
5.vi	Does fire burn shame?
5.vii	I can smell the eucalyptus, hear the birds, notice my breathing.
5.viii	Spontaneously prayed in tongues.
5.ix	Do I have a monstrous ego? Is that I'm trying to save.
5.x	Is the shame basement being wic-ked?
5.xi	I see everything through a fence.
5.xii	I let go of the desire to change anything.
5.xiii	I inhabit a feeling of peace right now.
5.xiv	A storehouse of ancient wisdom.
5.xv	I am looking forward to speaking at Exeter Cathedral.
5.xvi	I would like a little house.
5.xvii	Results could be this piece of work. What I did on the last Camino, the creative 140-word piece like Evagrius, and the House piece like Pilgrim's Progress.
5.xviii	Does my spirit leap like a gazelle?
5.ix	The hour alarm caught me by surprise I guess I must be in the moment.
6	
6.i	I haven't thought of coffee.
6.ii	Where are the swallows?
6.iii	Shame is a dip in the ground that catches you unawares.
6.iv	I'm crawling out of a shame pit.
6.v	I've packed my croissant and ham and cheese from breakfast, is that stealing if I have it for lunch?
6.vi	The coffee and food have given me a nice little buzz.
6.vii	I wonder if they'll do goulash in this place?
6.viii	Is the creative Boarding School piece a meta-narrative?
6.ix	I've lost the yellow signs I feel anxious.
6.x	There's a feeling of dread. It's rising.
6.xi	Can I sit in that chair? There's one person who's got a table of four chairs. I make myself sit.
6.xii	I just missed the sign and walked on a bit. This is an exercise in attention and awareness.
6.xiii	Is shame a state of mind?
6.xiv	I feel like I've got my wind and legs.
6.xv	I think symbolically. So that is why that creative story which is symbolic is a good story for me. I need to do some research into symbolism.
6.xvi	I can feel joy returning in the research. Writing is the research. I need to evidence that more. The creative story is the fruits of the counselling pilgrimage I've been on before. 20 years. I could put the 100 texts out on to Twitter as a social media experiment. PhD is like climbing a steep hill. Every now and then you get an amazing view. And then you have to start climbing again.
6.xvii	I'm a symbolist.
6.xviii	I took up mindful pilgrimage walking inspired by a Desert Father story.
	Of letting things go behind me in awareness.
6.xix	May the love of Christ take hold of me. May the light of Christ shine in my heart. May the love of Christ flow through me like a river.

6.xx	Even shame gets left behind on this hill.
6.xxi	Have the creative piece as a case study and then discuss it, analyse it. Start with this piece, this introspective phenomenological piece. There is a summit to this PhD and I will find it.
6.xxii	I think shame and anxiety lead to self-focus. In that way I lose my life if life is with others. I am now capturing meta-narrative themes, insights.
6.xxiii	I will ring them tonight. It will be nice to see their faces.
6.xxiv	One of the results is writing. Different forms of it. I can also put these three as case studies in an appendix.
6.xxv	What is mindful symbolism? What fountains of wisdom have I been drinking from? I saw a fountain just now which triggered a symbolic thought.
6.xxvi	Thank You Lord. Thank you, Lord.
7	
7.i	There's a beautiful old bridge I walk across. Maybe mindfulness is a bridge which you can only walk across you cannot get there technologically.
7.ii	Sometimes you have to go the way other people are going. Who has paved the way, people like Diadochus, Evagrius. The secular mindfulness guys. Some people are engaging with secular mindfulness but from a counselling perspective.
7.iii	Pain that comes and goes at the end of the walk. It doesn't stay it moves around. The sole of my right foot, left knee, Achilles on both hurt.
7.iv	Mindfulness weighs nothing but can hold heavy experience.
7.v	Gentle heat of the sun breaking through the clouds, birds still singing, cars in the distance. A stream. Open awareness. I've expanded into a bigger space. Elation, joy I think I've reached Negreira. Relief, happiness.
7.vi	I am no longer fizzing. I lose my ego as I walk. A leaky drain. I probably don't smell nice either.
7.vii	Anxiety says there's a 98% chance of rain on a cloudless day.
7.viii	The alarm caught me off guard again. I wasn't expecting it. I just want to get there.

Day Two

30.5.18

Hour	Verbatim recording
1	
1.i	I am both elated and worried another 20 kms to go.
1.ii	It's so beautiful, I just feel tearful. The mist, the green, the rolling hills.
1.iii	The cock crows. I think of the time I didn't turn up for my dad's birthday supper that I'd agreed to go to. I'm still filled with shame at that. A girl had asked me to go out on a date and I didn't want to say no to her and I didn't want to disappoint my dad so I did nothing. But I can look back now and see this crippling anxiety that I would be rejected if I said no...that came from boarding school. I feel more compassion toward my younger self. My mum said that my dad kept looking out of the window waiting for me to turn up. That's kind of symbolic. And the person never comes.

1.iv	Shame keeps me in the past and makes me anxious about the future that I would be exposed about something that happened in the past.
1.v	I left my little iPad in the big bag that is being transferred on. I'm now worried I should have carried it in case it gets stolen on route.
1.vi	Thank You Lord no injuries, no diarrhoea. Stretching was good this morning. I let go of the desire to change anything. I let go of the desire for security and control, for affirmation, for happiness. I'm filled with peace. I let it go.
1.vii	Looking for the yellow signs.
1.viii.	Where does this strange willpower come from? To walk another 20 kms.
1.ix	Public School is presented as a symbol of privilege; it is therefore hard to present a different narrative. In evangelicalism meditation and mindfulness is often presented as a symbol of the East, a negative symbol. I wish to represent it as a positive Christian symbol of transformation.
1.x	Meditation is the wrong word really for mindfulness practices because they are all about cultivating mindful awareness of reality.
1.xi	I pray for my friend's daughter and her Diabetes.
1.xii	I just love the space out in nature on my own, great expanse of sky.
1.xiii	I let go of the desire for power and control.
1.xiv	Break shame into bite-sized chunks.
1.xv	There's a good feeling in my lungs as they work.
1.xvi	Bless the Lord O My Soul.
1.xvii	If silence and solitude are the gateway to the soul and the soul is the gateway to God then silent solitary walking in creation is a gateway to the soul, the embodied soul in touch with all my senses. I feel a kind of ecstasy already.
1.xviii	Does ecstasy burn up shame? One of the ways to deal with shame is to cultivate something else like joy, like ecstasy, like peace.
1.xix.	I have been walking for an hour I am feeling good. I feel my body is part of my self and I am in tune with it.
2	
2.i	How can I paint this mist, and this earth, and these seedlings, and these trees, and these colours?
2.ii	I must email some photos to my mum and dad.
2.iii	I was walking on the flat bit without stones and a big guy was walking toward me on the same path. Who was going to step off first? And he did...I feel childishly elated. I record that because these are things that I would self-censor, not share out of shame.
2.iv	This is freedom. Anxiety is like walking on a stony road. All these little thoughts stab you. But there is a clearer path.
2.v	First test of my wet weather gear. There's quite a strong drizzle. And mindfulness, this has been said, is like wet weather gear that helps protect you in a storm, helps you be resilient in them. I feel new shoots popping up in my mind...about mindfulness research, about life, about family, about God.
2.vi	Just praying for my supervisor.
2.vii	Within AE I am using mixed methods. I need to say this.
2.viii	I feel I am walking through a portal into something else. There's like a circle ahead of me where the trees overhang. It has symbolic significance for me.

3	
3.i	May she know happiness, may she know health, may she know peace of being.
3.ii	I see the sign for taxi. I am not tempted.
3.iii	I have lost so much of my life to shame, to anxiety. Trying to save it. I feel a great anger as the birds sing around me. I moo like a cow inside in pain. Anoint me with the strength of a bull.
3.iv	If mindfulness is about developing self-awareness and is self-awareness, then the fact that I realise I'm a symbolist is mindfulness in action.
3.v.	This is the second hour of walking done. I feel ok.
4	
4.i	Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.
4.ii	Shame is like an injury that you nurse but nobody can see. Shame is a feeling I haven't learnt to tolerate so I try to avoid it. But if I can learn to tolerate it and I can feel it I believe it goes. Surf the wave of shame.
4.iii	May your healing loving presence flow through me.
4.iv	Taxi is the sign of experiential avoidance.
4.v	The cool weather is great but I crave the experience of sun on my skin.
4.vi	I pray in tongues.
4.vii	My body is remembering things like how to just keep going. What it feels like.
4.viii	I notice the silence, the birds only, the wind, the sound of me walking. The silence.
4.ix	I'd like a café now. Close to 10 kms, halfway through.
4.x	I wonder if mindfulness can be used to uncover our unconscious symbols, symbols out of our awareness, symbols of conformity to culture.
4.xi	There are crosses along the way. Take up your cross and follow me comes into my head. The Jerusalem cross, the St Benedict symbol, the patron saint of traveller's symbol around my neck, they're all symbolic. They speak to me.
4.xii	To re-perceive is one of Mark's metacognitive propositions. To have a perceptive faith. He who has ears to hear let him hear. The phrase, another metacognitive proposition from Mark, he who wants to save his life will lose it is morphing itself in my consciousness. Weaving itself into my narrative of anxiety and shame.
4.xiii	Where does my shame come from? I realise that I was shamed. That it wasn't originally part of me. It was a form of control; like a heavy weight they could put on us at boarding school. Shame cannot keep up with my walking body it is blowing away behind me. Shame is a weed. It can be pulled out. Though it might be like bindweed.
4.xiv	Swallows fly as I crave bacon and egg.
4.xv	The baker delivers here by car and beeps his horn to let everyone know he is here. Clun lorries are collecting the milk.
4.xvi	Mindfulness pasteurises anxiety and shame.
4.xvii	I see a stream. How did a little stream of words, mindfulness of God, fix your eyes in the depths of of your heart with an unceasing

	mindfulness of God, how did such a little stream become a major river leading to a sea.
4.xviii	The time is 11.53 the end of my third hour of walking. Things keep popping up symbolically. A little stream that prompted a symbolic thought.
5	
5.i	Are you ready to go home? The poster says, I have seen it twice. I realise I am not running away from home.
5.ii	My body remembers the willpower I built up last time.
5.iii	It's come back to me. The Welcoming Prayer it's come into my head. I let go of the desire for power and control, for safety, I let go of the desire for safety. It's how we lose our life.
5.iv	I see a slug, a spider web, a snail.
5.v	I feel a little burst of joy.
6	
6.i	It is now 12.30 and I am doing recording number six. I feel good. I have just had a rest and some food. I found a seat at the top of a big hill.
6.ii	Is cultivating pride in an achievement an antidote to shame?
6.iii	We put skin on feelings, like the peel of a fruit and then we have to stay with the feeling for it to be unpeeled and tasted.
6.iv	My mind is slowing down to the pace of walking. My breath feels clear of the asthma of anxiety.
6.v	I recognise that the anxiety is there most of the time.
7	
7.i	I just got a message from somebody I thought I had offended and was in a pit of shame about. It was a lovely message. Shame very often is not real. It is like a cloud has lifted even though the clouds are still there in the sky.
7.ii	I am getting to the bare rock of where the anxiety and shame comes from. Shame makes me think everyone is going to point their finger at me all at the same time. But this has never happened.
7.iii	Nothing but walking is left. Have I emptied my mind? No. It is just turned more into still water from fizzy water. I've entered a different state of mind, one that just is.
7.iv	I am entranced by the swallows flying so low all around me. What do they symbolise? They fill me with joy.
7.v	It's 14.13 it is the end of the fifth hour of walking. I have just been entranced by the swallows.

Table 2. Themes, categories from the data collection hours 29.5.18 day 1

Category	Theme	Entry
Feelings	Anxiety	1.i, 1. ii, 1.iii, 1. iv, 2. i, 2.iii, 3. ii, 4. iv, 4. ix, 5. i, 6. ix, 6.x, 6.xi, 6.xii, 7.vii,
	Shame	2.i, 3.iii, 4.vi, 4.x, 6.v,
Mindfulness	Senses	2.iv, 4.vii, 5.iii, 6.xiv, 7.iii, 7.v,
	Meta-awareness	3.i, 4. ii, 4. v, 4.xii, 5. ii, 5. v, 5.vi, 5. ix, 5.x, 5. xi, 6.iii, 6. iv, 6. xx, 6. xxii, 7. iv, 7.vi,
My Self	Meta-cognitive proposition	3.i
	Symbolic	4. i, 5.xviii, 6.xxv, 7.i,
	Gratitude	4.iii
Study	Home	4.viii, 4. xi, 5. iv, 5. xv, 5.xvi, 6.xxiii,
	Spiritual PhD	5.viii, 5.xii, 6.xix, 6.xxvi, 5.xvii, 6. viii, 6. xv, 6.xvi, 6. xvii, 6.xxi, 6. xxiv, 7.ii
Mindfulness	Present Moment	5.ix, 7.viii,
	Food	6.i, 6.vi, 6.vii,
	Nature	6.ii,
	Curiosity	6.xiii,
	Mindful walking	6.xviii,

Table 2. Themes, categories from the data collection hours 30.5.18 day 2

Category	Theme	Entry
Feelings	Anxiety	2.1. v
	Shame	2.1.iii,
	Mixed Feelings	2.1. i, 2.6.iii,
Mindfulness	Senses	
	Meta-awareness	2.1. iv, 2.1. viii, 2.1. xviii, 2.2. iv, 2.3.iii, 2.4. ii, 2.4.

		xiii, 2.6. iv, 2.6. v, 2.7. i, 2.7.ii,
	Meta-cognitive proposition	2.1.xiv, 2.6.ii,
	Symbolic	2.1. ix, 2.2. viii, 2.3.ii, 2.3. iv, 2.4. iv, 2.4.x, 2.4.xii, 2.4. xvii, 2.4. xviii, 2.7.iv,
Myself	Gratitude	2.1. ii, 2.2.i, 2.5.v,
	Home	2.2. ii, 2.5.i,
	Spiritual	2.1.vi, 2.1. xi, 2.1.xii, 2.1. xiii, 2.1.xvi, 2.1. xvii, 2.2.vi, 2.3. i, 2.4. i, 2.4.iii, 2.4.vi,
	PhD	2.1.x, 2.2.vii,
	Present Moment	2.1.vii, 2.1. xv, 2.4.v, 2.4.viii, 2.6.i, 2.7.v,
	Food	2.4. ix, 2.4.xiv, 2.4.xv,
	Nature	2.5. iv
	Mindful Walking	2.1.xix, 2.2.v, 2.3.v, 2.4.vii, 2.7.iii,
	Body	2.5. ii,

Table 3 meta categories for day 1

Meta category	Theme	Entry
Human concerns	Anxiety	1.i, 1. ii, 1.iii, 1. iv, 2. i, 2.iii, 3. ii, 4. iv, 4. ix, 5. i, 6. ix,
God concerns	Shame	2.i, 3.iii, 4.vi, 4.x, 6.v,
	Meta-awareness	3.i, 4. ii, 4. v, 4.xii, 5. ii, 5. v, 5.vi, 5. ix, 5.x, 5. xi, 6.iii, 6. iv, 6. xx, 6. xxii, 7. iv, 7.vi,
	Meta-cognitive proposition	3.i,
	Symbolic	4.i, 5.xviii, 6.xxv, 7.i,
	Gratitude	4.iii
	Home	
	Spiritual	5. viii, 5.xii, 6.xix, 6.xxvi,

Table 3 meta categories for day 2

Meta category	Theme	Entry
Human concerns	Anxiety	2.1. v
	Shame	2.1.iii,
God concerns	Meta-awareness	2.1. iv, 2.1. viii, 2.1. xviii, 2.2. iv, 2.3.iii, 2.4. ii, 2.4. xiii, 2.6. iv, 2.6. v, 2.7. i, 2.7.ii,
	Meta-cognitive proposition	2.1.xiv, 2.6.ii,
	Symbolic	2.1.ix, 2.2.viii, 2.3.ii, 2.3.iv,.2.4.iv, 2.4.x, 2.4.xi,
	Gratitude	2.1. ii, 2.2.i, 2.5.v,
	Home	2.2. ii, 2.5.i,
	Spiritual	2.1.vi, 2.1. xi, 2.1.xii, 2.1. xiii, 2.1.xvi, 2.1. xvii,

Appendix for chapter five

Self-interview One

Table 2 First Listening (self-interview transcript non-italic, listening in italic, key words in bold)

And so the story I want to tell is a **story** that hasn't been told before. Aah... and it is how my ah **distress** and lack of wellbeing brought into this research.

My question is why hasn't this story been told before?

My sense is it has been too distressing.

It all began back in 2006 when I was very stressed, very anxious, very close to breakdown to burnout.

And to help with this distress we were having some couple counselling... and it is the **only counsellor** who's made this point er in all the counselling I've had in my counselling training er she said **no wonder you are feeling like you are feeling** because you went to boarding school... And that was **an aha moment**, A moment of meeting where I realised something that maybe this wasn't all my fault, maybe I'd been shaped er in a particular way.

There is a feeling of isolation here. At the age of 44 only one person has highlighted the possible impact of boarding school life on my wellbeing. Up to this point I'd believed that my mental health distress was his fault. Did I believe it was a sign of weakness?

So what I did **I read a book** called *The Making of Them* by Nick Duffell all about boarding school experience and I'm going back now... I picked up three insights (*I notice as I transcribe this feeling tearful*)

Here is a sign of the way self-sufficiency, picked up later manifests in self-help – the turn toward a bibliotherapeutic book.

Which are I would say these are **cold insights** now the initial feeling I had realising these things has gone but...?

I call these cold insights, but I felt tears when I transcribed this early part of the interview. Are there strong feelings that are split off here?

Three things that I realised that I was I had been **shaped**

I'd been **shaped**, I'd been **made** Aah **to be self-sufficient, to not ask for help...**

Because as a child there wasn't anybody who could help, there was nobody you could say, 'help me too...'

This is a very strong statement. It sounds a non-negotiable about not asking for help and yet he is falling apart.

So I'd been **made... self-sufficient**, fashioned in that way (sniffs)... also **I was taught**, learnt, I learnt that there was *no point in expressing* (sighs) **my emotions of homesickness, sadness** or anything else, because again there was **nobody to talk to**, (inbreath) **nobody who could help** with that...

Again, this is a very strong statement that reinforces the sense of isolation – nobody to talk to, to ask for help, no point in expressing the feelings of homesickness or sadness. It feels as if there is a deep well of sadness still there, buried deep.

And um... laughs, swallows, that's what got me into **trouble...** that **I thought** I had to **solve everything myself** that **I couldn't express** these more difficult emotions because I thought that **I mustn't that I shouldn't... it wasn't allowed**

Here it seems that the culture of boarding school made it taboo to ask for help, to express those difficult emotions. It seems very hard to break with these ingrained habits.

It wasn't right...

this feels difficult as I type, like amber melting and the trapped insects of feeling stirring.

It wasn't what a man did (sucks in a breath) and I think the third thing **I learnt was to be loyal... I was loyal.** (sucks in a breath)

Here the boarding school masculine stereotype of being made a man, self-sufficient and so on. Loyalty here, as in ingrained boarding school culture value means silence, means not looking, living deliberately in unawareness.

And perhaps **overly loyal**, soo (sucks in breath) **I couldn't** up to this point **say anything about boarding school** and that would have been **disloyal** and **I wasn't even aware** that that's what I was thinking and that's why **I've never looked at this** or *addressed this...* (swallows).

I think this transcript shows the embodied, emotional nature of AE research.

And then at the same time in my **psychotherapy** training at Roehampton in 2006 I came across **secular mindfulness** and its **practices** (breathes in) which I found **really helpful** (breathes, sucks his teeth). These **practices** and the **mindful theory** began to **glue me back together** (swallows).

Here is another piece of cultural context: secular training, secular mindfulness. Here it is the practices and mindful theory that help, where nothing has helped before.

Especially **realising** that **I was not an anxious person... I did have anxious thoughts, but these were not facts** (sniffs). These were **just passing mental events**. Difficult ones ahh um...

A key part of mindful theory, that you are not your thoughts and feelings, that you can defuse, or dis-identify from them.

But at the same time I came across **a book** called **The Jesus Prayer** by somebody called Simon Barrington-Ward, former Bishop of Coventry... and I met him... and he helped teach me about the Jesus Prayer.

Which I also found **really helpful**. And sort of you took the gold and silver of God's kingdom and **helped glue me back aah together**.

Another piece of cultural context. This time a Christian contemplative practice originating in the Orthodox church, with an Anglican Bishop and his book acting like a second person teacher. This was not something present in his Evangelical and Charismatic church culture.

And as I was **researching** the Jesus Prayer, I came across the **fifth century Greek Bishop** Diadochus of Photike and a phrase of his **translated** by Olivier Clement (swallows) ah 'Fix your eyes on the depths of your heart with an **unceasing mindfulness of God**' (sniffs). And **this phrase**, this idea of mindfulness of God **rang me like a bell** (breathes through his nose).

Here is more on the historical context of the Jesus Prayer and the emergence of a researcher self, not just a contemplative self. This is an act of retrieval, with the vogue word of our culture mindfulness resonating in a hugely amplified way with an application to God and with myself.

And **I knew it wasn't part of secular psychology**, you wouldn't have this idea of

Mindfulness of God... I knew from my research **Buddhists wouldn't generally talk about mindfulness of God** but here was a **Christian Bishop** talking about mindfulness of God um... but I also knew that **in my Christian culture**, modern day culture, **Evangelical, Charismatic**, the **idea of meditations or mindfulness** was **something you weren't supposed to talk about** (pause). It was **taboo** almost, ah, to be **considered suspicious**, and um...

This is a critical piece of analysis, that mindfulness of God is a Christian distinctive. An insight coming out of research.

I've been **looking back**, as part of um the **data I've collected** for **this research**, to an **article I wrote** for the Baptist Times on Thursday July 24th 2008 (rustle of paper)... It was called Mindful of Our Lives and I was talking about mindfulness and er talking about its links er within the Christian traditions... And I say 'Instead of doing the **Evangelical swoon** the minute words like meditation and mindfulness are used we need to start **exploring and practising contemplative prayer** in all its rich variety.'

I recognize that although a 5th century Greek Bishop might talk about mindfulness of God in his culture there is pressure to be silent, to avoid this subject in the Evangelical culture (mirroring the silencing pressure of boarding school). In AE research the data you collect include personal writings like journals, as well as public writing like articles. Here I am resisting the pressure to avoid the 'taboo' subject of mindfulness and meditation and historically publicly stated the importance of exploring and practising contemplative prayer. There seems to be a lack of historical awareness as to the congruence of mindfulness with historical Christian contemplative practices.

That's the first time I (breathes through his nose) **WROTE** (emphasis) about it publicly.

*There is a strong emphasis in the spoken voice about he **WROTE** publicly back in 2008. There is a link between the books that are self-help and writing.*

And then um I did a **dissertation** called *Why Now for Mindfulness?* as part of my **MA in psychotherapy**, and it was published in **2010**. And **I'm very careful** there ah **in the way I talk about mindfulness**, and I say 'there is **some evidence** that mindfulness is a universal human capacity' and that was really ah and so as to **not rock the boat**, to **not attract criticism**, to be tentative ah in what I thought and felt.

This is the first formal piece of research on mindfulness published in 2010. Here the resistance is more deeply buried, and some of the learned caution emerges, to not rock the boat, to be careful and tentative in the words used

And **looking back now** I would be a **lot more confident in what I say** that mindfulness is our universal human capacity for attention and awareness... and I would say much more than that.

Looking back from my current perspective, the position has shifted to a more confident definition of mindfulness, but also that much more can be said. If mindfulness is our God-given capacity for attention and awareness, then a simple definition of mindfulness of God is to focus our attention and awareness toward God.

Um and at the same I started **writing** about **contemplative prayer**, like the Jesus Prayer, like **slow meditative reading of scripture**, *lectio divina*... and **these two things were not part of my Christian culture, nor was secular mindfulness** and so I **had to go outside my own culture, my Christian ecosphere...** to **find something that helped...** um... and I **hadn't found the answers**, or the insights I **needed**, up to that point **within this expression of my Christian faith...** and that's something I will come back to when I'm interviewed again (door opens)...

Here there is an historical retrieval of an ancient Christian practice and a going outside my immediate Christian culture. A significant step – to have to go outside that culture for help. This insight can be critically analysed and further developed. Why was this the case?

Self-Interview One

Table 3 The 'I' Poem – The Second Listening

The I Poem (the second listening in the Listening Guide) highlighting subject, verb and object where appropriate and listed in order of appearance. I have placed key words in bold. My second listening to the 'I' poem is italicized.

I want to tell
I was very stressed
I've had

This first stanza recalls a different sense of stress, like metal that fails if it is stressed beyond its capacity. It suggests a rigidity that will break if the stress continues.

The shaping and making is of a self that seems rigid and whose patterns of coping, self-sufficiency, emotionally inexpressive nature, are no longer working.

I realised
I'd been shaped
I did
I read a book
I'm going back now

I would say
I had realising
I realised
I was
I had been shaped
I'd been shaped
I'd been made

I'd been made
I was taught

I thought
I had to solve everything
I couldn't express
I mustn't
I shouldn't

Here again we have the cultural context of being taught to think certain things, and the power of these thoughts if they are maladaptive. Within the context of the 'I' Poem the task is also to look for the dissociated, the

unconscious processes and we have this in the phrases, 'I couldn't express, I mustn't, I shouldn't...'

I think
I learnt
I was loyal
I couldn't
I wasn't even aware
I was thinking
I've never looked

Here we have again the associative logic of the poem, unearthing unawareness, not looking, like not looking under the bed as a child in case you see a monster. There's a block in awareness, emotions, and the body.

I came across
I found
I was not
I did have

I came across a book
I met him
I was researching
I knew it wasn't
I knew
I also knew

From not knowing we move to knowing.

I've been looking back
I've collected
I wrote
I was talking
I say
I WROTE

A move from not looking to looking back. There is a collection of data. An act of resistance

I'm very careful
I say
I thought
I would be
I say
I would say

The cautious self.

I started writing
I had to go outside
I hadn't found
I needed
I will

There's a necessity here, that despite the fear of looking elsewhere for help, I have no choice if I am not to fall apart.

Table 4 – The Third Listening – Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

(key words in bold, the transcript non-italicized, my listening in italics)

And so the story I want to tell is a story that hasn't been told before. Aah... and it is how my ah distress and lack of wellbeing brought into this research. It all began back in 2006 when I was very stressed, very anxious, very close to breakdown to burnout.

There is a voice that wants to speak and a voice that has been silenced.

And to help with this distress we were having some couple counselling... and it is the only counsellor who's made this point er in all the counselling I've had in my counselling training er she said no wonder you are feeling like you are feeling because you went to boarding school... **And that was an aha moment, A moment of meeting where I realised something that maybe this wasn't all my fault, maybe I'd been shaped er in a particular way.**

Here we have the beginnings of a compassionate voice that is in tension with the voice of judgement – it is my fault.

So what I did I read a book called *The Making of Them* by Nick Duffell all about boarding school experience and I'm going back now... I picked up three insights...

Which are I would say these are cold insights now the initial feeling I had realising these things has gone but...?

This feels incongruent as I hear my own voice and feel something empathic. This could be the inhibited voice that pushes the feelings away, see the incongruence with the feelings of my researcher self, listening afterwards and feeling tearful.

Three things that I realised that I was I had been shaped I'd been shaped, I'd been made Aah to be self-sufficient, to not ask for help...

Because as a child there wasn't anybody who could help, there was nobody you could say, 'help me too...'

So I'd been made... self-sufficient, fashioned in that way (sniffs)... also I was taught, learnt, I learnt that there was **no point in expressing (sighs) my emotions of homesickness, sadness or anything else, because again there was nobody to talk to, (inbreath) nobody who could help with that...**

Here again we have the stoic voice, and beneath it is a silenced voice that wasn't allowed to ask for help or express emotions.

And um... laughs, (swallows,) that's what got me into trouble. That I **thought I had to solve everything myself that I couldn't express these more difficult emotions because I thought that I mustn't that I shouldn't... it wasn't allowed...**

Here we have the stoic voice again... Here beneath this is the judgemental voice that says it isn't allowed, you mustn't talk about it...

It wasn't right...

It wasn't what a man did (sucks in a breath) and I think the third thing I learnt was to be **loyal... I was loyal.** (sucks in a breath).

Boarding school was an all-male environment. And here we have the loyal voice, which says don't speak. So the voice that wants to tell is a disloyal voice.

And perhaps **overly loyal**, soo (sucks in breath) I couldn't up to this point say anything about boarding school and that would have been **disloyal** and I wasn't even aware that that's what I was thinking and that's why I've never looked at this or (*I think this transcript shows the embodied, emotional nature of AE research*) addressed this... (swallows).

And then at the same time in my psychotherapy training at Roehampton in 2006 I came across secular mindfulness and its practices (breathes in) which I found really helpful (breathes, sucks his teeth). These practices and the mindful theory began to glue me back together (swallows).

Especially realising that I was not an anxious person... I did have anxious thoughts but these were not facts (sniffs). These were just passing mental events. Difficult ones ahh um

Here we have the voice of the observing self that can defuse from afflictive thoughts, the voice of meta-awareness. This is contrasted with the voice this is not aware.

But at the same time I came across a book called The Jesus Prayer by somebody called Simon Barrington-Ward, former Bishop of Coventry... and I met him... and he helped teach me about the Jesus Prayer.

Which I also found really helpful. And sort of you took the gold and silver of God's kingdom and helped glue me back aah together.

And as I was researching the Jesus Prayer, I came across the fifth century Greek Bishop Diadochus of Photike and a phrase of his translated by Olivier

Clement (swallows) ah Fix your eyes on the depths of your heart with an unceasing mindfulness of God (sniffs) **And this phrase, this idea of mindfulness of God rang me like a bell** (breathes through his nose).

Here we have the voice of the contemplative self. This is the deep self talking, as opposed to the self, living in the shallows.

And I knew it wasn't part of secular psychology, you wouldn't have this idea of

Mindfulness of God... I knew from my research Buddhists wouldn't generally talk about mindfulness of God but here was a Christian Bishop talking about mindfulness of God um... **but I also knew that in my Christian culture, modern day culture, Evangelical, Charismatic, the idea of meditations or mindfulness was something you weren't supposed to talk about (pause). It was taboo almost, ah, to be considered suspicious, and um...**

Here we have the voice of the careful self, the take care of yourself, that lived in a dangerous environment.

I've been looking back, as part of um the data I've collected for this research, to an article I wrote for the Baptist Times on Thursday July 24th 2008 (rustle of paper)... It was called Mindful of Our Lives and I was talking about mindfulness and er talking about its links er within the Christian traditions... **And I say 'Instead of doing the Evangelical swoon the minute words like meditation and mindfulness are used we need to start exploring and practising contemplative prayer in all its rich variety.'**

That's the first time I (breathes through his nose) **WROTE** (emphasis) about it publicly.

Here we have the voice of the self that puts up resistance, as opposed to the careful self.

And then um I did a **dissertation** called *Why Now for Mindfulness?* as part of my **MA in psychotherapy**, and it was published in **2010**. And **I'm very careful** there ah **in the way I talk about mindfulness**, and I say 'there is **some evidence** that mindfulness is a universal human capacity' and that was really ah and so as to **not rock the boat, to not attract criticism**, to be tentative ah in what I thought and felt. And **looking back now** I would be **a lot more confident in what I say** that mindfulness is our universal human capacity for attention and awareness... and I would say much more than that.

And here we have the careful voice in tension with the voice that is resistant. Or even a not very confident voice in tension with a much more confident voice.

Um and at the same I started **writing** about **contemplative prayer**, like the Jesus Prayer, like **slow meditative reading of scripture**, *lectio divina*... and **these two things were not part of my Christian culture**, nor was **secular mindfulness** and so I had to go outside my own culture, my **Christian ecosphere**... to **find something that helped**... um... and I **hadn't found the answers**, or the insights I **needed**, up to that point **within this expression of my Christian faith**... and that's something I will come back to when I'm interviewed again (door opens)...

Here we have a voice of critical analysis which is in tension with the voice that does not look, does not question, is unquestioningly loyal.

Self-interview two

Tuesday 30th April 2019 Tables 2, 3, 4

Table 2 First Listening – Listening for the Plot and my response

In this first listening my answers are in normal script, and my listening in italics.

Question, 'what has emerged?'

Having read the introduction and case study of the man whose story sounds very like mine; I am aware that this has given me words for my story... so I didn't have the words to describe it. It has also shown me how deep the trauma (breathes) was...

I did not have the words for my story. I was given the words. As I read these words, I get the sense of something that looks like an extinct volcano, of a distant but powerful eruption of pain which has left a crater. But that deep down there is still lava and unfinished experience.

strong words... abandoned, without love, without family... or even worse intermittently. Ten weeks without, four weeks with, ten weeks without, four weeks with... so you can never quite trust those times, moments of happiness with your family because it's just going to be taken away again.

The words are still evocative for me. What was worse is that the wound of homesickness would scab over and then be ripped open again. It was easier not to enter fully into the holidays.

And there was nobody (ironic chuckle) you could ask for help in the sense of how you were feeling. So, I remember (aah) being sent to boarding school at 6 3/4s to Manor House in Kenya for a term. I had my brother... but I just remember how lonely I felt, how I did not understand why I was there, what I had done, why I had to go for a term... and prior to that it had been idyllic in the Kenyan highlands, running around, freedom ... and here suddenly who could you speak too, I did not know who to ask what to do (um)... I literally felt like I had been silenced.

As I tell my story I recall the earliest memory of the trauma of separation, of abandonment, of loneliness, and powerlessness and there being nobody I could say 'help' too. This was a trauma that was repeated each successive term. The contrast between the idyllic nature of my early childhood in Kenya and the tearing away from this 'home' makes the pain of separation worse.

My memory is being a very chatty child up to that point and after that being much quieter, finding it much more difficult to speak, say what I thought or felt. (Breathes in...) I think I have always been hard on myself and dismissed had no understanding of how traumatic boarding school was. But now I can

see that the person I became was understandable. So, this self-sufficiency, no point asking for help, not expressing emotions, there was no point.

I remember being called 'egghead' by my parents because I had white- blond hair and large round face. In the car I would call myself 'Emperor Egg' and regale my family with stories of how I was going to rule the world. This would have been at the age of 4 and 5. As I remember this the story of Humpty Dumpty comes to mind. I had a great fall. I didn't realise that I needed putting back together. The words that come to mind as I hear my voice and read these words again are, thrown out of Eden, paradise lost, a forbidding angel with a fiery sword blocking the way back to the place of innocence. My tongue taken away and a babel of words that make no sense from outside, e.g. boarding school is a privilege, be grateful. In the plot of this story, I am lost, silenced, and in the end blame myself. Only now do I look back with compassion and understanding. I can enhance this compassion with mindful theory and practices of self-compassion. My old narrative self is being challenged in the plot by a new narrative of compassion towards my own self.

I remember one evening at the prep school I went to later in England, someone being homesick. And triggering an asthma attack and how it was dismissed and how they'd also tried to run away...

and they were brought back by the police and I just realised how pointless it was to try and escape because there was no escape, you were a prisoner, a captive, I was a prisoner, I was captive.

I also remember writing this now that they were crying hysterically and struggling to breathe and it still made no difference, they weren't going home. I have borrowed another's words that tell my story but also in the telling of my story memories emerge that were foundational and underlined even further how hopeless to think of escaping home was. I was stoic in the face of the hysterical terror that could have overwhelmed all of us. I stepped back from the edge. I had a strong survival instinct.

(Swallows) and there wasn't intimacy... it was an all-male environment apart from the matron and at the prep school we had a matron who was very tough (sniffs) and we had a younger matron who was 18 and was very kind... and at half term, my parents lived in Kenya and so I couldn't go (sigh) home, so often you had to stay at school (sigh), you might get invited home to another boy's family... but she invited me and another boy to her family farm, and we stayed there for a week. I remember that kindness...

Again, here I notice what is missing from the environment. I have distanced myself slightly by not saying 'I' but 'you...' There were splashes of kindness, and I remember the bittersweet nature of this short escapes, and the envy. These feelings bubble up as I listen to my voice. I suspect I have also blocked good experiences from the holidays and term-time.

I'm sitting here at Scargill House in a walled garden, because it feels safe here...and that's what I did, I walled myself in, built a wall of protection around myself, with gates, doors but difficult to let people in ... and in the walled garden I would bring books where I could (breathes) escape...

I sense this is an explanation from distance, can I get closer to the original experience. I am drawn to the safety of walled gardens though. This is an important symbol in my story. The turn to books is also important, and I know it was fantasy books by authors like Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. I know enchantment has its uses.

And so a second question is, 'if I wanted to write a letter to someone about my experience, who would I write it to?'

And in Joy Schaverien's book the client thinks about writing to his mother and actually that's not what I feel, what I feel is I want to write to my younger self... and that that having read these books I feel much more compassionate, much more understanding (aah) to that part of me... and so that's something I may do as well as part of this research.

Compassion and understanding were missing then, has been missing all my adult life, and yet the healing I believe will come by talking to my younger self with understanding and compassion. Perhaps intuitively I am drawn to mindfulness for its emphasis on compassion. There is a new narrative here.

Another research question I have is about, 'what has the impact been on me in the present moment, in the right here, in the right now?'

And I think one of the reasons I'm drawn to watchfulness and mindfulness (sighs) is that I am extremely vigilant and anxiously watching all the time in order to keep myself safe which is a product of the boarding school experience...

I pick up a new insight here about my watchfulness and vigilance.

what I am intuitively looking for is a kind of more gracious, more spacious watchfulness (sucks his teeth) that is different to what I've lived with for so long...swallows...

I am anxiously watchful in order to keep myself safe because the world of boarding school was not safe, it was a jungle. That this state of watchfulness could be redeemed, is part of the magnetic attraction of biblical watchfulness and mindfulness. Here again I can write a new narrative about what sort of watchfulness will I inhabit. My intuitive self plays an important role again here.

With this idea that I'm always on the edge of (breathes) happiness, I can't quite fully allow myself to experience it, to enter into it, (sniffs) just in case it is taken away again. (Swallows) and I think as an adult there has been a fear that I can't quite trust people, they will (swallows) abandon me and I

think in the past I have withdrawn from people when I've not felt safe... and that again intuitively (swallows) through Benedictine spirituality, being in the same church for 22 years I am trying to live in a place of stability and not withdraw (swallows), although I am aware that is what I've done to the people I love and have loved.

I am aware here of a sort of staccato delivery, there are interruptions as I breathe heavily, sniff, swallow (repeatedly). This mirrors the stop-start nature of boarding school and holidays, the interrupted nature of my life. Perhaps intuitively in Benedictine spirituality I am drawn to the vow of stability, as that was what I didn't experience. Benedictine spirituality mirrors the stability of God's presence.

The next question is, 'how do I feel right now?' (pauses)

And I feel very emotional... I feel it in my body welling up, within my heart, I feel the closeness of tears... it is less intense than the first time I read it...

I still sense part of me is distanced from the depth of what I really feel, but my researcher self responds with tears that well up.

I captured that elsewhere and will use that as part of this research. And I guess what I'm trying to do is bring into awareness what has been split off, dissociated, what I am trying to do is get to the primary wound.

This is the closest I have been to the felt story that I dissociated from.

And that is not just about the anxiety but also about the shame... that this was a shaming culture... you had to be constantly vigilant to obey the rules in order not be shamed... and still now today I want to obey the rules so I am not shamed. I want to be free from this, free from the gravitational pull of this. I've just had an operation for Quinsy where they lanced, drew out pus from a very swollen throat wall and tonsil (aah).

I can name anxiety and shame, and it feels like pus deep inside that constantly drains my energy and life. This running theme of being shamed shows how the past is still influencing the present and is part of the old narrative self. But also, positively I feel I have lanced some of this, drawn some of this out. My new narrative and experiential selves are, with God's presence pulling me out of the gravitational pull of the old self.

And just the sense that deep down, somewhere deep inside there's still this pus (swallows) of trauma, that still infects me and I'm trying to draw this pus out of this abscess within me. Constantly leaking anxiety and shame and in this process, I want to draw it out, to lance it. To be healed completely.

I have a sense that this listening has been cathartic. I have moved into a place where I am not frozen in the irreversible past but have a new story of being healed completely.

Table 3 The 'I' Poem – The Second Listening

(Transcript of the poem is normal script, and my listening is in italics).

I am aware
 I didn't have the words
 I remember
 I had my brother
 I just remember how lonely
 I felt
 I did not understand
 I was there
 I had done
 I had to go

I did not have the words for the trauma I had dissociated from. I was frozen with fear and loneliness and not knowing.

I did not know
 I literally felt
 I had been silenced

Only now am I finding the voice that was silenced, words for the trauma that was experienced.

I thought or felt
 I think I have always
 I can see
 I became

I remember
 I went
 I also remember
 I just realised
 I was a prisoner
 I was captive

The words of another boarding school survivor gave me words for what was unspeakable, but also triggered memories I could access. Boarding school was a prison and there was no great escape.

I couldn't go
 I remember that kindness

I'm sitting here
 I did
 I walled myself in
 I would bring books

I could (breathes) escape

The symbol of the walled garden where I felt safe in the here and now, after the trauma of an operation, reminded me that I had walled myself in to protect myself.

I feel
I feel
I feel
I may do

Inchoate.

I think
I'm drawn
I am extremely vigilant
I am intuitively looking
I've lived
I'm always
I can't quite
I think

I wish to replace this hyper-vigilance with a fearless watching that is more spacious. Almost here it is if I am looking through prison bars.

I can't quite
I think
I have withdrawn
I've not felt safe

I retreat behind the walls when I do not feel safe. I may have been safe but not felt it. My fear is that others would withdraw from me so I withdrew first.

I am trying
I am aware
I've done
I love

I feel
I feel
I read it
I captured

I'm trying to do
I'm trying to do
I want to obey

I am not shamed
I want to be free

Here there are different aspects of the wrestling to extricate myself from the tyranny of wanting to obey, to avoid being shamed, of wanting freedom from this captivity.

I've just had
I'm trying to draw
I want to draw it out

I am trying to lance, to draw out the pus that remains from the past, still infecting me, robbing me of strength and energy and freedom.

Table 4 – The Third Listening – Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

(In this third listening my answers are in normal script, and my listening in italics.)

Question, ‘what has emerged?’

Having read the introduction and case study of the man whose story sounds very like mine; I am aware that this has given me words for my story... so I didn't have the words to describe it. It has also shown me how deep the trauma (breathes) was...

I must borrow words from another, so that I can find my voice. It is not just that the words have objective truth for me, they are hot, almost too hot to speak.

strong words... abandoned, without love, without family... or even worse intermittently. Ten weeks without, four weeks with, ten weeks without, four weeks with...so you can never quite trust those times, moments of happiness with your family because it's just going to be taken away again.

These borrowed words trigger memories of this pattern of fracture and repair, fracture and repair until I am calcified, and my voice is calcified.

And there was nobody (ironic chuckle) you could ask for help in the sense of how you were feeling. So, I remember (aah) being sent to boarding school at 6 3/4s to Manor House in Kenya for a term. I had my brother... but I just remember how lonely I felt, how I did not understand why I was there, what I had done, why I had to go for a term... and prior to that it had been idyllic in the Kenyan highlands, running around, freedom... and here suddenly who could you speak too, I did not know who to ask what to do (um)... I literally felt like I had been silenced. My memory is being a very chatty child up to that point and after that being much quieter, finding it much more difficult to speak, say what I thought or felt. (Breathes in...)

If there is no one to speak to, there is no point in speaking. To voice something somebody needs to be listening. Little children should be neither seen nor heard. Long hidden now as internal scripts are the adult voices that do not allow any dissent, ‘It's a privilege to be here, you are so fortunate,’ although now I do not feel this to be true.

I think I have always been hard on myself and dismissed had no understanding of how traumatic boarding school was. But now I can see that the person I became was understandable. So, this self-sufficiency, no point asking for help, not expressing emotions, there was no point.

An internalised and critical voice is giving way to a compassionate voice that understands and says, ‘I acknowledge your pain.’

I remember one evening at the prep school I went to later in England, someone being homesick. And triggering an asthma attack and how it was dismissed and how they'd also tried to run away...

and they were brought back by the police and I just realised how pointless it was to try and escape because there was no escape, you were a prisoner, a captive, I was a prisoner, I was captive.

The body's voice is silenced; the emotional voice is silenced. No one speaks up for the prisoner or the captive.

(Swallows) and there wasn't intimacy... it was an all-male environment apart from the matron and at the prep school we had a matron who was very tough (sniffs) and we had a younger matron who was 18 and was very kind...and at half term my parents lived in Kenya and so I couldn't go (sigh) home, so often you had to stay at school (sigh), you might get invited home to another boy's family...but she invited me and another boy to her family farm, and we stayed there for a week. I remember that kindness...

There are kind voices woven in like a silver lining, bitter-sweet these voices, leaving me envious of others. Here the dissociated voice sighs without words. As close as I can get to that voice right now.

I'm sitting here at Scargill House in a walled garden, because it feels safe here... and that's what I did, I walled myself in, built a wall of protection around myself, with gates, doors but difficult to let people in ... and in the walled garden I would bring books where I could (breathes) escape...

I say with my rational and stoic voice I built a wall, but far away I fear that it was the primal scream at separation and abandonment that threw up walls, , the psychic defence that flared up in desperation, the lava of pain and trauma. In time this became a crater, giving the semblance of extinction.

And so a second question is, 'if I wanted to write a letter to someone about my experience, who would I write it to?'

And in Joy Schaverien's book the client thinks about writing to his mother and actually that's not what I feel, what I feel is I want to write to my younger self...and that that having read these books I feel much more compassionate, much more understanding (aah) to that part of me... and so that's something I may do as well as part of this research.

I can be the first voice that acknowledges fully the pain.

Another research question I have is about, 'what has the impact been on me in the present moment, in the right here, in the right now?' And I think one of the reasons I'm drawn to watchfulness and mindfulness (sighs) is that I am extremely vigilant and anxiously watching all the time in order to keep myself safe which is a product of the boarding school experience... what I am intuitively looking for is a kind of more gracious, more spacious

watchfulness (sucks his teeth) that is different to what I've lived with for so long... (swallows)... with this idea that I'm always on the edge of (breathes) happiness, I can't quite fully allow myself to experience it, to enter into it, (sniffs) just in case it is taken away again. (Swallows) and I think as an adult there has been a fear that I can't quite trust people, they will (swallows) abandon me and I think in the past I have withdrawn from people when I've not felt safe...and that again intuitively (swallows) through Benedictine spirituality, being in the same church for 22 years I am trying to live in a place of stability and not withdraw (swallows) so, although I am aware that is what I've done to the people I love and have loved.

Although I have lost my natural voice, and my voice is stripped of emotion and flat, here again it is in the sighs and the swallowing that the hidden voice of trauma leaks. The intuitive voice of wisdom says seek stability, the intuitive voice says do not withdraw...it is a voice of health.

The next question is, 'how do I feel right now?' (pauses)

And I feel very emotional... I feel it in my body welling up, within my heart, I feel the closeness of tears... it is less intense than the first time I read it... I captured that elsewhere and will use that as part of this research. And I guess what I'm trying to do is bring into awareness what has been split off, dissociated, what I am trying to do is get to the primary wound.

I feel this and my voice says it distantly... The happy voice is missing; the sad voice is missing. I haven't dared to mourn or lament. I need to find these voices.

And that is not just about the anxiety but also about the shame ... that this was a shaming culture... you had to be constantly vigilant to obey the rules in order not be shamed... and still now today I want to obey the rules so I am not shamed. I want to be free from this, free from the gravitational pull of this. I've just had an operation for Quinsy where they lanced, drew out pus from a very swollen throat wall and tonsil (aah). And just the sense that deep down, somewhere deep inside there's still this pus (swallows) of trauma, that still infects me and I'm trying to draw this pus out of this abscess within me. Constantly leaking anxiety and shame and in this process, I want to draw it out, to lance it. To be healed completely.

In healing I will find all my voices.

Fourth listening – mindfulness of God

As with the first interview I have added a fourth listening, asking where is God? I am aware through mindful theory that I have a negativity bias, and so I have been focusing on the distortion of my narrative self, the trauma of separation. I am aware that it did not seem God was there explicitly, but I ask myself now was there anything good, sacramental in this experience? The clue lies in my references to Kenya as a paradise, but also in this phrase, 'with this idea that I'm always on the edge of (breathes) happiness, I can't quite fully allow myself to experience it, to enter into it, (sniffs) just in case it is taken away again.' The origin of this phrase lies in the pattern of boarding school life of term-time in Somerset, and holidays in Kenya. A pattern of agony and ecstasy. As I recorded in my journal:

'On the first day of the holidays in Kenya I would wake full of dread, but then the sunlight of home would filter through the curtains and the dread would leave and I would briefly feel happy. When it was the first night back at boarding school I would wake up feeling happy until I realised where I was, and then the happiness would seep out, and dread replaced it.'

I realise now I was happy in the period of the holiday between arriving and leaving. I am also aware that the African landscape, the animals, the coast, the marine life, the plants, became deeply important symbols in my secret inner life. I realise now they gained sacramental force, they sustained me in the English winters with their created beauty.

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