Lives as Revelatory Texts:
Constructing a Spiritual Biography of Arleen McCarty Hynes, O.S.B.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Of The Catholic University of America
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Washington, DC

2014
Throughout Christian history, hagiographical works were written as instruments for the adulation and emulation of spiritual exemplars, or saints. At their most effective, these literary pieces had transformative value for their readers. Modern methods of scholarship led understandably to a more critical stance toward these hagiographic materials, casting doubt on their historical accuracy and spiritual value. However, Edith Wyschogrod in her 1990 work, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, cautions against letting the pendulum swing too far in the direction of historicizing a saint’s life while neglecting the divine-human transformation that may have occurred there.

Kees Waaijman in his 2002 work *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* provides a scientific framework which takes seriously the dialogic nature of spiritual experience. Spiritual biography utilizes what Waaijman calls *form-descriptive* research tools from the fields of history, the social sciences, literary criticism and theology and employs them in *mystagogic* research to study the transformative divine-human relational process in an individual life. This study introduces and exemplifies the genre of spiritual biography as an update to pre-scientific hagiography that nonetheless treats individual lives as revelatory texts.

Arleen McCarty Hynes (1916-2006) is an apt subject for a spiritual biography. Her life’s work as a wife, mother, lay Catholic leader, political activist, bibliotherapist and Benedictine sister was rooted in an underlying belief in the transformative power of the texts of Scripture,
poetry and story. Arleen and her husband, Emerson Hynes, were Benedictine oblates of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, where Emerson taught ethics and they raised their ten children according to *The Rule of St. Benedict*. They moved to Washington to work with Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota. After the early death of her husband, Arleen Hynes helped launch the field of bibliotherapy as a librarian at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC, and then returned to Minnesota to become a Benedictine sister. Her letters, journals, interviews and published pieces suggest the revelatory role of text in her personal and professional life, especially during times of change. Her life narrative serves here as a case study of the genre of spiritual biography as revelatory text.
This dissertation by Elizabeth Leibold McCloskey fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Spirituality approved by Raymond Studzinski, Ph.D., as Director and by Joseph Komonchak, Ph.D., and William Dinges, Ph.D. as Readers.

______________________________
Raymond Studzinski, Ph.D., Director

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Joseph Komonchak, Ph.D., Reader

______________________________
William Dinges, Ph.D., Reader
This study is dedicated to all the unknown saints of Alcoholics Anonymous who have persistently pursued holiness in daily life, whose delight in God’s presence and faith in God’s power has made them, in the words of Alcoholics Anonymous adherents, “grateful and free.”
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Variation on A Theme By Rilke

(The Book of Hours, Book I, Poem 1, Stanza 1)

A certain day became a presence to me;
there it was, confronting me – a sky, air, light:
a being. And before it started to descend
from the height of noon, it leaned over
and struck my shoulder as if with
the flat of a sword, granting me
honor and a task. The day’s blow
rang out, metallic – or it was I, a bell awakened,
and what I heard was my whole self
saying and singing what it knew: I can.

~ Denise Levertov1~

This poem, one that Arleen Hynes used in her bibliotherapy work, captures my experience of writing this dissertation. So many days I was rewarded in my search for the perfect sun-splashed window at the libraries at Catholic University and Marymount University and at the kitchen tables at Bryce and in Falls Church. I was generously given original sources and consistent encouragement by the Hynes family, and so many opportunities by my family and by CUA to retreat into the research and writing that I felt it my honor and my task to do.

Everyone has been unbelievably patient with me and supportive as I have done this work, and that patience was borne most gallantly by Peter, Brian, Collin and Nora who I am sure noticed that the more I wrote, the more forgetful and prone to distraction I became in daily living. Arleen’s spiritual friendships in Arlington were with a group of women who have been

among my own spiritual mothers, most especially Dolores Leckey, and each of them has supported my work through prayer and genuine interest. The Hynes family has not only made themselves available to me for conversations in person, over the phone and in emails and letters, but they have also honored me by including me in family gatherings at Patrick and Mary’s house in Arlington, and by putting me in the category of extended family by dubbing me a “Hynes-Chooser.” Mary Hynes-Berry has welcomed me several times to her Chicago home, giving me access to every bit of material she has and allowing me to take a whole suitcase of original letters home with me. My adviser at The Catholic University of America Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., encouraged me when I forgot my own resolve, saying to me what deep down my whole self knew: you can. My father, Peter McCloskey, has always believed in me, even when I have not. Special thanks to my mother Louise McCloskey for aiding in the sorting and identifying of the hundreds of letters and for helpful comments on early drafts, to my niece Kate Connelly for carefully proofreading a later draft, to my daughter Nora for standing at the copier for hours one summer duplicating a large portion of Arleen’s letters and who has “extraordinary verbal skills” (as her namesake and grandmother Nora Leibold pointed out before Nora was a year old), to my sons Brian and Collin who have both grown to be impressive men with a passion for writing and living meaningfully, and for my husband Peter for his constant encouragement and love throughout our thirty-two years together, about half of which I have been a student in some capacity.

Each of these loved ones has been patient, patient with me as I have done work which I believe that the Holy Spirit, with a little help from Arleen, drew me to. There have been so many moments of sudden inspiration, leading me to a certain person, a certain letter or journal entry, a certain insight. I feel certain these were aided by Arleen, eager to see the work she began in her
life completed. Conscious of how little I have added, I keep in mind Paul’s encouragement that God “who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion . . .”^2 It has been my privilege to serve as one of those who feels appointed and anointed to help continue the transformative work of Arleen Hynes. My hope is that those who meet her in this text are moved and changed by the encounter.

^2 Philippians 1:6, NRSV.
Introduction: Choosing Arleen McCarty Hynes

Arleen McCarty Hynes (1916-2006) would be the first to say she was no saint, as her niece Sister Nancy Hynes pointed out at her memorial service. Yet Arleen Hynes is the subject of this spiritual biography, a genre descendent from the lives of the saints. Unlike the lives of saints from long ago, however, the spiritual biography of Arleen McCarty Hynes will not present an idealized version of a seemingly perfect person destined from birth for sainthood. Arleen McCarty Hynes is not likely to become a candidate for canonization, nor would that idea have ever occurred to her. She once described herself merely as “a creature of God gifted with average intelligence, a strong sense of wonder, and a persistent drive.” She made a big mark in a small and possibly shrinking field called bibliotherapy, a mental health practice that relies on literature as a healing tool. While the contours of her adult life do seem uncommon—she was the mother of ten by her mid-forties, a widow and bibliotherapy pioneer in her mid-fifties, a Benedictine sister taking her final vows in her mid-sixties—in many ways she was an ordinary woman. What makes her special, and indeed what this spiritual biography suggests makes each ordinary person who seeks holiness special, is the way in which a person perceives God as a dynamic presence throughout her life, especially during times of major change.

The spiritual biography of Arleen McCarty Hynes will attempt to map the role of texts in the ongoing conversions that took place during the transitional phases of her life. Becoming a

3 Arleen McCarty Hynes Memorial Service, September 8, 2006, St. Benedict’s Monastery, comments of Sister Nancy Hynes.
mother, becoming a bibliotherapist, becoming a Benedictine sister and, in the end, becoming terminally ill, were threshold periods in Arleen McCarty Hynes’ long life. During each of these times, the texts of scripture, the monastic rule, poetry, and her own letters, journals, and memoirs acted for her as recurrent mediators of God’s dynamic presence in her life. Her own experience of words as healing and transformative led her naturally to pursue a profession in bibliotherapy, with its use of poetry and literature as therapeutic tools. A central character in the story of Arleen McCarty Hynes’ spiritual and professional life, and the one explored is this study, is that of the revelatory texts that accompanied her through her continual changes. Further, the power of texts in Arleen’s life as a vehicle for her to encounter God is a fitting theme for a spiritual biography, a genre which itself offers the presentation of a life as a revelatory text.

This emphasis on the role of text in Arleen Hynes’ own transformation is especially fitting given her long association with the Benedictine order as well as her life’s work in the field of bibliotherapy. Both the Benedictine tradition and the mental health discipline of bibliotherapy promote the practice of reading for transformation. From their earliest married days, Arleen and her husband Emerson Hynes were Benedictine oblates of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, where Emerson Hynes taught ethics and where the couple raised their ten children using The Rule of Saint Benedict as a guide to family life. Emerson and Arleen Hynes remained oblates of St. John’s Abbey even after they came to Washington, DC, where they moved so that Emerson Hynes could work on the Senate legislative staff for close friend Senator Eugene

5 See Raymond Studzinski O.S.B., Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2009) for a history of this practice, suggestions for its contemporary use, and the use of the term “reading for transformation.”

McCarthy of Minnesota. Emerson Hynes suffered a stroke in 1968, just weeks after returning from the traumatic Democratic Presidential Convention in Chicago. The Hynes couple was at the convention in support of the presidential aspirations of Eugene McCarthy. There they witnessed the police brutality against many of McCarthy’s anti-war supporters. With her husband’s health compromised in the fall of 1968, Arleen Hynes looked for a librarian job so that Emerson would be able to retire at the end of Eugene McCarthy’s Senate term in January 1969. She found a librarian position at St. Elizabeths mental hospital in Washington, DC and began work there in the fall of 1970. Emerson Hynes died in 1971, having suffered a second stroke and a heart attack. It was while working as the patient librarian at St. Elizabeths when Arleen Hynes helped launch the field of bibliotherapy. She made an indelible mark as a pioneer in this field, helping found the National Association for Poetry Therapy as well as the National Federation for Bibliopoetry Therapy, the credentialing arm of the profession. In 1978, St. Elizabeths Hospital awarded Arleen Hynes the Dorothea Dix Award for her contributions to the institution. Two years later Arleen Hynes joined the Benedictine order in Minnesota, where she continued her poetry therapy work and co-authored the definitive training textbook for bibliotherapy with her daughter Mary Hynes-Berry. Arleen Hynes’ twin sister Eileen McCarty Yeager, at that time married with

7 St. Elizabeths was the first large-scale federally funded mental hospital and was built in the mid-nineteenth century, largely due to the efforts of Dorothea Dix, an early advocate for humane treatment of the mentally ill. It stood for over a hundred years as an innovative institution that used natural beauty to create a therapeutic environment. In the 1970s, St. Elizabeths was on the forefront of creative mental health therapies using art, music and literature. Originally named The Government Hospital for the Insane, the name changed to St. Elizabeths in its early days. St. Elizabeths (with no apostrophe) was the name of the tract of land upon which it was built. See Gail S. Lowe, ed., *East of the River: Continuity and Change* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, Anacostia Community Museum, 2010) and *Asylum* [videorecording]: *A History of the Mental Institution in America*, directed by Sarah Mondale, produced by Sarah Mondale and Sarah B. Patton, produced by Stone Lantern Films, Inc. (Princeton, NJ: Films for Humanities and Science, 2004).

six children and living in Texas, was also involved in poetry therapy. Eileen Yeager died in 1995, preceding her twin sister in death by more than ten years. A few years before her own death in 2006, Arleen Hynes was recognized by the National Association for Poetry Therapy as a pioneer in the field of bibliotherapy. Arleen McCarty Hynes died September 5, 2006 at St. Scholastica Convent, the retirement and assisted living community of the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict in Minnesota.

The Hynes family has a name for those family members who have married into or otherwise have chosen to associate with the Hynes Family. They call them “Hynes-choosers.” The above narrative begins to describe why Arleen Hynes was chosen as the subject of this spiritual biography, but does not tell the story of how she was chosen. In the fall of 2006, I had made it known to my spirituality professor, Raymond Studzinski, with whom I was taking a directed readings course in spiritual biography, that I was looking for an American Catholic woman of the twentieth century who made a noticeable public mark to be the subject of my dissertation. Firmly of the view that a life of faith ought to make a positive difference, I was beginning to explore the ways in which spiritual biography could be used as a testament to the constructive role that faith can play in the public world. One morning when Dr. Studzinski and I were meeting for our one-on-one seminar, he handed me an obituary he had clipped from the Washington Post, and said he thought I might be interested in this woman, Arleen Hynes.9

I was immediately interested, and seeing that she had lived in Arlington and Minnesota, I thought there was a good chance that I knew people who had known her. The first person I called

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was my spiritual director, Jean Sweeney, who told me that most of her close friends had been deeply influenced by Arleen Hynes as young Catholic women in Arlington, Virginia in the 1960s. She suggested I call Dolores Leckey, then a Senior Fellow at the Woodstock Center for Theology at Georgetown University, who had hired me at the Bishop’s Committee on Laity, Family and Children as an intern the summer of 1986. To my surprise, Dolores Leckey, who had been serving as a mentor to me since that time and who had involved me in various Catholic projects throughout the intervening twenty years, was in bible studies and prayer groups in the 1960s and 1970s with Arleen Hynes, a woman she considered her spiritual elder. Among other shared interests with Arleen Hynes, Leckey had been drawn into a study of Vatican II documents that Hynes had organized. In the mid-1980s, unbeknownst to me as I served as an intern to Dolores Leckey, she was making plans to write a dual biography on Hynes and the cloistered poet Jessica Powers, whose poetry had profoundly affected Hynes. Leckey had conducted a series of interviews of Hynes in Minnesota in the late 1980s, but ultimately decided to make Jessica Powers the sole focus of her biographical work.\(^{10}\) She was supportive of my picking up the project, twenty years later, and offered the recordings of her interviews with Arleen as a source. Further, I contacted Albert Eisele, a family friend, former editor of *The Hill* and biographer of Eugene McCarthy, who I knew had attended St. John’s University. He was also enthusiastic about the idea of my writing about Arleen Hynes; he had taken classes from Emerson Hynes at St. John’s University and held both the professor and his wife in high regard. Both Dolores Leckey and Al Eisele encouraged me to contact Arleen’s oldest daughter, Mary Hynes-Berry, to let her know of my interest in writing about her mother. Mary immediately welcomed the idea, and

graciously made herself and her home in Chicago, where most of Arleen Hynes’ letters were stored in an attic, available to me. Every door to making Arleen Hynes the subject of my dissertation was thrown wide open before me. Rather than being a “Hynes-chooser,” it might be more accurate to say that Arleen Hynes chose me.
Chapter 1: Spiritual Biography as Revelatory Text

I. Spiritual Biography: Critical Descendent of Hagiography

A spiritual biography is particularly apt for the study of Arleen Hynes’ life because the genre of spiritual biography, as will be defined in this project, is a distinctive approach to a life narrative that shares some characteristics with lectio divina and bibliotherapy. In particular, a spiritual biography as proposed here is a type of biography undertaken both as an informative and transformative exercise. It is a genre that I propose can assist in the academic study of spirituality. The different ways of viewing religious art can serve as an analogy to the perspectives brought to viewing a life as revelatory. Just as art can be studied with an eye for the forms and techniques employed, so too can it be appreciated for the religious meaning to be discovered in it. Spiritual biography picks up on the idea that stories of holy people, as well as the art that depicts them, can carry spiritual significance. Though spiritual biography is an emerging genre, the notion that engaged contact with a text can lead to a conversion experience is an ancient one. This type of dynamic engagement with a biographical text can be traced back as far as Plato’s writings on his philosophical master, Socrates.11 Scriptural biographical portraits have roots almost as old, cropping up in the Hebrew Scriptures in the written portraits of such religious giants as Abraham, Moses, and Elijah. Narratives of Jesus of Nazareth, recorded in the four Gospel accounts, are life stories with arguably the most profound and far-reaching influence. Early Christians wrote of the lives of the martyrs and ascetics, recalling the final words and death of the martyrs in Acta and the heroic struggles of the ascetics in vita.

One of the most famous of the vita was Athanasius’ *The Life of Antony*. St. Augustine of Hippo was deeply affected by this book when it was brought to his attention as a young man; he and his friends were eager to imitate St. Antony’s passionate commitment to a virtuous life. Just as Augustine’s *Confessions* defined the genre of an autobiography of the inner life, *The Life of Antony* served as a model for sacred biography, the story of another’s soul, intended to captivate, edify and transform its audience. These hagiographic stories of souls, or the lives of saints, have marked the Christian literary landscape for hundreds of years, being especially prolific in medieval times. Yet these stories of souls seldom told the whole story, and rarely told the stories of women and men outside the vowed religious life. My study is part of an effort to revive and retool this genre of hagiography in the form of *spiritual biography* as a contemporary approach to the academic study of spirituality. In this context, spiritual biography is an effort to craft a historically factual, anthropologically informed and psychologically attuned written life story whose intention is the reader’s spiritual transformation.

A parallel that this work will seek to draw between spiritual biography and medieval hagiography is that both seek to employ the powerful instrument of language to interpret the sacred. In medieval times and beyond, saints’ lives were read with eagerness. Not only were they read because the subject matter was that of a holy person, but because the work itself was an “authoritative discourse” able to orchestrate a “communication between God and the ordinary Christian” who might read it or be read to from it. Religious historian Peter Brown, in *The Cult*
of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity, acknowledged the vital contribution of hagiographic works as not only providing examples of good people, but also examples of God, revelations of God operative in a human life.¹⁵

Yet readers today view these hagiographic stories through a critical lens, through “spectacles of suspicion” because of the fantastic claims made and some distorted notions expressed.¹⁶ Theologian Elizabeth Johnson notes that “the modern and postmodern spirit offers a poor fit for traditional appreciation of the saints. Not only does this age deflate heroes, but the hagiography and iconography of many established saints render them remote and even singularly unattractive to contemporary concerns.”¹⁷ Rather than presenting a human life worthy of emulation, contemporary readers detect a propagandistic elevation of the saint as a deified life worthy of adoration, a perfect being, whose virtues “appear even before birth, and difficulties, temptations, and conflicts serve not to perfect but only to manifest a perfection already present.”¹⁸ In reading these hagiographic works, the reader might conclude that these heroes of the faith were closer to a conception of God than most ordinary people could ever hope to be. Such accounts of hagiographic adulation were not necessarily concerned about historical accuracy. Theologian Lawrence Cunningham in A Brief History of Saints identifies the problem noting, “many of the saints are known to us only by name to which fantastic folktales have

become appended with imagination supplying what history lacks.”19 To glean any truth from these works is to do so through the “misty gloss of hagiographic exuberance,” observes the poet and literature scholar Scott Cairns in his foreword to a recent edition of The Life of Antony.20

Medieval acta and vita are studied most seriously today in a field we now call hagiography. The contemporary hagiographer does not write sacred biography, but rather works in a manner reminiscent of archaeologists, digging through texts to uncover clues about the culture and the people who produced and read these works. Contemporary use of the term hagiography now refers more often to the field of study which examines these texts than to the hagiographic texts themselves, which no longer necessarily maintain the identity of holy writing. The medievalists or hagiographers studying this literature have made it clear that “these texts are not transparent windows into the saints’ lives, their society, or even the spirituality of their age.”21 What these lives of the saints do communicate is something of the dominant theology, morality and political culture of a particular age. As Stuart notes, “saint-making is perhaps the most effective form of theological communication in the church because it concretizes, indeed incarnates, the ideology dominating at the time. Lives make much better reading or watching than apostolic letters or theological treatises and they reach more people.”22 In that interpretive context, the texts are viewed as revealing, but not necessarily revelatory.

Furthermore, lives of saints or holy persons are judged dubious if too complimentary of their subjects. This presumption can be detected in a 2001 review in Religious Studies Review

21 Geary, 10.
22 Stuart, Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood, 37.
that contrasts modern hagiography with hermeneutically sound scholarship. In an analysis of selected Hindu literature, the review characterizes as academically suspect the work emerging from devotees of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and his disciple Swami Vivekananda. The author cautions against using the research and interpretation of devoted followers, even though such research “occasionally exhibits a somewhat scholarly (albeit reluctant) restraint.”

When it is “blissfully and openly adoring” of the Hindu leader, it ought to simply be dismissed. On the other hand, those works that receive the author’s stamp of approval as “eminently scholarly” are those that provide a “trenchant critique,” question the “ascetic image of Vivekananda,” and challenge assumptions in crisp, humorous and fresh ways. Though the review’s author may or may not be correct in her analysis of the particular works she evaluated in this review, her overall framework of pitting belief against scholarship is questionable. Her stark contrast between hagiography and hermeneutics leaves little room for spiritual biographies both sympathetic and scholarly in their approach. Accepting this premise seems to leave only two possible and unappealing models for religious biography. Either a religious biography looks at a revered life and writes about all the flaws, shortcomings and failings of that person to poke holes in the notion that that person should be revered or seen as holy, or a religious biography looks at a life in idealized form, with trumpets blaring and angels singing and the unavoidable conclusion that this person be regarded as far above the ordinary mortal. Spiritual biography is a genre that belies this categorization.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
The emergence of a new genre called spiritual biography prompts the question: have scholars gone too far in deconstructing hagiographical texts into their literary and rhetorical components, so that in the end the “holy” texts are left saying very little? Post-modern philosopher Edith Wyschogrod, in *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, thought so. She cautioned against letting the pendulum swing too far in the direction of historicizing a saint’s life while neglecting the divine-human transformation that may have occurred there, as well as the communication of that interaction that might be embedded in the text. Her project with respect to saints and moral philosophy was not to advance a moral theory, but rather to pay attention “to concrete social experience, to encounters with other persons.”27 She posited that there is value and utility in what she called the narrativity, corporeality, textuality, and historicality of saints’ lives, particularly as they assist in the building of moral lives today.28 Likewise, Lawrence Cunningham suggests that the tradition of saints should be of interest to others besides social historians, students of iconography, folklorists, and experts in popular religion. He notes that the lives of saints represent an under-used resource in Christian spirituality.29 Sharing the premise that hagiography has something to offer the contemporary scholar, Elizabeth Stuart suggests throughout *Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood* that a second hearing be given the saints, with an ear toward listening to the hidden whispers of the divine there. She maintains, too, that careful reading and writing, particularly of

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27 Ibid., 6.
28 Ibid., See “Why Saints?” Chapter One.
29 Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 3.
women’s narratives, can alter disquieting notions of God, nature, the human body, sin, and other categories of unsound theological thought that linger even in present times. Spiritual biographies of the ordinary faithful—past and present—that look the subjects squarely in the eye may draw readers more closely to the God who truly saves, she posits, saving us even from invalid anthropology and theology.30

Taking a cue from these scholars of philosophy and theology, this project seeks to dust off the genre of hagiography, making room in our bookshelves for what might be its contemporary iteration: spiritual biography. Spiritual biography is an emerging genre, as yet not fully defined, that this project suggests is an effort to do holy writing in the tradition of hagiography, using language to capture and reveal something of the dynamic interaction of God as perceived in a real and broken individual’s life. It regards language as a powerful instrument for bringing human beings into an intimate relationship with the God of their understanding, for forming and re-forming how they understand God. It recognizes that certain uses of language are privileged in that their meaning relies on an interaction between the reader and the text. It challenges the still potent characterization of saints, especially women saints, as somehow divorced from their bodies. Finally, it challenges the prevailing academic supposition that critical scholarship and hagiography are by definition incompatible, that biographical works meant to captivate and transform the reader by examining the sacred in a human life are necessarily hazy or lazy hagiography.

Instead of contrasting hagiography with hermeneutics, I intend in this spiritual biography project to propose a model for hermeneutical hagiography. A hermeneutical hagiography in this

30 Stuart, Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood, 39.
model would be the writing of a realistic spiritual biography marked by historical integrity and a healthy dose of suspicion for accepted characterizations of sanctity while at the same time bearing witness to how the dynamic work of God is perceived in an individual life. Hermeneutical hagiography in this understanding would be spiritual biography in which the narrative is true and compelling and the experience of reading it potentially revelatory.

In *A Brief History of Saints* Lawrence Cunningham asks whether there is “any possibility that the literary tradition of the ‘lives of the saints’ continues today in other forms, more accessible to a new generation of Christians?”31 Spiritual biography may be one such form. Contemporary readers long for models of holiness that allow for their exemplars to have struggled with demons other than those that St. Antony so valiantly fought off in his desert tomb. At the same time it is common parlance to remark that a person is certainly no saint if he or she struggles with addiction or rage or infidelity or any of the other demons that can plague a life. Yet a fresh look at holiness suggests that it is precisely recognition of one’s own demons and awareness of one’s dependence on a higher power such as God which marks the holy life. If so, a frank appraisal of a subject’s failings ought also to mark holy writing. Hermeneutical hagiographers might take a page from the books of Scripture, particularly the Gospels, which record the many mistakes, for example, of the apostle Peter while at the same time detailing the amazing ways that he experienced God working in his life.

The subject of a spiritual biography need not be a celebrated and celibate hero of the Christian faith on the road to canonization. The premise of spiritual biography is that God can be experienced in the lives of ordinary women and men striving for holiness in daily life, struggling

with finances, addictions, family dysfunction and other hurdles. The story of their lives can be the story of their perception of God’s intervention and grace; the text of ordinary human lives can be a powerful purveyor of divine action. Rather than heroes, the subjects of spiritual biographies ought to be helpers. As feminist theologian Carter Heyward points out, heroes might make us feel powerless or dependent on them to be saved or made better, while helpers “show us who we are . . . . Helpers call us forth into our power in relation and strengthen our sense of ourselves.”

**II. The Hermeneutics of Spiritual Biography**

The critical successor to hagiography, a hermeneutical hagiography called spiritual biography, will need more tools at its disposal than a simple acknowledgment that nobody is perfect (not even the saints), though that viewpoint did seem to be conspicuously absent from medieval hagiographic literature. To revive the genre of hagiography in the form of spiritual biography requires a more rigorous methodological approach. Because scholars do not always use the two terms *methodology* and *method* the same way, let me define my terms. By research *methodology*, I refer to the overall approach to the subject in terms of the study’s purposes, its presumptions and the questions that are being put to it. By research *method(s)*, I refer to the specific research strategies or various disciplinary tools utilized to go about answering the larger questions being posed. To craft a hermeneutical hagiography will mean borrowing methods from other disciplines, as well as drawing analogies with other methodologies, but in the end a methodology for spiritual biography will need to stand, like many of its research subjects, on its

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own two feet. In order to give legs to the genre of spiritual biography, which I hope an illustrative spiritual biography will do in the remaining chapters, I will lay out a methodological blueprint for spiritual biography in this first chapter, including the specific research methods I plan to use. Drawing some key themes and categories from older works about the biographical process and coupling them with more current writings on methodology in the study of spirituality will provide the building blocks for crafting a hermeneutical approach to hagiography, or in other words, a methodology for spiritual biography.

A. Hermeneutical Cues and Clues from Theology and Religious Studies

A review of two works written over thirty-five years ago, James W. McClendon’s *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* and Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps’ *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* provides a good starting point for constructing a methodology to ground spiritual biography. One work emerges from the field of theology; the other from religious studies. The academic discipline of spirituality draws its methods from both theology and religious studies. The two sections below examine the works at length, pulling from each some terminology and categories that will aid in the shaping of a particular methodology for spiritual biography. While these works pre-date the full development of a distinct academic discipline of spirituality, or the genre of spiritual biography explored in this project, their analysis of works of religious biography remains relevant both for comparing and contrasting with spiritual biography.

i. Clues and Cues from Theology

From the discipline of theology, *Biography as Theology* demonstrates how to approach the writing of a biography as a theological endeavor, thus offering clues as to how it might also
be a spiritual endeavor. *Biography as Theology* suggests that the genre of religious biography “at its best will be theology.”\(^{33}\) If the central vision of theology is “God and man in meeting,”\(^{34}\) then biographical works of religious figures provide a medium for examining that interaction, revealing something about the biographical subject but also about how that subject and the Christian tradition understand God. Exemplary members of the Christian community make known the character of Christ, upon which Christianity hinges. The Christian community “must continually find fresh exemplars if it is not to be consigned to the realm of mere antiquarian lore.”\(^{35}\) The proliferation of the lives of the saints testifies to this notion of the saint as an update of Christ.\(^{36}\) Given the revelatory potential of Christian lives, one would think these stories of souls would garner significant theological attention. Yet in an argument echoed in recent years in the work of Lawrence Cunningham, McClendon claims that Catholic theologians have overlooked the central theological significance of “this enormous body of religious energy and belief-guided biography.”\(^{37}\) McClendon attempts to remedy that oversight by borrowing from William James’ empirical method and examining selected religious lives for the theological data that might be extracted. Through the prism of a faithful person’s life, it becomes possible to show how “certain great archetypical images of that faith” crop up in these lives, and also in our own.\(^{38}\) McClendon concludes that writing biographies is thus a manner of doing theology. After introducing his theme of biography as theology, McClendon turns to four twentieth-century

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 91.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 38.  
\(^{36}\) Joseph McCloskey, S. J. writes about saints as “updates of Christ” in unpublished material.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 96.
Christian figures to examine how their lives give rise to images of God. His subjects are Dag Hammerskjold, Martin Luther King Jr., the lesser-known Clarence Jordan, and Charles Ives. His criteria for the religious figures he chose to write about is simple: he chose people he found interesting, people that he liked intrinsically. Suggesting that these figures “have no exclusive claim upon any reader,” he generously invites other scholars to “choose other lives and reap an equal or better harvest.”

McClendon’s invitation to study other lives, lives that offer rich terrain for the mining of meaningful theological and spiritual content, is one that the academic study of spirituality ought to be accepting with gusto. If the subject of the study of spirituality is the human-divine interaction, there is no better place to study that dynamic than in the concrete life of a human person striving for holiness. While McClendon’s notion of biography as theology emphasized the expanded images of God that can arise in the study of such a life, the notion of biography as spirituality creates a different emphasis. In McClendon’s conception, a biography of a religious person may give theological insight into God’s identity. In spiritual biography, scholars can seize on McClendon’s notion of God and man in meeting and thus study an individual life for a glimpse of how the movement and action of God as perceived by that person has transformed that human life. While biography as theology looks to the conceptions and understandings of God that may emerge from a life, biography as spirituality concentrates its gaze on how a person has been touched and moved by what they perceive to be an encounter with God.

39 Ibid., 38.
McClendon’s promotion of a biographical approach to theology makes a good case for taking biography seriously as a meaningful revelatory endeavor. A related methodology can be found in the approach of narrative theology. Narrative theology appears in a variety of forms but is tied together by a shared appreciation for the human story. In their collection *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones compiled seminal essays on the varied role of narrative in the fields of theology and ethics. The anthology includes an older work by H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Story of Our Life,” first published in 1941 as a chapter in *The Meaning of Revelation*. This early essay underscores the centrality of historical, human experience in Christian revelation in that “revelation must be looked for in the events that have happened to us, which live in our memory.”

H. Richard Niebuhr points out:

. . . the preaching of the early Christian church was not an argument for the existence of God nor an admonition to follow the dictates of some common human conscience, unhistorical and super-social in character. It was primarily a simple recital of the great events connected with the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and a confession of what had happened to the community of disciples.

In the Christian tradition, revelation cannot be separated from historical circumstances. The indivisible connection perceived by this tradition between God’s revelation and specific human experience means that the human narrative is essential to understanding the sacred. In narrative theology the premise is that studying the details of human life, as well as how those details are interpreted by those who experience them, thus leads to greater knowledge of God. H. Richard Niebuhr identifies experience and its interpretation as two levels of human experience

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42 Ibid., 21.
that he calls external and internal history. External history refers to “history as seen by a
spectator,” whereas internal history makes “constant references . . . to subjective events, that is to
events in the lives of subjects.” To understand how God is revealed in this sphere of internal
history, for instance in the testimony of Isaiah or of Paul, one must enter into it and “look with
them and not at them to verify their visions, participate in their history rather than regard it if one
would apprehend what they apprehended.” This attention to inner history is important in
Niebuhr’s conception because such attention reveals God, “not only the God of spiritual life, but
the universal God, the creator not only of the events through which he discloses himself but also
of all other happenings.” Spirituality research requires a focus on concrete, living events and
the revelatory experiences that infuse them. It is this form of story-telling as both outer and inner
history that spiritual biography hopes to capture.

The other essays in Why Narrative take H. Richard Niebuhr’s stance as a starting point.
Stephen Crites, whose article “The Narrative Quality of Experience” also appears in this
narrative theology collection, acknowledges that the inner need to express one’s self is a
constant and powerful force in human experience. He identifies three dimensions of the
narrative quality of experience, the sacred, the mundane and the temporal form of experience
itself. These narrative tracks are interrelated and each is “constantly reflecting and affecting the

\[^{43}\text{Ibid., 35.}\]
\[^{44}\text{Ibid., 36.}\]
\[^{45}\text{Ibid., 42.}\]
\[^{46}\text{Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, 81.}\]
course of others.” This multi-tiered nature of human narrative is a defining feature of spiritual biography.

ii. Cues and Clues from Religious Studies

If McClendon’s Biography as Theology and the other literature on narrative theology suggest what ought to be studied (the sacred and the mundane of individual lives), then Reynolds and Capps’ The Biographical Process offers insight into why lives have been studied in the field of religion. Together these approaches, one from theology and the other from religious studies, provide the beginnings of a methodological framework for spiritual biography. Published two years after McClendon’s work, Reynolds and Capps’ compilation of essays emerged from conversations begun at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago regarding biographical literature on religious leaders. In the collection’s introduction, Reynolds and Capp identify three religious studies disciplines employed in the study and writing of religious biography: the history of religion, the anthropology of religion, and the psychology of religion. Across these three disciplines, two categories of sacred biography can be identified: those that are myth-oriented and those that are history-oriented. This typology of myth and history is helpful in the effort to devise a methodology in the writing and reading of sacred biography within the academic study of spirituality. The field of academic spirituality, which draws from both theology and religious studies in its methods and methodologies, was only beginning to emerge as an autonomous academic discipline when Reynolds and Capps published their work. Yet their work on religious biography across the disciplines of the history, anthropology, and psychology of religion does

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47 Ibid.
provide some cues and clues as to how to approach the many levels involved in the writing of a spiritual biography.

The first discipline that Reynolds and Capps examine in the reading and writing of sacred biography is the history of religion. The historian of religion approaches the reading and writing of sacred biography, whether a classical text or a modern confessional biography, from a historical-critical perspective. Within this historical perspective Reynolds and Capp note that works are marked by either a myth-orientation or a history-orientation. The mythical orientation within a history of religion disciplinary approach wants to read sacred biographies with an eye toward determining their structure and significance within a particular tradition. The questions brought to the text have to do with what “symbolic, paradigmatic and stereotypical elements” these stories possess. Historians of religion reading sacred biography from a mythic perspective will want to trace the basic mythic or religious patterns in that period of history that emerge from the chronological life story of this particular person. The historical orientation within the history of religion, on the other hand, is more interested in writing or re-writing the stories of religious figures. Here text critical and religio-historical methods are used in which historians of religion attempt to go behind the hagiographic material and develop more historically accurate accounts of individuals. This approach, in contrast with the mythic approach, is more interested in tracing the “sources and development of various figures’ religious experiences” than in tracing their mythic significance or meaning in that historical context.

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49 Ibid., 4.
50 Ibid., 6.
A second discipline identified by Reynolds and Capps is the anthropology of religion. The anthropological model shares the same two categories as the historical model: the mythic and historical orientations. The mythic-anthropological approach is interested in religious biographies not so much for how they reflect a religious pattern in an historical context, but how they acted upon and shaped the religious understanding of a particular culture. Rather than emphasize the individuality of the religious subject under investigation, this approach concerns itself with an individual’s “role in generating and/or personifying the life model” of a culture.\(^5\) Clifford Geertz explained this cultural model’s approach as more focused on the ideal of the spiritual life than the actual events of a religious person’s life, saying “whatever they originally were or did as actual persons has long since been dissolved into an image of what Indonesians or Moroccans regard to be true spirituality.”\(^6\) A more historical orientation within the anthropological model would take a greater interest in the actual life history and personality of the biographical subject, but would still situate the subject squarely in the midst of the prevailing culture and evaluate his or her life based on its cultural impact.

In a third discipline, Reynolds and Capps observe that the reading and writing of religious biography within the psychology of religion shares this dual approach of myth and history with the other two disciplines. The mythic-psychological study of a religious figure will look for patterns in his or her life story, which are “rooted in the human psyche.”\(^7\) This way of looking at biography presents it as a “literary category with a social function,” so that the


\(^{52}\) Ibid.

biographical subject becomes a sort of composite person, an “everyman.” Sacred biography that uses this approach proves an exercise in developing and promoting a certain theory of human psychology, such as a Freudian or Jungian approach. An historical orientation in the psychological method is more evident in studies that seek to examine the psychology of the biographical subject in an empirical way. A historical-psychological approach would look at the connection between the psychological traits of the subject and their expression in his or her spiritual life.

Reynolds and Capps made an effort to carefully distinguish between the historical and mythical orientations across three religious studies disciplines: the history of religion, the anthropology of religion, and the psychology of religion. The Reynolds and Capps typology is useful for the conceptual language it introduces and the distinctions it makes between the intentions of those who both study and write sacred biographies. Using their typology as a guide, sacred biographies that intend to inform, describe and report would have an historical orientation. These historically-oriented sacred biographies would focus primarily on the concrete story of a life. On the other hand, those sacred biographies that intend to transform, enlighten, and edify would have a mythical orientation. These mythically-oriented biographies are less concerned with the details of an individual life and more interested in the moral or spiritual formation of the reader.

Reynolds and Capps examined sacred biographies that have emerged and been studied in the religious studies fields of history, anthropology, and psychology of religion. Because the field of the study of spirituality had not quite taken shape when they wrote, they did not address

54 Ibid., 17-18.
works of sacred biography that might arise or be read in the academic discipline of spirituality. The question to be considered is whether any sacred biography written or studied within the discipline of spirituality might be identified by these same distinguishing characteristics of myth or history orientation. I propose that there is something distinctive about the methodology in the study of spirituality that causes these descriptive categorizations to fall short in describing the purpose and process of spiritual biography. Spiritual biography must draw from the approaches in both myth-oriented and history-oriented sacred biographies in all three fields of religious studies: history, anthropology, and psychology. The Reynolds/Capps typology is useful in distinguishing between the various approaches in those disciplines. Its use in the field of spirituality is to help identify the various levels at play within one work of spiritual biography. The two categories of sacred biography that Reynolds and Capps have identified, historical and mythical, provide a helpful hermeneutical framework with which to begin to describe a methodology for the writing of spiritual biographies. The sections below on spiritual biography as narrative and spiritual biography as sacrament draw from Reynolds and Capps’ categories of myth and history in sacred biography, positing narrative and sacrament as the parallel categories in the writing of spiritual biographies in the spirituality field. Later sections draw specifically from the pioneers in academic spirituality to further develop the idea that biographies in the field of spirituality are sacramental narratives and thus uniquely collapse the myth/history distinction that Reynolds and Capps identified in the field of religious studies. A final section in this chapter will examine three published spiritual biographies to discern whether and how they conform to the model of sacramental narrative defined here.
B. Further Development of a Hermeneutical Approach to Spiritual Biography

If the Reynolds/Capps typology for sacred biography is to be extrapolated and put to use in defining the methodology for spiritual biography in the field of spirituality, what would these two categories look like? Taking a cue from McClendon that the writing of biography can also be the doing of theology, it may be helpful in the context of spiritual studies to modify Reynolds and Capps’ schematic terms with language drawn from theology. While the terms *myth* and *history* fit well in the fields of the anthropology and history of religion, the words *sacrament* and *narrative* may be terms better suited to describe these dual biographical orientations in the field of Christian spirituality, especially Catholic spirituality. The term *historical orientation* might be supplanted with that of *narrative orientation*, and the term *mythic orientation* with that of *sacramental orientation*. Like those sacred biographical works found in the realms of history, anthropology, or psychology of religion, a spiritual biography in the field of spirituality if it were to follow this typology would take *either* an historical/narrative or a mythical/sacramental shape depending on the particular reason for its writing. What an examination of both of these adapted categories in the field of spirituality reveals is that this *either/or* equation that aptly suited the works studied by Reynolds and Capps evolves into a *both/and* equation when applied to spiritual biographies. What is distinctive about spiritual biography is that it is both a historical narrative and a symbolic sacrament. In the case of Arleen Hynes’ spiritual biography, the historical narrative seeks to explain how various texts changed her and how her experiences helped to shape the field of bibliotherapy. The biography also has the potential of being a symbolic sacrament if it opens the reader to finding the traces of an experience of God in his or her own life.
i. Spiritual Biography as Narrative

Making the parallel with what Reynolds and Capps identified in some sacred biographies as an historical orientation, a narrative-oriented spiritual biography in the field of spirituality would have as its primary orientation an interest in accurately relaying the concrete details of a life. A narrative orientation would rely on historical record, anthropological evidence and psychological findings to tell a life story. If a biography were designed primarily to present a history of an individual life, the narrative would be concerned with the events, circumstances and context that shaped this person’s experiences and contributions. Narrative-oriented spiritual biographies would identify the dominant historical themes and theological currents from that period and attempt to situate the subject in the stream of those events and ideas. Such a spiritual biography would narrate events and explain their significance to the subject’s life and thinking as a way of shedding light on this person’s theological, pastoral, political, artistic, or other contributions. Just as illuminated manuscripts highlight central scripture passages to underline their meaning, this narrative-oriented form of spiritual biography would underscore the central concrete circumstances of a life to better elucidate the spiritual life of its subject.

ii. Spiritual Biography as Sacrament

A sacramental-oriented spiritual biography in the field of spirituality, drawing on the characteristics of a mythic-oriented sacred biography in the religious studies fields Reynolds and Capps presented, would have as its focus the symbolic meaning of the individual life studied. Sacrament-oriented spiritual biographies in this scheme might not attempt a comprehensive narration of a subject’s life, but rather might highlight certain classic theological and spiritual themes in this life, such as conversion, struggle with sin, death and resurrection,
and so on. The sacrament-oriented spiritual biography would seek to tell the story of its subject not so much as an explanatory exercise but as a means of offering a transformative experience to the reader. This type of biography would focus less on the many details of its subject’s life, and more on how the themes in this person’s life will resonate with its audience. For instance, the trials experienced by the biographical subject might offer an opportunity for growth and transformation should the reader identify with some of the defining themes of the other’s life. Perhaps recognizing the near-universality of these themes might inspire the reader similarly to confront and tackle them in his or her own life, or simply to change how he or she lives with them in faith. These works with a more sacramental orientation would share the assumption, articulated by Richard A. Hutch in his work *Biography, Autobiography, and the Spiritual Quest*, that “writing lives has the capacity to change the life of the investigator.” By extension, they have the capacity to change the life of the reader as well. Thus, sacramental-oriented sacred biographies would view individual lives as texts to be written and read not only for historical interest in a person, but also for illumination and transformation of the reader. Biographer Dana Greene notices that biography as a contemporary genre promotes the search for meaning, suggesting that the “ancient craft of biography might help us keep alive ‘living theology,’ the glints of God incarnate in human lives.”

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iii. A Closer Look at Sacrament

A closer look at what the notion of sacrament entails may suggest even further how to adapt the Reynolds/Capps typology of myth and history to a methodology of spiritual biography so that, as Dana Greene suggests, glints of God incarnate might be caught in biography. In the Catholic tradition, it is understood that it is through the power of grace that ordinary human beings are drawn into the divine life. The belief is that God communicates through God’s grace. Herbert Vorgrimler, in his book *Sacramental Theology*, presents a sacramental theology that proposes that all reality can reveal God’s true presence. Vorgrimler’s approach to sacrament is compelling enough to be quoted here in full:

> A theology that pursues these ideas systematically will conclude that the whole reality we humans encounter is imbued with symbolic or sacramental possibilities. The life that is given to us, the people we encounter, the beloved one, the companions who live in solidarity with us, our work and its products, those events in life that really touch and shake us (and above all, death itself), experiences of liberation, justice, and reconciliation, true works of art, God’s creation that makes up the world with us and around us: all these can be so transparent to God that they reveal God’s presence. In this way, our whole life can be understood as the fundamental sacrament, to the extent that our understanding of life and our interpretations take account of this transparency and do not remain on the banal surface of things . . .

Because God is a “great, impenetrable, and incomprehensible mystery,” God’s communication to humanity must be brought into the human dimension to be received, and is thus mediated by “events, in human deeds or in happenings (actions) . . .” Thus in this understanding sacraments are living events in which the sacred infuses the profane. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this communication of God through people and events is seen as

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58 Ibid., 6.
revelatory. The living of these events and the experiencing of them for believers reveals a God who seeks to be in close relationship with people, a God who “is inclined in love to human beings and intends all-encompassing goodness (shalom) for them.” Vorgrimler wants to make clear that this communication of God to humanity is not understood only in the form of news or information or “tidings;” instead, it is experienced as “God’s very self.” Vorgrimler describes how in this way even a human person can be revelatory. He adheres to the notion that God can communicate God’s very self through a finite, concrete human being:

God is internal to human persons or events in order to approach people in love, to change them, to impel them to further action, to move them to advance together with creation on the way home to God. At the same time, human beings do not cease to be human, and the events remain human accomplishments: in both, God is present and active, without destroying their uniqueness.

In this understanding, the human person has a privileged place as a revelatory vehicle for God. As in scripture, where the human language is a vehicle for God’s communication, the human person herself through the texture of her life can represent the Word of God. The thinking goes that because human lives incarnate God’s presence, the human person becomes a sacrament while at the same time remaining always embodied and flawed. This notion of the concrete human person as God’s revelation runs through the Jewish and Christian traditions. In the Jewish tradition, it can be found in the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber and of Emmanuel Levinas. See Martin Buber, I and Thou, a new translation with a prologue “I and You” and notes by Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970) and Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
inviting access to transcendence.”63 For Levinas, the experience of God is a “search for (divine) traces in the countenance of the other.”64 Vorgrimler points out that the idea of meeting God in others also deeply informs the Christian experience, in that:

... it is possible to encounter God in encountering other human beings, to love God in loving other human beings, to honour God in honoring other human persons. Here the sacramental principle emerges: the representation of God does not mean the substitution for one who is absent (or, still more, a replacement), but indicates the real, and not only imaginary or the intellectual, making present of the one whom in and of himself cannot be visible in our human dimension.65

This sacramental notion of encountering God in other human beings is a hermeneutical key to the understanding of spiritual biography attempted here. While Reynolds and Capps made a distinction between historical and mythical orientations, recasting these categories in terms of sacrament and narrative serves to narrow that distinction. While their typology helps parse out the distinct purposes for the varieties of religious biography in certain academic fields, it is a distinction that wants to be lessened, perhaps even collapsed when it comes to the writing of such sacred biographies in the field of spirituality. In the academic field of spirituality, a spiritual biography ought to be both historical and mythical. Adapting their terms in the field of spirituality, which draws upon both the methods of religious studies and theology, would mean asserting that spiritual biography will not be either simply a historical narrative or just a symbolic effort, but that it will be both narrative and sacrament. A spiritual biography, as distinct from a religious biography in the religious studies fields explored by Reynolds and

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63 Vorgrimler, Sacramental Theology, 14.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 13.
Capps, necessarily draws upon both strains and can be appropriately called a *sacramental narrative*.

This paper proposes that spiritual biography as a sacramental narrative as defined here is a distinct genre specifically within the field of the study of spirituality. As such, it is a genre that draws from the tools and categories of religious studies in the areas of history, psychology and anthropology to tell the story of a life. Further, sacramental narrative draws from the tools and categories of theology to tell the story of a life as a means of promoting a sacramental encounter with the living God of Christian belief.

C. Hermeneutical Clues and Cues from the Academic Discipline of Spirituality

Recent works in the methodology of the academic discipline of spirituality further help craft an approach to spiritual biography as sacramental narrative that carves out its place in the field of spirituality. Mary Frohlich offers an apt definition of the study of spirituality as examination of “the living and concrete human person in dynamic transformation toward the fullness of life.” For the study of *Christian* spirituality in particular she slightly refines that definition of spirituality as the study of “the living and concrete human person in dynamic transformation toward the fullness of life in Christ.” Frohlich’s definition helps make clear that the study of spirituality at one level is the study of the living and concrete person, so that as an academic field it uses many of the same sources and resources as do research pursuits in other fields. In the case of biographical research these material objects might be letters, journals, interviews, newspaper articles and other primary sources. The material objects studied

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67 Ibid.
shape the choice of which concrete research tools to use from the fields of history, psychology, literature or other areas. Yet the formal object of spirituality differs sharply from other academic pursuits, in that what is being studied is the human spirit in action. To study the human spirit in action as an academic pursuit in the field of spirituality, according to Frohlich, the researcher must be radically engaged and open to the mystical moments that emerge from the research subject’s life and from a study of that life.

The Irish theologian Bernadette Flanagan suitably describes this engagement as “trailing the spirit.” Drawing from these spirituality scholars, the premise can be stated that the study of spirituality entails qualitative research with a particular heuristic lens. The data in spirituality research is framed by the heuristic lens which posits a belief that God is revealed and experienced in human lives. This interpretive lens and the resulting study of lives that it prompts, means that much in the field of spirituality might be called applied spirituality. At its root, the field of spirituality is concerned with what its subjects experience as a living experience of God. American Benedictine Denis Robinson describes how a researcher’s belief in the authenticity of this experience guides applied spirituality research:

The development of the art and discipline of spirituality reflects the fundamental reality that God is experienced as actively and intimately present within us and all creation. This reality is the foundation of a potentially dynamic and creative relationship with God. The goal of Christian spirituality, therefore, is to help people understand how and why they are drawn to the Transcendent; to discover the most authentic and appropriate means of responding to and growing in this relationship, and to share this experience with others.

Spirituality research thus begins with a particular premise absent from the study of religion from a singular social scientific perspective; that is the premise that there is a God that can be and that is experienced in daily life, making each day holy. To look at a life—even in its ordinariness—from the perspective of the academic study of spirituality is to posit that God is revealed in human experience and thus to study human experience opens the possibility to catch a glimpse of God’s activity. As theologians legitimately pursue their academic field through the eyes of faith, so too, do many within the field of spirituality view the study of others’ lives as offering “moments of transition that propel us out of the ordinary and into the transcendent. In and through human experience we discover the presence, reality and activity of God.”

If the above spirituality scholars help clarify the dynamic of spirituality research as a way of gaining a greater understanding of God’s self-revelation, the seminal works of Kees Waaijman and Sandra Schneiders offer methodological language and a framework for further explaining how a spirituality scholar might trail the spirit in the writing of a sacramental narrative. Drawing from the work and language of these spirituality scholars, it becomes clear that spiritual biography must bring together what in the Reynolds and Capps scheme were carefully parsed and distinguished. Spiritual biography must be at once historical and mythical,

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70 Ibid., 176.
71 Ibid., 183.
at once critical and interior, at once descriptive and mystagogic, at once textual and revelatory, and thus at once narrative and sacramental.

i. Kees Waaijman

The work of Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, goes a long way toward further defining these characteristics of spiritual biography and establishing a rigorous academic method for writing spiritual biography. In his massive work, he seeks to identify and establish the central focus and distinct methodology for the study of spirituality. The oldest form of the transmission of knowledge, he notes, was spiritual in nature. He shares the view of other spirituality scholars that this ancient discipline deserves its own place in the academy, but it also must “integrate the findings of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and critical historical research.” Waaijman’s thousand-page tome guides the scholar as to how to approach the interdisciplinary study of spirituality as a unique academic discipline with a distinctive material and formal object. For Waaijman, the material object is *what* is being studied and the formal object is *how* it is being studied. Spirituality research possesses a unique material and formal object, as the study of “the divine-human relational process (material object) considered from the viewpoint of transformation (formal object).”

In Waaijman’s observation and explanation, different branches of research into the divine-human relational process will rely on four interrelated methods to a lesser or greater degree depending on the form of spirituality studied. These methods Waaijman identifies as:

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73 Ibid., 3.
74 Ibid., 6.
form-descriptive research, hermeneutic research, systematic research, and mystagogic research. A brief explanation from Waaijman of each method is helpful. Form-descriptive research uses an interdisciplinary approach of historical and sociological analysis to examine a form of spirituality, in a process by which “the contours of a form are established, its contextual embeddedness is described, its internal horizon is disclosed.” Hermeneutic research employs tools from the literary sciences and “aims at interpretation of texts of spirituality.” Systematic research brings systematic theology and philosophy into play to engage in an analysis and synthesis of spiritual themes. Mystagogic research relies on the human sciences to investigate “moments of awakening in the relation to God.”

Waaijman gives extensive examples of specific spirituality research projects that have employed these methods to varying degrees and in various progressions as they examine not only the concrete, observable, documented human experience but also the dialogue and the dynamic action between God and a human being inherent in those experiences. He recognized that spiritual biographies provide ample material for engaging in mystagogic research. In his long section describing the methodological step of mystagogic research, he addresses the ways autobiographical spiritual writing can help capture the dynamic action between God and another person. In so doing, he offers clues as to how to revive the genre of the lives of saints by replacing pre-scientific hagiographic treatments of spiritual figures with spiritual biographies that are scientific, but which still take seriously the dialogic nature of spiritual experience.

Waaijman’s approach promotes turning a trained lens on the real history of an individual as the

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75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
locus for divine activity. What emerges from Waaijman’s description of the mystagogic approach is a suggestion for a method of writing spiritual biography that employs the critical research tools from the fields of history, the social sciences, literary criticism, and theology but uses them toward the end of examining the transformative experience of the divine in a human life.

A spiritual biography would draw upon all four of Waaijman’s identified methods for spirituality research in exploring the divine/human dynamic in an individual life, but would concentrate most heavily on form-descriptive research and mystagogic research. Though texts and spiritual themes would come into play, thus engaging hermeneutic and systematic research, the primary focus would be on a description of the actual events of a life and the perceived dynamic action of God therein. Form-descriptive research enables the biographical subject to be placed in a particular historical and cultural context. The use of letters, journal, interviews, publications, and other secondary sources would enable the composition of a concrete picture of a life. This form-descriptive process is integral to being able to probe moments of awakening in the figure’s relation to God, and to come to a greater understanding of the dynamic work of God in an individual life. Engaging in both form-descriptive and mystagogic research produces a research project designed to present an informative and illuminative portrait of its subject that is also deeply concerned with the transformative element.

Waaijman’s definition of form-descriptive research and mystagogic research in the area of spirituality resonates with the Reynolds and Capps history/myth typology. A difference is that Waaijman’s schematic framework is not a typology, but rather an explanation of some of the methodological steps in the overall process of doing spirituality research. Both form-descriptive
and mystagogic research, along with hermeneutic and systematic research, ought to be employed to a certain degree in any study of spirituality. Spirituality research in the form of a spiritual biography is both descriptive of concrete human experience and conditions as well as suggestive of the dynamic work of God as experienced within human life. It draws from social sciences to examine a human life, literary sciences to examine the texts produced by that life, theology and philosophy to examine the spiritual themes of that life, and the human sciences to examine the spiritual transformation in that life. All of these steps are shaped by the distinct material and formal objects of spiritual research: the divine-human relational process as seen from the perspective of transformation. Waaijman points out that all four of his identified methods operate within a spirituality autobiography, where the “divine narrator presents himself in it” and where its author “seeks the ear and the voice of the divine presence” in her personal life story. The same can be true for spiritual biography, wherein the discovery of the divine presence is a “mystagogical moment.” This mystagogic research cannot be done in isolation of the form-descriptive research because the working of God is interwoven with the actual events of life.

ii. Sandra Schneider

The revelatory nature of human narrative is further developed in the work of eminent spirituality scholar Sandra Schneiders in *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. Her approach to scripture as both a human narrative and a revelatory event fits well into the notion of spiritual biography as a sacramental narrative. She suggests a way of

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78 Ibid., 926.
79 Ibid.
approaching scripture that takes what is known as the Word of God seriously as “a human text that manifests all the traits of such an artifact,” which at the same time mediates an encounter with God. By using the term revelatory text Schneiders wants to capture the idea that the text of scripture and its reader are in conversation. Schneider asserts that scripture is a revelatory text in the sense that the process is revelatory rather than saying that the text standing alone is either revealed or revealing. Scripture is a revelatory text because it is “the place of meeting, the locus of encounter and conversation between God and humanity.”

This concept of revelatory text works very well in the context of spiritual biography where the text is clearly and literally a “human text,” but which nonetheless might serve to mediate an encounter with God. Schneider’s characterization of scripture as both informative and transformative also helps to shape a notion of what spiritual biography can be as both human narrative and sacred experience. Scripture can be read with the goal of obtaining such information as who, what, when, where. It is also read with the purpose of seeking transformation by asking whether what the text is saying is true and if so, what are the personal consequences for its reader? In the case of a spiritual biography, informational questions are put to the subject such as: what is the context in which this person lived? What formative events are going on in the world, in her country, in her community during her lifetime? How does the subject’s cultural milieu influence him or her? What sort of psychological pressures might be at play? At the informational level, conclusions can be drawn about the meaning of a particular life. Similar to the text of Scripture, a person’s life can also be read at a transformational level, going

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81 Ibid., xix.  
82 Ibid.
beyond a thick description of a life to a personal engagement with the text. It is in this context that the text of a life can be revelatory. The reader interacts with the text of a life in such a way that the very process of reading another life becomes “the place of meeting, the locus of encounter.” This encounter then is not only with another person, but because that person represents the Word of God, as Herbert Vorgrimler noted in *Sacramental Theology*, it also can be experienced as a conversation between the reader and God. Spiritual biography, or sacramental narrative, is a unique genre because it treats an individual life as a revelatory text, capable of communicating something essential not only about a human being but about God’s action as experienced in that life. It is a genre that promotes reading for transformation and is offered in that spirit.

D. Spiritual Biography: A Methodology

The academic discipline of spirituality is indeed an interdisciplinary field that draws its methods both from theology and religious studies, and so it is fitting that the methodology of spiritual biography incorporate the insights and tools from McClendon, Reynolds and Capps, Frohlich, Waaijman, Schneider, and others. From McClendon’s *Biography as Theology* comes the fundamental insight that human lives can and do reveal true aspects of God’s nature and being. From Reynolds and Capps’ *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* comes the helpful typology of myth and history as markers in examining the approach and intent of religious biography, types which resemble the theological concepts of sacrament and narrative. From Frohlich comes a succinct definition of the study of Christian spirituality as the study of the living and concrete human person in dynamic transformation

83 Ibid.
toward the fullness of life in Christ. From Waaijman come the descriptions of research methods in the study of spirituality, in particular form-descriptive and mystagogic research in which both concrete human circumstances are studied and a divine-human interaction is recognized. And finally from Schneider comes the hermeneutic perspective of the Word of God, by which can be meant both scripture and the human person, as a living and transformative text revealing God; in other words, a revelatory text.

Pulling together these threads from theology and religious studies enables the formation of a definition and methodology for the writing of spiritual biography. Spiritual biography is a sacramental narrative, a distinct genre inviting the transformation of the reader by tracing the story of God’s participation in an individual human life. More than a biography of a spiritual person, a spiritual biography purports to convey and possibly prompt spiritual experience. Drawing from the disciplines of history, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the literary sciences, spiritual biography aims for a factual account of an individual life. As such, spiritual biography uses the same material sources as other biographical works: letters, journals, published work, and interviews. Yet spiritual biography trains a mystagogical eye on the life of the spirit, attempting in this effort to shed some light on the transformative work of God in that individual life.

To label a biography a spiritual one under this definition would necessitate affirmative responses to these questions: Does it narrate? Is it more than a biography of a spiritual person? Does it seek to trace the spirit? Does it invite the reader to be changed? Does it retain some of the spiritual power of hagiography?
III. A Case Study of Three Spiritual Biographies: John XXIII, Thomas Merton, and Henri Nouwen

Before attempting to put this new definition of spiritual biography as sacramental narrative into practice by turning to the revelatory life of Arleen Hynes, this section will examine a few published spiritual biographies in this relatively new academic field of spirituality. Scrutinizing recent works of spiritual biography will help to measure whether this adapted categorization drawn from religious studies, theology, and the emerging academic discipline of spirituality adequately describes these biographical works and captures what they set out to do. Such a survey of selected spiritual biographies may suggest how the contemporary heir of hagiography might look.

The offerings in the catalogue of any religious publisher are bound to include any number of biographies that come with the antecedent “spiritual” or “religious.” In addition to individual books there are a number of series published in recent years that bring interested readers religious biographies of notable and varied people in the fields of religion, politics, science, the arts, social activism, and other realms. “The Library of Religious Biography,” from the publisher Wm. B. Eerdmans includes religious biographies of Thomas Jefferson, Blaise Pascal, Emily Dickinson, George Whitfield, Thomas Merton, and others. Another series, from Crossroads Publishing “Lives and Legacies” offers spiritual biographies of such assorted figures as Joan of Arc, Frida Kahlo, Robert Kennedy, and John XXIII. An older series, “The Way of the Christian Mystics,” attempts to put forward spiritual biographies from a modern historical

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84 “The Library of Religious Biography” is a series of original biographies of important religious figures throughout American and British history, edited by Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company).
perspective and includes treatment of modern, medieval and early saints—canonized and uncanonized—such as Edith Stein, Teilhard de Chardin, Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, Patrick of Ireland, and others. A fourth series, the “Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series,” has turned out multiple works in the past ten years focused more on spiritual teaching than spiritual life concerning eminent theologians from Augustine to Aquinas to Karl Rahner.

A close examination of three such titles, all of which have the term spiritual biography in the subtitle or preface, will help in the effort to try out this new definition and methodology of the genre of spiritual biography in the field of the study of spirituality. Each of the three chosen works of spiritual biography treats an influential twentieth century Catholic male figure with European roots—a pope, a professor, and a monk—each of whom made significant contributions to contemporary Catholic thinking and practice. That they are all men is in part coincidental and in part a reflection of the limited works on female spiritual leaders and exemplars that have had widespread public impact. The pope is John XXIII, and the work is John XXIII: A Spiritual Biography by Justin Feldman; the professor is Henri Nouwen and the work is Michael O’Laughlin’s God’s Beloved: A Spiritual Biography of Henri Nouwen; the monk is Thomas Merton and the work is by Lawrence Cunningham, Thomas Merton and the Monastic Tradition. Looking at these three spiritual biographies with an eye toward applying the definition and method of spiritual biography outlined above, it appears that one of these works falls completely flat, offering neither convincing narrative nor transforming grace. Upon close inspection, two of these spiritual biographies come near the definition of spiritual biography spelled out above.

Though the biography of Thomas Merton and that of Henri Nouwen each falls slightly toward a
different side of the sacrament/narrative spectrum, they both do seek to write a historically true
account that nonetheless recounts archetypal faith. These two spiritual biographies resemble
what is envisioned in this paper as the heir to hagiography, a spiritual biography which is a
sacramental narrative. As stated above, a sacramental narrative is a spiritual biography that is
informative, illuminative and transformative. The spiritual biography of John XXIII is somewhat
informative; that of Thomas Merton is certainly illuminative; and that of Henri Nouwen can be
seen as transformative. Each example of spiritual biography helps, to a greater or lesser extent, to
shape and express what it might mean for spiritual biography to be an heir to hagiography as a
genre that offers compelling stories that are agents of conversion. I hope to draw upon these
examples and further refine an approach to transformative stories in the remaining chapters of
this project through my own case study of the spiritual biography of the little known yet
nonetheless significant twentieth-century American Catholic woman named Arleen McCarty
Hynes.

A. A Spiritual Biography of Pope John XXIII

First, Christian Feldman’s *Pope John XXIII: A Spiritual Biography* is somewhat of a
disappointment.\(^8^8\) This work acts neither as an illuminating nor transforming work. It makes an
effort rather to be a descriptive work. It is more a biography of a spiritually-edified person rather
than a biography for the spiritual edification of persons. By calling itself a *spiritual* biography, it
attempts to share a place in the genre being carved. But it is woefully inadequate to the task,
either of making the reading of the text a spiritual experience or of illuminating the life of John

XXIII so that the reader can perceive the presence of God there. It may be that the term spiritual biography has a certain caché in the publishing field, but it seems wiser to keep the definition narrow so that readers have a sense of what a work is offering when it presents itself as spiritual biography, rather than simply a biography of a spiritual person’s life.

Christian Feldman is an admirer of his subject. Unlike traditional hagiography, Feldman seeks to present a sketch of a real person, rather than some idealized pious portrait, “He had not starry-eyed majesty, but lots of earthiness and familiar intimacy.” Yet Feldman’s work does not really reveal the inner life of Pope John XXIII, even though he draws from some of the pope’s private journals. Pope John XXIII’s spiritual qualities are named and events are described that exemplify them, but there is a depth of spirit missing from the work that should mark a spiritual biography as defined here.

Words are used which are meant to show the true nature of the pope, “Wisdom of the heart. Simplicity. Open concern for others. Delicate feeling that avoids poses.” Pope John XXIII’s qualities are described as, “Attentiveness, tender kindness—and, as the keynote to his life—a compassion that had dramatic effects on the Church’s politics.” Though these are surely qualities that this pope must have possessed, they have a hollow ring as presented in this biography. His spiritual qualities are asserted in other areas as well, without a feel for the humanity that Feldman wants to convey. In terms of John XXIII’s psychological disposition and its link to his spiritual expression, Feldman discounts Pope John XXIII’s personality and background as contributing at all to his holiness:

89 Ibid., 10.
90 Ibid., 124.
91 Ibid., 125.
What might look like an enviable disposition or a combination of peasant slyness, diplomatic experience and savoir vivre looks upon closer inspection like the fruit of a piety that was as naturally emotional as it was deliberately cultivated. Loving God and wishing to live near him; loving human beings because they are God’s children and brothers and sisters to each other; being good because an inner voice moves you to; doing one’s duty because this world has to get better; remaining serene because this world is neither the last nor the highest thing.92

This emphasis on Pope John XXIII’s innate goodness, without any sense of the drama of his ongoing conversion or personal failings, in the end looks more like a traditional hagiographic piece than its retooled contemporary cousin, spiritual biography. Though primary sources such as journals and letters are used, and a thus a historically-based narrative of his life is presented, the effect of this work is to confirm Pope John XXIII’s iconic status rather than illuminating the pope’s spirituality through the narrative or promoting a recognition of God’s active presence through the experience of reading the book.

B. A Spiritual Biography of Thomas Merton

A work such as Lawrence Cunningham’s spiritual biography of Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision*, does enlighten the reader about Thomas Merton’s spirituality because his subject shines through the narrative. Cunningham’s spiritual biography of Merton traces how Merton’s spiritual writings sprang from a disciplined monastic life. This spiritual biography of Merton falls somewhere between a descriptive work such as that of John XIII and a transformative work such as that of Henri Nouwen. It can be said to be an illuminative work in that it goes beyond mere explanation to engage the reader in a more personal interaction with the subject. Cunningham’s effort has a layered effect. The reader develops a better understanding of Merton’s writings by becoming acquainted with the very real person of Merton and, at the same

92 Ibid., 126.
time, the reader absorbs a fuller comprehension of the rigors and rewards of monastic life. This intertwining of the monastic life, Merton the man and the trajectory of his writing creates an empathetic interchange between the author, the reader and Merton.

Cunningham begins his work on Merton by recognizing the power of life stories to change lives, particularly when those life stories are told autobiographically. He cautiously places Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain* within the venerable tradition of Augustine’s *Confessions*, outlining some parallels both in the works and in their influence on others. Merton’s autobiography changed lives, as many who read and continue to read the book can attest, including Cunningham who noted, “it is the rare literate Catholic of a certain age who cannot remember when he or she read *The Seven Storey Mountain*; many a priest or nun will affirm that Merton’s book had a strong influence on their own religious vocation. I myself remember quite clearly reading it as a high school student in the 1950s, and the enormous impact it had on my life.”

*Seven Storey Mountain* narrates the first twenty-six years of Merton’s life leading up to and including his decision to join the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, or the Trappists, in 1941. The story told in *Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision* picks up where Merton left off, drawing from the twenty-seven years Merton spent as a monk at Our Lady of Gethsemani until his untimely death in 1968. Cunningham’s work is not intended to be a sequel to Merton’s autobiography with its same power to convert, nor is it intended as an exhaustive biographical work. Its stated aims are more modest; “to see the development of his life against

the background of his monastic education and the events of the times as they impinged on that
education.”94 There is, however, an underlying continuity between the two works. Merton’s
autobiography was an effort to “detect the impulses” that led him to genuine Christian belief and
then to join the Trappists.95 Cunningham’s work is also an effort to illuminate the thread that ties
together Merton’s life and work after joining the monastery. While more subtle than Merton’s
autobiographical work in this effort, it shares with it a profound awareness of the genuine
spiritual promptings and bearings of Merton’s life. Those promptings have the power to move
others who read Merton’s life as well.

Cunningham identifies Merton as a theologian in the traditional sense of the word, as
defined by fourth-century Evagrius of Pontus, “the theologian knows how to pray and the person
who prays is a true theologian.”96 In this biography of Merton, Cunningham wants to show that
Merton’s thinking was intricately connected to his spiritual life. Cunningham’s book is an effort
to present aspects of Merton’s monastic life chronologically to help readers of Merton better
understand his writings in this light. He writes, “My desire, in short, is to show that the prolific
works which flowed from Merton’s pen and the impact that these writings and his person had
and continue to have can only be understood against the backdrop of his contemplative
experience as a Trappist monk.”97 Cunningham deftly achieves this goal by his exhaustive
knowledge and sympathetic understanding of the full gamut of Merton’s voluminous writings,
now published in books, articles, essays, and collections of letters and journals. Cunningham

94 Ibid., 18.
95 Ibid., 4.
96 Ibid., 188.
97 Ibid., 208.
leaves the reader anxious to return to Merton’s works armed with Cunningham’s insights so as to better glean the meaning of Merton’s spiritual contributions.

Merton was a person with a deep need and a great ability to communicate, who wanted especially to convey a “sense of the attracting power of God’s love.” His writing was a way of mediating his experience of God and “this capacity derived, in turn, from both his poetic gifts and from his long experience as a person of prayer.” For Cunningham, it is essential that Merton’s prayer be placed both in the context of the ancient monastic practice of contemplation as well as in the context of the issues and problems of the modern world. He sees Merton’s vocation, and thus all of his writing, as an “articulation of ancient wisdom for the present age.” All that Merton communicated was not achieved from thin air, but was rather the fruit of his concrete, daily monastic life. His life and writings are those of “a person who lived a dedicated and disciplined life in order to be true to his deepest self.”

The way that Merton wrote about contemplation exemplifies this inextricable connection between his life and writing. In a letter to Abdul Aziz, a retired Pakistani civil servant with an interest in mysticism, Merton wrote about his personal experience of contemplation as a “kind of praise rising up out of the center of Nothing and Silence.” Cunningham cites this particular letter as a “hermeneutical key” to understanding Merton’s published writings on contemplation,

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 208.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., x.
102 Ibid., 97.
such as *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *Contemplative Prayer*. Other journal entries and letters demonstrate this link as well. Merton, who wrote regularly in his journal, dated his entries not only by month and day, but by saint’s day and liturgical season. When he lived in the monastery, Merton’s day was punctuated by the monastic rhythm “that began with early rising long before dawn, regular prayer, periods of meditation, manual work, study, writing, and the celebration of the liturgy.” In 1965, Merton moved into a hermitage on the Gethsemani property. This monastic rhythm continued to mark his days, enabling Merton to write that he was living “with the tempo of the sun and of the day, in complete harmony with all that is around me.”

Cunningham contends that Merton’s immersion in prayer, rather than separating him from the world, enabled him to be deeply attuned to the tumultuous events that rippled through church and society in the 1960s. He was steadfast in his commitment to adding his contemplative voice to a chaotic society. He grew to see his monastic vocation less as separation from the world and more as a means of engaging the world. This sense of engagement from a prayerful perspective was not to be reserved for monks and nuns alone in Merton’s view. Rather, it captures the authentic life of all Christians and, indeed, all people of faith. In the 1960’s, the byword was *relevance*. Merton wanted to show that a life oriented toward God was of enormous relevance. The way in which we live our life, whether monastic or otherwise, communicates

105 Ibid.
important truths to the world. In Merton’s case, he was a contemplative activist whose writing sprouted from a dedicated life.

To adopt a life that is essentially non-assertive, non-violent, a life of humility and peace is in itself a statement of one’s position. . . . By my monastic life and vows I am saying NO to all the concentration camps, the aerial bombardments, the staged political trials, the judicial murders, the racial injustices, the economic tyrannies, and the whole socioeconomic apparatus. . . . I make monastic silence a protest against the lies of politicians, propagandists, and agitators, and when I speak it is to deny that my faith and my Church can ever seriously be aligned with these forces and injustices. . . . 106

By tracing the contours of Merton’s life and writing, Cunningham has done a service for Merton readers. He has illuminated the text, much in the way that monastic scribes illuminated the text of the Gospel, and has made an aesthetic contribution that urges the reader to look more closely at Merton’s writing, to look there for signs of the presence of beauty and truth and goodness in Merton’s life and writing. The effect of Cunningham’s work is to attract the reader to Merton’s written legacy as a way to glean truths of great relevance for the Christian and all who seek to live faithful lives of integrity. Again, like an illuminated manuscript, Cunningham’s spiritual biography highlights the text of Merton’s life for the reader, compelling the reader to take a closer look so as to better grasp Merton’s spiritual insights as they might relate to his or her life.

C. Spiritual Biography of Henri Nouwen

If Lawrence Cunningham’s spiritual biography of Thomas Merton seeks to illuminate the writing of Merton for the reader, Michael O’Laughlin’s God’s Beloved: A Spiritual Biography of Henri Nouwen hopes to present a portrait of Nouwen that will spark a process of transformation

106 Ibid., 147.
and growth for the reader. O’Laughlin asks two methodological questions in his work on Nouwen, “What does his life mean in spiritual terms?” and “What should I or anyone else do to continue Henri Nouwen’s spiritual legacy?” O’Laughlin’s own definition of the term *spiritual biography* as an attempt to “see Henri’s life and teachings in spiritual terms” sounds more modest than what O’Laughlin is seeking to achieve in his work. His aim, he states, more than anything else, is “to search out some of the less explored aspects of Nouwen’s life, the ones that are most pertinent to a better assessment of him.” According to this stated definition, a spiritual biography would provide a lens for viewing a life in order to better understand that life. But that is only one level of O’Laughlin’s effort. He also wants this spiritual biography to provide a lens for the reader to view his or her own life. Reading Nouwen’s life in spiritual terms means approaching it in spiritual terms, in other words in terms of one’s own spiritual life.

O’Laughlin states clearly that he wants to present the inner life of Nouwen as an aid to the reader in his or her own spiritual journey. This is a spiritual biography in the sense that the reading of the biography is meant to be a spiritual experience. It is not intended only as a biography of a spiritual person.

O’Laughlin knew Nouwen well. He admits that he was profoundly affected by his relationship with him. He states that he hopes to give Nouwen to the reader in this personal way to offer the reader the opportunity also to know Nouwen and be changed by him as well. For O’Laughlin, Nouwen can be seen as a bearer of God’s Word whose life revealed something

108 Ibid., 15.
109 Ibid., 16.
about the ways of God. Thus O’Laughlin views the reading of Nouwen’s life as analogous to the way one might read Gospel narratives, as revelatory and relevant for one’s own life. O’Laughlin is forthright that this way of reading can result in something quite different than simply holding Nouwen’s life up as a model to imitate:

This book is very much about living in that ‘Nouwen legacy.’ Like others perhaps, I want to learn all I can from the one person I have known who seemed sent into this world with a special grace and message from God. However, I have found that not every aspect of following in Nouwen’s footsteps has been easy or completely straightforward. Henri Nouwen was unique enough as a person that his way of living might be admired, but it can hardly be embraced by anyone other than another Henri Nouwen. One then turns to his teachings to find something about prayer, about community, and about living—a message relevant for our lives.\(^{110}\)

O’Laughlin’s approach offers a contemporary twist to the traditional experience of reading the lives of saints. Traditional hagiographic writing on the saints, though intended as a genre for molding one’s life, often portrayed the holiness of the saint as unattainable. O’Laughlin discourages this reading of Nouwen’s life and at the same time attempts to dissuade the reader of Nouwen’s spiritual biography from trying to be like Nouwen. Instead, he turns this idea of imitation of the saints on its head. Nouwen cannot be imitated, O’Laughlin claims, not because Nouwen was perfect, but because he was human. O’Laughlin does not give a sanitized presentation of Nouwen, devoid of references to his personal failings and psychological weaknesses. Neither is he attempting a comprehensive biography. Rather, O’Laughlin seems to want to present elements of Nouwen’s life and spirituality as part of salvation history, as told in Scripture as well as told in the lives of Christians throughout history:

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 9.
My hope is to begin a process in which we place ourselves in the unfinished story of God’s Spirit. There may be lessons that Henri Nouwen has yet to teach us, and these lessons will be more about how we live our lives than about how he lived his.111

Then, one might ask, why even tell Nouwen’s story, if the point is to draw the reader toward his or her own story? O’Laughlin’s conviction is that each person can be the bearer of God’s word in his or her own life, a way unique to each individual. Finding one’s own way to be a bearer of God’s word, O’Laughlin asserts, is not done in the abstract or in isolation. It is not done in separating from the world, but in engaging the world. If indeed the Word became flesh, then each of those now living in its spirit comprise its body. For O’Laughlin, reading Nouwen’s life as a text can further promote understanding of the Word and our recognition of its manifestation in different lives.

O’Laughlin chooses to present only a few dimensions of Nouwen’s biography and Nouwen’s written legacy as a way of drawing the reader into the texture of Nouwen’s life. In O’Laughlin’s six chapters, he devotes the first three to a biographical sketch of Nouwen in his origins and early influences, his psychological composition and his artistic bent. The other three chapters address three prevailing Nouwen themes: the meaning of Eucharist, the centrality of Jesus, and the practice of prayer.

The chapter on Nouwen’s psychological composition can serve to exhibit O’Laughlin’s method. In this psychology chapter, O’Laughlin delves into several psychological forces seemingly operative in Nouwen. This approach is based on the premise that Nouwen’s spirituality—or any spirituality—cannot be separated from a personal journey. Nouwen’s own psychological make-up impacted the way Nouwen internalized and expressed his spiritual

111 Ibid., 18.
insights. Thus a close look at Nouwen’s personality and psychology is a way to shed greater light on his spiritual message. By focusing on Nouwen’s psychological make-up, O’Laughlin is able to do two things. First, he uses the psychological lens to make clear Nouwen’s primary spiritual message, that is of God’s love for every person. Secondly, by drawing attention to Nouwen’s psychological needs, O’Laughlin encourages the reader to examine his or her own psychological composition in order to better understand how that might affect one’s particular experience of God.

O’Laughlin makes four observations about the psychology of Henri Nouwen that help explain Nouwen’s spiritual message. First, he places him in the same category as other expansive leaders who have a sort of star quality, noting that “what with his outsize charisma, drive and sense of calling, he was closer psychologically to a politician or celebrated artists than to a typical priest or university professor.” 112 Secondly, Nouwen had a classic *puer* quality, “a childlike quality that managed to be both naively idealistic and yet wise at the same time.” 113 A third psychological point that helps paint a picture of Nouwen comes from the Myers Briggs Typology Inventory. In this scheme, Nouwen seems to fit perfectly the description of an ENFP, or Extroverted Intuition with Feeling and Perception. 114 Finally, Nouwen had a psychological predilection toward shame, a fundamental insecurity about himself and his lovability. O’Laughlin posits that Nouwen from a very early age, possibly even from birth, possessed an insatiable need for love and acceptance that no human being could possibly fill, “Henri was a highly sensitive ENFP child, and there was simply not enough unqualified support in his

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112 Ibid., 59.
113 Ibid., 61.
environment to quiet his apprehensions . . . . Henri was forever asking too much of his relationships with others, and his relationship with his father was no exception."\textsuperscript{115}

O’Laughlin’s psychological treatment of Nouwen does more than explain Nouwen a little better, though it does do that. It also helps illuminate Nouwen’s writings on God’s love, as well as his recognition of how God can be revealed even through human weakness. In Nouwen’s case, he became known and loved for being a “wounded healer.”\textsuperscript{116} Nouwen believed that consciously recognizing and accepting one’s own needs presented a path to living authentic human and Christian lives. As Nouwen wrote:

\begin{quotation}
As good shepherds we are called to lay down our lives for our people. This laying down might in special circumstances mean dying for others. But it means first of all making our own lives—our sorrows and joys, our despair and hope, our loneliness and experience of intimacy—available to others as sources of new life. One of the greatest gifts we can give others is ourselves.\textsuperscript{117}

In addition to shining a light on Nouwen’s Christian message, O’Laughlin’s focus on Nouwen’s psychological weaknesses and strengths has another effect. It encourages the reader of Nouwen’s life to recognize that human failings need not necessarily impede the quest for holiness; “Henri teaches us that we grow in holiness by becoming more completely ourselves and acknowledging our authentic feelings and failures.”\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quotation}

D. Comparative Analysis: Hagiography, Biography or Spiritual Biography?

The focus on the authentic failings of their biographical subjects is one obvious way that both Cunningham’s and O’Laughlin’s works deviate from traditional hagiography. For

\textsuperscript{117} O’Laughlin, \textit{God’s Beloved: A Spiritual Biography of Henri Nouwen}, 85.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
Cunningham, disclosing a biographical subject’s flaws has merit for “the simple fact that every human search after Christian perfection is just that: a human search.”\textsuperscript{119} Cunningham distinguishes his approach from the medieval lives of saints, “one would never guess, for example, from a reading of the various Franciscan legends that Francis of Assisi ever had a bad day. If one can intuit some dark moments in the saint’s life one must detect them behind a veil of hagiographic exemplarism.”\textsuperscript{120}

Another way these authors differ from the hagiographic model is related to the first characteristic. Cunningham and O’Laughlin question the underlying assumption of traditional hagiography; that is, that sainthood is for the few and far between, those who are perfect and have always been that way. Feldman’s biography of Pope John XXIII, though it uses credible primary source materials such as journals and letters to tell its story, does not significantly depart from this limited scope of old-school hagiography in its treatment of the jolly pope who had an unusual innate spirituality from a very young age that was detectable throughout his life. But Cunningham and O’Laughlin’s works differ. Neither author shies away from his subject’s faults. Nor do they consider these faults as able to cancel out or contradict the holiness of Merton or Nouwen. It may sound at first as if O’Laughlin accepts the prevailing notion of sainthood when he writes of Nouwen, “he was not a saintly figure, like a Mother Teresa or a Dalai Lama. Instead, Nouwen was one of us, more a layman than a priest in his outlook, another imperfect, questioning believer in Jesus.”\textsuperscript{121} Yet O’Laughlin’s invitation to the reader to advance in holiness through a better understanding of Nouwen’s struggles implicitly questions this limited

\textsuperscript{119} Cunningham, \textit{Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision}, 207.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
understanding of saintliness. For Cunningham, if the common definition of sainthood were to be accepted, he admits that Merton would leave “very little elbow room for the hagiographer.”122 Any formal process of canonization, recognizes Cunningham, would not move forward as “Merton seems very unlike the pious persons who glide easily through Rome’s canonical process.”123 Yet Cunningham suggests that saintliness means more (and less) than it has traditionally implied, maintaining that Merton, an unlikely candidate for canonization “was a most saintly person.”124

Spiritual biography as an emerging genre in the field of spirituality studies has an important contribution to make in democratizing the notion of holiness. If the academic study of spirituality, and Christian spirituality in particularly, examines the living and concrete person in dynamic transformation toward the fullness of life in Christ, as Mary Frohlich defines it, spiritual biography offers a mechanism to examine any ordinary life to see if and how that dynamic transformation took place. Spiritual biography thus retains at least that element of hagiography which seeks to trace the spirit in a life. However, spiritual biography starts with a very different premise, one shared by Cunningham and O’Laughlin in their treatments of Merton and Nouwen. In contrast to hagiography, spiritual biography posits that a person need not have been perfected or on the road to canonization for his or her life to be considered holy, or even saintly. Further, these examples of spiritual biography communicate that the life of one who pursues holiness does not necessarily hold as a model for others to imitate. In this framework, men such as Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and even John XXIII, though his spiritual biography does not

122 Cunningham, Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision, 207.
123 Ibid., 185.
124 Ibid.
explicitly acknowledge this, are examples not in the sense of being paradigms, but of being illustrations, imperfect examples of flawed human persons who nonetheless seek and reveal God through their lives.

Unlike hagiography, spiritual biography does not seek to present awe-inspiring heroes but rather may consciously seek to inspire belief, awe or at least interest in the existence of a God whose influence in these lives it attempts to uncover. A Christian spiritual biography would take seriously the premise that through Christ ordinary human beings are drawn to share in the divine life and by means of their living in relationship to Christ they become vehicles for making God’s presence and action known. As defined here, the genre of spiritual is generous enough to accept the premise that there is value to the reading of such a life both in how it can inform and also in how it can potentially transform the reader. In this way, spiritual biography resembles hagiography and seeks in a modified way to revitalize the lives of saints as a genre of holy writing.

Of the three spiritual biographies evaluated in the previous sections, both the biography of Merton and that of Nouwen have the potential to stir the spirit of the reader and to draw the reader into a deeper relationship to God. Such a purpose for spiritual biography may be more than the genre can bear, but if indeed an encounter with another human being can become an encounter with God, as Hans von Balthasar proposes, it should hold that the text of a life might convey the same power. Lawrence Cunningham’s spiritual biography of Thomas Merton comes close to suggesting such a thing. Though he would not likely venture that his Merton work is holy, he does maintain that Merton, as “a theologian in the old monastic sense of the word is someone whose life becomes a ‘text’ that speaks of God; and this person’s writings are, as it
were, an extension of the text of life.”125 While Cunningham’s goal in writing the Merton biography was not necessarily to do holy writing, he did aim to turn readers back to Merton’s own writing with a deeper appreciation for who Merton was, and thus perhaps to be attuned to hearing God’s word as expressed in Merton’s writings. O’Laughlin also hoped by presenting Nouwen as a bearer of God’s Word in his spiritual biography that each reader would see him or herself also as a bearer of God’s Word. O’Laughlin hoped that by offering Nouwen’s spiritual biography, he could help prompt what his readers would experience as an encounter in their own lives.

While many biographies may be called *spiritual biography*, it is the underlying premise shared by the spiritual biographies of Merton and Nouwen discussed above which I argue here ought to be a distinguishing mark of the genre of spiritual biography that differentiates it from the religious biographies described in Reynolds and Capps’ work. As explored here, a spiritual biography in this new vein begins with the organizing principle that a human life can bear testimony to a life of faith but also might reveal something by that life to believers and even to skeptics about God. As do the historically-oriented religious biographies categorized by Reynolds and Capps, both Cunningham and O’Laughlin employed the tools of religious studies by offering historical detail, describing cultural milieus and positing psychological predilections. Yet each of these spiritual biographers, as do the mythically-oriented religious biographies described by Reynolds and Capps, treats his subject from a symbolic point of view, as a sign pointing beyond his individual life.

125 Ibid., 189.
This dual biographical approach is consistent with Christian tradition and belief that makes the claim that it is through the human story—the concrete details of a life of messy relationships, personal struggles, deep suffering, disappointments as well as survival, joys and accomplishments—that the sacramental, ‘real presence’ of God becomes known. This sacramental framework allows for the reading of a life as a sacred text, a text that may reveal to the believing reader something new about God and perhaps challenge the unbelieving reader as well. Spiritual biography as the genre that captures this dynamic would present the story of a life with the conscious intent of aiding a reader to seek signs of divine activity in his or her life.

O’Laughlin certainly acknowledges this approach in his spiritual biography of Nouwen, leaning heavily on a psychological approach with the expressed intention of having his readers examine how their own psychological composition might mediate an experience of God. Cunningham leans more heavily on a cultural approach to his analysis as he describes the monastic milieu of Merton. By doing so his spiritual biography may prompt readers to consider their own spiritual environments and influences. Cunningham explicitly encourages readers of his Merton biography to return to, or discover for the first time, Merton’s spiritual treatises.

Each of the spiritual biographies discussed in detail here uses a wealth of primary sources for its work, such as letters, journals, published writings of the biographical subject, and first-hand knowledge of the person, as well as secondary sources springing from the fields of psychology and the culture of monasticism respectively. Making use of Kees Waaijman’s methodological framework, the exploratory steps leading to a coherent narrative in these spiritual biographies comprise what Waaijman would call form-descriptive research. Further, in the effort to investigate and unveil at least a dimension of the inner life of Merton and Nouwen in relation
to the God they each profess, the further exploratory moves are what Waaijman identifies as mystagogic research.

IV. A Revelatory Life: Returning to Arleen McCarty Hynes

It is this two-pronged model of research that will be attempted in the next several chapters in the case study of spiritual biography treating the life of Arleen McCarty Hynes (1916-2006). Like Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen, and countless other unknown individuals who persistently pursued holiness, Arleen Hynes may never be a candidate for canonization but is still an apt subject for a spiritual biography. Hers is the life of an ordinary woman whose life nonetheless might serve as a revelatory text. Viewing Arleen Hynes’ life as a revelatory text is particularly fitting because her life’s work as a wife, mother, lay Catholic leader, political activist, bibliotherapist, and Benedictine sister was rooted in an underlying experience of and belief in the transformative power of the texts of scripture, poetry, story and other written words. As will become evident in the spiritual biography in the next several chapters, Arleen Hynes etched the Word of God quite literally on the walls of her home and figuratively on the walls of her heart where she called upon it as a potent force throughout the many changes in her ninety years of life.  

Her life story unfolds in concert with some of the most dramatic periods of American Catholic history: the rural life movement and liturgical reform of the 1940s and 1950s and the seismic wave of the Second Vatican Council and the political and social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1940s and 1950s, she and her husband Emerson Hynes, an admired

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126 See Appendix B for photographs from Kilfenora with passages from psalms, proverbs, and poetry etched and painted on the walls.
college professor at St. John’s University, lived with their ten children in the woods near the university in Collegeville, Minnesota in a home they named Kilfenora. They were part of what was somewhat cheekily dubbed “The Movement,” a group of Catholic writers, artists, professors, and others in their rural environment dedicated to Catholic renewal. In the 1960s, they moved to the Washington, DC area when their close friend Eugene McCarthy was elected to the United States Senate and where he later launched the first of many bids for President. Living outside Washington, DC, Arleen Hynes was part of a study group that helped interpret the liturgical changes of Vatican II for parishes; she served as the President of the local chapter of American Association of University Women; she was a member of the National Council of Catholic Women as well as numerous diocesan commissions. In 1968 she was the National Chair of Volunteers for Senator Eugene McCarthy during McCarthy’s first presidential bid when he was dubbed “the peace candidate.” In 1970, just after the sad drowning of her eighteen year-old son Michael in the Potomac River and less than a year prior to her husband’s early death at age fifty-six, she began working as a librarian at St. Elizabeths Hospital. There she helped pioneer and standardize the emerging field of bibliotherapy. She then spent the years 1981 until her death in 2006 as a Benedictine sister still active in bibliotherapy at St. Benedict’s Monastery in Minnesota.

In this research, borrowing an investigative tool from the study of language and linguistics, a content analysis of Arleen Hynes’ letters and journals uncovers the repeated theme of the power of text to change lives.\(^\text{127}\) Content analysis is used in the study of language to

determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts. Conceptual analysis is a subset of this method of research, with an emphasis on concepts or themes rather than specific words or phrases. A concept repeated in Arleen Hynes’ papers is that of the revelatory text. Seventy years of extant letters and journals reveal that the revelatory role of the shared word was a constant thread through her years as a child in Iowa, a rural wife and mother of ten in Minnesota, a lay Catholic leader, political campaigner, bibliotherapist in Washington, DC, and a Benedictine sister back in Minnesota. The voluminous private collection of personal papers itself testifies to the importance of the written word for her, a continual theme even as the profound changes in church and society reverberated in her and her family’s life. While concept analysis is associated primarily with quantitative research, this research project uses it qualitatively to observe, describe, and draw insights into Arleen Hynes’ spiritual life. Pulling out the theme of transformative texts in Arleen Hynes’ life as reflected in her letters, journals, and interviews with those who knew her well is an effort in the words of trailing the spirit as Irish theologian Bernadette Flanagan identified the process. According to Flanagan, a qualitative approach to these sources offers “the opportunity to explore in some depth and detail the sensibilities, hopes, values, beliefs or lived practice” of the subject of an academic spirituality inquiry, such as that of the life of Arleen McCarty Hynes. The distinctive contribution of the academic study of spirituality in this type of qualitative research is the lens through which such qualitative research is conducted. Flanagan identifies the lens of the spirituality scholar as a heuristic inquiry:

A second challenge in the approach to spirituality research proposed here will be how to attend more deeply to the gathered data as one prepares to represent it in a written text.

Heuristic inquiry may be distinctly helpful in this regard in that it seeks to pay particular attention to the personal character of data. Heuristic analysis also consciously includes the researcher’s own experience within the framework of analysis. In this way it may be considered as an extension of spiritual accompaniment into the public forum. The skills required to be a spiritual director and to function as a reflective qualitative researcher often seem to have multiple overlaps.  

This type of heuristic inquiry draws insightful analysis from the researcher’s spiritual intuition; it “calls the researcher to be open to being guided into initially unrecognised directions and sources of meaning. This will occur through a movement from the raw initial engagement with the data . . . through processes of immersion and incubation in the data.” In the case of this research project, concentrated attention is paid to the transitional periods of Arleen McCarty Hynes’ life and the texts that were influential in helping her cross the threshold to a new era of her life.

Each of the major transitional periods of Arleen McCarty Hynes’ life will comprise a chapter in her spiritual biography. Before closely examining the texts that brought her over the thresholds to married life, to the Benedictine life and to the end of her life, the following chapter will present a descriptive overview of Arleen McCarty Hynes’ life. This introduction to her life will situate her within her historical and cultural framework, describe the basic contours of her life and introduce the theme of reading for transformation to be explored in subsequent chapters. This second chapter, like the three that follow it, will begin with a Prelude which uses the voice of Arleen Hynes and sometimes other voices to imaginatively conjure specific moments during each of the transitional times treated in this spiritual biography. The Preludes present an opportunity for a meditative look at the inner life of Arleen Hynes and thus to serve the narrative.

129 Ibid., 203.
130 Ibid., 205.
that follows. After the second chapter, the ensuing chapters will more deeply explore how reading transformed Arleen Hynes in transitional periods, first in her married life at Kilfenora in Minnesota (chapter 3), then in Washington, DC where her bibliotherapy career was launched and she discovered her calling to become a Benedictine sister (Chapter 4), then back in Minnesota where she joined the Sisters of Saint Benedict just a few miles from St. John’s Abbey and lived the rest of her life (Chapter 5).

These three middle chapters that focus on three major transitions in Arleen Hynes’ life use the heuristic approach advanced by Bernadette Flanagan and reflected in Kaas Waaijman’s description of mystagogic research. While presenting in narrative form the role of texts in Arleen Hynes’ life and career, the overall conceptual structure that frames these three chapters is the thesis that Arleen’s active engagement with these texts, particularly in times of crisis and change, were experienced by her as a dynamic encounter with God which deepened her understanding. Further underlying these chapters is the premise that when viewed through the heuristic lens of trailing the spirit, the life of Arleen Hynes itself can act as a revelatory text. A final concluding chapter (Chapter 6) will return to the subject of spiritual biography as the critical successor to hagiography and as a valuable research tool for scholars of spirituality.

Due to my close reading of Arleen Hynes’ life throughout these past several years, I have gained a familiarity and intimacy with her that I believe she invites. I have come to appreciate her indomitable spirit and her ability to keep growing throughout her ninety years. Deeply immersed in her letters and journals, following her trains of thought and acutely aware of her grief and joy, it has become natural for me to refer to Arleen Hynes as simply “Arleen,” which is how she will be referred to throughout the rest of this work. I will continue referring to her by
her first name alone even in the chapter treating of her time in the Benedictine Monastery, when she became known to many as “Sister Arleen.” The hope is that the reader of her spiritual biography will also grow in familiarity with her and that the use of her first name will seem natural and fitting.
Chapter 2: The Revelatory Life of Arleen McCarty Hynes

September 7, 2006

“It has been a lovely life,” said Benedictine Sister Arleen Hynes in a feature article of the St. Cloud Visitor in 1994. This simple sentence captures the lovely rhythms of her life—lovely when she grew up in Sheldon, Iowa, with twin sister Eileen under the prayerful guidance of Josie Dunn (“Mama”) who became their surrogate mother when their biological mother died in childbirth.

There is a time to plant and a time to die.

It was lovely when she married Emerson Hynes, settling in Collegeville near St. John’s Abbey, having ten children and participating in the rural life movement, the Catholic family movement, and liturgical renewal. They led their children in praying psalms antiphonally. How did Emerson and Arleen manage all these activities? “Every night we all got 30 seconds of loving each,” says their daughter Mary Hynes-Berry. “Any time one of us needed some special care, she would take us on her lap. There were six of us under six at the time.”

There is a time for doing and a time for loving.

It was lovely when they pulled up stakes to move to Washington D.C. when Emerson accepted Senator Eugene McCarthy’s offer to become his legislative assistant.

There is a time to legislate for the hungry and the thirsty.

It was not a lovely time when husband Emerson and son Michael died within six months of each other. She might have let her whole world crash then, and friends would have said, “That’s all right. It is too much to deal with.”

There is a time to die.

Instead she started a new job in the library at St. Elizabeths Hospital and found herself pioneering a form of healing called bibliotherapy. Later it became poetry therapy. It was lovely and engaging work. In fact, she described it as “falling in love all over again.”

There is a time to build up.

But she found herself praying alone. She felt the draw of community. After consulting with her lifelong friend, Mother Henrita Osendorf, she followed the call to this Benedictine community where she just celebrated her 25th year of religious life last month.

There is a time to pray and a time to be.

When St. Elizabeths celebrated its 25th year of its Biblio/Poetry Therapy Program in 1998, the staff planted a dove tree—a poet-tree—in Arleen’s honor. She continued her work in biblio/poetry therapy by writing the classic book on the process with daughter Mary, developing a bibliography, and publishing 15 articles. She developed retreat sessions of poetry as prayer. She met with a bimonthly poetry group here and in the Twin Cities.

She would be the first to say that she was no saint. “Family life was a discipline for me,” she said. “I had to work at developing patience. And community life asks that same kind of discipline.” Perhaps that’s why one of her favorite poems was Father Kilian McDonnell’s “Perfection.”

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I. Arleen McCarty Hynes, a Revelatory Life?

Arleen McCarty Hynes was no saint, as Arleen would have been the first to say, yet interestingly the contours of her life do seem to bear many of the markings of the classic life of a saint. She and her twin sister miraculously survived a traumatic birth whereupon they were orphaned and adopted by a pious woman of no blood relation who sacrificed a great deal to raise the twins. Arleen spent her formative years engaged in hours and hours of spiritual reading and attending daily Mass. She married an extraordinarily decent and principled man who truly loved her; she raised ten children; she treated severely mentally ill patients with uncommon compassion and respect; she followed her vocation to become a Benedictine sister in her early sixties. Yet behind what seems formulaic in her life story—the obligatory miraculous birth, religious upbringing, ten children, outreach to a forgotten and vulnerable population, the ceaselessly praying Benedictine sister—lies a real human being with genuine struggles. She hurt her husband deeply by kissing another man after the two of them were engaged to be married, a wound that brought Emerson pain until the day he died. She yelled at her children when overwhelmed by the tasks of parenting ten children and running a household; she complained about the gossipy and small-minded women in her Minnesota community; she experienced the disappointing and very personal political defeat of 1968’s anti-war candidate, Eugene McCarty; she saw two sons go overseas to serve in the military during the Vietnam War; she mourned the sudden loss through drowning of a beloved teenage son and then the premature death of her husband; she was at times inattentive to the emotional needs of her remaining family, failing to address the drug and alcohol addictions some of them were developing as she threw herself into her work. She joined the Benedictine order, despite the objections of some of her children that
doing so would deprive her grandchildren of a close relationship with her. Arleen could be forgetful, quick-tempered, and judgmental. She harbored secret feelings of resentment toward her twin sister. She cared a bit too much about her appearance and took close note of how others looked, yet pettiness and small-mindedness annoyed her to no end. In short, she was human.

Given those human failings, as well as the manner in which some of her life’s details are curiously akin to those pious lives of the saints of old, it leads one to wonder to what extent the hagiographers of those saints glossed over some of the less appealing but very real aspects of their subjects’ characters. Those revered lives of the saints have created the strong impression that to be saintly means to have an almost inevitable spiritual strength with very few flaws. If not from birth, then from the point of a very pronounced conversion, these saints are presented as being wholly holy. But in the telling of Arleen’s life, the point is not to emphasize an unerring spiritual strength or flawless character, but rather to tell part of the story of a woman who possessed a singular desire for God no matter how weak or flawed she might have been. A set of resources for her in pursuing God were the texts that she engaged, an engagement very like the model of bibliotherapy she came to adopt and to promote. So although this sketch of Arleen will interestingly share resonances with a classic saint’s life, it will drive at a more human telling that hopes to be at once inspiring and true.

A. Birth and Early Childhood: In Love with Books and Life

Arleen McCarty Hynes and her twin sister Eileen were born as premature identical twins on May 3, 1916. They were the ninth and tenth children born to Mary Grace Gannon McCarty, their mother who died as a result of their birth. Dr. Cram, who attended their mother at the birth but left the house while she lay dying, instructed their father to ask the neighbor to make the
casket for Mary Grace big enough to hold the tiny newborn twins, barely three pounds each. It was not likely that they would live. Even if they did survive, their father Veatus McCarty did not see how he could care for these two vulnerable babies with seven children already in the home, all of whom were needed to help with the farm and the housework. Two of Mary Grace’s sisters offered to take one child each, but Veatus’ sister-in-law Josie Dunn McCarty offered to take both the twins home and raise them as her own. Josie Dunn was reserved, a very erect and dignified lady with delicate features, blue eyes, and wavy grey hair twisted softly into a bun at the nape of her neck. She was fifty-six years old. By taking in girls not biologically related to her when her own four children were grown or nearly grown, she saved the lives of the McCarty twins and engendered a lifelong gratitude from them. Later in life, Arleen reflected on the woman she and Eileen always called “Mama:"

We twins grew up knowing our lives were a daily miracle. This was because Mama kept us alive in the first place. She did not gift us with life itself – Mary Grace Gannon McCarty and Veatus Cletus McCarty, our birth parents, did that. But her strong will and unflagging care kept us kicking and crying, and lapping up milk, till we could survive on our own. As Mama preserved our existence, so she kept us in love, faith and grace as we evolved in our early experiences together and went on to carry out those loving values through the rest of our separate lives.132

Arleen had no hesitation speaking most positively about the kind of spiritual direction her adoptive mother gave her, writing later in life that “it was the very essence of life with Mama that ‘life’ and ‘spiritual life’ were synonymous.”133 According to Nancy Hynes, Arleen’s niece who was also a Benedictine sister; “Josie Dunn is the key to Arleen’s spirituality.”134 Throughout her life, Josie possessed a keen desire for spiritual learning. She attended daily Mass

132 Arleen Hynes, “Mama and We Twins,” (1999), unpublished work in Arleen Hynes personal papers.
133 Ibid.
134 Nancy Hynes, Author Interview, June, 2007.
at St. Patrick’s Church in Sheldon, Iowa with the twins whenever feasible; she engaged them in
spiritual readings and periods of silence; she said the rosary with them at night and often would
add poetic prayers such as “Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord,” which Arleen only later
learned were from the psalms. Josie taught the twins that an essential component of life, and thus
also of the spiritual life, was the absolute necessity of reading. Arleen’s training as a librarian,
and later her profession as a bibliotherapist and her vocation as a Benedictine are consistent with
this heavy emphasis on the written word. Arleen credits Josie Dunn with this deep appreciation
for reading:

    Although we could not spell or do arithmetic, Mama taught us to be excellent readers. As
we read aloud to each other daily, she would stop us every so often and say, ‘Twins, what
did this say?’ We had to remain attentive. Among many gifts, Mama gave us a sense of
wonder, a delight in learning, and a longing for God. All of which were a preparation for
biblio-poetry therapy which enriched our lives in our 60s and beyond.135

Reading aloud was a practice instituted by Josie Dunn from the time the twins could read.
Their routine of an hour of spiritual reading a day instilled in Arleen a lifelong habit of doing
so.136 The twins and their “Mama” would read aloud from spiritual texts, each taking their turn,
including Josie Dunn. Though Arleen and Eileen rarely argued, Arleen recalled that “the only
tension in that hour was which one of us got to read out loud the longest; Mama wanted her turn
too.”137 Arleen knew from an early age that reading aloud and then chewing on those words is a
powerful and important practice. At thirteen years of age, the twins and Josie were reading aloud

135 Arleen Hynes, “Poetry Therapy in Our Lives.”
136 In a questionnaire that Arleen Hynes completed when inquiring about joining St. Benedict’s Monastery
in St. Joseph, Minnesota, Arleen wrote, “My mother was very interested and alert about religion so from 6 to 20
years of age we had an hour of religious reading daily,” St. Benedict’s Monastery Archives, December 30, 1978.
Benedict Monastery.
from the three volume work, *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection* by the seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit Alphonsus Rodriguez. Originally published in 1609, there was much of practical use in these volumes about living humbly and according to the virtues. Arleen confessed to having forgotten the content in her adult years, though recalled vividly how much fun it was to read aloud and how ordinary it seemed to them to be doing so, remembering “it never seemed to occur to Mama that we might not be able to grasp what she wanted to read nor that we would not find it interesting. We did.”

In addition to reading aloud, Josie Dunn valued periods of silence and would sometimes say; “Twins, let us have an hour of silence in God’s name.” Throughout her life, Arleen dedicated a portion of the afternoon, her “nap time” as she called it when the children were young, to quiet reading and silence. Arleen hated to break the silence of that time, and in later years continued to seek it out in various places of refuge for her such as The Little House at Kilfenora, where she wrote in a private reflection, “but silence at the Little House—the still trees—lovely, hesitant to break, as when we were little and Mama said ‘Let’s be silent for an hour’ and how we hated to break it!”

When Arleen and Eileen were twelve years old, Josie’s husband Jim McCarty died. From then on, it was only the twins and Josie in the house. Without a man in the house, the pressing need for an adequate dinner plan or a pristine house seemed to vanish, and Arleen remembered very little attention being paid to the domestic arts other than sewing. Josie Dunn loved to make

\[\text{\textsuperscript{138}}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{139}}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{140}}\text{Arleen Hynes, “Reflections on Identity,” (1992), unpublished work in Hynes personal papers.}\]
clothes for the twins and taught them both to make their own clothes. Spiritual reading, sewing, and socializing became more important daily tasks than any other. Arleen remembered:

Life changed after Daddy died. Mama no longer had to get meals for his manly hungers, and Eileen and I were no more interested in regular meals than Mama. Mama believed in eating lots of fruits, which we loved, any time of the day. We simply did not have three-times-a-day meat-and-potatoes meals. Everything about housekeeping also became more casual. It seemed to us that life was more focused on us and our friends.\(^{141}\)

As the girls went to high school, they formed a circle of friends they came to call “the gang.” Josie Dunn was generous in welcoming the gang to the house, where they would come in the evenings to listen to the radio and dance. Almost as much as the twins did, Josie enjoyed the liveliness of the house when the gang was there, and regularly engaged the young people in conversation about what they were studying or reading. She would often interrupt the gathering with some reading from a prayer book or spiritual guide, and the friends began to expect it.

Arleen and Eileen later wrote about how they appreciated Josie’s interest in her friends and their ideas, as well as her willingness to let them hold their spirited gatherings at the house:

The ‘gang’ was made up of about twenty-five kids. It lasted from our sophomore year in high school to sophomore year in college. They were at our house every single night dancing—unless we all went elsewhere to dance. During basketball and football season they had to leave at 10 p.m. because all the boys were on the teams. We danced to the radio, fifteen minutes of music, then ads, then fifteen more minutes. Mama would sit on her davenport and read until about 9 p.m. If she found a good article in the *Sacred Heart Messenger* or the *Ave Maria*, or *Our Sunday Visitor*, she would have one of us turn off the radio. ‘I would like to have you listen to this,’ she would say, and she would read aloud.\(^ {142}\)

As seventh graders, Eileen and Arleen had begun creating poetry notebooks where they would paste or copy poems from magazines and other sources. This sharing of meaningful texts

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\(^{141}\) Hynes, “Mama and We Twins,” (1999).

\(^{142}\) Ibid., Eileen McCarty Yeager, Appendix I.
persisted as they continued to exchange poetry, books, and magazines throughout their life. After
their graduation from Sheldon High School in 1934, this textual sharing took the form of a
Literature Club which they created with other students and a teacher moderator. Arleen and
Eileen had great respect for the young female teacher who moderated their club and who shared
her contagious love of reading with the twins. Their “Lit Club” continued for several years, even
as the twins attended Sheldon Junior College from 1934 to 1936. Arleen was an enthusiastic
participant; she would read selections aloud to her friend Joan Emerson in preparation for the
meetings and reported in letters to Eileen in Chicago that she had a “whale” of a time at their
literary gatherings.143

In later years, Arleen would speak of their time growing up in Sheldon, Iowa in literally
glowing terms. They were fortunate to have moved from a farm to the town of Sheldon before
the worst effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s and even before that time sent many Iowa
farmers into bankruptcy. They lived modestly in the town of Sheldon, Iowa without any luxuries
but also without a sense of great deprivation. Arleen remembered these years in Sheldon fondly,
reminiscing years later with Eileen about the morning light they would often see as they walked
home from church, a light she could only explain as a “Sunday light that pervaded everything . . .
a light too lovely to describe.”144 Its luminousness was perhaps a sign of the special eye for
beauty that Arleen and Eileen both possessed and both attributed to God’s creative presence.
That she and Eileen survived their birth was a fact that each believed was nearly miraculous, a
miracle mediated by an incredibly determined middle-aged woman not related by blood to these

143 Arleen Hynes, Sheldon, IA, March 1938.
144 Hynes, “Family Life and Spiritual Development.”
babies. For the rest of their lives, Arleen and Eileen would bear a deep gratitude for Josie Dunn’s determination that these tiny twins should survive. Arleen viewed that lovely Sunday light as a spiritual confirmation that she and Eileen were blessed. Certainly she saw in it a reason for gratitude, a posture she cultivated throughout her life. According to a nephew of Arleen, the twins “figured it out that the gratitude that they physically felt for Josie was theologically the gratitude that we all owe God. And they certainly loved Josie for that, but I also think as they got older . . . they got it in a visceral way that made them kin to us recovering alcoholics because we get it: we’re miracles.”

B. Education: In Love with Books and Emerson Hynes

After two years at their local junior college, Arleen and Eileen took turns seeking higher education so that one of them would always be home with Josie Dunn, who turned seventy-four the year they finished high school. In 1937, for the first time in their lives, Arleen and Eileen lived separately when Arleen stayed in Sheldon to care for Josie Dunn and Eileen attended the Vogue School of Design in Chicago for a year.

Toward the end of Eileen’s studies in Chicago in the summer of 1938, Arleen took what had become an annual silent retreat. In previous years she and Eileen had gone together, with Josie Dunn. The twins never considered it breaking the silence if they were in conversation with one another; they justified it by saying it was more like talking to oneself than another person. With Eileen still living in Chicago, Arleen had no one to talk to and was thus obliged to maintain the silence at her 1938 silent retreat. The retreat led Arleen to write about an increasing sense of purpose emerging in her life:

145 James (Jamie) Yeager, Author Interview, Washington, DC, March 25, 2009.
This is certainly the best retreat I’ve ever made; maybe keeping the silence had something to do with it. Now if I can just remember until the next that the sole purpose of my creation is to ‘love, honor and serve God.’ That’s a pretty staggering thought when you stop to consider how little we think of it. Worldly success seems of so much more importance at the moment. I’ve never had the thought so forcibly imprinted on my mind before . . . \(^{146}\)

The timing for such musings about Arleen’s own purpose was opportune. Not only would Arleen be leaving for St. Catherine’s College in Minnesota in a short time, but shortly before her retreat she had met Emerson Hynes for the first time. Emerson was a bright graduate of St. John’s University in Collegeville and in 1938 was studying for a master’s degree in sociology at the University of Notre Dame. The twins had a mutual friend from Sheldon, Idaho who knew Emerson Hynes from St. John’s University and who encouraged Emerson to seek out Eileen when passing through Chicago. Emerson had done so and subsequently invited Eileen to a Notre Dame dance, encouraging her to bring her twin sister for whom he would find a date. Though Arleen went to the dance with Emerson’s friend and Emerson took Eileen to the dance, Arleen decided almost on the spot that Emerson was the man she would marry.

Emerson Hynes was a lover of words, both written and spoken, and a master at using them well. Emerson, like Eileen (the younger of the twins by a few minutes) was the tenth of ten children. His large family ran a farm in southern Minnesota. Emerson’s father died before Emerson turned two and his older brother Stanley took over the running of the farm. The Hynes were a gentle and accepting people; Arleen always thought they showed respect for others by their natural reticence. But they also had a wonderful way with words. The Hynes’ loved to play with words, delighting in the verbal spar and spinning puns the way other families spin cotton.

\(^{146}\)Arleen Hynes, Sheldon, IA, June 15, 1938.
One thing the Hynes farm did produce was a number of wordsmiths as handy with a metaphor as with a plough. Emerson’s sister Florence, known to the Hynes children as Aunti Dutch, culled poetry from the land and her Catholic faith and published several volumes of poetry throughout her life. Emerson wrote articles and essays published various places, including many in *Commonweal* magazine. Having read so widely, and having digested so much of what he read, Emerson was able to supply Arleen through the years with a wealth of reading suggestions and encouragement. The day after the McCarty twins left South Bend after the spring dance in May 1938, Emerson wrote to Eileen: “I can imagine the two of you steeping yourselves in Chesterton; too bad more of his books aren’t available. Advice: digest what you have thoroughly and wait for more to appear. The Lord provides.”


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Some man in his few acres scattered seed  
And scythed and flailed it as of ancient law;  
And unaware how hallowed was the deed  
Bedded his stable with the broken straw.  
No lodgings at the inn . . . but here were rest  
And humble shelter; here were kine and sheep  
To warm the chill about the strawy nest  
Whereon the new-born Child lay hushed in sleep.  
All nature labored fully for this night;  
Earth took the grain and warm rain did its part;  
Sun drew the slender spears into the light  
And burnished them with delicate sure art;  
and some goodman, unknowing and unknown,  
Forked up the golden straw to make a throne.  
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148 Emerson Hynes, South Bend, IN, May 1938. He went on to write to Eileen that he was thinking about her and would very much enjoy seeing her again: “So glad that you enjoyed the weekend; as should have been apparent, it was a mutual pleasure. Tom mentioned that he had written; did he hint at the fact that it might be necessary for him to do some ‘research’ at the University of Chicago library? If he does, I, of course, in the spirit of the society, shall have to accompany him. Something to think about during class.” But it was Arleen, not Eileen, who had determined she would marry Emerson from that first Notre Dame weekend, and it was she who kept up a correspondence with him that led to their marrying three years later, on June 26, 1941.
With this appreciation of books it was natural that Arleen should pursue a library science degree at St. Catherine College in St. Paul, Minnesota. At Emerson’s urging, she worked for a year after college graduation as a high school librarian in Mandan, North Dakota where Emerson’s friend and future Senator, Eugene McCarthy, was the principal. Emerson strongly believed Arleen should have a year’s experience working in the library profession, in the event that she would ever need to support herself later in life. This idea proved prescient in later years when Emerson’s health declined and Arleen did find work as a librarian to support the family.

During Arleen’s college years, Eileen stayed home with ‘Mama,’ slowly finishing the two-year degree she had started before her year in Chicago. After Arleen’s graduation, Eileen followed Arleen’s path to St. Catherine College for a library science degree and to Mandan High School as school librarian (the high school seniors did double-takes in the fall of 1943 when the new librarian looked exactly like the new librarian from the fall of 1940). Arleen and Eileen maintained their own version of a literature club between the two of them throughout those first years of living away from each other and then continuing almost unabated for six decades after each left Sheldon and their Sheldon “Lit Club” disbanded. Arleen’s letters to Eileen routinely refer to the book Arleen is reading, either thanking Eileen for sending it or letting Eileen know Arleen planned to share it with her when she was done. When Emerson married Arleen in June 1941, he “thought he was marrying ‘hundreds’ of books,” only to find “he was duped,” with only
half a dowry because Arleen and Eileen shared their collection, constantly sending books back
and forth.\footnote{Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, January 3, 1944. It was in one of Arleen’s many letters to twin sister
Eileen in 1951 that the nascent idea of bibliotherapy was first articulated by Arleen:
“I’m just bursting with an idea I’ve thought to give you more to do. As if you aren’t busy. But you know
the old business about losing yourself and gaining thereby. Now, me, as I sit in my bed of an afternoon, I thought of
your experience as a hospital librarian in Kansas City. I remember you said they didn’t read very intelligently, but
even so being able to read anything when they are captive in the hospital is a great help. Especially to the chronic
patients. So I thought that if you could volunteer to help with a library service in some nearby hospital, or even start
one yourself, you’d find it absorbing for one afternoon a week. If they don’t have a library or facilities you’ve got
even enough vastly interesting books of your own for a good core of serious stuff. And I’d be glad to send $15 to help
you buy a good selection of 25 cent books. You could, you know, to start with. Because, as you know, even tho they
do cost only 25 cents people in hospitals too often can’t get hold of them. If you thought it could work, I’d be
willing to let you keep your own New Yorkers even! And use them, too. And you could beg other magazines from
people you feel lack social awareness, it might help give them some. I’m so eager to hear if you think it at all
possible. After all, you know Houston, I don’t. And what the heat may do to you.” Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN,
March 31, 1951.}

C. Early Marriage: In Love with Books and Benedictine Living

Soon after their wedding day on June 26, 1941, Emerson and Arleen began building a
home near the fertile ground of St. John’s Abbey where the liturgical and rural life movements
were in full bloom. While Arleen was finishing her librarian job in North Dakota, she was
pleased to know that Emerson had “tramped the fields and woods looking for land for our ideal,
rural home. He found it on the hilltop along the gravel road between Saint John’s and the
Collegeville railroad station.”\footnote{Arleen Hynes, “Emerson Hynes at Collegeville,” in \textit{Saint John’s at 150: A Portrait of This Place
Called Collegeville}, ed. Hilary Thimmesh O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: St. John’s University Press, 2006), 83.} They moved into the house in December 1941, just as the
United States was becoming involved in the Second World War, so that their first several years
of marriage were during wartime. The most significant change for them in Collegeville,
Minnesota was that St. John’s University offered army classes that Emerson taught. Arleen
wrote, “this week Em has Fr. Dominic’s army classes plus his own, plus a lecture for Social
Institute in the cities Sun. So he doesn’t get to bed till too late.”¹⁵¹ In the throes of a Minnesota blizzard, Arleen felt sympathy for the “new army men,” those “poor Californians” who would be spending time in frigid Minnesota away from their families, remembering “we would call Christmas day but with the army here, I don’t think there is a chance and it wouldn’t really be fair either.”¹⁵² Emerson set up a lending library to “travelers and sundry members of the armed forces,” and friends wrote to them about their army experiences saying things such as, “think of Chuck mentioning ‘latrine.’ That’s one word darn few people knew before the broadening influences of the war.”¹⁵³ The war became part of the background of daily life; like everyone they were subject to rations and the possibility of the draft for Emerson, twenty-five years old at the start of the war. Arleen was worried about Emerson going for his physical in 1942 when their first son Denis was a baby and she was pregnant already with a second:

Em’s going to Ft. Snelling Tues. for medical. Ora! Card from Tom C. saying that they would start taking 900 in daily from now on. How horrible. Will let you know by postcard as soon as possible. I’m going to call Sr. Henrita and have her accumulate some things I can do for her and then work there all day and come home in aft. on the bus. I’m really anxious to work again and she can surely use me and it will pass the day.¹⁵⁴

Emerson did receive induction orders to leave for the army, but then his papers came back marked 4F, meaning he was unsuitable for military service. As he wrote to Eileen, “needless to say, both your twin and Denis and St. John’s in general are very much relieved.
After all, I didn’t even have the storm windows on yet. We are sorry you aren’t here to celebrate this new respite with us.”155 Arleen also wrote to Eileen:

Em is in 4F!! Just heard last nite. Both called St. John’s and said they’d heard from Fr. Snelling at last. They had sent his papers to Cloud once without classifying him and Cloud sent it back. Finally, and thank God, they decided he’d be 4F instead of IA. He has his induction papers and if he wasn’t filed in 4F he’d be inducted tomorrow at 7 o’clock. Deo Gratias! So now we are breathing again. And planning to paint the baby’s room and get a washing machine that will last the duration. Also planning to give up things in thanksgiving. If we don’t have to be separated (till they reclassify 4F’s again) we can’t go on living just as if there were no war and no one had to suffer.”156

In Emerson’s Christmas letter to Eileen in 1943, he had high praise for Arleen in his typical wry style:

Since the discrediting of the Royal House in Italy, titles are not worth much. Fortunately, because women have a way, it seems possible to retain the title of Queen for the highest position that a woman can occupy . . . So I begin by saying that the Queen of the rural home of Kilfenora is, in my eyes, more queenly all the time. She too has had a productive year. Clothes for Denis, drapes and finery for the house, canning for the table, good humor for a husband, and a welcome for relatives and guests, of which rationing, Deo Gratias, has not cut down a bit.157

Emerson makes reference in this letter to the cow Leopold that they finally butchered and all the fruits and vegetables they had grown, the rationing only bringing one casualty—”the sugar shortage made impossible the fermentation of that most Catholic drink—wild grape wine. There is nothing that can compensate for that loss.”158

Kilfenora from the beginning was beloved by Arleen and Emerson. Writing in the Living Parish in 1944, Arleen Hynes expressed how the psalms, with their gratitude to God for the land, for the harvest and for the animals, made particular sense to those living in the country. She

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155 Emerson Hynes, Collegeville, MN, 1942, ND.
156 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, October 14, 1942.
157 Emerson Hynes, Collegeville, MN, December, 1943.
158 Ibid.
noted that “the lintel over the front window overlooking the valley and the wooded hills begs to bear the message of thanksgiving, ‘In green pastures the Lord hath settled me.’”\(^{159}\) In her newly built home—*Kilfenora*, Irish for *church of the fertile hillside* or *church of the north*—she did just that, stenciling those words and other scriptural and poetic phrases onto the very walls of her home.

Continuing the practice of Josie Dunn with the twins, Emerson and Arleen read plays, poems, and short stories aloud to each other in the early years of their marriage, and later to their children. But there was another practice that Arleen treasured, and sorely missed when it was no longer possible (when Emerson worked in the Senate and then later, after his death), which were the late evening conversations she and Emerson would have when the children were asleep. Late evenings at Kilfenora, Emerson and Arleen would indulge in a bowl of ice cream or some other sweet together and Emerson would tell Arleen what he would be teaching the next day in his ethics class at St. John’s University. They had a pact that during this hour together they would not discuss any travails or triumphs of the children or other household topics; they would talk about *other* real things, such as what was discussed in the interdisciplinary lunches held at the prefect’s room at St. John’s, or the issues and ideas to be raised in Emerson’s next classes, or something drawn from the reading that each was doing. Arleen was a hungry, eager audience for Emerson’s thoughts. She was also grateful that his evening work meant she would also have time to read in the evenings as well. Arleen saw these evening chats as not only supportive, but life-giving, as essential to her in these years as the daily bread she baked for her family:

But for me, what was such a treat was that Emerson would perhaps review his ethics lecture of that day, or maybe his sociology lecture or his economics lecture. That’s what I wanted to hear. I would be reading Commonweal and something else and we would exchange about that. So our time in the evening, which was about a half hour or forty-five minutes, was not to talk about the children, not to talk about family, or was the furnace going, that kind of thing, but to talk about ideas. It was a marvelous opportunity.\textsuperscript{160}

As a student and then a professor of ethics and sociology at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, Emerson Hynes was greatly influenced by Virgil Michael, a Benedictine monk and leader in the American liturgical and rural life movement. Virgil Michael sought to make clear the social aspect of prayer and liturgy.\textsuperscript{161} Arleen and Emerson incorporated some of Virgil Michael’s ideas that prayer and liturgy had a social aspect into their family and community life. They made every effort to live off the land, heating their house with wood, canning vegetables and beef, relying on milk and butter from their own cow, and of course baking daily bread.

Some of the Hynes’ closest friends were the monks and nuns of the two Benedictine communities that surrounded them. Rooted in the Benedictine way as lay oblates, the Hynes’ were part of what they called, slightly tongue-in-cheek, “the Movement,” an informal network of Catholics committed to the integration of rural living, productive work and a rhythm of prayer, nourished also with lively fellowship, stimulating conversation and good humor. According to one of their Collegeville neighbors, there was never any need to explain things to one another; all had an interest in liturgy and Catholic social thought which seemed to sprout from the very soil

\textsuperscript{160} Arleen Hynes, interview transcript (St. Joseph, MN: St. Benedict’s Monastery Archives).
there.162 In their Collegeville community, Arleen and Emerson were seen as spiritual leaders, much as the Benedictine monks were. Emerson and Arleen made an effort to shape their family life around The Rule of Saint Benedict. Rural life was hard work, especially when Arleen did not particularly like being outdoors, but she did enjoy their community of friends. Included among this group at various times were politician Eugene McCarthy, writer J.F. Powers, sculpture-artist Joe O’Connell, artist Don Humphrey, translator Leonard Doyle, as well as the engaging and intellectual wives of these men. Also among those who gathered were liturgical leader and Benedictine monk Fr. Godfrey Diekmann and many other Benedictine friends and Collegeville neighbors who gathered at Kilfenora, often late into the night, for what Arleen described as witty banter and lively philosophical exchanges.163 When both Eugene McCarthy and Emerson were teaching at St. John’s University, it would not be unusual for Gene to stop in at Kilfenora for a quick visit and end up staying to talk until two in the morning.164 Dorothy Day was an occasional visitor to Collegeville who wrote about the encouragement she found in these pioneers of American Catholic renewal, applauding the Hynes’ leadership in Catholic rural life and in spreading credit unions. She wrote in her travel journal in The Catholic Worker:

Within an area of a few cities, St. Cloud, St. Joseph, Collegeville, there are a number of families I always visit when I come west, the J.F. Powers, the Joe OConnells, the Eisles, the Cottons, the Doyles, the McKibbens, the Palmquists and the Petters, the Thersens. Emerson Hynes and his family are now in Washington, where he is aide to Senator Eugene McCarthy and where one of his sons is page boy, going to the page boys school. Emerson is on a committee traveling around the country investigating unemployment.

162 Monica Erler, Author Interview, Collegeville, MN, March 21, 2009.
163 See Arleen’s description of life at Kilfenora in Hynes, “Emerson Hynes at Collegeville,” 83.
164 Arleen McCarty Hynes, Collegeville, MN, September 14, 1944: “Gene McCarthy stopped in again last night and talked till 2, as usual;” Arleen McCarty Hynes, Collegeville, MN, 1941: “Sunday we read and looked at the house carefully and then Gene came down about 5, we had dinner about 7, they talked philosophy problems till after 1. It is so much fun to listen.”
This last year he was named His Brothers Keeper for 1958, by the district of Minnesota League of Credit Unions, on the 112th anniversary of the credit union movement. He has served on the board of directors of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference helping to spread credit unions and educate the public in regards to them. He and his family (and there are ten children) have been engaged in rural life work, and 4H work, and all are members of credit unions themselves from the month of their birth.\(^{165}\)

And there were many births. The first child was born in 1942 when Kilfenora was just built. The family grew, and grew, and grew. By 1957 there were ten children. At Kilfenora, Arleen would often have a book of poetry or an issue of *Commonweal* or the *New Yorker* in her cookbook holder (rather than a cookbook) as she prepared dinner for the growing family and all those who came to their house in the woods for supper and conversation. As she fed herself on those words of poetry and prose, one of her sons laughingly remembers, the dinner was usually being burned.\(^ {166}\)

The family ritual in the evening was to read Scripture aloud, using the Benedictine breviary to pray the divine office, with alternating choruses for the psalms. Liturgical feasts were colorfully celebrated, particularly the Feast of Epiphany in which the family dressed in costume and had an Epiphany parade, inviting their friends and monks at St. John’s Abbey to participate. Eugene and Abigail McCarthy and their five children spent every Thanksgiving with the Hynes family, and adopted many family rituals from the Hynes’ practice. Ellen McCarthy, Eugene and Abigail McCarthy’s eldest daughter, recalls the Hynes and McCarthy families finding inspiration

\(^ {166}\) Patrick Hynes, Author Interview, Arlington, VA, November 22, 2006. Also Christopher Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, Feb. 20, 2009, remembers his mother always reading: “And of course reading the *New Yorker, Commonweal*, or some book and cooking our dinner, and that was no cookbook either let me tell ya.”
in a book called *With the Bible Through the Church Year*, which was full of family ideas for every liturgical season.\(^{167}\)

Between having what her eldest son lightheartedly calls “the annual baby,” Arleen and Emerson were busy in their rural life and Catholic community. They gave talks in local parishes on marriage and parenting. Arleen and Emerson joined the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), an organization with the premise that “there is something almost sacramental about the life of the rural family.”\(^{168}\) They attended its annual gatherings when they could.\(^{169}\) They attended performances and lectures on the St. John’s University and St. Benedict’s College campuses. Together with their neighbors, they organized pilgrimages to local churches with all the children in tow.

D. The Move to Washington, DC: In Love with Books and Bibliotherapy

In 1959, the family moved from their rural home to follow Senator Eugene McCarthy to Washington, DC so that Emerson could be his legislative assistant. The shift from days marked by the liturgical calendar and the feast days, centered on the intellectual and spiritual life of St. John’s Abbey and University, to those punctuated by the legislative calendar and election days and the political and cultural environment of Washington, DC was a bit of a culture shock to some of the Hynes family. The massive jolt that the move to Northern Virginia was for the Hynes family correlated with broader changes in the country that hit with seismic force and were

\(^{167}\) Ellen McCarthy, Author Interview, Washington, DC, February 4, 2012.


\(^{169}\) In October 1948, in Al Cross, WI, Emerson Hynes was on the National Catholic Rural Life program; his role was to give a father’s perspective on the philosophy of the Catholic rural life movement; National Catholic Rural Life brochure found in Arleen Hynes’ personal papers.
perhaps most pronounced at the nation’s epicenter: Washington, DC. Just as in Collegeville the Hynes family’s interaction with the Benedictine Rule and tradition was as natural as breathing, so too the Hynes family’s move to Washington, DC placed them in an environment where change was in the air. The legacy of the sixties is a mixed one for our country, arguably leading to its growth and change as well as contributing to a certain unraveling and disintegration; the same might be said for the Hynes family.

The period of the 1960s, when both the Catholic Church and the American cultural and political landscape changed so dramatically and when her own family life changed significantly is a particularly pivotal period in gaining an understanding of Arleen Hynes. Arleen lived in the Washington metropolitan area for two full decades. It is well documented that those two decades, the 1960s and 1970s, were times of great cultural upheaval and chaos. Many scenes of the drama of the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the peace movement, and the war on poverty were played on the Washington stage. The Kennedy administration, the March on Washington and the peace protests were part and parcel of Arleen’s life. The race riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968—days of rioting that left parts of Washington, DC as tense as a war zone for the next several years—were a dramatic and traumatic time in the nation’s capital and for Arleen who recalled in a letter, “as I rode the bus I was appalled at the evidences of the police state.”

When living in Minnesota, Arleen and neighbors had toasted the Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education, while also excitedly discussing national legislation in

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what they considered to be far-off Washington, DC. When they moved to Washington, all these things were happening in their back yard. Though they were leaving the rural life they had consciously cultivated and while the older Hynes children sorely missed their Minnesota home when they moved to Washington, DC, Arleen found it was a stimulating time as she plunged into the cultural, political, and religious offerings of their new city. She went regularly to the Supreme Court to listen to the oral arguments, to the National Gallery of Art to marvel at the collections, and to concert halls to hear music.

Yet it was also a disruptive and transitional period in her life, as will become clear as the narrative continues. The invigorating and at the same time disorienting climate of this decade parallels her experience. Commentators, whether generally sympathetic or mostly critical of the movements of the 1960s, describe it as a disruptive time, a time of the unraveling of America.\textsuperscript{171} Contemporary scholarship on the historical period of the 1960s tends to criticize the simplistic approach of looking at the era with either fondness or disdain, although sometimes it is cast in one of those two ways in public or political discourse. Scholars note, “in trying to avoid both the nostalgia and hostility that romanticize and vilify the 1960s, scholars are beginning to consider the period as part of the broader spectrum of American history, not simply as an isolated episode of political radicalism, social experimentation, or cultural craziness.”\textsuperscript{172} It is certainly a complicated period in American history, unique in many ways, particularly in its marked and widespread questioning of received traditions and authority structures. It was unarguably a time


of change, as the voices of those on the margin became much more audible and more insistent about their perspectives and their needs. However, its forces can also be seen as expressing a continuity and natural progression in the nation’s history, a time that “the insurgent political and social movements of the decade—including civil rights and black power, the New Left, environmentalism and feminism—drew upon, even as they sought to transform, values and beliefs deeply rooted in American political culture.” Arleen’s life also remained rooted in those things that had always defined it: family, literature, and liturgy. However, at the same the ground beneath her shifted both at a cultural and a personal level.

John F. Kennedy’s election in 1960, a year after the Hynes family came to Washington, ushered in a youthful energy and a catalyst of change to the city. The Kennedy administration turned a lens on the injustice of racial segregation, poverty, and the status of women. He formed the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, which some have argued—as they have with some of JFK’s other social initiatives—did not bring these issues into sharp enough focus. For Arleen, as an advisor to the Commission’s subcommittee on the Home and Community, the public recognition of the needs of women was novel. She began regularly clipping and collecting articles on the status of women and helped craft and collect surveys on the role of women for a study by the American Association of University Women. It was in The Washington Post where Arleen read about the burgeoning women’s movement, with which

175 Some of the Hynes children brought from Minnesota the memory of their mother baking bread daily and mistakenly thought she was spending time on “the roll of women,” Mary Hynes-Berry, Author Interview, Chicago, IL, June, 2008.
she agreed on most things except its views on abortion saying, “lots of red-hot articles lately in the Post about Women’s Liberation. It has also gotten so the Post daily gives almost as much space to their precious—but diabolical cause—of abortion as they do to the Vietnam War.”

Arleen believed in greater respect, involvement and equality of women, but did not embrace feminism wholeheartedly because of its position on abortion. In 1970 she wrote, “one day I looked in Bartlett’s Quotations . . . to see what quotes it had about women . . . I found only 3 in pages of quotes that had anything complimentary to say about women. Women’s Lib isn’t all wrong but their abortion bit really turns me off. Furiously.” In a letter years later in the mid-1980s, she was still hesitant to use the label of feminism, noting “in my personal life I have never found a term that causes anger and guilt has ever ‘converted’ me to another point of view.”

If Arleen read Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963, she never mentioned it in her letters or journals. Her interest in the role and status of women, however, was clearly piqued by the issues raised in the literature, the newspapers, and in the interviews she conducted for the American Association of University Women’s study of women, where she asked college-educated women whether they were fulfilled in their roles. As chair of the Spiritual Development Committee of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, she indicated her interest in many facets of women’s lives, including the intellectual and the spiritual. In 1964, energized by the presence of women at the Second Vatican Council, Arleen gave a rousing,

178 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, April 26, 1986.
inspiring, action-oriented talk to Catholic women where she called attention to women’s obligation to find their work in the world.\textsuperscript{179}

The leadership struggle within the Democratic Party after Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 was very personal for the Hynes family, as their friend and now Emerson’s boss Senator Eugene McCarthy from Minnesota was one of those who hoped to be tapped for Vice-President in President Johnson’s 1964 election. McCarthy became increasingly identified as an anti-war figure, entering the 1968 presidential Democratic primary race widely viewed as the peace candidate. Arleen joined the McCarthy campaign as McCarthy’s national coordinator of volunteers. As protests against the Vietnam War became more vocal and visible—protests against the Vietnam War were staged as marches in Washington annually throughout the mid to late-sixties and early seventies—four of the Hynes sons were drafted in that same year of 1968. The family now muses about whether Senator McCarthy’s presidential run and their close association with him was just coincidental or whether it had any bearing on the eagerness of the draft board to enlist so many of the Hynes sons at once.

Senator McCarthy was also aligned with civil rights efforts. Though no mention is made in Arleen’s letters or journals about one particular march that had such enormous impact on the national recognition of that cause, it is possible they did attend the 1963 March on Washington. The Hynes’ chosen parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace, had originally been formed after World War II by black Catholics unable to attend the white Catholic Churches in the diocese. It integrated as a parish in 1963, the same year that “several OLQP parishioners boarded a bus from the church parking lot on August 28, 1963 to participate in the March on Washington

where they witnessed Dr. King deliver his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Pastor of Our Lady
Queen of Peace, Fr. David Ray, and members of the parish established the Catholic Interracial
Council of Northern Virginia to work on issues of poverty, employment, and fair housing. Some
of it members included Connie Latier, John Phoenix, Dixie Rigdon, Joe Wholey, Emerson
Hynes, Frances Kelly, Patricia Bonbrake and Marguerite Thomas”180 (italics added). At Our
Lady Queen of Peace, Arleen spearheaded the creation of Matthew 25, a thrift store that
provided goods at affordable prices for needy parishioners and others in the community. In 1970,
Arleen reported; “The Matt. 25 shop sold its first $10 (worth) to a welfare mother so we are
finally in business.”181

Our Lady Queen of Peace was also quick to embrace the changes in Catholic liturgy and
mood that were emerging from the Second Vatican Council in Rome. Of all the changes swirling
in the air—the civil rights movement, the peace movement and the women’s movement—what
seemed to energize Arleen the most was the liturgical movement. As soon as the Constitution on
the Sacred Liturgy was put forward, Arleen was eager to absorb it, practice it and share its
wealth with others. To her sister Eileen in Houston she wrote:

... at your Cathedral where they are ‘hip’ the new liturgy must be great—as at Our Lady
Queen of Peace. Mary, Pat, Hilary carried the hosts up at offertory the first Sunday. I’ve
been eating, breathing and sleeping the new Const on the Sacred Liturgy preparing 8 Sun.
Bull. For Lit. Press. I’m fascinated about the potential of developing effective family
discussion materials on all aspects of the liturgy and the other Const on the Church . . .
Discussion and thus communication is the ticket to real formation, I think.182

An accomplishment of which Arleen was very proud was the exhaustive effort she spearheaded to summarize and distill the emerging documents of Vatican II as a guide for parish discussions. Continuing her love affair with text, she and other lay Catholics poured over each of the sixteen documents of Vatican II, synthesizing the documents under broad themes and publishing their work. Arleen was thrilled to be able to write the section on holiness, which highlighted the portion of each of the sixteen documents that treated the subject. Arleen identified four broad themes to be found in the Vatican documents: (1) All are called to be holy; (2) God is the source of our holiness; (3) In our daily life we find and carry out our holiness; (4) God made us free to choose holiness or not. She wrote:

If such phrases as ‘we are called to holiness,’ or ‘God is the source of our holiness,’ and ‘our holiness lies in our work and everyday life,’ and the ‘sacraments, and most especially the Eucharist, are all given to us by God to help us achieve holiness,’ seems repetitious, they are. The Documents are delightfully, reassuringly repetitious on all these ideas. One of the fascinating things about reading and studying these Documents is that you acquire a glad sense of recognition concerning many of these points. And you come to treasure both the familiarity and the freshness of approach of the recurring ideas . . . Each one of us will want to study the Documents, think over the meaning of these statements, and apply them to our own individual lives.

The change that Arleen was swept up in was political and cultural, but also religious and personal. She, like many of that era, became intensely interested in the psychological movements of self-awareness and self-discovery. The popularization of psychological theories could be found in the interest in the works of Erik Erikson on child development and in Jungian dream interpretations. Arleen was also focused during these years on the ordinary but important aspects

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of daily life: Christopher’s new paper route; Em’s new glasses; Denis and Katrine’s new marriage.

In the case of the Hynes family, the political became acutely personal in the summer of 1968. McCarthy’s failure to win the Democratic nomination at the traumatic 1968 Chicago convention marked the beginning of an adverse turn of events for the Hynes family. Emerson suffered a debilitating stroke just after returning from the Chicago convention from which he never fully recovered. As Emerson’s health failed, it was time for Arleen to begin looking for paid work.

In the decade since they had arrived in Washington, DC, six of the ten Hynes children had turned eighteen and had begun leaving home. In 1968, four of the Hynes’ eight sons received draft notices within the same year, ultimately resulting in two sons serving overseas, one in Vietnam and one in Korea. Yet despite Arleen and Emerson’s constant worries about the safety of their sons serving abroad, tragedy struck close to home. Arleen and Emerson lost their teenage son Michael in a Potomac River swimming accident Labor Day weekend in 1970. At a loss for words as they learned the news from their other teenage sons, Arleen and Emerson read the psalms aloud the night of Michael’s death. Not long after Michael’s death, Arleen began work as the patients’ librarian at St. Elizabeths mental hospital where she found some solace in her work. Less than a year later, Emerson suffered a second stroke and died of a heart attack while in the hospital.

Arleen’s job as the patients’ librarian became a way of surviving these two devastating losses. St. Elizabeths opened a window for her, showing her a way to use her love of language to bring healing, both to herself and to the mentally ill patients languishing in that institutional
setting. It was during these first raw years after the deaths of Emerson and Michael that Arleen helped pioneer the field of bibliotherapy, or poetry therapy. Through her dogged efforts and with the cooperation of a young psychiatrist on the St. Elizabeths staff named Ken Gorelick, Arleen fashioned a breakthrough training program in bibliotherapy on the St. Elizabeths grounds. The training program became a national model and resulted in the first federally-funded bibliotherapist position. Arleen was a leader in founding two national organizations for the promotion of this burgeoning field, the National Association of Poetry Therapy, a membership organization which gathers together “lovers of words who recognize and appreciate the healing power of language,” and later the National Federation for Bibli/Poetry Therapy, the credentialing arm of the field of poetry therapy.185

While feverishly working at St. Elizabeths, Arleen had little time or energy for her three teenage boys still living at home, each of whom dealt with the loss of brother, father, and in some respects, mother, by turning to drugs, alcohol, angry confrontations or hard silences. During these difficult years, Arleen began discerning a call to the Benedictine life. As a young married woman with her first baby in tow in 1941, Arleen had volunteered in the library at St. Benedict’s College and Monastery and formed a friendship with Sister Henrita, her supervisor at the library. Thirty-five years later when Arleen was a widow whose youngest son would soon graduate from high school, Arleen made two important retreats with Sister Henrita in Minnesota. During these retreats in the summers of 1976 and 1977, it began to seem possible to Arleen that she might join the round of prayer and work of the Benedictine sisters. While immersed in the

developing field of bibliotherapy, she was concurrently engaged in praying and reading the scriptures under the guidance of Sister Henrita, and preparing for another major transition in her life.

E. Joining the Benedictine Order: In Love with Books and Benedictine Life

In 1980 Arleen left her job at St. Elizabeths and moved to St. Benedict’s Monastery in Minnesota. Her family prayer life had been based on the Liturgy of the Hours in the breviary, so praying the divine office together in a Benedictine community attracted her. This type of prayer had been a strong element of her liturgically-oriented spiritual life for the past forty years. And Arleen loved the psalms. The psalms, “those 150 ancient but ever new expressions of human longing for God,” are at the heart of the Liturgy of the Hours.186 In Benedictine practice, the liturgical singing and reciting of psalms is meant to prepare monks to hear and meditate on the spiritual readings from scripture and other sources to be read in community. Thus there is a close connection between the singing and reciting of psalms and the Benedictine practice of lectio divina, a way of prayerfully reading or listening to scripture. The resonances between Arleen’s bibliotherapy work and the Benedictine practice of lectio divina are rich.

Arleen’s directors at St. Benedict’s Monastery supported the notion that Arleen would continue developing bibliotherapy as a ministry after joining the order. Arleen took her final, or perpetual, vows as a Benedictine sister in 1985. The following year, her bibliotherapy work culminated in the publication of the definitive guide for the practice, Bibliotherapy—The Interactive Process: A Handbook, written in collaboration with her daughter and writer Mary

186 St. John’s Abbey, found at http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/prayer/ on September 24, 2010.
Hynes-Berry. After its publication, Arleen continued her work of poetry therapy through the monastery’s Spirituality Center as well as outside the monastery with abused women, with addicts, and with inmates. Into her eighties, Arleen continued to be fully engaged in her work; her training handbook for this practice was in its second printing; she still led poetry therapy groups and retreats with the Benedictine sisters in the monastery and the imprisoned of the St. Cloud jail. She maintained her active involvement in the National Association for Poetry Therapy, as well as with local poetry therapy networks, until very near the end of her life. In 2002 Arleen moved into St. Scholastica’s convent, the assisted-living facility for St. Benedict’s Monastery. While at St. Scholastica, she would continue to meet with small groups of retired sisters at St. Scholastica for one-hour sessions on themes such as forgiveness or something drawn from the church calendar. She died there on September 5, 2006 of lung cancer at the age of ninety.

II. A Revelatory Life of Continual Conversion

While this brief biographical sketch of Arleen Hynes may seem almost formulaically to echo the life of a saint—a miraculous birth, a sacrificial and faithful mother, hours of spiritual reading, a loving marriage and ten children, fruitful work as a widow, a call to a celibate life prayer and community, and even the valiant strength to overcome profound grief and loss—the premise of this spiritual biography is that Arleen “our sainted mother” as her adult children refer to her lightheartedly, was not at all perfect. She herself consistently and honestly acknowledged

\[187 \text{ Arleen McCarty Hynes and Mary Hynes-Berry, } \textit{Biblio/Poetry Therapy, The Interactive Process: A Handbook} \text{ (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1986).} \]

\[188 \text{ Patricia Lefevre, “Poetry Opens a Window to Prayer, Healing: Nun Helps Others Discover Spirituality in Verse,” } \textit{National Catholic Reporter} \text{ (December 7, 2001): 34-36.} \]
how undeserving she was of love, and her spiritual strength seemed to emerge from a ready and consistent gratefulness for it. The spiritual biography of Arleen McCarty that follows is a case study of the genre, an effort to investigate the life of a Christian believer who is not a candidate for canonization, nor ever likely to be, for the ways that he or she understood experiences of the sacred in his or her ordinary life. Like hagiography, the intent of this case study of spiritual biography is for to invite an engaged and possibly transformative reading of another’s life. Unlike traditional hagiography, the subject of the spiritual biography is the text of a human life whose experiences of brokenness and loss might resonate with the reader. Further, this genre of spiritual biography seeks a broad understanding of the communion of saints as the community of flawed and undeserving believers, nonetheless open to being vehicles of grace and transformation.

The next few chapters will explore whether Arleen Hynes belongs to this notion of the communion of saints by seeking to demonstrate that her continual openness to grace and transformation, especially through texts, enabled Arleen to keep growing and having an impact on others as she crossed the thresholds to marriage, to widowhood, to professional life, to monastic life, and finally to the end of life. By plumbing Arleen’s letters and journals, this spiritual biography will argue that she was able to move through the threshold moments in her life through her stance of openness to continued change and conversion. She once wrote, “it is always energizing to make a change, I have found in my life.” 189 In her threshold moments her written record reveals that she turned to the text of a person or poetry or scripture. This spiritual biography examines whether and in what way these texts may have become for her the locus of

the dynamic interaction between God and her, as revealed in her writings, providing a model of transformative text that she would carry with her from one stage of life to another, and that would become the basis of her contribution to the bibliotherapy field.

This spiritual biography makes the case that when the conditions of Arleen’s life shifted, she seems to have sharpened her attentiveness to life-giving texts, leaving her open to what she experienced as God’s transforming and loving presence. Having lost a mother at birth, she seemed to possess a particularly acute sense of not deserving love, and most especially of not deserving God’s love. The reverse side of not believing she deserved love was for Arleen her expression of a deep and genuine gratitude for it. This stance of openness and gratitude is one promoted by the Benedictine vow of *conservatio morum*, or the call to continuous change. It seemed to naturally mark Arleen even before she ever heard of this vow; whether she sought it or it came to her unbidden, Arleen did—at least to this observer—come to live that vow faithfully. As Esther de Waal wrote, “conversation, openness, means that I must be ready to pick myself up again, and start all over in a pattern of growth that will not end until my final dying . . .”\(^{190}\)

A. Threshold Clusters of Arleen’s Life: Marriage, Widowhood, Terminal Illness

When examined, the threshold moments in Arleen’s life support the hypothesis that texts were transformative for her. An examination of her letters, journals, interviews, and other sources suggest a spiritual tendency to draw upon transformative texts as a means she made use of to be aware of God’s presence and to recognize what she perceived as God’s gifts. Hans Georg Gadamer, in his essay “On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth,” describes

poetic texts and religious texts; both types of text represent more than the mere transmission of information. Just as in a conversation, there “must be a readiness to allow something to be said to us” for genuine dialogue to take place, so too do poetic texts “emphasize a dimension of our everyday use of language other than that of the mere exchange of information.”\textsuperscript{191} Religious texts also require something of the reader. According to Gadamer, “they only acquire the character of an address insofar as they are acknowledged on the part of the believer.”\textsuperscript{192} In this way, poetic and religious texts are active and interactive texts in a manner distinct to their genre.

The question considered in these pages is whether Arleen’s interaction with certain key texts during transitional times of her life exemplifies the dynamic nature of poetic and religious texts. The following chapters will more closely examine whether transformative texts played a sacramental role during times of change in Arleen’s life, identified here as threshold clusters, as she adjusted first to marriage and parenthood, then to widowhood, career, Benedictine life, and finally to her terminal illness. Herein begins the mystagogic turn of this examination of the transformative role of texts in Arleen’s life, as the investigation becomes one of discovering and conveying Arleen’s own sense of her experience of the grace and love of God in times of change through her interaction with texts such as the Benedictine Rule, scripture, and poetry. Each chapter begins with a poem of significance to Arleen, and an imaginative prelude that seeks to capture a moment of time in the threshold period. Each of the three chapters that focus on a threshold of Arleen’s life presents three different texts, as well as a theoretical context for the texts, that arguably guided Arleen through that threshold to a new phase of her life.


\textsuperscript{192}Ibid., 109.
Chapter 3 will concentrate on the first ten years of her marriage in Collegeville, Minnesota. The chapter begins with a Jessica Powers poem, “Christ my Utmost Need,” and an anecdotal prelude, both of which seem to capture something of Arleen’s spirit at this phase of life as she crossed the threshold to love. The poem is a Jessica Powers poem that Arleen read over and over beginning in the early 1940s when she first came upon it. The prelude, May 3, 1938, is intended as an imaginative portrait of Arleen at this threshold moment, written in her voice using a combination of her letters, interviews and later reminiscences as sources. The remainder of the chapter examines the transformative role of three important texts that appear to have guided Arleen in this chapter of her life: the Benedictine Rule, the breviary, and Jessica Power’s poetry, which comprise the sections of Chapter 3. Within each section, there will be a theoretical interlude which intends to give a brief exposition of the text as it relates to its historical, cultural, and religious context.

Chapter 4 will focus on the first ten years after Emerson’s death. The chapter also begins with a Jessica Powers poem, “Everything Rushes,” and an anecdotal prelude that again seeks to capture something of Arleen’s spirit as she crossed the threshold to care. The prelude, September 9, 1970, is written in Arleen’s voice and draws from her own descriptions of that day recorded in a private journal. The remainder of the chapter examines the transformative role of three important kinds of texts that Arleen’s letters and journals suggest were formative for Arleen in this phase of her life: psalms of lament and praise, therapeutic literature, and spiritual reading done under the guidance of Sister Henrita at St. Benedict’s Monastery. Each section on the three texts will include a theoretical interlude that places the texts in a theological context.
Chapter 5 will center on Arleen’s last ten years in St. Benedict’s Monastery in Minnesota. In keeping with the two previous chapters, this chapter begins with a Jessica Powers poem, “Homecoming,” which Arleen clipped and taped to a prayer journal in her later years and an anecdotal prelude that attempts to capture something of Arleen’s spirit as she crossed the threshold to wisdom. Again, the prelude, May 8, 2004, is based on Arleen’s reflections on that particular day drawn from a private journal she kept at that phase of her life. The remainder of the chapter presents the transformative role of three texts that may have shaped Arleen in this last chapter of her life: the daily gospel readings, Al-Anon’s twelve-step program, and Arleen’s own unfinished memoirs. There will be a theoretical interlude for each text in an effort to describe its religious and cultural significance.

Chapter 6 follows the pattern of beginning with a poem, in this case one of Arleen’s favorite poems toward the end of her life written by her Benedictine friend Killian McDonnell, “Perfection.” The poem captures something of the overall spirit of this dissertation: impatience with the concept of perfection as the goal of holiness. This final, concluding chapter revisits the concept of spiritual biography and argues for the genre’s inclusion in spirituality studies.

B. Arleen’s Threshold Clusters as Erik Erikson’s Stages of Development

Before probing Arleen’s threshold periods through this case study, another structural note will help. Psychologist Erik Erikson’s developmental psychology provides a useful framework to examine these life transitions of Arleen to marriage, career and sisterhood, and death. Erikson observed eight life stages, each of which he argued involves a conflict between two poles to be

resolved. In his analysis, when the tension between the two alternatives is navigated successfully, core life virtues emerge from each stage. The eight stages he identified are infant, toddler, preschooler, school-age child, adolescent, young adult, middle-aged adult, and older adult.

Erikson’s final three stages correlate agreeably with the three transitional or threshold periods of Arleen’s life that the remaining chapters explore. For Erikson, the conflict in young adulthood is between the poles of intimacy and isolation, with a successful transition producing the value or virtue of love. In middle-aged adulthood, the conflict to be resolved is the choice between generativity and stagnation and the resultant virtue from an effective evolution is care. Finally, in the older adult, the primary conflict is between the extremes of integrity and despair. Avoiding despair by reconciling the parts of one’s life and living with integrity in this final stage is what Erikson maintained brings about the virtue of wisdom. Erikson offered that what is required in this final stage is “the aliveness and awareness that it takes to live with tact and vision in all relationships.”

When Arleen discovered Erik Erikson’s work in the mid-1960s, her letters indicate that she was captivated. She was particularly drawn to a chapter in one book in which Erikson developed his schedule of virtues that ought to emerge out of the cycle of life. Writing to her twin sister in 1964, Arleen highly recommended reading it, “. . . had a big day today. I went to a meeting of psychiatrists and heard Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund, and Erik Erikson . . . you must read Chpt. 4 of Insight and Responsibility by Erikson. As parental guidance it’s fabulous.”

Her fascination with his work on psychological development continued:

194 Ibid., 9.
I’ve had a thing going in Erik Erikson. Chpt IV-”Cycle/Generations” in new book Insight and Responsibility-marvelous-especially to reinforce religious values for parenthood in terms even the sophisticated would recognize. ‘Translated’ it for the Bennies and have it as my new material for women’s talks.\footnote{Arleen Hynes, Arlington, VA, May, 1965.}

Several years later, Arleen was still recommending and adapting Erikson’s ideas in her own life and for various groups she addressed:

Pleasant interlude—a lady just called me who had heard me talk about Erik Erikson at a Md. State AAUW meeting and wanted to ask if I would give a Communion breakfast talk to young mothers who are bogged down. It cheered me, after 3 yrs she still remembered. (I’ll try to remember to see if I can find a paperback of ‘Insight and Responsibility,’ Chap IV is great).\footnote{Arleen Hynes, Arlington, VA, March, 1969.}

As Arleen was recommending this book in the late sixties, she was in her middle adulthood. Unbeknownst to her, she would soon face the very life stage crisis that Erikson outlined for those in middle age: to grow stagnant or to be generative. Perhaps Arleen had an intuitive sense—as she continually recommended that others read him—of how relevant Erikson’s life stages would become in her own development. In any case, her recommendation to read this pivotal chapter prompted this researcher to do so and to then marvel at how closely the stages correlated to the previously identified threshold moments in Arleen’s life. Arleen as a young woman was accustomed to a fair degree of independence, yet she would make a decision in favor of intimacy over isolation when she married Emerson. As Erikson saw it, and as Arleen seemed to experience it, the resulting virtue was love. In her middle adulthood, as a grieving mother and wife, Arleen would be faced with a decision about whether and how to be generative in her life, rather than to be at a complete loss. The resulting virtue: care. As a Benedictine sister dying of cancer, Arleen would choose to avoid despair, making a decision to live her final days
with integrity. The resulting virtue: wisdom. Thus Erik Erikson’s schema provides a psychological framework for examining the Benedictine openness to change that marked each of Arleen’s threshold periods.

Erik Erikson adapted his own theory to Martin Luther’s life, in his work *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, which represents one of the first efforts at psychobiography in which Erikson uses his own stages of development and the continuing development of individuals into adult life as a framework.198 His efforts garnered some criticism from Protestant historians. Some Protestant commentators criticized Erikson’s work as being reductionist in defining Luther’s struggle as a psychological one rather than a religious one. Others leveled the challenge that it was not grounded sufficiently in historical data, and thus drew too many unsubstantiated inferences from limited research material. In terms of the charge of reductionism, psychologically attuned Protestant commentators such as Roger A. Johnson countered that Luther’s struggle need not be characterized as either psychological or religious, but as both, in that “even pathology can serve creative purposes.”199 As Protestant theologians such as George Lindbeck point out, Christians believe that “the vehicles of God’s grace and inspiration are innumerable” and can include psychological experiences such as identity crises.200

The second challenge, that Erikson’s biography was not grounded sufficiently in historical data, is particularly relevant for an analysis of a spiritual biography because these

200 Ibid.
criticisms question the legitimacy of drawing interpretive inferences from the evidence of a life. Historians “trained to empirical approaches which maximize facts and minimize speculation” were critical of Erikson’s “frankly speculative” approach and his “appeals to thematic utility to justify his hypotheses.” Yet some Protestant theologians, such as George Lindbeck, were more sympathetic to Erikson’s approach, recognizing the value of using “narrative coherence as his criterion for a valid reconstruction of a life.” This view benefits from the thinking of Thomas Kuhn and others who maintain “that all observations are theory-laden” and “no facts are ‘brute’.” From this perspective, Erikson’s life cycle framework is useful from a religious perspective and provides biographers a tool to probe motivation, “something biographers have always done.” Scholars in the field of psychology and religion who take a positive view of Erikson’s psychobiography view as helpful his use of the life cycle for religious perspectives. These scholars conclude that “Erikson is not a reductionist and his hermeneutical pluralism is a creative response to current discussions of the role of interpretation in dealing with texts and with a life as a text,” offering historians “an important interpretive arrow to add to their quiver.”

C. Research Methods and Methodology for Arleen Hynes Spiritual Biography

A last note before exploring the threshold periods of Arleen Hynes’ life, this one returning to the research methods and methodology explored in the first chapter. Chapter 1 explored in detail how to conceptualize a spiritual biography, how to approach it

201 Ibid., 132.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid., 133.
205 Ibid., 132.
methodologically and what actual research methods to use in its development. Conceptually, spiritual biography can be thought of as a successor to hagiography, one possibly better equipped to take a realistic look at an actual life while also viewing it as an exemplar revealing the presence and activity of God. The following three chapters as noted above take a more concentrated look at these transitional periods and how each appear to be guided for Arleen by the compass of sacred texts that, in Gadamer’s words, were “privileged” texts with which she had a “reciprocal relationship.” The primary research methods for this analysis are drawn from psychology and the literary sciences. Erikson’s life cycle is a critical psychological tool employed. The last three of Erikson’s eight stages provide the organizing principle and theoretical backbone for this approach to Arleen’s young, middle and advanced adult life. Because the material objects of the research include Arleen’s letters and journal entries, literary tools also come into play in the analysis of these texts. A method of examining Arleen’s papers is supplied in the tool shed of the literary sciences: concept analysis. Because Arleen’s dual professions as bibliotherapist and Benedictine sister lift up the power of text to bring change, a question put to Arleen’s personal papers is whether the concept of transformative texts appears in her own life story. Study of Arleen’s letters and journals from her threshold periods do seem to reveal the repetitive theme of certain texts as instrumental in her successful navigation through major life changes.

These research methods from the social and literary sciences could also handily be used in other forms of biographical writing that do not purport to be spiritual. Erikson’s life cycle stages in psychology and the method of concept analysis in literature are practical tools for

establishing a narrative. In Waaijman’s description of the methods of spirituality research, these methods might be used in the form-descriptive and the hermeneutic steps, respectively. What distinguishes a spiritual biography from other biographies of spiritual persons may not necessarily be the research methods used to build a narrative account. Instead, the principle that determines how the story is interpreted differs in a spiritual biography. In order to be the study of spirituality, another aspect of research comes into play, which Waaijman called the mystagogic element.

Remember Reynolds and Capps’ schematization of religious biography as either on the historical or the mythical side of the spectrum. For the purposes of spiritual biography, the category of history was recast as narrative, and that of myth was changed to sacrament. Recall that spiritual biography does not fit neatly at one spot along the spectrum of history or myth—narrative or sacrament—but that spiritual biography is both narration and sacrament. In the field of spirituality, a spiritual biography is more than just an explanation of its subject. In the case of Arleen Hynes, her spiritual biography will evaluate her life transitions and the role of the text using psychological and literary tools, but it will also have another dimension. Looking even more closely through the lens of the spirit, the transitional periods in Arleen Hynes’ life can be seen to symbolize the potent and transformational activity of God in her life. The hope of a spiritual biography is that while reading a life as a revelatory text one comes to recognize the potent and transformational activity of God in one’s own life. This mystagogical view is at the heart of spiritual biography. While all research is a search for knowledge, spirituality research sets its sights on the discovery of divine truths through the living text of a human life. Paul Riceour described this kind of reading:
If reading is possible, it is indeed because the text is not closed in on itself but opens out onto other things . . . the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself (or herself) better, understands . . . differently, or simply begins to understand himself (or herself).²⁰⁷

One pleasure of this project lies in the multiple levels in which text can be seen as transformative. Arleen’s spiritual journey was marked by the signposts of various texts, which appear to have oriented her and guided her to an ever-deepening conversion of spirit. Her spiritual biography is arranged according to the texts that her letters and journals reveal were most transformative at points of transition in her life. Arleen’s professional life as a bibliotherapist was defined by the therapeutic value of various texts, which helped mentally ill patients and others looking for change and healing to more fully understand themselves and their unique gifts, thus moving them forward in growth. Finally, the text of Arleen’s spiritual biography might act for some of its readers as a transformative word, as it has for this author. To the extent that a spiritual biography increases understanding of its subject, it is to the credit of the lucidity of the biography. If beyond that, the work also brings some measure of illumination or transformation, there is another process involved. A person’s story may be revelatory, sparking in a reader the recognition of divine presence. In the case of a spiritual biography of Arleen, whose personal presence made an impact on others, the goal is to offer an explanation of some dimensions of her life while at the same time leaving open the possibility of an interactive encounter with her. Arleen’s son Hilary described an encounter with Arleen as leading in his experience, and in what he observed in others, to a divine encounter:

She had the desire to foster the divine within herself with an acute inner attentiveness and to search it out and put her finger on the divine in others. It was her art and her gift, so

from her inner practice she could extend the divine by searching for it in her interactions and her conversations with others . . . a light in her feeding the light in others. Arleen could concentrate on and search out the divine and awake it as a presence in others and people would never forget her for it.\textsuperscript{208}

My hope in offering the genre of spiritual biography, and in the effort here to construct one of Arleen Hynes, is an unabashed one: to promote encounters that might spark an awakening to the presence of God in human lives.

\textsuperscript{208} Hilary Hynes, Author Interview, Burtonsville, MD, March 5, 2009.
Chapter 3: Crossing the Threshold to Love: Becoming a Wife and Mother

Christ My Utmost Need

Late, late the mind confessed:
  wisdom has not sufficed.
I cannot take one step into the light
  without the Christ.

Late, late the heart affirmed:
  wild do my hearts-beats run
when in the blood-stream sings one wish away
  from the incarnate Son.

Christ is my utmost need.
I lift each breath, each beat for Him to bless,
  knowing our language cannot overspeak
our frightening helplessness.

Here where proud morning walks
and we hang wreaths on power and self-command.
I cling with all my strength unto a nail-
investigated Hand.

Christ is my only trust.
I am my fear since, down the lanes of ill,
my steps surprised a dark Iscariot
plotting in my own will.

Past nature called, I cry
who clutch at fingers and at tunic folds;
“Lay not on me, O Christ, this fastening.
  Yours be the Hand that holds.”

--Jessica Powers

May 6, 1938

She stepped off the train in South Bend and with a thrilling shock of recognition laid eyes on Emerson Hynes for the first time. THE Emerson Hynes! His smooth prose and insightful comments had made quite an impression on Arleen and Eileen as each eagerly poured over the St. John’s University student newspaper, The Record, sent during the past four years by Emerson’s admiring fellow Johnnie, Tim Donohue, to his hometown friends from Sheldon, Iowa. At Tim’s urging, Emerson had written not to Arleen, but to Eileen, wondering if Eileen would like to meet him in Chicago on his way home to Minnesota for Easter break, and possibly again on his way back on Easter Monday. If she didn’t care to go to all the bother, Emerson had said with his charming self-deprecating wit, he would credit her with good sense, for if he were someone else, he shouldn’t be the least interested in meeting himself.

Yet Eileen most certainly did care to go through all the bother. And Arleen had been beside herself, keenly anticipating the meeting on her sister’s behalf. Oh to meet Emerson Hynes! Planning a trip to Chicago to see Eileen a few weeks later, Arleen would just miss crossing paths with Emerson Hynes. Though she took vicarious pleasure in her twin sister’s happy fate, Arleen envied Eileen’s good fortune. Why couldn’t he be passing through just a few weeks later? She was full of suggestions for her ‘sin-twister’ for her upcoming conversation with someone sure to be a leading layman: get in a good talk on Catholic Action; sound him out on this old problem of the cure for Communism being removal of the causes of unrest; ask him if he feels sure that Franco won’t be as bad a Fascist as Mussolini. A correspondence with such a lad would be a pretty fine thing in Arleen’s mind. And what’s more, Emerson Hynes seemed to have a touch of the whimsical—he had a “crush” on Dopey—which Arleen liked very much.

Emerson and Eileen did meet in Chicago at the train station, and when it was time for Emerson to pass through again on his way back to Notre Dame, he planned on another stop. Arleen gave more advice to her sister: engage in stimulating conversation, yes, but also charm him, “slay him with your slay-iest.” Emerson was charmed enough to invite Eileen to the Notre Dame Spring dance. When it was clear that Arleen would be in Chicago visiting Eileen at the end of April, Emerson encouraged Eileen to bring Arleen along to the May dance; she could attend the dance with his friend Tom Neill. Arleen was proud of Eileen, teasing her that Eileen’s beauty was going to her head and facetiously declaring Emerson Hynes a saint. Not having met him yet, Arleen mused: Isn’t he a lovely man?

Staying in Chicago until the Notre Dame dance meant prolonging Arleen’s planned Chicago visit. She stretched her tight travel budget by eating a can of beans a day and sleeping on a couch in a boardinghouse until finally Arleen and Eileen took the suburban train together from Chicago to South Bend. On Friday the sixth of May at 4 p.m., twenty-two year old Arleen stepped off that train and waiting on the platform—taking note of the twin prayer missals that Arleen and Eileen held—stood a man with marvelous eyes, so clear and intelligent, who would change her life. From the first time she saw him, she couldn’t live without Emerson. The moment made a tremendous impact; Arleen never got over it in all her ninety years.

210 This prelude is a composite of her words and voice drawn from Arleen’s letters, interviews, and journals.
Falling in Love

Arleen’s marriage in 1941 to Emerson Hynes launched a chapter in her life when she and Emerson would build a family home and cultivate a strong family ethic in Collegeville, Minnesota. Arleen’s transition from a young single woman to a married woman with children set a pattern that she would continue to follow in each of the three threshold moments identified; she delved into various texts that would shape her life and identity. In the first threshold examined here, chief among those texts were Saint Benedict’s *Rule*, the short breviary, and the poetry of Jessica Powers. From her letters, journals and interviews, these particular texts appear and reappear as transformative influences. This chapter on transformative texts is called “Crossing the Threshold to Love” because it tells the story of the words that carried Arleen from one life stage to another, from that of a young single librarian to a married woman who in partnership with her husband made a concerted effort to create a home environment in which the individual gifts of each of their ten children were recognized and a familial spirit was cultivated. Erik Erikson identified love as the virtue to emerge from a successful resolution of the crisis of intimacy versus isolation in young adulthood. Each of the three threshold periods chosen to be examined in this spiritual biography resonate with Erik Erikson’s scheme of the three successive adult life stages that produce the virtues of love, then care, and then wisdom. But in Arleen’s case, in addition to demonstrating Erikson’s scheme, each transition also involves some level of falling in love, first with Emerson, then with St. Elizabeths and then with St. Benedict’s Monastery.

As Arleen seemed to sense before she ever met Emerson, he was indeed the lovely man she imagined. She and Eileen had heard of Emerson Hynes from a childhood friend who
attended St. John’s University and who greatly admired this upperclassman, an acknowledged intellectual and editor of his school newspaper. Arleen envisioned Emerson as a true Catholic intellectual, even before meeting him, when she encouraged Eileen in letters to be in communication with the young man who could clearly keep up a good conversation and a good correspondence. Then when Arleen first met Emerson, she felt she already knew him from reading his articles and hearing about him; she felt a “shock of recognition” when she realized instantly that she loved this man. Arleen would later describe Emerson as calm and unpretentious, respectful of others and with an innate sense of justice, a knack for listening well and getting to the heart of a matter with wit and good humor. His sense of fun, Arleen pointed out, lay not in the telling of jokes, but in seeing and pointing out lightly the paradoxes in situations and relationships.211 From the moment Eileen and Arleen stepped off the train in South Bend, Eileen no longer had the chance to “slay him,” as Arleen had coyly suggested she do. Eileen “swallowed hard” and then said, “well, okay,” when Arleen proclaimed privately the night of the dance that Arleen would marry Emerson.212 If Eileen felt a bit cheated by the older twin’s pronouncement, no surviving letters tell that story. What may be telling though is that a half-century of carefully preserved weekly letters from Arleen to Eileen include only a handful from a two-year period after the twins met charming Emerson. While this could certainly be attributed to hungry squirrels in an attic that years later ate the letters, there is a chance it signals lapsed communication. Yet the surviving letters then flow fast and furious beginning again in 1940. These weekly letters (in later years Arleen called the weekly letter the ‘weakly’) were

routinely engaging and informative, at times gossipy and petty, and always full of recommendations for books or articles. The letters also make clear just how profound an impact Emerson Hynes had on Arleen as she joined in his embrace of the Benedictine ethos that imbued the Collegeville environment of St. John’s Abbey.

Much of the thinking behind the intentional effort to craft a Catholic rural family life came from Emerson and his commitment to Benedictine ideals. Emerson was wholly taken with the Benedictine ethos as a young college student at St. John’s University:

The Rule of St. Benedict captured the enthusiasm and idealism of a young man destined to live out in written and spoken words of peace the precepts of the master in a modern-twentieth-century milieu of academia, family, church, and social institutions. His was a ‘vocation to conversation,’ but also a vocation to conversatio in the spirit of Benedict.

The very choice of the name Kilfenora for their Minnesota home, a name Emerson discovered when biking through Ireland and visiting an early ninth century church, captured this vision. It was to be a “Kil”, or “church” of “Nora” or “north.” The family home was to be a domestic church in northern Minnesota where monastic principles would be at work in a unique way in a family setting. Kilfenora is usually translated as “church of the fertile hillside,” which, given the ten Hynes children that were born, is also a fitting description.

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213 Mary Hynes-Berry, Author Interview, Chicago, IL, June, 2007.
215 Though the Hynes family translates Kilfenora as “Church of the north,” Cill Fhionnurach in Irish, means “Church of the fertile hillside” or “Church of the fair white brow.” Kilfenora was quite a fertile hillside, as all ten Hynes children were born when the family lived there from 1941 to 1959. Kilfenora reference found at: http://www.kilfenoraclare.com/aboutkilfenora on March 10, 2010.
Arleen was delighted to be Emerson’s partner in realizing the vision of their rural home as a family cloister.\textsuperscript{216} She was so in love with Emerson, according to an Arlington friend, “she would have gone to the moon with him.”\textsuperscript{217} For Arleen, it did not initially matter so much whether she and Emerson were living in a rural or urban environment, but rather that they were shaping a life together, wherever that might be. But for Emerson, having attended St. John’s University and then serving as the first layman on its faculty as a professor of sociology and ethics, life was shaped in very large part by the book that structured the Benedictine life: \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}. Spending his early childhood on a farm in rural Minnesota made Emerson ripe for cultivating the ideas of Benedictine Virgil Michel about sanctifying rural life with liturgical practices. Emerson had become a Benedictine oblate in the year before his marriage to Arleen. For the rest of his life he kept his St. Benedict medal on him at all times. From the earliest days of their marriage, Arleen joined Emerson as a fellow oblate of St. John’s Abbey.

It was natural for Emerson and Arleen to seek a rural family life based on the Benedictine Rule. Just as the Rule regulated the life of Benedictine monks for centuries, this text held real meaning for the way Arleen and Emerson worked, prayed, welcomed and loved in their little church of the fertile hillside, Kilfenora. Emerson kept his slim and dog-eared copy of the Rule close and referred to it as he and Arleen began their married life and as their young family began to grow. His well-thumbed copy indicates some of the passages that would become cornerstones of the growing Hynes family at Kilfenora. Emerson’s natural commitment to integrity, rural living and hard work resonated deeply with the Benedictine Rule and Emerson’s embrace of the

\textsuperscript{217}Midge Wholey, Author Interview, Arlington, VA, November, 2009.
Rule gave form to the kind of family life the Hynes’ would live in Collegeville. In Collegeville, St. Benedict’s design for communal living was part of the natural habitat, seemingly part of the air breathed there. During their years at Kilfenora from 1941 to 1959, innovative liturgical ideas were taking root and resources for building a rural life abounded in this environment. Emerson and Arleen took full advantage of this rich offering to craft a marriage and family life imbued with a profound religious spirit deeply rooted in the Benedictine way.

Theoretical Interlude: Married and Lay Spirituality

Here the narrative outline of Arleen’s life story pauses, as it will at various points in this and the following two chapters, for a theoretical interlude. These breaks in the account of Arleen Hynes’ spiritual life are designed to take a brief step back from the narrative flow to set the stage so that Arleen’s triumphs and struggles can be viewed in the context of historical religious trends. The theoretical interludes will introduce one or another spiritual discipline or tradition and make reference to the defining literature in this area so that the reader might go elsewhere to explore those spiritual traditions in depth. The interludes are not intended as exhaustive treatments but as opportunities to look at particular religious or historical ideas or practices that directly affected Arleen’s experience. Thus, the interludes draw upon the broader portrait of American cultural life in the service of gaining a sharper picture of Arleen.

The emergence of a new theology of marriage and marital spirituality dovetailed with Arleen and Emerson’s own marriage. In the thirty years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, the ideas of the Belgian and French Jesuits—published regularly in La Nouvelle Revue Théologique—were gaining traction in the United States. Commonweal, which both Arleen and Emerson read religiously, often reported on these and other theological developments. When
Arleen and Emerson decided to get married, an English translation of a controversial European theological treatise on the meaning of marriage became available.\textsuperscript{218} German theologian Herbert Doms’ work \textit{The Meaning of Marriage} was reviewed in \textit{Commonweal} in the spring of 1940, on the cusp of Arleen’s college graduation from St. Catherine’s and the year before she and Emerson married. As they were planning their own marriage, Emerson and Arleen, avid readers of \textit{Commonweal}, would very likely have encountered and pondered Dom’s ideas in its pages. His notion that the primary purpose of marriage was the communion of souls formed between husband and wife, rather than exclusively procreation, squares with the approach that Emerson and Arleen had toward their relationship. A summary of Herbert Dom’s view of marriage can be found in a \textit{Commonweal} book review:

> The spiritual, mental and physical sharing of life, the resultant community of life whose joy and peace spring from love—that is the meaning of marriage. The child is not included in that community, even if it is the living embodiment of its common good.\textsuperscript{219}

In this new perspective on Catholic marriage, it was the unity of the two persons wedded in marriage—a lifelong communion—which would represent the primary meaning of marriage, rather than the procreation of children. This approach was consistent with the Christian personalist approach, an approach that Virgil Michael promoted. The Christian personalist approach with respect to marriage was one in which the juridical definition of marriage was challenged by a “psychological, anthropological and philosophical” approach.\textsuperscript{220} The new theology coming from Europe was influenced by the personalist approach which looked to experience “as a resource for moral reflections,” and thus “a characteristically modern


phenomenon in that it stresses the priority of the human subject.”221 While the Catholic definition of marriage had heretofore stressed marriage as a good due to its being a vehicle to continue the human race and pass on the faith, this new personalist approach emphasized marriage as an inherent value in and of itself for being a community of love, “a community of persons with a meaning.”222 In this view, it is this community of love that makes a marriage fruitful, rather than the procreation of children. Herbert Dom’s understanding of marriage is captured in his own summary:

To sum up: -- the immediate purpose of marriage is the realisation of its meaning, the marital two-in-oneship. In the process of this realisation a community of fundamental importance for human society is formed. This intimate community is marriage. As a result of marriage two human beings come to live a life single in everything from religious community to sexual. But the presence of sexual community is what expressly constitutes marital community, for every other community can be realised outside marriage. By marriage we mean the enduring love-relationship of two grown-up persons of different sex, who come together to form one indivisible and indissoluble community of life in which they can fulfill and help one another. The supreme point of intimacy in this community occurs when they become one in the marriage act. This two-in-oneship of husband and wife is a living reality, and the immediate object of the marriage ceremony and their legal union. This vital two-in-oneship is to some extent a purpose in itself. But it also acts powerfully on the personalities of husband and wife, though in such a way that the individuality and independence of each is not lost in the union. It is for them a source of health and sanctity, and becomes for them the door to every natural and supernatural consummation. It tends also to the birth and education of new persons—their children. The child assists their own fulfillment, both as a two-in-oneship and as separate individuals. But society is more interested in the child than in the natural fulfillment of the parents and it is this which gives the child primacy among the natural results of marriage.223

The Catholic hierarchy saw Herbert Dom’s ideas as a threat to the teaching of the Church that marriage and sexual intimacy in marriage are designed first and foremost for the procreation of children. Yet Dom’s provocative discussion of marriage prompted greater reflection on marriage as a locus for the sacred, not only because husband and wife share in the creative work of God through forming new life but also precisely because of the loving and intimate nature of their covenant relationship where redemption and God’s grace abound. While matrimony was affirmed as one of the seven sacraments at the Council of Trent, the focus was more on the actual rite of the marriage ceremony. The new theology of marriage that began to emerge before the Second Vatican Council emphasized that the entire married life ought to be viewed as a vocation like the priesthood, and its daily life as sacramental.

Dom’s writings on marriage were countered and censored, first by order of the Congregation of the Holy Office and then by Pius XII himself, only to be incorporated twenty years later at the Second Vatican Council. Arleen was given a copy of the documents of Vatican II on her fiftieth birthday in 1966 at a National Council of Catholic Women’s board meeting, where the group was making recommendations to a diocesan synod on lay organizations. The passages she highlighted resonate with Herbert Dom’s prior writings. She underlined the phrase “community of love” to describe marriage. She underscored those passages that emphasized the sanctification of woman and man through marriage:

Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church. Thus this love can lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and can aid and strengthen them in the sublime

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office of being a father or a mother. For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ. This spirit infuses their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity. Thus they increasingly advance their own perfection, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.  

The Second Vatican Council in its statements about marriage elevated the unitive purpose of marriage to equal status with the procreative purpose of marriage, so that both became considered primary. In addition, marriage itself became understood as a vocation as worthy as ordination and as holy an occupation. This change in the thinking about marriage served to make sacred and dignify marriage to a much greater degree. The community of love formed by husband and wife was akin to that of a religious community or order, where the sanctification of its members is intended both through individual holiness and shared prayer and service with the religious community. Both callings were recognized as a way of bringing the love of Christ more fully into the world:

Though this new insistence on marriage as primarily a community of persons relating to one another in love and Christian faith initially received opposition, its acceptance by the Second Vatican Council has opened up a new stage in Catholic appreciation of marriage as sacrament. Today our theology locates the distinctiveness of Christian marriage in the injection of the transforming significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection into the relation between spouses. Married love and life is transformed as a human experience because of its perceived role as a revelation of God’s loving presence to humans.  

The notion of daily life as sacramental, or that in the ordinary course of business and family life holiness could be pursued and God’s grace experienced, was also given support by

\[225\text{Ibid., 251.}\]

Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church also promulgated at Vatican II. Again, Arleen marked the sections of the document that promoted the universal call to holiness, whereby “in the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshiping God the Father in spirit and truth.”227 Just as Vatican II was concluding, a work published about lay spirituality made a distinction between lay spirituality and the ancient monastic spirituality of the religious orders. The movement toward recognizing the earthly, fleshly, the “of this world” aspect of holiness, was seen as a departure from the monastic and priestly forms of spirituality that preceded it. Lay spirituality would turn toward the daily realities of life, whether on a farm, in an office or an art studio because “in every situation in life the Christian layman must be conscious of his partnership with God in the divine plan of creation and redemption. Hence he cannot be concerned solely with the care and salvation of his own soul.” 228 Yet that distinction between lay and monastic spiritualities, with one being of the world and the other detached from the world, did not last long after the Second Vatican Council. With the windows thrown open at Vatican II, the trend was that the religious orders and ordained priests also grew in recognition of their place in the world, so that the distinctions between lay and ordained lessened. Thomas Merton, even though a cloistered monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani, was certainly engaged and interested in what was happening outside the monastery walls. Though Auer and others who have sought a lay spirituality are correct in seeing the need to cultivate the spiritual life of non-

ordained persons through their own experiences in the world and to allow a distinctly lay spirituality to emerge from those marital experiences of intimacy and partnership, it would begin to share with the monastic and priestly traditions fewer clear demarcations between the secular and the profane. The direction that lay spirituality has taken is the course that the Church as a whole has taken, recognizing the central role of human experience and the sacramentality of daily life in understanding spirituality, whether in the married, lay, monastic or clerical state. It can be argued that in embracing the monastic approach to spirituality as a rhythm of work and prayer, Arleen and Emerson were ahead of the curve in lay spirituality which in recent years has affirmed the value of this ancient spiritual wisdom for both lay and ordained. While the experiences of married couples and the celibate differ, especially with respect to the covenantal, sexual relationship that married couples share, what is shared is a notion that one’s spiritual life is not separate or apart from one’s work, relationships and experiences.

Arleen and Emerson were certainly not the first to tap monastic spirituality as a way of living. Even in the time of Saint Benedict there were lay people attracted to the life of prayer and work of the monks. Over time, a formalized association between interested laypeople and the monks developed with the institution of the Benedictine oblates. Rather than developing a separate spiritual program that would be wholly distinct for the lay or married state, Benedictine oblates draw wisdom and spiritual practices from an ancient monastic path just as the Benedictines themselves gain insight from the experiences of lay friends and colleagues. The overall idea is that ordinary human life is infused with the divine presence, a recognition that can be operative in all states of life. For Arleen and Emerson, their married life and intimacy was the experience from which they drew as they crafted their family cloister.
Benedictine Kilian McDonnell, who in the fall of 2011 celebrated his ninetieth birthday and was still writing and publishing poetry, published regular columns during the 1940s in *The Oblate*, a monthly publication for those lay people committed to living according to the principles of the Benedictine Rule. Each article was inspired by a chapter of *The Rule*, “a Rule whose basic plan is family life in Christ.”

McDonnell recognized that the lay vocation had not been given proper attention as a locus for spiritual growth and sanctification, and he saw that lay people had the same calling and challenge as the ordained. The challenge of all Christians, he wrote, is “the problem of integrating their whole life in accordance with their vocation to sanctity.” The value of the Benedictine way is that it recognizes the sacred in the daily rounds of work and prayer, the presence of God in the ordinary acts of human beings which makes “the present full of divine realities.” Family life, wrote McDonnell, is like a “little cloister of the world” as families pray, play, and work together. Benedict’s program for living and praying together was indeed an effort to form a holy community:

Any family prayer emphasizes the point that St. Benedict made many years ago: that we are saved as a family. St. Benedict did not bother too much about pointing out ways in which to make each separate individual a saint. What he wanted was a holy family. He knew that once he had a holy family all its members would be saints. Not only is that the shortest way to heaven; it is the safest way, for we travel the road together.

Father McDonnell’s advice to the Benedictine oblates received a warm hearing from Emerson and Arleen, who made the conscious choice to live an intentional and committed

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230 Ibid.
231 Ibid., 54.
232 Ibid., 158.
233 Ibid., 157.
Christian life in the context of marriage and family. As speakers at a National Catholic Rural Life Conference convention in Bellevue, Illinois in October 1950, Arleen and Emerson spoke of how they were living the sacrament of marriage through their love for each other and for their children. They identified being parents and raising children within the sacrament of marriage, where souls were being formed, “as important or as challenging or as stimulating” as the work of being a priest or religious.234 Emerson and Arleen knew from experience that as a sacrament marriage conveys actual grace to parents to carry out their work. They also gave talks about how the love of a husband and wife for each other can lead to spiritual perfection, a state that the Church traditionally taught could only be achieved through the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience, and chastity in the celibate orders. In a talk on the sacrament of marriage, fifteen years before the Second Vatican Council, when the Church moved toward recognizing marriage as a spiritual vocation on par with ordination they spoke of the sanctification that marriage promotes, “so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love towards God and their neighbor.”235 From their own experiences, they were able to testify to the vocation of marriage as a sacrament to be treated “with the awe and respect that we do other sacraments.”236 For Arleen and Emerson, marriage was not only sacred, but it was a joy. Arleen gave a presentation on the topic of “The Family as One,” in which she mused, “too many of us have a Puritan rather than a Catholic slant

234 Arleen and Emerson Hynes, “The Sacrament of Marriage at Work,” Address at the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Bellevue, IL, October 18, 1950.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
to married unity.” She reminded her audience that the physical union of husband and wife was chosen as a special symbol for the unifying love of God and, as such, should be a consciously joyful and enjoyable interaction.

Speaking so openly about marital sexuality as a way of drawing closer to each other and to God was not common in the 1950s in the Midwest. But Arleen and Emerson drew these insights on married spirituality from their own experience of a healthy and active sex life, which for them was primarily about sharing love and not primarily about having more children. Later in life Arleen lamented in private reflections that none of her surviving children loved himself or herself and this was a great sadness to her. Child psychologists have found that ironically when the relationship between their parents is particularly strong and intimate, it is possible for children to internalize a secondary status.

Without knowing this child development theory, Arleen and Emerson were conscious in their effort to expand their notion of marital spirituality to family spirituality. They asserted in talks about the family that the family environment should be designed to promote the living of the sacrament, “it should be a place where the family can and will want to work together, play together, pray together.” In this environment, and in the surrounding community, they contended that the family can be a vessel of both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Emerson and Arleen likened the home environment to that of a monastic cloister, a sacred place of work and prayer, where the intimate and loving community of faith also positively influences the world outside its enclosure.

237 Arleen and Emerson Hynes, “The Family is One,” Address to Cana Couples group at Incarnation Church, Minneapolis, MN, date unknown.
238 Hynes, “The Sacrament of Marriage at Work.”
It took some years for Catholic literature to catch up with Arleen and Emerson’s practice and to view lay vocations to marriage or even to the single life as a sacred calling: capable of promoting spiritual growth and holiness as fully as monastic life. In the past thirty years, a number of books have appeared that acknowledge that the earliest Christian habits of prayer, sacrament, work, and evangelization are to be practiced in every state of life. Rather than setting up monasticism as the model of holy living that family life can only approximate, each of these more recent works holds in common the belief that family life is a locus of the sacred. The Benedictine approach promotes the pursuit of God in all things, which makes it pertinent to any life situation. Family life in these works is not presented as second best to monastic life, but does still draw wisdom from the spiritual disciplines which emerged from monasticism.

Dolores Leckey, who served as the first lay Executive Director of the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and was mentioned earlier, was deeply influenced by Arleen Hynes. After Arleen moved to Arlington, Virginia, she was the spirit behind a regular ecumenical prayer group of young mothers in which Dolores took part. For many young Catholic women, the prayer group was their first experience praying with Protestants. Arleen was in a sense the elder of the group, and women from the group remember her as a great encouragement and model to them. She demonstrated to them that it is possible to be a committed wife and mother and yet still cultivate an active life of the spirit and of the mind. To them, Arleen’s life was a living testament to the Benedictine practice of seeking God in the ordinary events and rhythms of daily life. Arleen’s influence can be detected in Dolores Leckey’s 1982 book, *The Ordinary Way: A Family Spirituality*, in which Leckey draws on Saint Benedict’s vision of the monastery as God’s household:
Saint Benedict’s vision of the households of God has great meaning, I suggest, for family life in these last years of the twentieth century . . . Not so much a treatise on spirituality or a strict regimen, but rather more a way of simply being in life, of setting up a household, Benedict’s household of God.239

Leckey highlights nine elements of family life, most of which are drawn from Benedictine monastic life, which provide a firm foundation for a family of faith: intimacy, equality, authority, prayer, solitude, play, study, stability and hospitality. Intimacy is as important a concept in a family as it is in a monastic community; families are built on the relationships between marriage partners, with their children, and with the broader community. The intimate relationships within a family ought to prime family members to encounter strangers as friends of God as well. For a family to function well, like any community, including monastic communities, every member must be treated with equal respect and care. Humility, not superiority, ought to guide the family relationships. Likewise, parents’ authority in the family can be modeled on that of the abbot in a Benedictine monastery who engaged in consultation where each member is given a voice. Though Saint Benedict’s idea of brotherly counsels in the monastery was an ancient idea, this form of authority was popularized in the twentieth century by psychologists who favored this kind of consultative decision-making.240 Though she does not mention the Hynes family by name, Leckey may very well have them in mind when she writes of a family that embodies the respect for every individual and respect for his or her gifts to the community:

When I was a young wife and mother I met a family consisting of wife, husband and ten children. Theirs was a household where everyday creativity was encouraged. I don’t mean creativity in the strict sense of sculpting or painting. That was there, and rope sculpture did indeed hang from the chandelier because one son was (and is today) an artist. But I mean this more in terms of the value that was placed on the life-work unfolding in each one, including the parents. I remember the parents rejoicing over one boy’s carpentry skills (he’s now a furniture maker), one girl’s struggle to be lawyer (and now she is), another boy’s itinerant adventures as an apple picker, where he learned all about apples and more about life on the road. These parents were obviously as proud of their plumber son as of their literary daughter. A rich variety of gifts and life-work was able to develop in this family environment because the family community affirmed the gifts as equal in value for the sake of the world. This, too, reflects the monastic attitude. The prologue to Benedict’s Rule acknowledges that God’s good gifts are present in the community, and later in the Rule, the abbot is cautioned against favoritism. As the organizational plan of the monastic life unfolds, one sees how the various roles are regarded.241

Leckey’s emphasis on the other attributes of the monastery which ought also to inform a family’s life—prayer, solitude, play, study, stability, and hospitality—also very much resonate with the Hynes’ family life. Dolores Leckey, who married and had five children and who remains an advocate for an enhanced role for laity and particularly women in the Catholic Church, does not devalue lay and married spirituality by her embrace of monastic values but rather elevates the vocation of marriage as a sacramental locus of holy living.

Other writers have also promoted the value of the Benedictine way of life for lay people, some specifically highlighting its desirability as a family model. Historian Esther de Waal has written several insightful and accessible books on incorporating the Rule into non-monastic life.242 She discovered the Benedictine Rule’s powerful influence in the early 1980s when her

husband became the pastor of an English church that had once been inhabited by Benedictine monks:

About 15 years ago when my husband went to be the dean of Canterbury Cathedral, we went to live in the cottage that goes with being an Anglican priest in England. In this instance, that “cottage” was a vast medieval house which had belonged to the Benedictine priors during the Middle Ages when Canterbury had been a great Benedictine monastic community. Living in that extraordinary place, I, as a historian, believed that I should not allow myself to be crushed by the power of the past. So I picked up the Rule of St. Benedict to know something of the minds, hearts and vision of the men who had built the building that surrounded me, indeed the very house in which I lived with my husband and four teenage sons.243

Poet Kathleen Norris also helped to popularize the notion that monastic values provide valuable insights not only for monks, but all manner of living arrangements. She does so most compellingly in her best-selling work The Cloister Walk.244 She wrote her book having spent two nine-month periods at St. John’s Abbey, where Arleen and Emerson had grown their own Benedictine roots. In The Cloister Walk, Norris reflects on various aspects of her life in relation to the Benedictine spirit, including her marriage. In her preface, Norris notes that the focus on her marriage is appropriate “as my life vows are not to a monastery but to a matrimony, and marriage has for me been a primary instrument of conversion, ‘a school for love’ to employ Benedict’s metaphor for the monastery.”245

A more recent work, The Family Cloister: Benedictine Wisdom for the Home, guides families in the very practical ways that family life might be sanctified using some of the same practices of a monastic community. Its author, a married Presbyterian minister whose sons were

245 Ibid., xiv.
teenagers when he wrote the book, identifies seven fundamental principles of the family cloister which he draws from the Benedictine Rule. In his experience, family stability and peace can be achieved by focusing on a family design, a family spirituality, a family discipline, family health, family life together, family service and hospitality, and family growth. In many ways when examining the family life that Emerson and Arleen crafted in the 1940s and 1950s, it could be said that the two of them “wrote the book” on the family cloister.

I. The Rule of Saint Benedict as a Transformative Text

A. The Rule: A Design for Living

In the prologue of Benedict’s Rule, the monastery is described as a “school for the service of the Lord,” and in the seventy-two chapters that follow Benedict lays out the monastic principles that have endured for centuries. These foundational notions continue to be essential to a well-ordered Benedictine community and include the importance of establishing and maintaining a rhythm of work, prayer and rest, the goal of continual growth, the merit of hospitality, service, the integrity of work, and the value of creating and appreciating beauty. In an article published in 1948 in the Marianist, Arleen and Emerson laid out their seven principles for Christian homes derived from their experience of family community that closely echo Benedictine values.246 Drawing from the Benedictine tradition which seemed most to resonate with their experience of family, they proposed that the Christian home have a conscious design to promote family living. A Christian home, they advised, ought to be independently owned and built not only to last, but to grow. As the monastic enclosure does, the Christian home ought to

246 Arleen and Emerson Hynes, “Building a Home: Seven Keys to a Christian Home,” Marianist (1948), NP.
provide privacy but at the same time be a part of a larger community. The Christian home should be a productive place, and it should be a place of beauty. These seven principles which came from Arleen and Emerson’s own family vision—designed for family living, independently owned, made for permanence and growth, protective of privacy, communal, productive, and beautiful—fit especially well with the Benedictine emphasis on a design for communal living that emphasizes stability, growth, prayer, outreach, work, and creativity.

B. The Rule: Rhythm of Work and Prayer

Based on the notes he made in its margin, an especially key passage of The Rule for Emerson is found in the chapter on daily manual labor. Chapter forty-eight begins, “Idleness is the enemy of the soul.”247 It goes on to say, “therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading.”248 This emphasis on establishing a rhythm of work and prayer was one that Emerson hoped to repeat in his own life and in that of his family. Emerson built Kilfenora with his own hands, enlisting the help of his monastic and lay friends at St. John’s Abbey. In the Kilfenora years, he planted and tended large gardens to feed the family and cared for the family cow, Leopold. He worked diligently preparing the ethics and sociology classes he taught at St. John’s University, as well as the papers and articles he wrote on a variety of topics. Likewise, as soon as the Hynes children were able, they contributed to the household tasks. A chart of jobs and responsibilities was drawn up and each was expected to do their part, although the older children bore the heavier burden for the household tasks.

248 Ibid.
The Rule also called for the brothers to serve one another, “consequently, no one will be excused from kitchen service unless he is sick or engaged in some important business of the monastery, for such service increases reward and fosters love.”\textsuperscript{249} This system in the Hynes household evolved partially out of a commitment to live the Benedictine Rule at Kilfenora, and partially out of Arleen’s lack of experience or really any genuine interest in the process of cooking, cleaning and laundry that were essential to maintaining a household. Her culinary abilities were limited, and she thought it a terrible chore to figure out something to eat every single night.\textsuperscript{250} Her son Patrick Hynes, only partly joking, has said she would have fed the children sand if it had any nutritional value.\textsuperscript{251} Yet despite Arleen’s personal aversion to the tasks of keeping a household, she shared Emerson’s Benedictine belief in the importance of working with integrity so as to build relationships and enhance the smooth functioning of a community. So important did Arleen and Emerson hold the value of work to be that Arleen stenciled the words attributed to the poet and prophet Kahlil Gibran to the kitchen wall at Kilfenora, “work is love made visible.”

C. The Rule: Communal Living

Another practice to enhance the smooth functioning of the community of the Hynes household was the institution of the Family Council Meeting, which closely resonates with Chapter Three in \textit{The Rule}, “Calling the Brethren to Counsel \ldots Whenever any important business has to be done in the monastery, let the Abbot call together the whole community and

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{250} Arleen McCarty Hynes, Recorded Interview with Dolores Leckey, Collegeville, MN, 1986, St. Benedict’s Monastery Archives, St. Joseph, Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{251} Patrick Hynes, Author Interview, Arlington, VA, November 22, 2006.
state the matter to be acted upon.” The family councils at Kilfenora were designed for giving affirmations or “bouquets” as well as reminders to each member of the household about what needed correction, such as the need to bring a load upstairs when the stairs were filled with items. The eldest daughter Mary kept typewritten notes of the meetings. In addition to addressing how well this large family was functioning, these council meetings could often dissolve into laughter and inane comments. For Arleen, though she had many biological siblings, she grew up in a household with only one. Other than her one discipline of daily spiritual reading, Josie was a mother who did not strictly enforce any other discipline. Arleen’s memories of growing up were of a relatively unstructured home. For Arleen living in a large family according to The Rule was a discipline, a difficult challenge and yet an altering experience that gave her a lifelong appreciation for diversity and community. Saint Benedict’s model of consultation enabled even the youngest in the Hynes household to have a voice. The decision to move to Washington, DC was one that was discussed in the context of the family meetings. Those who opposed the move were listened to, even if in the end their preference did not prevail. For Arleen, this model of communal living was a true discipline for her.

D. The Rule: An Appreciation of Beauty

Emerson and Arleen fostered the Benedictine appreciation of beauty in their household. Arleen loved to rearrange the few pieces of art hanging on the Kilfenora walls, taking delight in the new way the light would reflect off the paintings. She saw a touch of divine in art and other things of beauty. She never failed to comment on the beauty of the first cardinal’s

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252 The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 3.
253 Mary Hynes-Berry, Author Interview, Chicago, IL, June, 2007.
appearance in spring or how a branch might look when the snow fell outside the window. Over the picture window that had a view of the apple orchard, the wheat field, the railroad tracks, and the creek, Arleen lettered these words from the psalms; “in green pastures the Lord has settled me.” Peter Hynes shared this memory of his parents’ appreciation of the beauty of nature:

One full moon winter night at 10 p.m., they woke all the children to come see ten deer feeding in the wheat field. Someone asked why they were all walking in a circle. Arleen said they were dancing to nature. Emerson said it was . . . that each one was cooperating so everyone would have to work less to get at the stubble below. Arleen said notice how some are always looking around while the others eat so nothing could sneak up on them and we should learn to look out for one another that way. We all sat there and watched the clouds dance shadows across the snow for 10 or 15 minutes until suddenly they all broke and leapt the fence back into the birch and oak forest. Then we all went to bed.

Their neighbor and friend, Joe O’Connell, seemed to them to embody the Benedictine value of creating beautiful things with humility. O’Connell sculpted statues of saints and other figures which graced the homes of his neighbors. Even today his sculptures, commissioned by the Hynes family, can be seen in the beautiful and open foyer at St. Benedict’s Monastery where the Benedictine sisters are encouraged to create items that are useful and beautiful to grace the monastery. Chapter 57 of Benedict’s Rule states: “if there are artisans in the monastery, let them practice their craft with all humility.” Such work is seen in Benedictine practice as a form of prayer that speaks of God and the beauty of creation and such creative work gives glory to

254 Peter Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, May, 2009.
255 Ibid.
256 Peter Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, May 2009.
257 The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 57.
God. Arleen and Emerson’s communicated their appreciation of art and beauty by encouraging their children’s creative pursuits. A downside of that emphasis on art as a vehicle for God’s presence was felt by their daughter Brigid, who remembers not feeling special because she did not see herself as an artist and leaned more toward practical skills than creative ones. As adults, there are artists, storytellers, writers, photographers, craftsmen, art restorers and collectors among the nine living children of Arleen and Emerson. Though Brigid is a lawyer with the New York City Transit Authority, her New York apartment is completely filled with art and jewelry collections, as well as her own photography, and has the feel of an intimate art gallery.

E. The Rule: Benedictine Hospitality

Another aspect of Benedict’s Rule that shaped Emerson and Arleen’s family life was the scriptural notion of every guest being received as Christ in “I came as a guest, and you received me.” (Mt. 25:35). Chapters Fifty-Three and Sixty-One of The Rule emphasize the honor that is to be shown to pilgrims and people of faith. As described earlier, Kilfenora was a gathering place for family, neighbors, monks of St. John’s Abbey and out-of-town visitors. Some of the explanation for this hospitality lay in the fact that Emerson was not only a gifted analyst and philosopher, but a delightful conversationalist more at ease with lively discussion of significant ideas than with idle chatter. Eugene McCarthy described Emerson as having a “vocation to conversation.” Yet the open door at Kilfenora represented more than an invitation to intelligent discussion, it was founded on a spiritual principle of trying to see every visitor as

Christ. In a thoughtful piece on Christian parenting published by the Liturgical Press, Arleen and Emerson posed the question of how to live in accordance with the Benedictine dictum: “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ.”\textsuperscript{260} Arleen and Emerson wondered, “can this spirit be maintained toward all who come to our front door, including salesmen, baby sitters, neighborhood children, and visiting teenagers? Should we make an attempt to invite people to our homes as guests if we think they need help, although we would prefer our privacy?”\textsuperscript{261} The many references in Arleen’s letters to dinner and house guests, staying up and talking late into the evening, give evidence of how Emerson and Arleen answered those questions in their home. Though those who spent time at Kilfenora would remember it to be a remarkable and memorable experience, the impact of the visitors on Arleen was also noticeable. Her letters describe dinner guests that remained talking until two, three, or four in the morning. There was Mrs. Biddisan, Monsignor Leegett’s secretary at the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, who told of the hectic life working there; there were the St. John’s professors, lay and monk, such as Fr. Emeric and Steve Humphrey, or Leo, who told stories about the wild people who lived around Collegeville; there was the professor visiting St. John’s University whose wife Arleen thought was a most interesting artist and Catholic convert who found St. John’s to be a revelation. For Arleen, these visitors may have been received as Christ, but it might be more apt based on her letters to describe her as receiving them hungrily, as she would an issue of \textit{Commonweal} or the \textit{New Yorker}. She found them interesting and stimulating and worth describing in detail in her letters. In a household of ten children, one might think a mother would not have the time or

\textsuperscript{260} \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}, Chapter 53.
energy or interest in so many people coming to the house. Yet the guests at her home at Kilfenora were an essential part of the fabric of life there and Arleen eagerly welcomed them.

F. The Rule: Unceasing Prayer

A final aspect of The Rule that anchored the Hynes family life and is remembered by the Hynes children as a defining feature was the practice of praying the divine office at night. The Benedictine Rule devotes twelve chapters to praying the divine office in community. With kids in school and Emerson teaching during the day, it was not practical for them to pray all the monastic hours, but a commitment to prayer in the evening together was possible and, to Emerson and Arleen, an important component of their family spirituality. Arleen was delighted when in 1941 the monks of St. John’s Abbey translated their “wonderful little brown books” into English so that lay people could participate as fully in the church’s prayer as monks. Each child received his or her copy of the breviary. In the evenings, the family would read the psalms in counterpoint, as Emerson had often seen and heard the monks at St. John’s Abbey do. Though it was evening prayer, they did not always read Vespers or Compline, rather Arleen and Emerson would try different ways to modify the monastic prayers to fit their family’s life. Sometimes they would follow the daily prayer schedule, but would spread it out over a week’s time, so that one evening would be matins, one lauds, one terce, another sext, then none, vespers, compline, and so on. On busier days they tended to read the shorter hours, though second son Patrick Hynes

262 The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 8-20.
263 Arleen McCarty Hynes, Recorded Interview with Dolores Leckey, 1986.
would often loudly and somewhat facetiously protest and suggest they recite the longest prayer: “Let’s read lauds!”

Arleen saw the value of this form of prayer and promoted it as early as 1944 in a publication called *The Living Parish*, which may have been a liturgical press publication, though the copy in the St. Benedict Monastery archives is simply identified as *The Living Parish*, June, 1944. Because of the Hynes’ friendship with the monks at St. John’s Abbey, she was often tapped to write for parish supplements. She wrote regularly for a Sunday parish bulletin supplement called *Bible and Liturgy*, which was edited by Rev. William Heidi, O.S.B. In these supplements, Arleen gave practical and spiritual advice to families, and especially to mothers, and often gave insight into her own struggles and frustrations as she attempted to cultivate a spiritual life while raising ten children. In one article, after describing how one might sanctify the daily routine of feeding children, doing the dishes and washing the clothes by using the short breviary during the day, Arleen describes how family could join in the church’s prayer:

But the breviary is not just for the housewife. She, perhaps, is best able to pray it in its entirety. It can also serve as common prayer for the whole family. . . . There are one or two plans to follow. We sometimes start on a Saturday evening with Matins and read it throughout the week; the next week we read Lauds for each day’s prayer, and so on. In seven weeks we have read the complete Office. Occasionally we vary the week’s prayer by saying Matins Saturday evening, Lauds Sunday, Prime Monday and so on through the week. But there is no need to make an inflexible rule to govern as glorious a prayer as the Divine Office. When special feasts intervene, we read that day’s Office instead of the one hour. Either of these patterns gives us a better appreciation of the entire Office than restriction ourselves to Compline nightly as the one form of family prayer.

When Arleen was young, she and Eileen would recite the rosary with Josie (though the twins would often sneak a book and read throughout the prayer). Her own children—at least the

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264 Ibid.
youngest of them—would have no memory of the evening rosary as a family ritual, but Arleen hoped they would always remember the evening breviary prayer as a lively time together. 

266 Arleen’s second daughter Brigid does remember this form of prayer from her childhood warmly saying, “it was a very rich spiritual life without in any way being saccharine or down on your knees, hands clasped in prayer.”267

The Hynes evening prayer ended with a family litany of saints, in which each child’s saint name was called as well as the trait defining that saint. Emerson and Arleen devised this prayer as one of the ways to ensure each of their ten children knew how special he or she was:

St. Emeric, make me a good person.
St. Helene, help me accept the Cross of Christ.
St. Denis, make me a defender of the faith.
St. Patrick, make me a missionary for the love of God.
St. Mary, make me sweet and humble of heart.
St. Hilary, make me a laughing boy.
St. Brigid, make me a housekeeper for God.
St. Peter, make me a rock of faith.
St. Michael, defend us with the sword of the Spirit.
St. Thomas More, let us meet merrily in heaven.
St. Timothy, fight the good fight of faith.
St. Christopher, help me see Christ borne in all men.
St. Joseph, grant me the grace of a happy death.
St. Benedict, may your holy Rule be our family guide.268
II. The Breviary and the St. John’s Missal as Transformative Texts

A. Theoretical Interlude: American Liturgical Movement

Like their well-worn copy of St. Benedict’s Rule, the breviary was a text that shaped life at Kilfenora. The Benedictines at St. John’s Abbey had translated their breviary into English in 1941, in part to encourage greater lay participation in the prayers of the Church. The St. John’s monks followed the production of the short breviary in English with an English-language translation of the Missal to involve the Collegeville community more in the abbey’s liturgical life. These efforts were undertaken as part of an ongoing process of American liturgical renewal. St. John’s Abbey was on the forefront on this renewal due to the efforts of Benedictine Virgil Michel and others. In the late nineteenth century, efforts at liturgical reform had been made by a Benedictine monk at St. Meinrad’s Abbey, Father Bede Maler, who recognized the need for a liturgical movement but could not garner much support at that time. In 1895, Maler wrote:

I do not know whether steps have already been taken in order to win superiors in the Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation to a systematic promotion of the liturgical movement. If so, one certainly has to await what position they will take towards it. But I want to warn you, after long experience, against too great expectations in this respect . . . It would be nice if all the abbeys in the U.S. would unanimously participate in this work. But I have no such hope. 269

Although in Belgium, France, and Germany the liturgical movement had been picking up steam and gained some bishops’ support from the mid-19th century on, it would take another generation after Father Bede Maler before the liturgical movement began to take hold in the American Benedictine community, and even longer in the broader American Catholic population. Benedictine Virgil Michel played an instrumental role in realizing Bede Maler’s

vision of Benedictine abbeys participating, even leading, the work of liturgical reform. In the mid-1920s, as a young Benedictine monk in his early thirties, Virgil Michel spent a year or so on the European continent, returning to St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota determined to bring the spirit of liturgical reform he observed in Europe to the United States. Michel had received a doctorate in English from 1916-1918 at the Catholic University of America in Washington. He was enamored of the power of language and its efficacy as an agent of change. In 1926, Virgil Michel founded *Orate Fratres*, arguably the journal that did the heaviest lifting in laying the foundation for liturgical renewal in the American Catholic Church, described as some as “destined to be the organ of the liturgical movement in the English-speaking world.”

By 1954, historians of the liturgical movement, who may not have realized just how close they were to witnessing the dramatic historical change that was about to happen in the Church, were already crediting Virgil Michel and his team with moving the liturgy to a more participatory and social action model:

The movement in America may be said to have been born with the beginning of *Orate Fratres*, published by the Benedictines of St. John’s Abbey at Collegeville, Minnesota, in Advent of 1926. The review was founded by the able Dom Virgil Michel, who combined a thorough liturgical knowledge with an active social concern. Since its beginning the periodical has combined original contributions with reports on the apostolate abroad and developments at home. At St. John’s a Liturgical Day was held in 1929, and it was the Benedictines who in 1940 sponsored the first Liturgical Week in America.

Indeed, this same historian republished his history of the liturgical renaissance just after the sweeping changes of the Second Vatican Council and noted that he would not and could not

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have predicted the dramatic transition the Church made in such a short time period. Virgil Michel may not have been able to predict how swiftly the liturgical renewal would be adopted, but he certainly approached it with a sense of urgency and importance and his Benedictine reform spirit certainly prefigured the spirit of Vatican II. In one of the first years of the publication of *Orate Fratres*, in 1929, Michel wrote something that would resonate almost forty years later at Vatican II:

> For the liturgical spirit is just that—a spirit, a fundamental attitude towards the whole of Christian life, which will enter into and lend new and richer spiritual color to every angle of that life. It is not the learning of any new dogmas—God forbid! But it is the flourishing of a new spirit, or, much better, the reflourishing of an old spirit . . . It is a change of spirit, or an enhancement of spirit, if you wish; not a change of dogma. Yet it may mean a shift of emphasis regarding the influence of some truths of our faith on our Christian life. It will mean among other things a better understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ; Christian solidarity; the prayer-life of the Church; the priesthood of Christ, i.e., in Christ Himself, in the Church, in the ordained ministers, in all the faithful; the Communion of Saints; the life of grace, human participation in the Divine; the sacramental character, e. a. And it will mean not only a better understanding of these, in the sense of greater abstract knowledge about them, but an understanding of them as inspirational sources of a more intense spiritual life in and with Christ and His Church.273

It is this liturgical spirit that was so alive in the Collegeville community of the 1940s and the 1950s when Arleen and Emerson Hynes were living there. This spirit of liturgical renewal would only become widespread in the United States after the changes promulgated at the Second Vatican Council, but it was already embraced and put into practice in Collegeville and was reflected in their daily use of the breviary and of the new participatory missal of St. John’s Abbey. An instance of this more widespread liturgical participation came several years after the conclusion of Vatican II when Pope Paul VI sought to promote great lay involvement in the

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Liturgy of the Hours, or the divine office as the breviary came to be called, by issuing a revised breviary in 1970. At that time, Pope Paul VI noted that the revision was done in part so that the laity might also more fully participate in the Church’s daily prayer:

The Office has been drawn up and arranged in such a way that not only clergy but also religious and indeed laity may participate in it, since it is the prayer of the whole people of God. People of different callings and circumstances, with their individual needs, were kept in mind and a variety of ways of celebrating the office has been provided, by means of which the prayer can be adapted to suit the way of life and vocation of different groups dedicated to the Liturgy of the Hours.  

Even with its Vatican backing, it can be argued that the embrace of the Liturgy of the Hours by the laity in the United States has been lackluster. Though some Catholic scholars consider the divine office to be an underutilized form of prayer, it has been promoted by a few Catholics who have shared their experience of it in popular Catholic journals. There is anecdotal evidence that the practice may slowly be spreading, in modified form, through the increasing use of monthly publications such as *Magnificat*, a prayer and Mass resource which first appeared in English in 1998 and includes morning and evening prayer, daily Mass readings and reflections, as well as subscriptions to the newer Liturgical Press publication of a similar nature, *Give Us This Day*. These resources offer a way of sanctifying the entire day through prayer, tapping the ancient monastic practice of praying the psalms daily, perhaps leading to their memorization due to the repetition over time. Some who engage in the practice advocate that “the continued, faithful praying of the Divine Office expands our capacity for the grace of God,

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conditions us to respond to life in ways conformed to Christ and aids immeasurably in our quest to become what God wants us to be.”

In the liturgically charged milieu in which Arleen and Emerson Hynes became Benedictine oblates and practiced the Liturgy of the Hours, they viewed this practice as closely connected to the social teachings of the Church. Emerson Hynes recognized a connection between the prayer of the Church and social action, as put forward by his mentor Virgil Michel, about whom Emerson wrote, “an analysis of the thought of Father Virgil presents a striking illustration of the way in which a sound basis in philosophy and liturgy can flower into a penetrating social leadership.” As a young family, at one point with six children under six years old and ultimately with eight sons, the ideal of praying the breviary with the discipline and attention that a monastic environment both fosters and demands could be only that: an ideal. Yet Emerson and Arleen Hynes nonetheless made the effort to place the prayers of the church and the habits of the breviary at the center of their family life.

B. The Breviary and the St. John’s Missal

This commitment to incorporate the Church’s breviary prayers into their family life began at the very beginning of Arleen and Emerson’s marriage. In 1941, Arleen’s letters reveal that she already felt the revitalizing effect of joining in the church’s daily prayer. She references the breviary repeatedly, as well as the new St. John’s Mass missal which she welcomed as a way for her and other Collegeville parishioners to be more engaged in the parish. Arleen treasured these texts and wove them into the fabric of her daily life. For Josie Dunn’s birthday, Arleen had

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277 Baxendale, 230.
hoped to send her a copy of the new daily lay breviary, but the translation was not quite completed at that time. She thought long and hard about what to send her instead of the much-anticipated breviary, deciding on homemade chocolate chip cookies, an apt symbolism for the way in which the breviary seemed to Arleen a nourishing delight.279

In her formative years, though Arleen, Eileen and Josie Dunn read many spiritual texts, Arleen was not in the habit of reading scripture until she began praying with the breviary. It was the breviary that opened the door to scripture for Arleen. Before praying with the breviary, Arleen had said she never really understood how to pray the psalms. Though she remembered Josie Dunn quoting the psalms in her childhood, she thought they were good poetry and did not even realize they were scriptural. At Kilfenora, her familiarity with scripture increased and it became part of her daily life. As each child was born and baptized, it became natural for Arleen to choose a scripture apt for the occasion. Though when it came to her second child’s baptism her knowledge of scripture was still limited and, at a loss for the perfect scripture passage, she asked for her sister Eileen’s advice:

We’ve looked and looked for a proper text to use. I looked in concordance and breviary. Just couldn’t find anything. Can’t think of anything Gill or G.K.C. said that could be used either. Just nothing liturgical! Could it be that we shot the works on Denis’s? Unless you can think of something.280

Eileen did think of something, and Arleen was grateful that Eileen thought of some suitable psalms for the occasion saying, “your suggestion for the card is just the thing. Why didn’t we think of those singing psalms? They will really be Eileen’s contribution—sure to tell

279 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, 1941.
280 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, Feb. 1, 1944.
people you did all the printing and searching out the exact text for the others. Thanks darling.”

Arleen asked for Eileen’s help again after the birth of their third child, Mary, the following year. Emerson thanked Eileen for her biblical assistance in a letter that humorously captures the spirit of the life, the liturgical movement and the beginnings of ecumenism stirring among the monks and families of St. John’s Abbey. Though Emerson was earnest about building a family in this rural Catholic environment, he was not the least solemn and unsmiling about this aim. In an ironic letter to his sister-in-law Eileen, he feigns offense at her use of a Protestant bible:

Dear sister, city cave dweller, librarian of mass minds, derelict minds, frustrated minds and delinquents—this is a breath of fresh air from Kilfenora, from the countryside, where the deer roam and there are no foreign noises to drown out the abbey church bells. This is a message from a Catholic community, where, indeed man is still human and still capable of sin, but at least is aware of sinning. This is a message from a liturgical center, where, indeed, not everyone is liturgical, but at least they know, they know, and it is orthodox and in keeping with God’s revelation. This is a message to you, to thank you, of course, for all the work involved in the baptismal and birth announcements, but honesty and trust demand that the thanks be two edged. For how can we, living here, trying to be strong of faith, give thanks to one who used texts from the Protestant Bible, who in reference gave a book that does not even appear in the Catholic version of the Bible (“And she conceived and bore a daughter?”)? That was so brazen it had to be cut off; only hope no one else notices the others. Now this would be set down as a simple mistake, if you were just a peasant, a crude and healthy farm girl, one without education. But you are a graduate of a Catholic college. You are a trained librarian. On either count, you should have known. A Catholic college graduate ought to be able to recognize the difference or prose between the two Bible versions. And a librarian in particular, should know thatCrudens concordance is a Protestant one; that up to a year ago the Catholics never even had one. What would Sister Marie Caecelia say? What can I say? What can the deer say? What can the cow say? What can Denis say? What can your twin say? What can Mary say (for she, after all, was formally the most offended, even though she may not actually recognize it now)? What will her biographers say? What will her biographers say? What will my enemies say? What will our friends say? What will the Pope say? My dear girl—look what you have started. ‘And of these, the greatest is charity’ (Love) therefore, with love, uncle Em

(Your sins are multiplying; vice is like that).282

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281 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, Feb. 11, 1944.
Living in the liturgical center of Collegeville was stirring and fun for Emerson and Arleen. The new lay breviaries and the English-language missals that the St. John’s monks were producing enabled Arleen and Emerson to participate in liturgical reform in a way not previously possible for them. The use of these texts became natural for them, in part because the translators and producers of the English language materials were their friends and neighbors. Arleen acknowledged how unusual and fortunate this situation was, especially when others visited them and were amazed at the liturgical environment. Arleen describes with pride a couple who visited the Hynes family in 1944 who were so enthralled with this newly available breviary that they decided to order two copies so they could share in praying the divine office even when they were apart. The woman visitor, a sculptor who promised to make Arleen a statute of the Blessed Virgin, was so inspired by this liturgical culture that in her view, “St. John’s was a revelation.”

C. St. John’s Missal

For Arleen and Emerson, if St. John’s was a revelation, it was in part through the texts of the breviary and the Missal which became integral parts of their Collegeville life. Arleen’s letters to Eileen show just how integrated these texts became with Arleen’s everyday life, and how much she delighted in them. She regaled Eileen with stories of Holy Week in 1951, while also poking a little fun at herself. “I’m getting very liturgical these days,” she wrote to her sister, “wouldn’t dream of wearing a new hat before the new Easter season.” She and Emerson were inspired by a “loaded” talk by one of the Benedictine monks, Fr. Paschal, on the liturgical

283 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, May 8, 1944.
284 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, March 21, 1951.
explanation for Tenebrae and Holy Thursday Mass. They decided to hold a family feast for Holy Thursday. After hearing a talk at St. John’s on the church as the mystical body of Christ, they thought they ought to be more inclusive and invite their neighbors the Erlers to attend the Passover meal as well. Arleen was tickled to be able to use their tablecloth with the epithet “Wine to Gladden the Heart of Men.” She prepared a paschal feast of pork roast, yellow jello salad, and a mold cake shaped as a lamb. In later years, she and Emerson would refine the Passover meal (no more pork roast!) to bring it more in line with the traditional Jewish meal with a Christian interpretation. They worked on their Christian adaptation of the Haggadah ritual with a convert from Judaism, named Fr. Roland, and with others. After distributing it and a guide to Holy Week in the Home through the Benedictine publication Worship (the successor to Orate Fratres, first published at St. John’s Abbey in 1926) in the mid-50s, Arleen ultimately published their guide to a Christian Passover with Paulist Press in 1972.

In addition to creating liturgical events during Holy Week at her home at Kilfenora, Arleen was also thrilled by the possibility of attending the Easter vigil midnight Mass, a new offering for lay people that was not widely practiced in the early 1950s. Arleen wrote to Eileen of her delight in what she saw as sweet liturgical offerings and her hope that her twin sister could partake in Houston as well:

I almost hesitate to tell you of our spiritual desserts we’ve been having hearabouts. I can’t remember whether there’s a Cathedral in Houston (I really think it’s in San Antonio tho) but this year for the 1st time midnight Mass on Holy Sat. was allowed at cathedrals and monasteries. So of course St. John’s had it too. Everybody predicts a new storm on Good Friday so we may not get to midnight Mass after all, and unless Nellie very generously

offers to stay, I won’t go either. But just the idea is exciting (I reread the clipping and maybe your church will have it too, tho in St. Cloud only the cathedral is) Hope so!\(^2\)\(^\text{87}\)

Arleen was just as enthusiastic about the liturgy to install the new abbot of St. John’s Abbey that also took place during the 1951 Easter season. As she expressed in her letter to Eileen, not even an event in St. Peter’s in Rome could come close in her mind to the remarkable blessing ceremony she attended:

> Well, the biggest thing in my career-aside from your and my wedding days has happened-the blessing of Abbot Baldwin. It was a stupendous liturgical affair. I’m sure I cannot do it justice in any way but I’ll try. I’m sending you a copy of the liturgy, printed by St. John’s, which everyone used. The cover design and type are in the color Frank Kacmarcik has called the Baldwin grey. Frank designed the whole book, but the printing, unfortunately, isn’t perfect. But the sense of participation by the users was excellent because of it. (By the way, Fr. Paschal had some extra ones and said you could keep this copy, if you don’t want to, I could send it to one of the Sisters to keep. I was delighted to get an extra one, there weren’t too many and you can’t really understand anything about it unless you can read it all for yourself).\(^2\)\(^\text{88}\)

This grasp of the significance of lay participation that would come to shape the life of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council became a regular feature of the Hynes’ experience during the 1950s. Even as they began to grow accustomed to the rich liturgical offerings of St. John’s Abbey, it was still refreshing for Arleen to experience its novelty through the eyes of visitors for whom she saw that ordinary St. John’s liturgies were like parish missions. The abbey missal translations also began spreading to other parts of the country, enabling those outside the Collegeville community to share in these experiences. The translations did not hurt the abbey monks either:

> All over the nation the reports are coming in of unprecedented Holy Communions and people at Mass for Holy Week. Fr. Godfrey’s missal was sold out long before Holy Week

\(^2\)\(^\text{87}\) Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, March 21, 1951.

\(^2\)\(^\text{88}\) Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, March 30, 1951.
In fact Leonard is wearing Holy Week Missals in the form of a very fancy tan (light, light) coat and brown slacks and new overcoat. We keep kidding them about when they are going to start driving Holy Week Missals.289

The texts of the breviary and the missal were like daily bread (or chocolate chip cookies) for Arleen during this early phase of her marriage in Collegeville. Prayer and liturgical worship were experienced as part of the fabric of daily life. Further, the materials produced by St. John’s Abbey were received as tools for daily prayer by Arleen and Emerson. Their stance toward their Benedictine friends appeared to be one of gratitude for sharing their resources rather than relying on the clergy and the monastery in a dependent way for their spiritual growth. Arleen claimed these texts of the breviary and the missal and used them as guides for further cultivating a strong prayer life and appreciation for scripture. She internalized and digested these texts in a way that fits the description of transformative reading. It was a kind of reading that brought change, and perhaps was a vehicle for grace. These texts fostered communal bonds with their neighbors inside and outside of the Benedictine abbey. They also strengthened the family bonds, moving Arleen in this stage of life from a young single librarian to a married woman creating a family life. In this early adulthood phase of Arleen’s life, these potent texts of the Benedictine Rule, the breviary and the missal were instrumental for crafting that life and bringing Arleen to a new threshold.

For every such life stage, Erik Erikson identified a virtue that emerges from the transition from one stage to another. In the case of the transition to early adulthood, according to Erikson’s scheme, the virtue of love emerges from the successful resolution of the crisis of intimacy versus

289 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, April 14, 1956.
isolation in early adulthood. With a husband and ten children, as well as monks and Collegeville friends and out of town visitors stopping by the house at all hours of the day and night, it would seem that isolation was not an option for Arleen. Yet remember that Arleen came to age in a small female household where periods of silence were indeed as valuable as gold. Though the Benedictine texts helped Arleen to fashion a communal life rooted in prayer and the sanctity of the ordinary, noisy mess of daily life, the choice for intimacy did not always come easily. For additional spiritual strength in making the transition to a large family life in a vibrant and active community, Arleen also turned to the poetry of cloistered Carmelite sister Jessica Powers.

III. Transformative Power of the Poetry of Jessica Powers

In the same springtime season of 1956 when the St. John’s missal was becoming so popular among Catholic laypeople supportive of liturgical reform, Arleen and Emerson were having their own success as sought-after parish speakers. In one ten-week stretch, they gave eight Sunday talks on Christian marriage, sexuality, and parenting in various Minnesota parishes. At that time, Emerson and Arleen had eight children under the age of twelve at home and would soon have two more. Yet even though Arleen was the mother of ten children, Emerson may have been the more natural parent. For Arleen, being a partner to Emerson, being guided by the Benedictine Rule and being faithful to the prayers of the breviary (and to her daily nap and spiritual reading!) came easily; being a parent was a much greater challenge. When her daughters complained that Arleen was leaving the house once again for one of her meetings, she looked at
them with her blue eyes flashing. Suggesting they would be even more unhappy if she did not go, she indignantly exclaimed “I go to these meetings as much for you as I do for myself!”

Growing up in the relative quiet of Josie Dunn’s home, Arleen could never quite grow accustomed to the noise level at Kilfenora. In her later years, she realized that in the din she had missed many of her children’s “small silences.” Arleen could not really be described as maternal in the classic sense of being warm or affectionate. With so many children it was difficult enough to meet their physical need for clothing and nutrition, let alone their individual emotional needs, though she and Emerson did try. Recognizing the daunting nature of meeting the needs of so many children, Emerson devised a nightly ritual of “Thirty Seconds of Loving,” in which each child would receive a thirty-second hug from either him or Arleen. They tried to encourage each child’s individuality. If a child was particularly gifted in storytelling or art or helping around the house, Emerson and Arleen would affirm and encourage that gift.

Nonetheless, with so many children in the house and with what the eldest son now calls “the annual baby,” there was some degree of chaos and benign neglect.

A humorous example of this inadvertent inattention is an incident that occurred when Arleen and Emerson had three small children. In the early years of the childbearing, Emerson would sometimes come home from the university for lunch with Arleen. Upon leaving, when it was Arleen’s naptime, he might put two year-old Denis in the playpen, one year-old Patrick in the crib and the new baby Mary in the bed with Arleen. Arleen’s naptime was absolutely sacred.

In Josie Dunn’s household, ‘Mama’ had required Arleen and Eileen to do very little housework

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290 Mary Hynes-Berry, Author Interview, Chicago, IL, June, 2007.
292 Denis Hynes, Author Interview, Collegeville, MN, June, 2007.
or cooking; Josie Dunn may have done even less. There were no younger siblings to care for. Seemingly the only requirement of the twins was that they do their hour of spiritual reading every day, a habit which probably explains why Arleen was absolutely religious about taking her daily afternoon ‘nap’ for resting, reading, and writing, no matter what level of mayhem exploded outside her bedroom door.

One afternoon, Arleen and Emerson lay down to listen to the radio and take a nap. As Arleen dozed off and on, she had a vague awareness that two-year old Denis was near the fireplace, but she just hoped . . . After a while, Denis came in their room with his face completely black and every inch of him covered with ashes. Every step he took left a mark. He had been sitting deep inside the fireplace among the ashes. As his pale blue eyes danced with mischief against his blackened face, Emerson and Arleen laughed at their predicament. They quickly decided they could not very well scold or spank Denis because they had been the ones to leave him unattended as he explored the fireplace. So Arleen dumped him in the bathtub and Emerson scrubbed the floors and the fireplace, and Arleen wondered if she needed to start doing a better job of keeping the fireplace clean.293 She was not prepared, however, to give up the afternoon nap.

Keeping the mind and spirit engaged while tending to the immediate and sometimes overwhelming needs of a growing household was a constant struggle for Arleen. Her nightly conversations with Emerson were essential for her sense of worth; her ‘naptime’ provided a period for reading and reflection. She also tried to integrate reading into her daily household

293 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, May 8, 1944.
tasks. Arleen had a subscription to *Commonweal* Magazine and Eileen regularly sent her copies of the *New Yorker* and *Punch*, for which Arleen was grateful saying, “we continue to bless you each week as the New Yorker and Punch come pouring in. They, plus the New York Times and Commonweal, are sufficient unto themselves to keep one going.”

Emerson would occasionally publish articles in *Commonweal* and Arleen was an enthusiastic reader of the magazine. To Eileen in 1944 she wrote, “subscribe immediately to Commonweal and Be Sure to Read It. Very essential.” Frustrated with the level of conversation among many of the Collegeville women, Arleen and her neighbor and friend Monica Erler started a “Think Club,” a precursor to the now ubiquitous neighborhood book club. One rule of the club: they would only discuss what they considered weighty matters; no discussion of children or household issues. At one point, the group read John Locke, coupled with some papal writings on the duties of democracy. They read a Jacques Maritain essay published in *Commonweal* and they read the Federalist Papers together. When cooking for the family, Arleen was more apt to have an issue of *Commonweal* in her cookbook holder than any recipe book.

A. A “Christ My Utmost Need”

In all this reading, and in the midst of the busy years of bearing and raising children, Arleen came upon a poem by Jessica Powers that touched her deeply and became a transformative text for her, in the manner of the Benedictine texts of the Rule and the breviary that so shaped her life. In 1952, when Arleen was still very much in the midst of her child-

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294 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, September, 1954.
295 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, September 14, 1944.
296 Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, August 12, 1954.
bearing years, she read Jessica Powers’ poem, “Christ My Utmost Need,” in an issue of Commonweal. She clipped it and placed it in her prayer book, reading it daily, slowly and meditatively, in her own private practice of lectio divina. It became an integral part of her daily prayer, becoming more browned with age with each passing year.\footnote{Hynes, Recorded Interview with Dolores Leckey, 1986.} With the needs of so many children surrounding her, the poem spoke to her of her own struggle and occasional failure to meet these needs. It expressed for her the only antidote to the frightening helplessness of being a mother to so many children. Even years later, when Arleen was discerning whether to take her final vows as a Benedictine sister, she had a dream that there were children crawling all around her, crying out to her. In the dream, she would pick one up, and another would cry; she felt helpless and found she did not have enough arms to hold them.\footnote{Arleen Hynes, Dream Journal, 1982–1983.}

Jessica Powers’ poem perhaps enabled Arleen to visualize that while her children clung to her, she could in turn cling to Christ. The poem seemed to speak to her of Christ’s hand being the one that holds her, as well as the one that she must hold onto; “I cling with all my strength unto a nail-Investigated Hand.”\footnote{Regina Siegfried and Robert Morneau, ed. Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 152.} Arleen daily ingested these poetic words, reminding herself that her every breath and every step depended on Christ, her utmost need. In the words of Jessica Powers, “I cannot take one step into the light without the Christ.”\footnote{Ibid.} This poem may have enabled Arleen to put into words her own frightening desperation, and fear, with Christ as her only trust. With so many small hands to hold, Arleen’s daily repetition of this poem became for
her a necessary and profitable complement to her use of the breviary and missal which were ingested like daily bread for her.

Later in life Arleen reflected on her identity; “If I truly looked at myself long and penetratingly, what would I see? Mother? Widow? Benedictine? Writer? Bibliotherapist? Worshipper?” All of these identities were hers, yet it was her identity as a mother that she sometimes strained to understand. As she reflected in her later years, she was troubled in retrospect by her failure to recognize many of her children’s needs. She took some solace that at least she gave her children life and love. They would have to make whatever they could of those gifts as they grew to adulthood. As she heeded Jessica Powers’ poetic admonition to cling to Christ, she hoped her example would at least point her children toward God, whom she believed was the only one who could truly meet their needs.

B. Theoretical Interlude: Poetry as Prayer

Arleen’s meditative and repetitive reception of the words of Jessica Powers’ poetry, especially “Christ My Utmost Need” which spoke to her as an occasionally besieged mother was a fitting precursor to her later work as a bibliotherapist and as a Benedictine. For Arleen, as for many others who later wrote of the spiritual influence of Jessica Powers’ poetry, she was taken by how Powers’ poetry provided fertile ground for prayer and spiritual growth.

Arleen’s practice, whether she was conscious of it or not during the 1950s, closely resembled the monastic practice of *lectio divina* in Benedictine communities. The ancient Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* had developed as a way for monks to be prepared and receptive to absorb the words of scripture that they would be reciting during the divine office and hearing at the Mass. Benedict’s Rule in its fourth chapter prescribes listening willingly to holy reading and devoting oneself frequently to prayer as instrumental to good works.\(^\text{304}\) According to Saint Benedict, the texts that were considered appropriate for holy reading included scripture, naturally, but also other readings of the church, including the lives of holy people:

> For what page or what utterance
> of the divinely inspired books of the Old and New Testaments
> is not a most unerring rule for human life?
> Or what book of the holy Catholic Fathers
do not loudly proclaim
> how we may come by a straight course to our Creator?
> Then the Conferences and the Institutes
> and the Lives of the Fathers,
as also the Rule of our holy Father Basil –
what else are they but tools of virtue
for right-living and obedient monks?\(^\text{305}\)

In ancient days, time would be dedicated in the monastic day to hear the words of works such as the conferences, institutes, lives of the Church Fathers, in addition to scripture, read aloud, repeatedly and slowly. They were read aloud in part due to the scarcity of books and the high rate of illiteracy among the monks. Due to this deliberate and repetitious reading, the texts—especially scripture—came to be memorized. Having memorized the texts, monks could call them to mind during silent meditation and during daily tasks. Indeed, “since daily life in


\(^{305}\) Ibid., Chapter 73.
preindustrial monasteries involved much time spent in simple, repetitious tasks, biblical prayer-phrases could be ‘ruminated’ all day long. In time, a rhythm of praying with scripture evolved into a four-stage process of lectio, meditato, oratio, contemplatio described by the twelfth century Carthusian monk, Guigo II as “reading puts as it were whole food into your mouth; meditation chews it and breaks it down; prayer finds its savour; contemplation is the sweetness that so delights and strengthens.” Raymond Studzinski in his historical survey of the practice of lectio divina describes this type of reading as “a sacramental activity in which ordinary words, ordinary things are vehicles for the divine.” Studzinski also suggests ways in which this ancient practice might be brought into contemporary use. Examples of this adaptation of transformative reading abound, in numerous Christian denominations. The United Church of Christ provides its members a definition of lectio divina and promotes it as a way of approaching scripture texts:

“Lectio” (reading). Read the Word of God slowly and reflectively. Any text from the Bible can be used for this purpose, but the text should not be too long.

“Meditatio” (reflection). Think quietly about the text you read. Sometimes, a text can be read many times to let the words sink into your mind and heart.

“Oratio” (response). Leave your thinking aside and simply let your heart speak to God.

“Contemplatio” (rest). Let go not only of your own ideas and plans but even of your holy words and thoughts. Simply rest in the Word of God. Listen at the deepest level to God who speaks within you with a still, small voice.

308 Studzinski, Reading to Live, 221.
As you read, reflect, respond and rest, you leave yourselves open to be transformed from within by God’s Word. Whether over time this transformation has an effect on the way you see and live in the world is one test of the authenticity of prayer. You take what you read in the Word of God into your daily life.\textsuperscript{309}

Arleen’s engagement with her favorite Jessica Powers’ poem had many of the markings of \textit{lectio divina} as described in the contemporary account above. As a Benedictine sister who practiced bibliotherapy into her elder years, Arleen became increasingly interested in articulating the connection between poetry and prayer. More than fifty years after discovering Jessica Powers’ poem, “Christ my Utmost Need,” Arleen would write about poetry as a way of creating a renewed monastic ambiance. Poetry, she wrote, “can give a home and a name to what otherwise might dwell unknown in the heart.”\textsuperscript{310} In her work at the Spirituality Center at St. Benedict’s Monastery, Arleen helped others tap that power of poetry to understand and express their deepest self in relation to God. To do that, she would choose poems whose images expressed universal themes but that also retained some ambivalence. For Arleen, even though all poetry can lead to spiritual insight, she found the best poetry for prayer—as for therapy—was that which left room for the readers’ own interpretation and understanding; that way the reader of poetry could have an experience of interacting with the text. Through that dynamic interaction, Arleen noted, the words could come alive and stir the reader toward greater understanding, not only intellectually, but as apprehended in one’s heart and manifested in one’s actions. Poetry in Arleen’s estimation had the power to help one frame and fulfill the ultimate question of God’s

\textsuperscript{309} United Church of Christ, “\textit{Lectio Divina: How to Use the Bible as a Tool for Meditation},” \url{http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar/lectio-divina.html}, found September 15, 2011.

\textsuperscript{310} Arleen M. Hynes, “Creating a Renewed Monastic \textit{Ambiance} Via Poetry as Prayer,” (Yankton, SD: American Benedictine Academy, 1993).
purpose for one’s life. Arleen’s earliest experience of reading Jessica Powers’ poetry became honed into a practice that regularly turned to poetic language as a potent source for growth:

In the end, it comes down to this: The power that lifts the poetry off the page and the power we are praying to is the same power. A good poem helps us see that. That power resides everywhere, in every corner of our living. Poetry helps us see the power of God shining through; it becomes more apparent in our lives. We realize we aren’t doing any of this. Whatever name we call God shines through. It’s not just faith here; there is an experience involved. We experience the awe and wonder and beauty of existence. Experience produces actions that fulfill our purpose in life. This is true spiritual development of our nature as creatures of God. We are growing.311

The process for that spiritual growth as Arleen described it is very much like the process of careful reading of \textit{lectio divina}. As with \textit{lectio divina}, praying with poetry involves reading, reflecting, responding and resting with the words. Arleen made explicit some of the links between the ancient monastic practice of holy reading, especially in community, and her poetry as prayer practice:

We gather together; we read a poem. I ask the group: Are the images or metaphors relevant to your daily life? Then, we invoke the Holy Spirit and sit quietly for about 15 minutes. Some will start to write or draw; others will sit and meditate. Then we gather again to discuss it. St. Gregory the Great said that when he didn’t really understand the Scriptures, he asked his brothers and sisters in the church community what they felt about them. Then they often become clear to him. The points of view of others inform us, and that is what happens here with the poetry. We bounce it around. In the end, a kernel of the truth is picked up. Folks will say what they are going to do about what they have learned. Poetry as prayer moves us through the emotions and intellect, integrating both into some personal action that moves our spiritual life forward.312

A recent multi-volume series called “Poetry as Prayer” validates Arleen’s promotion of this practice of praying with poetry. This series includes beautiful individual volumes on spiritual poets such as Jessica Powers, Denise Levertov, Gerard Manly Hopkins, Thomas Merton and

312 Ibid., 30.
others. It explores the transformative power of their poetry in ways that echo Arleen’s approach to poetry. The publisher, Pauline Books and Media, offered each volume on a particular poet’s writings in the series as a means to deepen the reader’s prayer life.

Arleen’s description of the dynamic between poetry and prayer in terms that echo the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* also received further substantiation in a work published just two years after her death, *The Language of Poetry as a Form of Prayer: The Theo-Poetic Aesthetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins.* Arleen Hynes certainly seemed to embrace the poet Hopkins’ notion that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God,” and would likely have appreciated the author Francis X. McAloon’s efforts to explain the connection between poetry and prayer. In her foreword to McAloon’s work, spirituality scholar Sandra Schneiders articulates the parallels between the practice of *lectio divina* and efforts to draw out revelatory meaning from poetry:

In this book Francis McAloon begins with the recognition that non-biblical poetic texts, for example, the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, can and do function in the prayer experience of some Christians in a way analogous to the functioning of biblical texts in the ancient practice of ‘lectio divina,’ that is, as spiritually transformative.

McAloon begins his work by underscoring the effect of the poetry of Hopkins on influential spiritual writers such as Simon Weil and Thomas Merton. He also shares his own experience reading Hopkins’ poetry as an entrée to a dynamic conversation with God, noting “the creative product itself, the poem as a text, facilitated an open engagement between the

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divine and me . . . Indeed, much to my surprise, I discovered that God could and would address, invite, encourage, and challenge me through praying with these poetic texts.”

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s description of what is involved when a person engages any text, including a poem, McAloon grounds his analysis in a solid theoretical foundation. From a hermeneutical perspective, a poem can disclose to the reader another way of living in that “praying with the poem opens him to the conditions for a changed or transformed way of being in the world.” Throughout his work, McAloon uses the case study of a composite man named Philip whose encounter with Hopkins’ poetry brings about spiritual transformation:

. . . the poem ministers to Philip, inviting him into a new and revealing experience of himself, God, family and friends. As both a spiritual and literary event, Philip’s poetic prayer experience--informed and sustained by God’s grace--simultaneously draws upon an ancient prayer practice \( \textit{lectio divina} \) and the necessary dynamics of textual interpretation. While Philip read, interpreted, and ultimately prayed with this poem, what transpired, in part, was an encounter between Philip’s world and the world projected by the poetic text. Spiritual growth and personal transformation are potential consequences of this ongoing encounter between Philip’s world and the worlds of possibility disclosed by this poetic text.

IV. Chapter Summary: Crossing the Threshold to Love in Young Adulthood: Intimacy Over Isolation

McAloon’s description of the interplay between \textit{lectio divina} and the dynamics of reading poetry captures in theoretical terms what Arleen experienced in 1952 when she came across Jessica Powers’ poem, and throughout her early married life as she creatively interacted with and adapted the texts of the Benedictine order to her family life. With the aid of the Benedictine Rule, the breviary and the Jessica Powers poem, the evidence from the cited letters and journals

\[ 316 \text{ Ibid., 8.} \]
\[ 317 \text{ Ibid., 48.} \]
\[ 318 \text{ Ibid., 47.} \]
of Arleen is that the sources helped her make peace with her own inadequacy when it came to mothering so many children. In these years as a young mother of a growing family, the passages quoted herein from Arleen show that a healthy diet of the monastic rule, scripture, and poetry were as necessary for her as food and water. As she described it, Benedict’s Rule provided a design for living, while the regular recitation of psalms sanctified daily life and poetry gave expression to her deepest desires and fears. The record she left of her life suggests that she digested these words on a daily basis, enabling her in her experience to draw more regularly on the spirit that animated them, guiding her across the threshold to intimacy, and to love.

Arleen’s habit of turning repeatedly to holy texts was one that would continue not only to sustain her, but to transform her through the years into a compelling and wise woman whose gift it was to seek out and find the holy in those around her. Her reliance on transforming texts was to prove nearly life-saving for her at another transitional period of her life when in the span of a year she lost both a dear son and her beloved Emerson. At this life stage in her middle adulthood, as Erik Erikson describes it, Arleen was faced with whether to become stagnant or to be generative. This next chapter will take a close look at the psalms, the poetry and other literature that enabled Arleen to cross another threshold as her identity shifted from wife and mother to widow, bibliotherapist, and a Benedictine nun.
Chapter 4: Crossing the Threshold to Care: Becoming a Widow, a Bibliotherapist and a Benedictine Sister

Everything Rushes, Rushes

The brisk blue morning whisked in with a thought:
everything in creation rushes, rushes
toward God—tall trees, small bushes,
quick birds and fish, the beetles, round as naught,

eels in the water, deer on forest floor,
what sits in trees, what burrows underground,
what wriggles to declare life must abound,
and we, the spearhead that run on before,

and lesser things to which life cannot come:
our work, our words that move toward the Unmoved,
whatever can be touched, used, handled, loved—
all, all are rushing on *ad terminum*.

So I, with eager voice and news-flushed face,
cry to those caught in comas, stupors, sleeping:
come, everything is running
    flying,
    leaping,
    hurtling through time!
    And we are in this race.

—Jessica Powers\(^{319}\)

October 21, 1970

She rode the streetcar over the Potomac River, changing from the Virginia bus line at Pennsylvania Avenue and 9th Street to the District bus. The bus rumbled along Pennsylvania Avenue, merging onto Constitutional Avenue toward the Capitol Building. In a few months, Emerson’s career would end with Senator Eugene McCarthy’s last Senate term. Emerson had determinedly kept going to work at the Capitol the two years since his stroke, but had no desire to work for Senator Humphrey or anyone other than Gene. And he was not strong enough to take another job. You are strong in spirit, he told Arleen, emboldening her as the bus passed the Capitol. It heartened Arleen to know that Patrick was at the Capitol answering phones in the Democratic Cloak Room, his booming voice reverberating in those cavernous halls, his income helping the family finances and his presence in the house a help in these days of mourning Michael’s death.

From the bus window, she could see the looming Supreme Court Building where she had sat many mornings, a silent witness to truth, transfixed by the oral arguments. With this new job at the patient’s library at St. Elizabeths, would she find the time to visit the Supreme Court again? Or visit the art galleries, even though the floors had gotten harder and harder on her aching feet? She was fifty-four years old and starting her first day of work. It had been thirty years since she last held a paying job.

The bus rattled over the Anacostia River and ascended the gradual hill on Martin Luther King Highway to the gates of St. Elizabeths. Arleen got off the bus, crossed the street and walked past the small gabled guard building, past the winged Main building, toward the library. Deep green wells of tree shadows were thrown across the bright, finely bladed grass. Was she falling in love again? Shadows and light, Arleen said to herself; shadows and light, so symbolic of the contrast in her life between the sorrow over Michael’s drowning and the pleasing tension of beginning this new job.

It was not easy to find this job. Emerson’s stroke, a week after the tense and frightening atmosphere in Chicago at the 1968 Democratic Convention, had precipitated the search. Arleen hoped all her volunteer work would add up to a qualification—head of national volunteers for McCarthy’s campaign, librarian for the National Democratic Women’s Club, librarian for the Family and Child Services agency, facilitator of programs for the National Council of Catholic Women on family life, contributing member of the Richmond Diocese Committee on Liturgy, the President’s Commission on Women, the American Association of University Women, the National Catholic Rural Life Movement, and author of various articles and pamphlets. The bottom line, though, was that Arleen was 54 years old with only one year paid librarian experience in a Mandan, North Dakota high school. Not exactly a prize item, she thought. Yet she was hired by a woman who said that if Arleen could handle ten children, there was no doubt that she could handle St. Elizabeths.

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320This Prelude, drawn from Arleen’s unpublished reflections and interviews, portrays her conflicted thoughts in her own voice on her first day of work at St. Elizabeths Hospital.
Falling in Love Again

The years following the deaths of Michael and Emerson are a second cluster of years that represent a threshold period in Arleen Hynes’ life. This chapter is called “Crossing the Threshold to Care” because these years were a time of making lifelong commitments in favor of fruitfulness and productivity in the face of what could have been crippling grief. She allowed herself to fall in love again, first with the grounds of St. Elizabeths and then with the monastic life at St. Benedict’s. Again the pattern persists at this time of change that Arleen would tap the power of text as a means for understanding herself in relation to God, and as she understood it, God’s purpose for her life. As she grieved the deaths of Michael and Emerson, as she began a new career at St. Elizabeths Hospital, and as she discerned her calling to the Benedictine order, she sought insight and guidance in the texts of the psalms, gospel passages, and literature to find healing and a way of moving forward.

I. Transformative Power of the Psalms

A. Death of Michael

When Arleen and Emerson moved to the Washington area to help launch Eugene McCarthy’s Senate career in 1959, they envisioned staying for a few years and returning to Minnesota. They could not have foreseen how much their life would change in those few years. So convinced were Emerson and Arleen that their sojourn back East would be temporary, that St. John’s University had granted Emerson a prolonged sabbatical from his professorship and the Hynes’ had not sold their house in Collegeville. Like many who come to the nation’s capitol to serve on the staff of a Member of Congress, they planned to move back home after making a contribution in Washington, but Emerson never did. As it turned out, Arleen would spend the
next twenty years in the Washington, DC area. Arleen maintained that their hearts never abandoned their treasured Minnesota home; they “did not leave Kilfenora and Saint John’s because the abundant life became sterile but because, as legislative assistant to Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, fellow alumnus of SJU, Emerson could work on national legislation furthering the common good.”

Neither could have imagined that in little more than a decade Emerson would pass away and in the following decade Arleen would launch a career, not returning to the Collegeville area permanently until the early 1980s, and then not as a family but on her own as a Benedictine sister.

Emerson had been wise before they were married to encourage Arleen to work as a librarian in 1940 so she would at least have some work experience to fall back on if ever it became necessary for her to support herself and the family. Soon after Emerson’s stroke in 1968 when it became clear that Emerson would not return to his full capacity, Arleen began looking for employment. Emerson struggled to finish out Senator McCarthy’s Senate term, which ended in January 1970, at which time both Eugene McCarthy and Emerson Hynes retired from the Senate. Though he could have sought disability payments, Emerson had an ethical objection to doing so, making it more imperative than ever that Arleen find work. Ultimately, the only job offer she received was the patients’ librarian position at St. Elizabeths Mental Hospital. Her first day of work was scheduled for the Tuesday after Labor Day in 1970, but a tragic event over the holiday weekend delayed her start until late October. Friday afternoon, fifteen-year old Tim Hynes and his friends decided to go swinging on the construction ropes that had begun appearing on the Georgetown side of the Potomac River in anticipation of the building of a controversial

321 Hynes, “Emerson Hynes at Collegeville,” 83.
bridge near the cluster of rocks known as “The Three Sisters.” Nineteen-year old Michael Hynes went along, perhaps as much to look after them as to join in the fun. They may have been trying to swim out to the rocks, though the details were never clearly established. Tim’s best friend David Wroe and Michael Hynes were both swept away by the strong pull of the river and could not make their way back to shore. Tim and his other friend stood helplessly watching them slip away. They spent the next three or four hours at the police station and when Tim arrived home to bear the awful news, Emerson and Arleen were not there. Tim called the family’s pastor, Fr. David Ray, who at that time was not at the rectory, but the associate pastor Fr. Hearn took the call and came instead to the house to comfort Tim and his brothers Chris and Thomas More (TMore), leaving the house and the boys before Emerson and Arleen arrived home. One of the brothers, either TMore or Tim, urgently called Hilary, who was living then in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood of Washington.

Emerson and Arleen had been in Georgetown for the evening. The new Irish film they had wanted to see, “Quackser Fortune has a Cousin in the Bronx,” was too crowded, leaving only the front row seats, so they skipped the movie and instead “played tourist” in Georgetown and walked around, arriving home about 10 p.m., knowing nothing. Arleen arrived first at the door of the family home on Pershing Street and was greeted there by the stricken face of her twenty-four year old son Hilary. Hilary’s memory is that it fell to him to give Arleen the news that Michael was lost in the river. Arleen’s first reaction was to put her hand on her heart and

322 Arleen Hynes, Arlington, VA, September 17, 1970; Arleen wrote, “Some details of this last time will never be known for certain and in many ways it serves no genuine purpose to try to irrefutably set them straight.”
whisper, “Emerson,” a protective instinct as she feared Emerson was in too weak a condition to survive such news.\(^{323}\)

Tim, whose best friend David and whose older brother Mike were lost in the river and presumed drowned, made the suggestion at some point in that bleak late evening that they pull out their breviaries and pray the psalms. The family ritual of evening prayer had been a central part of Hynes family life in Minnesota, but the family had lost its rhythm a few years after arriving in DC, with an older Hynes leaving home every year for six consecutive years and Emerson working late in the evenings on the Hill. Yet Arleen recorded that they found the *De Profundis* immediately in the prayers for all souls on November 2\(^{nd}\), which Arleen remembered so well reading aloud at Josie Dunn’s bedside as she lay dying. As she prayed this psalm in this dark night, Arleen recalled how Josie on her death bed had recited this psalm with such strength and faith, saying it with Arleen and Eileen until she could no longer speak. So it was Josie’s voice Arleen heard as she said in the midst of her own shock and grief, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.” Out of the depths, indeed. There was little hope that Michael would be found alive as Arleen cried out, “and for thy law, I trust in Thee, O Lord. As the sentinel watches for the dawn, so I watch for thee O Lord.”

The small cluster of the gathered Hynes family read a few more psalms together and then opened the breviary once again, as the night wore on, when Father Hearn returned to the house. The grieving family and Fr. Hearn divided into two groups and read many psalms, all the family favorites from the breviary:

\(^{323}\) Hilary Hynes, Author Interview, Burtonsville, MD, May, 2009.
Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”

Psalm 25, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress.”

Psalm 27, “Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! . . . Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.”

Psalm 34, “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 42, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’”

When they came to Psalm 150, a psalm of praise and joy, Emerson insisted that they should go on reading it, because as Emerson stated “we must praise Him.” And so even in their anguish, they read together Psalm 150, a psalm full of joyful thanksgiving:

Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
Praise him in his mighty firmament!  
Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
Praise him according to his surpassing greatness!  
Praise him with trumpet sound;  
Praise him with lute and harp!  
Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
Praise him with strings and pipe!  
Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

324 Arleen Hynes, Arlington, VA, September 17, 1970.
Let everything that breathes
Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

The family spent a long night together, calling and informing family members and friends. Throughout the night they would pause, and read some psalms aloud. The next morning, the Saturday of Labor Day weekend, Arleen took a tabbed book of psalms to the grieving Wroe family, highlighting some of the special ones that meant so much to the Hynes family and hoping they would have meaning for the Wroes as well. That evening, when Michael’s body had not yet been recovered, the family and close friends gathered at their parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace, for a private Mass celebrated by Fr. Hearn. They gathered around the altar and used an experimental canon. Arleen was grateful for the new liturgical resources which ended in a way she felt was apt for her current suffering. It promised that God’s strength would lead them forward to a life of hope. It reminded her that no man walks alone. Even in her grief, Arleen noticed the new liturgical alternatives and asked then that they be used at the funeral Mass to come. After the private family Mass, the Hynes family again recited the psalms, alternating between two different groups, as they had done for so many years in the model of monastic prayer.

Then again the following day, the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, the psalms were a central feature of another gathering, when the Hynes family asked a few people to spread the word for friends and neighbors to come to their house for prayer at eight in the evening. Forty or fifty people arrived at the Hynes house on Pershing Avenue and once again the favorite psalms were prayed aloud, Psalm 130, Psalm 42, and Psalm 34. They ended their prayer with a litany of praise, the family favorite from Sunday lauds found in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel. In
the past, because of its length, second son Patrick Hynes had often good-naturedly called for this
long prayer during their habitual evening prayer together, when a suggestion of such a lengthy
prayer may not have been enthusiastically embraced by other tired family members. But this
evening was different:

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.
Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.
You heavens, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you waters above the heavens, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you hosts of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Sun and moon, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Stars of heaven, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Every shower and dew, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you winds, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Fire and heat, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Cold and chill, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Dew and rain, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Frost and chill, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Ice and snow, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Nights and days, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Light and darkness, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Lightnings and clouds, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.
Mountains and hills, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
You springs, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Seas and rivers, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
You dolphins and all water creatures, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you birds of the air, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
You sons of men, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
O Israel, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Priests of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
Holy men of humble heart, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
The next evening, Labor Day itself, was again covered in prayer as Mike’s friends from a new Eucharist-centered, progressive Catholic worshipping community with many teen members, organized a prayer service at Our Lady Queen of Peace. The service began with another recitation of the blessings from the third chapter of the book of Daniel. It included readings from Dag Hammerskold, F. Scott Fitzgerald and from Michael’s own poetry. The gathered group sang songs such as Michael’s favorite, “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.” They told the story of how Michael’s first spoken word as a baby was “Alleluia” and how one of his last conversations was about how he envisioned heaven. A passage from The Great Gatsby seemed to them to capture Michael’s spirit:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes a thousand miles away. It was an extraordinary gift of hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.

As they prepared the casket on Tuesday and held the funeral Mass on Wednesday, the psalms and the new liturgical rites continued to be an anchor for Arleen. As she described the series of events, before leaving the funeral parlor for the church, the grieving group prayed the psalms aloud again. Arleen described the healing balm of the psalms for her as “a quiet

325 “The NOVA Community began in 1967 as an experimental worship and study group approved by the Diocese of Richmond to explore new approaches to the liturgy. The rumblings of change in the Catholic Church which culminated in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) laid the groundwork for reform and renewal among clergy and laity alike. With the help of a small group of priests, who agreed to team with community members to plan liturgies, NOVA developed a spirit-filled weekly Eucharistic celebration that continues to challenge and comfort all who attend. Our community is one of hundreds of Intentional Eucharistic Communities in the U.S. and throughout the world whose members seek a more personal, lay-run alternative to the traditional parish structure.” [http://www.novacommunity.info/](http://www.novacommunity.info/), Feb. 1, 2012.

emotional release for natural sorrow and the liturgy itself provided the strength and Christian joy of the readings.”

All the spontaneous and planned prayer events on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in the wake of Mike’s sudden and tragic death were based on texts that had special meaning for Arleen: the psalms, other scripture, and literature. For a family that held the breviary central to its shared identity, it seemed natural to them to cling to this scriptural foundation when the ground beneath them collapsed. Just as Jessica Power’s poetry helped Arleen cling to Christ when drowning in the overwhelming needs of her family, the passages selected here from Arleen’s letters and her written memories suggest that the psalms and other healing literature were similarly a lifeline to Arleen at this time.

Her recognition of the centrality of these sacred texts for her was very much in keeping with the Benedictine tradition of lectio divina. So it was appropriate when Arleen’s dear friend and prayer partner Sister Antoinette took off her large enameled Benedictine medal and gave it to the Hynes family to put on Mike’s lapel as they fixed the casket. Sister Antoinette’s gesture offers an indication that the Benedictine way of prayer and living was that engrained in the family culture. For Arleen, the familiar texts of the psalms, the promising direction of the new liturgical rites, and the familiar faces of family and friends during this time were a salve for her. As she wrote in her first letter to the family circle after Michael’s death: “And so far, of course, we have this healing activity and a full house. Nothing was as healing as the prayers and Mass except the healthy and charming activity of the babies. One can sit and watch and laugh and

327 Hynes, September 17, 1970.
tenderly smile at their activities and not think of the loneliness.” The psalms were one channel that gave voice to Arleen’s unspeakable sorrow. For Arleen, the psalms accomplished what good literature does according to William Shakespeare who appealed to literature as a way of giving words to sorrow and unspeakable grief writing, “give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak.” What Arleen found was that the psalms gave expression to her sorrow and grief; they gave her the familiar language to call out to God. It was in the wake of Michael’s death, Arleen noted, that she became even more aware of the reasons for living.

B. Theoretical Interlude: Praying the Psalms

Relying on the familiar words of scripture during times of trouble is an age-old practice found in the earliest days of Christian monasticism. The desert fathers and mothers understood the therapeutic value of these sacred texts;

The desert ascetics developed a nuanced practice of meditation. This was a process of repeating scriptural words or the words of the elder until they were committed to memory. The oral exercise, in which the monk spoke and heard the words over and over, meant quite literally taking the words to heart, so that, stored in one’s memory, they could serve as a reservoir of healing texts.

Scripture scholars have found that the psalms in particular serve the faithful as living texts that, as Walter Brueggman has written, can “make a transformative difference.” In reading the psalms, Brueggman claims, a dialogic process can take place in which the address to God and answer from God has the potential to change a person. These poetic conversations, he

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328 Hynes, September 17, 1970.
330 Raymond Studzinski, Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina, 99.
observes, are timeless: “They will not quit. They have not quit. And they keep inviting people . . . into the wholeness that comes in embracing brokenness.”

In Brueggman’s work *The Message of the Psalms*, he draws upon the critical research of biblical scholars Hermann Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel, and others to study the impact of the psalms on believers. He also takes into account the reality of human experience in his attempt to explain the impact and meaning of the psalms. Each psalm, in his observation, falls into at least one of three loose categories. These categories are: the psalms as poems of (1) orientation, (2) disorientation and (3) new orientation. Brueggman then studies individual psalms under that general scheme. Looked at within this rubric, the psalms bring various seasons of orientation, disorientation and new orientation to speech. Viewed through Brueggman’s lens, the psalms of orientation recall seasons of well-being; they are poems that express “joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God’s creation, God’s governing law.” The psalms of disorientation are those that outline a different season of life, a season of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death, which evoke “rage, resentment, self-pity and hatred.” Finally the psalms of new orientation in his categorization bring forth the experience of surprise, when “we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair.” The move from one season to another may not always be obvious and is not necessarily developmental, Brueggman asserts, but is always transformational he claims.

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332 Ibid.
333 Ibid., 19.
334 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
A psalm that expressed the profundity of Arleen’s sorrow was Psalm 130, “Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord.” Brueggman places this psalm in the category of disorientation. He identifies it as striking one of the most poignant notes in the psalms. It is disorienting in his scheme, because in a properly ordered situation, the one addressing the almighty king would do so from a place of prosperity and success, but in this psalm the king is addressed from a position of abject loss. Brueggman observes the contrast:

But this psalm is the miserable cry of a nobody from nowhere. The cry penetrates the veil of heaven! It is heard and received . . . The gospel affirms that the cries from the depths are the voices to which Yahweh is particularly attuned. This God is palpable, available—a staggering comment both about God and about the speaker. Moreover, the Lord is attentive to and moved by the beggar. A new solidarity is forged in the moment of speaking between the Lord and ‘the least,’ a new binding between the throne and the depths.336

Brueggman identifies the literary flow of this psalm as moving from the depths of despair, to forgiveness, to a fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord comes after forgiveness is granted, not as a prerequisite for it. Out of this distress call and response comes a transformed relationship, whereby “the depths” are also transformed. The response of the Lord produces a stance of trust and hope. As Brueggman writes, “fear of Yahweh means to have confidence that things as they are (in the depth), are not as they will be. Life will be transformed.”337

In addition to repeating Psalm 130, Arleen also spoke the words of Psalm 34 aloud several times in the days following Michael’s drowning. This psalm is one that Brueggman puts in the category of psalms of new orientation. It is a poem of thanksgiving, but it remembers well the need for being rescued. The psalm closely equates the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit

336 Ibid., 104.
337 Ibid., 106.
with the righteous, so that what makes a person righteous is not his or her goodness but his or her inclination to cry out to the Lord. Having been delivered and saved from troubles by the Lord, the righteous one is then given instructions on how to live in this new orientation:

    Whoever of you loves life
    and desires to see many good days,
    keep your tongue from evil
    and your lips from telling lies.
    Turn from evil and do good;
    seek peace and pursue it.\(^{338}\)

As Arleen prayed these psalms of disorientation and new orientation aloud over and over in the days after Michael’s death, she seemed to be enacting the process of transformation that Brueggman describes. In 1992, more than twenty years after reciting the psalms at the time of Michael’s death in the way that Brueggman would later describe, Arleen came across Walter Brueggman’s 1982 book *Praying the Psalms*. On the front cover of a notebook she kept at St. Ben’s Monastery in 1992, she drew a diagram of Brueggman’s explication of the psalms and explicitly connected it to her process of grieving. Recognizing that the process of moving from orientation to disorientation to a new orientation is not a linear process, she drew a circular diagram. Inside the notebook, Arleen noted that Walter Brueggman’s work on the psalms and the repeated pattern he described could correlate with her own spiritual journey of dying and rising in the wake of Michael’s, and then Emerson’s, death.\(^{339}\) In the death of Michael, and then of Emerson less than a year after, Arleen wrestled in her journals with how to understand this season of her life. Later Brueggman’s explication of the psalms gave her some insight. On the night of Michael’s death, Arleen had cried out to the Lord from the depths, as the psalmist says.

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338 Psalm 34: 12-13 (NIV).
She opened the possibility for the psalms to offer some kind or solace or wisdom. In so doing, she followed Brueggman’s identified pattern of the psalms of seeking a new orientation out of disorientation. This pattern for Arleen played a key role in her being able to set a new course for herself after the profound and disorienting losses of Michael and Emerson, a new orientation that would enable her to make a distinctive mark on the newly developing field of bibliotherapy.

II. Transformative Power of Therapeutic Literature

A. St. Elizabeths

A new orientation for Arleen came in the very concrete form of her work at St. Elizabeths Mental Hospital. Arleen’s new job at St. Elizabeths was previously scheduled to begin on September 9, 1970, just after Labor Day weekend. Michael’s death over the holiday weekend made beginning work that week unthinkable, so she delayed her start until mid-October. She was hired to be the librarian of a little used resource at St. Elizabeths, the circulating library, a small patients’ library near the main building. When Arleen had fallen in love with Emerson in 1938, she fell headlong. It was the same with St. Elizabeths and its patients’ library in 1970; she fell in love again. Arleen’s very first impressions of the verdant St. Elizabeths campus were of the interplay of shadows and light, which she never forgot. At her memorial service, Arleen’s niece, Sister Nancy Hynes who was also a Benedictine sister, described Arleen’s work at St. Elizabeths as a time to build up. Recalling Arleen’s embrace of St. Elizabeths at this painful time in her life, Sister Nancy said of Arleen that she chose not to let the darkness prevail:

Instead she started a new job in the library at St. Elizabeths Hospital and found herself pioneering a form of healing called bibliotherapy. (‘What is that?’ asked a small
grandchild. ‘Is it caring for sick books?’) Later it became poetry therapy. It was lovely and engaging work. In fact, she described it as ‘falling in love all over again.’

Her original job description named her duties as primarily acquiring materials of the library and cataloging them, helping patients learn proper reference techniques, and the proper methods for a library search. There was another library on the St. Elizabeths campus referred to as the Professional Library, which was used by the psychiatrists and other staff of the hospital. Arleen was under the supervision of Lawrence C. (“Larry”) Moore, the Chief Librarian for both the professional library, which was a health sciences library and the patients’ circulating library.

It did not take her long to realize that despite the name of the library she was being hired to work in, most of the materials in the library were not being read by patients, and were not circulating at all. Her initial goal as a librarian was to make the patients’ library inviting and comfortable with new furnishings and carpet, so as to attract patients to come and read. She was also committed to cataloging the books. But she found that patients were not in the habit of even coming to the library, so she sought resources for a mobile library to bring books and magazines directly to the patients. If not able to attain that goal, she hoped to at least arrange for the hospital shuttle bus to make a stop at the library. In a formal request to obtain a shuttle stop she wrote:

The Circulating Library has been refurbished and is now even more pleasant than it was a year ago. The building itself lends a great deal to the atmosphere a hospital library should have; that of a warm, friendly, non-threatening environment where patrons are all expected to be treated equally—staff and patients. Mingling with staff on a equal basis is seen as having a beneficial effect on patients, this is part of library policy. That this non-threatening environment exists within the therapeutic community and is readily available to all patients able to experience it is important to the life adjustment processes of the patient. Now that the Library has been repainted and carpeted and has new furniture, it seems to most people to be very attractive. The use of the library has increased, as has the

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scope of services. However, many patients, for a variety of reasons, are reluctant to walk the long distance from the other side of Nichols Ave. where most of them now live. Short stories and poetry are now read each week on Thursdays and Fridays but very often patients say that they do not come because of the long walk over here.  

The practice of reading aloud to patients began in the earliest days of Arleen’s employment at St. Elizabeths. Reading aloud was a natural practice for Arleen, not only because she was trained as a librarian, but because it was a routine begun long ago with Josie Dunn that continued with her Literature Club in her hometown of Sheldon, Iowa, with the reading aloud she and Emerson did with their children at Kilfenora, and with the prayer and scripture groups Arleen began when the family moved to the Washington, DC suburbs. During the years during and following the Second Vatican Council as an active volunteer in church and politics in the 1960s, Arleen’s evolving view of the process of reading and its importance for transformation sharpened. The study guide on the documents of Vatican II completed in 1968, in which she took great delight and of which she was so proud, is predicated on the model of reading the council documents aloud in small groups. In 1970, before she began working at St. Elizabeths, Arleen authored another manuscript in which she describes the interactive process of deepening one’s relationship with and communication with God through shared, vocal and prayerful scripture reading in a group. The unpublished work captures her thinking at this juncture just months before she would begin work at St. Elizabeths where her deeply rooted interest in reading scripture, church documents and literature aloud for transformation would branch out to bibliotherapy:

The Now Look in our church for the 1970’s is going to find small groups of Catholics reading the Bible and praying together. As we pray and talk with others about our insights into the gospels and epistles we learn to pray in a scriptural way. With God’s guidance we broaden our own vision by sharing with others; “Where two or three are gathered together, there I am.” We will practice in our own lives what our participation in our parish liturgy will also have us doing, prayerfully picking themes from liturgical readings for the Sunday masses.342

In her first weeks working at St. Elizabeths, Arleen would share in her evening conversations with Emerson her experiences of reading aloud to the patients, and would write about it in her weekly letters to the growing number of family members living elsewhere saying, “each evening I tell tales of responsive patients, or what I read aloud. You’d be surprised how the implications of something changes when you read it to patients—one becomes aware of sensitive undertows.”343 While not trained as a therapist, only as a librarian, she knew from her own still raw experience of Michael’s death that words held the power to bring hope out of misery and to gain new insights:

Because the troubles and joys of humankind are ever-old and ever-new, literature has many expressions of universal truths. The individual group member may read with a shock of recognition. ‘Ah ha,’ he/she can say, ‘I may not be the only one who has suffered in this way or rejoiced over this situation.’344

It was not difficult for Arleen to recognize that the patients she encountered at St. Elizabeths were emotionally broken, so she offered them the salve that she was applying to her own deep wounds, using materials ranging from poetry, short stories, Scripture, songs, articles, and music, as well as the writings of patients themselves.345 The poems she chose to read aloud with patients were about survival, awakenings, transformations and journeys, facing old conflicts

and letting go. Arleen tapped the wisdom of a Dylan Thomas insight when he had explained in 1961 what the value of poetry is: “the best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps in the works of the poem so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash or thunder in.” 346 Arleen sought to have the St. Elizabeths patients find that potency in poetry and literature which as she described later; “helps us to appreciate the journey from sometimes dark and despairing places to the discovery of strength, survivorship, and awakening of the ‘good self’.” 347 Through reading aloud to patients, Arleen began to notice that it evoked a process of change that “often involves discovering small and beautiful aspects of ourselves or helping our clients to identify those qualities that sustain and stabilize them, despite all that they have endured.” 348

The bibliotherapy work became particularly important to Arleen when she faced a second heart-rending, life-changing loss in the summer of 1971. Emerson suffered a second stroke and subsequently died of a heart attack while in George Washington Hospital. At this point, arguably at the expense of her children still living at home who felt at this point they had lost brother, father and mother, Arleen more fully immersed herself in her work and her reading remembering “you know, I had an advantage that other librarians didn’t have. Then I read widely, and I loved it. After Emerson died, it kind of kept me alive.” 349 The words of William Wordsworth about the power of the written word to strengthen the one who mourns resonated with Arleen:

346 Dylan Thomas, “Poetic Manifesto,” The Texas Quarterly (Winter, 1961), NP.
348 Ibid.
349 Arleen Hynes, St. Benedict’s Monastery Interview, 41.
To me alone there came a thought of grief,
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I am again strong.  

As patients’ librarian, Arleen dipped into Alexander Sozhenitsyn’s *Cancer Ward*. She was taken by the Leo Tolstoy riddle embedded there, “What Men Live By.” Tolstoy’s short story tells the tale of an angel sent to earth to discover the answer to three questions: *What dwells in man? What is not given to man? What do men live by?* Arleen thought the answer to what men live by, that is “love that dwells in man,” was obvious, yet she puzzled over how in daily life to carry it out. She was struck by two selections from the Tolstoy parable. One in particular was something that Arleen took to heart; “Men can live without father or mother but without God one cannot live.” Arleen was learning to live without husband and son; her children were learning to live without father and brother. Arleen recognized that none of them could live at all without God. She also clung to another passage from Tolstoy’s story, “What Men Live By” that comforted her in her loss, reminding her of the unconditional love of Josie Dunn when she took in the two tiny newborns—Arleen and Eileen McCarty—when their mother had died in childbirth. In Tolstoy’s story, a widow who cares for two small girls comes to the shoemaker. There the disguised angel is discovering the meaning of the three questions. The widow explains why she took in the two motherless girls, saying “how lonely it would be, if it were not for these

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two little girls! How could I help loving them? They are like the wax in the candle."352 Tolstoy’s short story encouraged Arleen, enabling her to recognize and articulate her own need for and dependence on God. She humbly embraced the notion that Josie Dunn’s love for her and Eileen was nothing they deserved or earned, it was simply a given. For her, as she expressed in her letters to her family, reading this literature was healing and prayerful not only because she gained insights about her reliance on God and her gratitude for unconditional love, but because the very act of her sharing her personal reactions with her mailing list also encouraged her. She expressed to each of those who received her letters that they were to her “as essential as wax in a candle."353

After Emerson’s death Arleen began to expand her reading aloud practices at St. Elizabeths beyond the circulating library. In September, 1971, she began taking poetry to Holly House, the drug addiction center at St. Elizabeths and to the Last Rennaissance, another special unit of St. Elizabeths where Arleen described the discussions as “intuitive, cogent, lively.”354 At Holly House, Arleen shared the poetry of Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, Langston Hughes, Carol Sandburg, E. St. Vincent Millay, Edwin Markham and others. The poem “Preparedness” by Edwin Markham suggests the power that comes with understanding one’s own capacity:

For all your days prepare,  
And meet them ever alike;  
When you are the anvil, bear—  
When you are the hammer, strike.

352 Ibid.  
353 Ibid.  
354 Ibid.
Patients and volunteers were sometimes asked to write their own poetry in response to the poems read aloud. In response to “Preparedness,” a patient named George Robinson wrote:

Here I am in this house trying
To overcome my fear and doubt.
But just the same, I know my name.

Another, named Kermit Haynes, wrote:

I wore a mask to hide my face.
I ran and ran from Place to Place
Ducking and dodging, hoping to find,
Someone to love and to feel alive.355

This approach of reading aloud to patients, occasionally having them write their own poetry, and always discussing what had been read or written took place throughout St. Elizabeths. Within the circulating library program, patients ranged from those in open wards to closed wards, those who were relatively high-functioning and those patients described as “chronic and regressed.” Even those patients with little to no verbal communication in the closed wards of the hospital could respond. Arleen described a gratifying moment when a patient who had been sitting outside the door for a number of sessions finally moved his chair into the room, though never spoke. For Arleen, the simple act of his moving his chair into the room was deeply satisfying. At times, the poetry chosen drew typically non-verbal patients into the conversation, such as Betty MacDonald’s “Egg and I” which drew observations from patients with rural

355 Ibid.
backgrounds about their own experiences in raising chickens.\textsuperscript{356} Another work that proved fertile ground for discussion was a favorite of Arleen’s: Erik Fromm’s \textit{The Art of Loving}.\textsuperscript{357}

This kind of work with patients seemed much more important to Arleen than the library cataloging that needed doing. Arleen’s supervisor, Larry Moore, was not always supportive of Arleen’s foray into this therapeutic realm and she had to work hard to win his support. It helped immensely that she developed an important alliance with staff psychiatrist Ken Gorelick. The two of them shared a love of literature and a deep appreciation of its therapeutic effect on patients. Together they set to work creating a training program on the grounds of St. Elizabeths for certified bibliotherapists. This training program became the first in the country of its kind and led ultimately to Arleen’s publication of the bibliotherapy training handbook, which to this day remains the definitive guide to the practice. Arleen’s handbook included the insights she gleaned from those first days at St. Elizabeths regarding the power of poetry to change people.

The handbook describes how patients are changed by the process of bibliotherapy, leading patients to:

- have a kindly regard for themselves
- find ways to develop themselves more gracefully
- deal more creatively with what cannot be changed.\textsuperscript{358}

A poem that was a favorite of Arleen’s for use in bibliotherapy was Galway Kinnell’s poem “Saint Francis and the Sow.” The poem, first published in Arleen’s treasured magazine \textit{The New Yorker} in 1976, paints a vivid portrait of a large sow with “creased forehead,” a “thick

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
length,” the “earthen snout” and the “hard spininess spiked out of the spine” who remembers her own “long, perfect loveliness” when touched with the gentleness and love of St. Francis.359 When using this poem for therapy, Arleen would begin with some photographic or painted image of a big, fat pig. Then she would have the whole group read the poem aloud together twice, on her strong belief that “reading aloud together carries the message deeper than merely listening to a poem.”360 Like a community of monks chanting the psalms together, the community of a poetry therapy group reading in unison heightens “the nuances of the lines.”361 Reflection on and discussion of the poem would ensue, such as what it might mean to “re teach a thing its own loveliness.” Favorite memorable lines to carry away after the poetry therapy session might be identified by different participants. The poetry could prompt memories of being called “darling” or being told one is “lovely” at other times in one’s life by a grandparent or teacher or a favorite uncle.

This poem provides not only a tool for poetry therapy, but an apt expression of what Arleen needed to be reminded of in these difficult years of adjusting to life without Emerson, as single mother to three teenage boys at home who were hurting, lost and angry. There was a crumbling of the cohesive family life that had taken shape in Collegeville and persisted for a period of time in Washington. The habits of evening prayer and dinners together gave way to a

361 Ibid.
pervasive silence at sundown, pierced occasionally by heated arguments and ugly words but marked mostly by Arleen’s retreat to her room to be alone.

In this dark time, Arleen’s engagement with poetry through her therapy work at St. Elizabeths enabled her to see a way out of her grief and loneliness. Another important dimension in her own healing was her turning to therapy sessions with the highly regarded Gerald May, a psychiatrist deeply interested in the spiritual life. With May, Arleen sought a greater understanding of herself and her relationship with God; she also sought a sense of peace. She shared with May, whom she came to call Gerry, her own worry about her burning drive when it came to establishing a national organization and standards for bibliotherapy, and wondered with him whether her single-mindedness was to the detriment of herself and others. She confessed to him that she felt busy, forgetful, harried. She wondered if she had identified herself too closely to a cause, so that its success or failure would be to her a reflection of her own success or failure. In the journal that May encouraged Arleen to keep, she wrote that she did not want to “become confused into thinking that I was the propelling force in bibliotherapy being effective—or becoming a national organization” or “lose sight of being (apparently) the tool at this particular moment to push biblio into a ‘profession’ because of being at St. E’s. If I think it’s me that’s doing it—I’ve lost touch with reality.” She expressed that she hoped her sessions with Gerald May would keep her focused on the reality of the others in her life. She sought his help to explore whether her work compulsion, as she called it, was leading her to neglect the important


people in her life. She reflected “the question comes to me often—if I knew I had (3 days—3 months—3 years) to live would I push so hard on biblio? Be so busy I don’t write to the children—not call Katrine and see how she is—or be so goal conscious I am not attuned to patients or fellow staff needs?” At this time, she also struggled with the question of whether she had grieved too privately for Michael and Emerson, having rarely shed any public tears about their deaths.

Even as she raised these questions and sought professional psychiatric care, Arleen’s relationships with her three youngest sons, who were still high school students living at home when she began work at St. Elizabeths, may indeed have been splintering. While her sharp focus on the development of a bibliotherapy program at St. Elizabeths, her therapy with Gerald May and later her retreats with Sister Henrita at St. Benedict’s Monastery kept Arleen sane, grounded and always moving forward, her teenage sons saw the lack of attention as an opportunity to “party” with friends, amply using drugs and alcohol. As Arleen plunged into her work with mentally ill patients, she may even have missed the signs that one of her own sons was stumbling toward a serious bipolar disorder.

Yet it is abundantly clear that the burgeoning field of bibliotherapy benefitted from Arleen’s single-minded concentration on its development. Further, she profited greatly personally from the work as a healing endeavor for herself as well as for the patients. As she testified in her writing at the time, and as she looked back over her life years later, it not only gave her a career, but a reason to live.

364 Ibid.
365 Christopher Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, February, 2009.
It certainly wrought changes in her life. Her encounters with the texts that she used in poetry therapy can be viewed through the hermeneutical circle described by Hans-George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and other philosophers of language and interpretation. Gadamer’s explanation of engaged participation between a person and a text, which Gadamer famously calls the “fusion of horizons,” captures the dynamic that Arleen was both promoting and experiencing in poetry therapy. For Gadamer, an encounter with a text such as a poem leads not only to an understanding of the poem, but to an understanding of one’s self. The value in any literature is that it is more than just words on a page that plainly convey a literal message. It is the dynamic interaction, the back and forth as in a game, between the reader and the text that brings forth meaning. In this engagement new meaning is gained. The dialogue with a text leads to a communion and the reader is no longer the same.366

Poetry is a genre that lends itself to this kind of reading. It is meant to be read aloud; it relies on rhyme, rhythm, repetition, imagery, and the imagination. It was natural for Arleen to turn from the psalms to poetry in choosing texts for her patients and herself. Just as in reading and repeating the psalms aloud in unison, the reading and re-reading of poetry out loud allows an active form of listening; “the first time, listening with the ear of the mind; the second time, with the ear of the heart.”367 In the federal mental health facility of St. Elizabeths, Arleen would not and perhaps could not, equate this process with that of the prayerful Benedictine practice of reading called lectio divina. The staff psychiatrist, Dr. Kenneth Gorelick, Arleen’s collaborator in instituting the St. Elizabeths bibliotherapy program and dear friend, did not even know that

Arleen was a particularly religious person until she announced that she was retiring from St.
Elizabeths and that she was becoming a Benedictine sister.368

B. Theoretical Interlude: Bibliotherapy and Lectio Divina

When Arleen was helping to develop the practice and standards for bibliotherapy at St.
Elizabeths, there were concurrent efforts in New York, Texas and California to promote this
form of therapy. As early as the 1920s, there were efforts underway to use poetry’s healing
powers in a therapeutic way. The first poetry therapy group was formed at Cumberland Hospital
in New York, led by psychiatrist Jack Leedy, who described the early efforts:

We tried new approaches for the use of poetry in or as therapy; we went on tours; we
participated in meetings and conventions. Our aim was to stimulate members of the
health professions, teachers and educators, the clergy and penologists, nurses and others,
to explore the uses of poetry in the alleviation of mental suffering.369

In later years, Arleen recalled that the work begun at St. Elizabeths in Washington, DC
was due to a confluence of people and events that she believed was providential. Ken Gorelick
was a young psychiatrist and a “Renaissance man,” according to Arleen. He loved to read and
was open to new ideas. Arleen Hynes was an intelligent woman with a passion for books and
uncommonly good sense. Arleen had a sympathetic ear in Ken Gorelick when she discussed with
him how helpful a bibliotherapy approach could be for mentally ill patients. Even if she worried
to herself at times that her lack of professional training was a hindrance to her leadership in the
field, she knew deep within that she was a necessary ingredient in the field’s launch. Her
insistence that there be adequate training led to her creating the first training program in the
country, and her unwavering position that the profession needed a credentialing body led to the

368 Author Interview, Kenneth Gorelick, Washington, DC, December 2009.
establishment of the National Federation for Biblio-Poetry Therapy “in order to unite the related fields with uniform standards.”

Another contribution of Arleen’s that is more difficult to document but is nonetheless recognizable, is the Benedictine spirit pervading her understanding of bibliotherapy. While others leading the bibliotherapy field were trained in psychiatry and other mental health fields, Arleen was a librarian and a Benedictine oblate who at her core believed that words held transformative power. This librarian’s sensibility coupled with a Benedictine spirit arguably shaped her approach to bibliotherapy. Informed by the Benedictine Rule and in the habit of practicing the divine office, Arleen was intimately conversant with the Benedictine practice of \textit{lectio divina}. In \textit{lectio divina}, the four steps of reading for transformation are reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating. Whether \textit{lectio divina} is practiced in groups or alone, the dimensions of dialogue and action are also present. In the Benedictine tradition “Lectio differs substantially from the ordinary act of reading . . . and goes beyond the act of merely absorbing the contents of a page.”

A spirit of reverence informs reading in the practice of \textit{lectio divina}, as well as an openness to being changed by the text:

Unless we come to our lectio with an antecedent will for conversion, the exercise is vain. Our lectio will thrive most fully when we aim to incarnate what we read in the way we act . . . Lectio demands much of us, but it is an enriching experience that constantly renews our spiritual life. God’s word adds perspective to our experience, gives meaning to our struggles and keeps alive the flame of hope.

\begin{itemize}
\item[370] Ibid., xxi.
\item[372] Ibid., 108-09.
\end{itemize}
When the development of bibliotherapy is seen through the lens of this Benedictine practice, a fuller appreciation of Arleen’s contribution to this mental field is possible. The profound changes affected by the reading of poetry richly resound with the Benedictine theme of being called to constant and continual change and conversion based on reading and re-reading the Word of God. In bibliotherapy, as in lectio divina, the desired result of careful, communal reading is to bring about change through a dynamic encounter with a text. Robert Frost captured this vision of a poem’s power; saying “a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom.”

Both in prayerful reading of scripture and in bibliotherapy, the hope is for wisdom—even practical wisdom—to be gained.

The process of therapeutic reading in bibliotherapy follows a sequence not unlike the four-step process for reading scripture that forms the basis of the practice of lectio divina described above and previously but bearing repeating here:

“Lectio” (reading). Read the Word of God slowly and reflectively. Any text from the Bible can be used for this purpose, but the text should not be too long.

“Meditatio” (reflection). Think quietly about the text you read. Sometimes, a text can be read many times to let the words sink into your mind and heart.

“Oratio” (response). Leave your thinking aside and simply let your heart speak to God.

“Contemplatio” (rest). Let go not only of your own ideas and plans but even of your holy words and thoughts. Simply rest in the Word of God. Listen at the deepest level to God who speaks within you with a still, small voice.

As you read, reflect, respond and rest, you leave yourselves open to be transformed from within by God’s Word. Whether over time this transformation has an effect on the way

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373 Hynes-Berry, Biblio/Poetry Therapy--the Interactive Process: A Handbook, 43.
you see and live in the world is one test of the authenticity of prayer. You take what you read in the Word of God into your daily life.\(^{374}\)

In bibliotherapy, the four steps of reading for transformation described by Arleen Hynes are recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application. Upon closer inspection, the parallels in these steps of \textit{lectio divina} and of bibliotherapy are striking. In bibliotherapy, the first reading of a text is meant to prompt some form of recognition in that “there is something in the material that \textit{engages} the participant-something that piques interest, opens the imagination, stops wandering thoughts, or in some way arrests attention.”\(^{375}\) Reading a poem for therapeutic value does not involve reading it for knowledge or analysis, as one might read poetry in a literature class. In the same way, the first step of \textit{lectio divina} is to read the material slowly and carefully with the heart, listening to anything that might be said in the text. The second step in bibliotherapy is examination, an intensified version of the first step. In examining a text, questions are brought to the text and words are probed more deeply for what they might mean for the listener. In the same way, the second step of \textit{lectio} involves a meditative approach to the text in which even more careful attention is paid. In this step of \textit{lectio}, a particular word may be brought to one’s awareness repeatedly, prompting the reader to stay with and reflect on this word or phrase. This step of \textit{lectio}, as in bibliotherapy, can involve turning over a phrase in one’s mind and probing its meaning. In bibliotherapy, a third step is to juxtapose various impressions from the text. Again, in \textit{lectio}, a similar juxtaposition takes place in terms of the reader who turns to God in prayer, attempting to place one’s own response to the text side-by-side with how one

\(^{374}\) United Church of Christ, “\textit{Lectio Divina: How to Use the Bible as a Tool for Meditation},” \url{http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar/lectio-divina.html}, found September 15, 2011.

perceives God’s voice. Finally, a bibliotherapeutic reading of a text ends with some life application, a new awareness that changes the way one sees his or her own reality. Similarly, *lectio* can lead one to sense a deeper awareness of God’s presence. In group, *lectio* the parallels are even closer as both discuss the text in dialogue fashion, with the goal of better insight and understanding. Both processes also often end with some application or action in one’s own life.

Whether at the time she was pioneering bibliotherapy Arleen was so fully conscious of its resonance with *lectio divina*, or for some other reason not now known, Arleen did not note the parallels between the two practices at the time. Yet she possessed the same reverential approach to both scripture and poetry, seeing each as tools of change with affirmative and transformative power when read interactively. In this way, Arleen not only contributed to the practice and discipline of bibliotherapy, but helped to define its spirit. In her later years, Arleen did write more explicitly about poetry as an avenue into the spirit, in which she examined the philosophical and psychological underpinnings that link the poetic and the spiritual. In an article in the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, she used one of her own poetry therapy techniques—the acrostic—and created an acrostic of the word SPIRIT to reveal her “personal intuition about what happens to participants when they have taken part in a series of biblio/poetry therapy sessions and have achieved growth through participation.”

In her use of the word SPIRIT, she identified the following qualities that poetry therapy participants gain from the process: Spirituality, Perception, Insight, Relevancy, Integration, Totality. Though her colleagues did not know that concurrent with her pioneering of bibliotherapy, Arleen was also discerning her

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calling to a vowed religious life in the Benedictine women’s monastery back in Minnesota. In retrospect the connection between Arleen’s spirit and the successful launch of this novel mental health practice has been repeatedly noted.

In 2012, a revised and updated edition of Arleen’s bibliotherapy training manual was published where the spiritual roots of this practice were recognized. In its preface a bibliotherapist named Peggy Heller, who had been trained by Arleen in the 1970s, wrote “it is fitting that the book affectionately known among practitioners as ‘the bible of poetry therapy training’ was birthed by so spiritual a woman as Arleen Hynes.” In a tribute to Arleen in this edition, I claim that “the brilliance of Arleen’s contribution to the mental health field lies in her adaptation of this ancient spiritual practice to a modern therapeutic practice.” This spiritual contribution of Arleen’s was acknowledged by the psychiatrist Ken Gorelick who admitted in an interview that when he worked with Arleen at St. Elizabeths he was not aware of her deep spiritual life. Later he recognized the spiritual influences, “Arleen developed outside the traditional psychiatric focus on pathology and diagnosis. She knew the work of Carl Rogers and also came from a spiritual angle. One of her mentors was a psychiatrist, Dr. Gerry May . . . so here she was synthesizing spiritual, humanistic, and psychiatric insights.” Though her colleagues recognized and noticed this connection as they looked back on Arleen’s contribution, none of them at the time knew that concurrent with developing as a well-regarded and sought-after bibliotherapist, Arlene was discerning her calling to the semi-cloistered life of a

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378 Ibid., xvii.
379 Ibid., 204-05.
Benedictine sister during several visits to St. Benedict’s Monastery in the mid-1970s. Two visits in particular are well-documented in Arleen’s journals as she sought out spiritual guidance at St. Benedict’s Monastery in Minnesota. Arleen participated in two guided reading retreats which would not only tap her familiar path of reading for transformation, but would help her cross a new threshold to that of a vowed Benedictine sister.

III. The Guided Retreat as Transformative Text

A. Guided Retreat with Sister Henrita—1976

Just as it was fitting that Arleen was adapting Benedictine habits of reading to her new practice of bibliotherapy, it was appropriate that she do so unbeknownst to anyone as she discerned a call to the Benedictine order. The one person fully aware that her development as a bibliotherapist was occurring simultaneously with her discernment to the religious life was her spiritual director, a woman Arleen had known when she was a young mother in Collegeville working at the St. Benedict’s College library, Sister Henrita.

Arleen made two retreats with Sister Henrita, the novice director at St. Benedict’s Monastery, during the years following Emerson’s death. In August 1976, she stayed at the guest house at St. Benedict’s and followed the daily round of prayer with the sisters. She attended early morning mass at the local parish, prayed the morning praise in a small convent room with three other sisters on a guided retreat with Sister Henrita, went to the divine office readings at midday and then evening praise in the main chapel. On her own, Arleen was given various books and articles about ministry and calling, such as works called *Bread that is Broken*, *Called by Name*, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, and *the Pilgrim Continues His Way*. Arleen was to read the scriptures of the daily liturgy and look for the ways God was speaking to her in the Book of
Ezekiel and the Gospel of Matthew. It happened, too, that the passages in Ezekiel and Matthew also related to ministry and calling. In preparation for the spiritual discipline of listening to God speaking to her through the daily readings, she slowly and meditatively read a paper on how to pray the scriptures by a Jesuit named Fr. Armand Nigro. The Ignatian way of contemplating scripture, as Arleen learned from reading Nigro’s paper, is to imaginatively place oneself in the text either as Christ or a disciple or some other character. As much as Arleen had prayed the divine office and recited the psalms throughout her life in the Benedictine spiritual tradition, this Ignatian form of praying the gospels may not have come naturally to her. In effect, reading scripture in this way was a way of reading her life as a text. Arleen had begun going to therapy with psychiatrist and spiritual counselor Gerald May after Emerson died. Even though she had been going for several years to him by the time of her guided reading retreat with Sister Henrita in 1976, Arleen was still not very comfortable focusing on herself. Her stated goal was to achieve a level of self-understanding that would enable her to then forget herself in God, “Just forget self and be in love with God.”  

The first day of the retreat Arleen was instructed by Sister Henrita to read the story of the rich young man who was too attached to his wealth, found in the nineteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew. To what was Arleen too attached she wondered, her own will? She had feared becoming a domineering mother, but she was fairly certain she had avoided clinging too excessively to her own vision of who her children should be. If she were to enter the Benedictine

order, she would want to relinquish any hint of that kind of dominance of will. But such comparisons between her and the rich young man seemed to disturb her, reminding her of her upset stomach and of a troubling dream about childbirth she had the previous night. Her meditation moved away from her own will and her role as a mother and moved instead toward a chant that Sister Henrita had written and that Gerry May had put to simple music for her: “Changeless and calm, deep mystery. Ever more deeply rooted in Thee.”382 Arleen tried again to imaginatively pray the following days’ scripture readings, which included Matthew’s gospel asking, “Who will be saved?” She found her only response to be “Be Still and Know that I am God.”383 The following day, in Ezekiel’s description of the false shepherds (Ezekiel 34:1-11), she recognized herself, “the false shepherds remind me to listen to the patients I meet each day more fully. To take more seriously my personal relationship to the trainees and interns.”384 But then Arleen was on much more secure ground again when turning toward the psalm for the daily liturgy, Psalm 23, “But my heart truly responds to the responsorial: ‘Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.’”385

Perhaps placing herself in the scripture passages was uncomfortable for Arleen because she was still consciously struggling to accept herself and the fact that God loved her “for nothing,” as she liked to say. Gerald May and Sister Henrita were each in their way, through therapy and through spiritual direction, helping Arleen recognize God’s unconditional love, but

384 Ibid.
385 Ibid.
she still had a somewhat muted view of herself. Describing herself in her journal, she was fair but not glowing:

Capable, pleasant, hardworking, interested in many things, preferring good conversation to idle chatter, religious, not a really strong sense of humor but laughing often (in embarrassment sometimes) warm in personal relationships but not allowing people to get too close-nor getting too close, nice looking person who dresses nicely, but too fat.\footnote{Arleen Hynes, Jungian Journal, October, 24, 1976.}

Also telling was how she thought other people viewed her:

As more capable than I really am, as stronger than I really am, as “better” than I really am (those are my friends). Strangers, I think, see me as short, grey-haired, earnest, smiling (inappropriately sometimes) pious, hard working (Like Mrs Z . . . at St. E’s-who is fatter than I-unctuously pleasant, very rigid and authority-oriented, humorless. Someone once called me Z . . . and I found I resented it-and now feel a clear rejection of her when I see her because I don’t want to be confused with her).\footnote{Ibid.}

Arleen struggled with a sense of self-confidence. Her therapy sessions with Gerry May brought that lack of confidence to light, causing Arleen to gain a better appreciation of what an impediment personal insecurity could be. She recognized that “maybe the biggest drawback to that is that it keeps me from realizing how much God loves me.”\footnote{Arleen Hynes Journal, 1973.} After Emerson’s death, Arleen struggled to understand just who she was and whether she was lovable:

Of course I am afraid I do not like myself; I have known that for some time. That is why I have talked about love, love for God, so much, knowing how much I need it. Do I believe God loves me? Not if what I say is true; If I do not love myself, I do not believe that God could love me either. And yet I \textit{think} I do believe that God accepts me.\footnote{Arleen Hynes Journal, 1976–1977.}

Arleen admitted to herself that she had a constant anxiety about whether she could ever be good enough, “. . . I can never be good enough for Mama, for Em, for God and I could cry

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1]{Arleen Hynes, Jungian Journal, October, 24, 1976.}
\footnotetext[2]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[4]{Arleen Hynes Journal, 1973.}
\end{footnotes}
forever because our children are not happy either—they do not love themselves. Not one of them—10 children and not one of them free. How terrible! All in the name of God’s will.”

It was in this process of reading scripture and conversing about it with Sister Henrita that Arleen came to new insights about herself and God. Sister Henrita, being an experienced spiritual director, was able to draw out Arleen’s doubts about her ownlovability and to use the scripture discussions as a way of opening Arleen’s eyes to God’s unconditional love. For Arleen, it was not only the spiritual reading but the interaction with Sister Henrita that led to some important changes. Sister Henrita encouraged Arleen to explore herself a little more as the way to meet God. Arleen paraphrased Sister Henrita in a journal entry during her first guided retreat, in the summer of 1976, “turn to the core of your being where God dwells and realize that Arleen is unrepeated and unrepeatable, uniquely God’s. Praise the Trinity that dwells within thru Him and with Him and in Him.” Sister Henrita encouraged Arleen to recognize that she did not need to love herself enough to accept the fact that God dwells within her, but rather that because God loved her enough to create her, she must love herself and God’s presence in her. God loved us first, Sister Henrita explained, and it is that look of love that makes one realize she is lovable. For Arleen, as with most people, it was a revelation to realize that God loved her in this way, “God loves me for Nothing. This speaks to me so much! My twin and I formed by God from all eternity—for love!” Being loved simply for being was something that resonated with Arleen. She felt that Josie Dunn had loved Eileen and herself before they could have possibly been lovable. Her gratitude to Josie Dunn was a component of the more expansive gratitude to God.
for loving her, as she put it—for nothing! She was also so grateful for Sister Henrita for guiding
her on this retreat, “Met with Mother Henrita after Mass this morning. She will be 70 tomorrow.
Thank God for Sister Henrita! We spoke of our joy in each other’s friendship as a reflection of
God’s love for us -- He loves me for Nothing! So I must believe Sister when she speaks of
delight in our friendship.”

B. Guided Retreat with Sister Henrita--1978

Arleen’s second guided retreat occurred two years after the one with Sister Henrita, from
April 24 to April 27, 1978. The structure of this retreat was very much the same as the prior
retreat: daily Mass, morning, noon and evening prayer with the Sisters, assigned reading and
daily interactions with the text through discussions with Sister Henrita. Arleen came to the
retreat ready to discern whether she should return to St. Benedict’s Monastery permanently.
Arleen felt that being able to pray the divine office in community and serve God there felt like
coming home for her. She loved the idea of being under vow to pray the office and having a
Christ-centered vowed life rather than just a dedicated one. Yet she was concerned too with how
many negative aspects she could conjure up and she also noted these in her journal to discuss
with Sister Henrita. She sketched out her concerns as follows:

- having to be with others too much;
- obedience, having to check personal wishes against the concepts of community,
  poverty and obedience;
- need for solitude harder to satisfy in religious life;
- cold winters and long;
- having to give up the rights to a house to live in, if ever the decision was made to
  leave the convent;
- a sort of fear, perhaps anxiety, about commitment;

393 Ibid.
● being bound to a schedule as a permanent way of life;
● being away from the children and grandchildren;
● the “burden” of interrupting an interesting active life to pray mid-day and early evening. 394

Despite these concerns, the idea of joining the Sisters of Saint Benedict still made Arleen “wondrously happy!” 395 And though she wrote in her journal that she would await discernment, Arleen seemed fairly set on the idea even before the retreat with Sister Henrita fully began. Sister Henrita made sure Arleen understood that the religious life was not a call to greater holiness necessarily; it was not a calling for “better” people. All are called to be Christ to others, whether in the religious life or not, and the religious life is simply a radical call to change a way of life because God has specifically called a person to do so.

This form of reading and discussion that Arleen engaged in with Sister Henrita was very comfortable for Arleen. In some ways, Josie Dunn has been Arleen’s original “spiritual director.” Josie fed Arleen and Eileen reading material (and as was mentioned, their steady diet of spiritual books was not necessarily matched by a steady diet of nutritious meals), and the twins discussed the works with Josie. Reading from the very beginning of Arleen’s life was a community endeavor, something engaged in with others and in conversation with others. In the case of Arleen’s two guided reading retreats with Sister Henrita, this practice of engaged reading in concert with others was to have an enormous impact on her decision to become a Benedictine sister. It is another example of a crucial time in Arleen’s life when reading changed the course of her life.

395 Ibid.
C. Theoretical Interlude: Transformative Texts and Spiritual Direction

These two retreat experiences that Arleen had under the direction of Sister Henrita were pivotal in her discernment of whether to join the Benedictine order. Arleen had told very few people that she was considering becoming a Benedictine sister, but she spoke freely to Sister Henrita. Sister Henrita was an experienced spiritual director. She employed a form of spiritual direction in which the retreatant is asked to engage with texts, whether scripture or commentary, and then to bring one’s experiences with the text to a director. A second level of engagement with the text then occurs when the spiritual director helps draw out the insights and revelations that occurred. The dynamic interaction with the spiritual director as one discusses the impact of the text helps make clear how one is being changed by that reading. This interactive process is very much like that found in bibliotherapy, so that the spiritual direction Arleen received during this time with Sister Henrita and her therapy with Gerry May enabled her to experience this process on its receiving end. During this time, Arleen’s directed reading and discussions gave her an image of herself joining the Benedictine order that became sharper from one year to another. She was learning to read her own life through the lens of the texts that her spiritual director provided her.

This practice of spiritual direction and discernment owes much to the Ignatian spiritual tradition. Saint Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* offers a roadmap of how to read particular scripture passages with the able guidance of a spiritual director. According to Ignatius of Loyola, a good spiritual director, like a good text, is able to help promote an encounter with Christ for another, or at least to recognize when such an encounter occurs. A good spiritual director helps the other to hear the voice of God by paying close attention to what the directee says. By paying close
attention, the spiritual director also draws attention to the way that God might be revealing or acting in another’s life. The impact of this careful listening on the directee may help her or him recognize God’s presence and action, and also equip one to discern what path she or he is called to. For those who have experienced this form of spiritual direction, they might feel moved in responding to what they perceive to be God’s calling in a total and loving way. A spiritual director particularly attuned to the Holy Spirit can lead one “to experience God in her life, to understand the meaning of that experience, and to act on her understanding.” But spiritual direction relies first and foremost on the insight and experience of the directee while the spiritual director acts more as an interpreter or translator of that experience. Some of these same qualities are necessary in the writing of a spiritual biography, which seeks to trace the spirit in an individual life. A spiritual biographer, like a spiritual director, must be sensitive to the movement of the spirit, relying on the biographical subject’s own insights and experiences to notice and interpret it. Two Jesuits practiced in the art of spiritual direction defined spiritual direction in a way that might resonate with the practice of writing a spiritual biography, in which the text of another’s life might act upon another in such a way that there are consequences for the reader:

We define Christian spiritual direction as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God and to live out the consequences of the relationship.

In the Spiritual Exercises this communication with God is not done in a vacuum, but rather through an attentive and imaginative engagement with scripture texts. Later in life, in her

last few years, Arleen grew more comfortable with having a dialogue with God through scripture. She would do so daily, on her own, without the benefit of talking it over with Sister Henrita. The spiritual direction she received in these years of discernment planted the seeds for her later transformative interchanges with scripture. The spiritual direction she received also was as important in these years as her reliance on the psalms and therapeutic literature in bearing her over the threshold of change from being a married homemaker and mother of ten to a widowed bibliotherapist and Benedictine.

IV. Chapter Summary: Crossing the Threshold to Care in Middle Adulthood: Arleen Chose Generativity Over Stagnation

These threshold years after Michael and Emerson’s deaths were indeed a time of radical change for Arleen. The loss of Emerson, which gradually began in 1968 with his first stroke and was made complete by his death in 1971, not only left Arleen without her partner but also left the teenage sons at home without the parent who had played such an instrumental role in shaping the family with Benedictine values. When Emerson died, Arleen was fifty-five years old, at a stage of life that Erik Erikson described as middle adulthood. Successful navigation of middle adulthood in Erikson’s scheme requires a choice for healthy generativity over an unhealthy stagnation. The strength of caring is the virtue that emerges when this middle adulthood crisis is successfully resolved.398 Despite the great loss that Emerson’s illness and subsequent death represented for the Hynes family, Arleen made an effort at this stage to embrace the possibilities in her situation. She remained open to life and maintained a sense of hopefulness. She was able to do this through once again clinging to texts that could save her. These texts were keys as she

walked through this threshold of middle adulthood. It would have perhaps been easier to choose to remain stagnant in her grief, but instead Arleen chose a generative approach to life. At the time of Michael’s death, she held on fiercely to the psalms. She turned her attention to the patients at St. Elizabeths and shared with them the power of poetry to spawn growth and change. Her slow and intentional reading undertaken in the community of patients that came to the patients’ library to read aloud together helped Arleen move through her own crisis of grief. She attended therapy sessions with a famous psychiatrist, Gerald May. She put herself under the spiritual direction of Sister Henrita, tapping the wisdom of an older mentor and friend who helped draw out God’s message for Arleen in the readings she assigned her. In Erik Erikson’s scheme, it is crucial at this stage of middle life to choose a fruitful course over one of stagnation. If one is able to do that at his phase of life, the virtue developed is one of caring about people beyond one’s inner circle. In her young adulthood, when Arleen chose intimacy over isolation by marrying Emerson and having ten children, she strengthened her virtue of love according to Erikson’s scheme. Now, in her middle adulthood having lost Emerson and struggling in her parenting of her youngest sons, she chose generativity over stagnation and strengthened her virtue of caring. In Erikson’s classification, there remained one more life crisis to be resolved in old age. In this final phase of life, Erikson classifies a choice between living with integrity or living with despair. Living with integrity, in Erikson’s categorization, enables one to gain the virtues of wisdom and peace in one’s final days.
Chapter 5: Crossing the Threshold to Wisdom: Becoming Reconciled to Death

The Homecoming

The spirit, newly freed from earth,
is all amazed at the surprise
of her belonging: suddenly
as native to eternity
to see herself, to realize
the heritage that lets her be
at home where all this glory lies.

By naught foretold could she have guessed
such welcome home: the robe, the ring,
music and endless banqueting,
these people hers; this place of rest
known, as of long remembering
herself a child of God and pressed
with warm endearments to His breast.

– Jessica Powers

May 8, 2004
Stepping into the car, Arleen thought “What a day it has been!” A spring day in the Twin Cities, a time of nature’s first green, was a lovely time to be attending the Poetry Therapy Network. The first green of spring is always gold. A beautiful green-gold day, Arleen noted, the lacy trees blossoming over the entire round trip to the cities. Arleen’s heart almost stopped with its Beauty. The good sprightly talks and inspirational examples of caring therapists at the meeting were so heartening. So why was Arleen feeling so angry on the ninety-mile drive home, especially about something that happened so, so long ago? It was an old story, but it still hurt. Why had God let her mother die at her birth? She and Eileen survived only through the assistance of ‘Mama’ and Vivian and Vete and ‘Daddy.’ Vete and Vivian had helped feed the helpless twins, waking in the middle of the night to pour milk into bowls and waiting as the tiny babies slowly lapped it up. How then could Vete have initiated the movement at Mama’s death to view Arleen and Eileen not as children to Mama, but as the equivalent of grandchildren? It was not about the land or money—there wasn’t much of it, though it could have helped a little—it just bruised Arleen’s heart to have Mama’s own children deny that Mama really did love the twins as her own. It hurt to think Mama’s children may not have loved Eileen and her at all. Rejected. And hurt, all these years later.

She was having a hard time practicing the “Little Way” with this wound, letting it go and letting God handle the repercussions. She so wanted to erase her sad and angry feelings and let the memory of this day, Chris’ 45th birthday, be a good one. Smile! Rejoice! Be thankful! Sing! Be at peace! She told herself. She could not control her feelings, but she could decide they would not control her. When she arrived home at St. Ben’s, she would go to the chapel, she would think of Eileen and Emerson resting in peace, she would recount all the events that led to the establishment of bibliotherapy at St. Elizabeths, and she would thank God for all his goodness.

It was providential that St. Elizabeths had such a welcoming professional staff. It was providential that she came to St. Elizabeths at a time of experimentation and innovation in mental health practice. It was providential that Ken Gorelick, the brilliant head of psychiatric services, welcomed new ideas. It was providential that she began reading poetry and short stories to patients who came to the circulating library, where the gentlemanly, quiet former patient, Mr. McHugh, was such a positive presence. It was providential that she was able to develop a training program for new bibliotherapists, that she could hire the first trained bibliotherapist at St. Elizabeths, that she could write the definitive textbook on the practice. It was providential that in helping launch the healing practice of bibliotherapy, she helped heal herself. These feelings of gratitude, thought Arleen, are not new. No. Gratitude had defined her life, had been there from the very beginning and would be there until the very end.

400 Prelude uses Arleen’s voice, drawn from an unpublished journal, to depict her frame of mind two years before her death at age ninety.
Forever Falling in Love

Gratitude defined Arleen’s life and would be with her until the end, which would be another beginning. The last years of Arleen’s life, the years that she called her “Bonus Days” after she was diagnosed with liver cancer, became a threshold like the other transitional years.401

In her view, her bonus days could work in two ways; it was a bonus to keep on living, but also any gift she could give by the way of kindness and peace to others was a bonus for them as well.402 In her last cluster of years, Arleen still engaged in poetry therapy and in promoting poetry as prayer, but would eventually slow down her work in bibliotherapy to manage her declining health and to begin writing her memoirs.

Erik Erikson identified this life stage as Old Age. According to Erikson, the central conflict in one’s advanced years of late adulthood is between integrity and despair. If at this stage one can look back on one’s life with a sense of contentment and fulfillment, Erikson would describe such a person as having a sense of integrity. If, by contrast, one is consumed with one’s mistakes and failures it leads to a sense of despair. To successfully navigate this phase of life is to gain the basic strength of wisdom. It was in her “old age” that Arleen had to face the Eriksonian crisis of whether she would live her final days with distressing regrets or a lasting peace.

Arleen did not necessarily like the term “old age” if it meant that one’s spirit stopped growing. She liked Virginia Woolf’s adage, “I don’t believe in ageing. I believe in forever

altering one’s aspect to the sun.”

She wrote to her daughter Mary that for the first time she felt old, but Sister Arleen did not believe growing old meant to stop growing. At eighty-seven years old, she wrote in her journal, “Thank you for my just now coming to realize I have important work to do Now. I am 87 and I have work to do before I take my final journey ‘home,’ and it doesn’t include worrying about not ‘getting how’ to do computers . . . Pay attention to Gratitude and the gift of Joy in the Holy Spirit. And being of service to others.”

In her final years, Arleen was still very intentionally living according to the Benedictine way, “I must consciously live the RB—esp. conversation . . .” She continued to be faithful to this vow of conversation that Esther de Waal describes as “perseverance to the lifelong process of being transformed.”

Arleen understood this as well, that conversion means on-going change which requires patience, acceptance, and awareness of peace, “I do not do this change alone,” she wrote. At the retirement and assisted living facility of St. Benedict’s Monastery, called St. Scholastica Convent, Arleen looked for ways to keep on growing:

> I looked out my window here at St. Scholastica this morning. I hadn’t noticed it earlier—this twisted, broad-branched tree has leaped out while I was gone. It is a lovely, embracing tree! And below it—farther away are many trees at the top of the ravine. Dark green. So I can live in Nature’s growth and change.

Moving forward in her own spiritual life and drawing others to deeper growth marked her path even as she stepped into these final threshold years.

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403 Arleen Hynes, Personal Papers.
405 Ibid.
True to her vow, Arleen did not stop growing at any point in her life. Writing in her journal in 2001, Arleen reminded herself, “Remember: Change is Constant.”\textsuperscript{409} When she entered the monastery in her mid-sixties, she did not even begin to think of herself at retirement age; she was prepared to be fully engaged in the work of the sisters. To Arleen, sixty-four years old seemed a good time to be at the peak of one’s career and in the prime of one’s life.

Remembering her adoptive father, she wrote:

> I remember his sixty-fourth birthday. I decided that he had become ‘middle aged,’ and that continued to be my notion. I felt I had turned middle aged when I became sixty-four and entered the Benedictine order. It still seems sensible, if not mathematically viable.\textsuperscript{410}

When she was thirty-five years old, Arleen had wondered with Eileen what it would be like when they doubled their age and turned seventy:

> Dearest Eileen and Fran, Happy Birthday! And about 35 more of them. Can’t you see us walking around at 70, talking about our wonderful, wonderful grandchildren and their most excellent talents. And, I hope, with the habit of prayer as deeply ingrained in us as it was in Mama. Really more deeply interested in the topic of religion than anything else we might be talking about. Sometimes it seems rather dismal, old age, but I was just reading The Oblate which quoted Msgr. Hilbrand from O.F.’s April issue in which he said we are much more deeply blessed by being born anew in Christ since the resurrection, than was Adam in his first state of innocence. So encouraging!\textsuperscript{411}

As she did age, Arleen developed her own version of describing the creative changes that growing older can bring, “I believe getting older is constantly finding new ways to overcome loss.”\textsuperscript{412} What marked each of Arleen’s life transitions was this willingness to constantly find new ways to overcome loss. In her early adulthood, Arleen had found new ways to overcome the loss of control precipitated by having ten children. She lived by the Benedictine Rule, practiced a

\textsuperscript{409} Arleen Hynes, Personal Papers.
\textsuperscript{410} Hynes, “Mama and We Twins,” 6.
\textsuperscript{411} Arleen Hynes, Collegeville, MN, March 31, 1951.
modified Liturgy of the Hours and read voraciously, especially poetry. In her middle adulthood, Arleen had found new ways to overcome the loss of Michael and Emerson. She sought out spiritual guidance from a Benedictine sister, clung to the psalms from years of evening prayer, and read more poetry. In her late adulthood, Arleen found new ways to overcome the loss caused by strained relationships, parenting regrets, and her increasingly poor health. She read the gospel daily, sought spiritual wisdom from the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, and looked back carefully on her own life story. In these years, Arleen spent many hours reviewing her life, considering her faults, naming her regrets, wondering about her identity, and giving thanks for the many blessings she had received. Difficult for Arleen were the unresolved and strained relationships, especially with some of her younger sons who had borne the brunt of her inattention and occasional fierce anger in their teen years.

This chapter will explore the three types of texts that were most alive for Arleen in these years when she sought to integrate and understand her life experiences. Her openness to these texts and her willingness to keep growing and changing even as she neared ninety years old marked this transitional stage as it did her early and middle adulthood. In her late adulthood, as she navigated between integrity and despair, these texts worked as revelatory agents that helped steer her toward the virtue of wisdom.

The first revelatory text is that of the daily Mass readings. Arleen had always faithfully prayed the psalms, but it was only in her last years that she returned to the practice of mining the gospels for stones of wisdom, which Sister Henrita had encouraged thirty years earlier. Again and again, she read of Jesus’ healing mission and the power of forgiveness. The second revelatory text was the literature of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon which helped Arleen
loosen the hold of profound regrets and the feeling of grave responsibility for the outcome of her children’s lives. And the final text that helped Arleen avoid despair and instead choose integrity was the story of her own life. As Arleen studied her own life, her written reflections revealed to her what she had sought to embrace all along: that she was truly loved. The text of her own life disclosed a happy and abiding truth about God, that God loves his creatures for nothing.

I. Transformative Power of the Daily Scripture Readings

A. Conversations with God

The love of God that continued to surprise Arleen was communicated most clearly to her at this stage of life in the daily readings for the Eucharist. As always, she was drawn to the psalms, which still resonated deeply with her; she also turned to other scripture as a springboard to a conversation with God. Her journal entries reveal that she understood this to be a true and intimate dialogue. She wrote her own response to the scriptures and then also recorded what she heard God saying back to her, usually beginning with “Arleen dear . . .” These dialogues helped her at this stage to find peace and wisdom, to forgive and forget, to let go, to practice kindness, and to keep growing.

Again and again, in her interaction with the daily scripture readings Arleen was drawn to the promise of forgiveness in Christ, what she considered to be a “miracle of love.”

Arleen consciously resolved to join her belabored breathing as a result of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) with Jesus’ dying breaths and “to do so smilingly and with joy, not reluctance,” she prayed, “God, thank you for the very special gift of being reminded—with each breath—of all your gifts to me and mine.” In her prayer especially, Arleen sought to join her breath with that of the Holy Spirit in accordance with Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he assured his fellow Christians, “We do not know how to pray but the very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” (Romans 8:28, RSV). Upon reading that scripture, Arleen recorded her dialogue with God where she heard:

Dear Arleen, it is a sensitive gift—born out of Love. I know your need, unable to pray. Of course, I sent the Holy Spirit—my love, demonstrated. Believe in Me! Imitate my love Arleen.

For Arleen, the daily liturgical readings conveyed God’s message of love to her. It was love which brought Jesus to die on the cross; it was love Jesus expressed as he looked with compassion at the young rich man; it was love that Jesus felt go out from him as the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of his garment; and Arleen understood it was love that Jesus felt for her, “. . . so it is that God loves You, died to save you. Loved You. Love him in return.”

The glance and touch of Jesus in the gospel was powerful for Arleen; she imagined Jesus looking at her in this way and her returning the gaze;

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414 Ibid., October 18, 2003.
Dear Jesus, help me take the time to look at a picture of you, try to experience your half-smile, your benign glance, your penetrating eyes . . . After 87 years I still need you to activate my heart, to love, to keep me aware of you, to change.\textsuperscript{417}

It was clear to Arleen through her daily contact with scripture that she was still called upon to be actively growing and changing until the very end of her life. She felt keenly that she needed God’s help if she were to endeavor to do all things with love. Her responsibility as she heard it in the Gospel of John was to abide in God’s love and to let God’s words abide in her. This “Little Way” of St. Teresa challenged her to let go of the things that were bothering her with respect to her children’s decisions and her sisters’ actions. It plagued Arleen that most of her adult children had “fallen away,” as she phrased it, from the Church.\textsuperscript{418} She wondered if it were her fault. Had her decision to work at St. Elizabeths been wrong? And yet, she thought the opportunity was a blessing and the opportunity to write the book a gift. But could it be that the words of Psalm 82 were meant for her, “You are God’s, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.” (Psalm 82:7, NRSV). She was saddened that so many of her children had left the Catholic Church, but recognized in her reflections that a loving stance would be to trust in God, “They call me to have notes put on the prayer board. So it seems that they know that God helps them. I am indeed powerless to turn them to you—but I must trust in you—and them—they have free will!”\textsuperscript{419} In reflecting on Jesus’ counsel, “did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?” (Luke 26:26 NAB), Arleen recognized that in order to share in that glory she, and her children, would suffer.

\textsuperscript{418} Ibid., November 12, 2003.
\textsuperscript{419} Ibid., May 21, 2003.
As each of her children experienced trials, Arleen hoped for them that their suffering would lead to openness to the love of God. In her scripture dialogue on Luke’s passage, she was heartened;

If Christ has to suffer in order to enter into his glory, so must I, and my children. So I ask that this painful leg-nerve test Brigid has to suffer, will be a spiritual awakening for her—an awareness of Jesus’ suffering for us—or whatever she needs to re-orient her life to Yours. God says to me: I will be with her—whether she lets herself be aware of me, or not. I will be—ready to help her because I created her and made her to love me. So be it. Be at peace.\textsuperscript{420}

When Arleen read the daily scripture readings she heard them as being addressed to her directly and was open to being challenged and changed, even in her late eighties, by the messages she heard. When she read Jesus’ words about asking for anything, she asked for wisdom with her children.\textsuperscript{421} When she read St. Paul’s words about being slaves of righteousness, she sought earnestly to know what that might mean in her daily life.\textsuperscript{422} For one thing, she tried to maintain a practice of thanking God for life at the very moment she awoke every day and to let that “joyous, gracious attitude” shape her day, allowing her to expect less of everything and appreciate it more.\textsuperscript{423}

B. Theoretical Interlude: Ignatian Spirituality

The movement of Sister Arleen’s spirit from gratitude for God’s love, to a feeling of her own failures, to an immense sense of Jesus’ suffering on the cross and finally to the meaning of the resurrection for her life as she read through the church’s liturgical readings follows the

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., May 20, 2003.
\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., May 21, 2003.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid., April, 2003.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., October 22, 2003.
pattern of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. 424 Though steeped in the Benedictine Rule and its rhythm of work and prayer (Ora et Labora), with its Liturgy of the Hours and the practice of lectio divina, Arleen also felt the influence of the Ignatian spiritual tradition. When under the spiritual direction of Sister Henrita in the 1970s, Arleen had made and kept careful notes on the Ignatian approach to finding God in all things. At the time discerning her calling to Benedictine vows, she had been encouraged to plumb the scriptures through imaginative prayer. During her two retreats with Sister Henrita she had been assigned Jesuit writers to read and was tasked with reading the daily scriptures in a modified form of the spiritual exercises. On her first retreat with Sister Henrita in 1976, she and Sister Henrita “discussed briefly the concept of using the scriptures of the daily liturgy to see if God speaks to me thru them—but not to force anything.” 425 At her second retreat in 1978, she recorded in her journal, “Each day read the Gospel and meditate on Jesus speaking to me today. The 1st step of the Examen of Consciousness—How does God see me? Read the Gospel each day for both how God sees me and my actions.” 426 In her notes, Arleen underscored the importance of understanding her own religious identity, that which was uniquely her Christian identity as Arleen Hynes. In the Ignatian tradition, God invites one deeper into one’s own identity where one finds the presence of the spirit. This is meant to be done prayerfully; if not done in prayer, “it is an empty self-reflection

425 Hynes.
426 Arleen Hynes, “Guided Retreat from Sister Henrita.”
or an unhealthy self-absorption” noted Arleen.\textsuperscript{427} Prayer and daily life were meant to be melded so that prayer would grow out of one’s lived experience. When under the spiritual direction of Sister Henrita in the 1970s, this method of prayer and reflection on the life of Jesus did not seem to engage Arleen as much as praying the divine office and meeting with her spiritual director. But she chose this form of Ignatian prayer as she carried out her daily scripture reflections in these last years of her life. If she understood the concept in the 1970s, she saw even clearer in the new millennium that the goal of this kind of examination of consciousness was not perfection, but “aimed at a heart with a discerning vision, at all moments of my life.”\textsuperscript{428}

The movements detected in Arleen’s journal entries as she meditated on the daily readings have a close resemblance to those that the Spiritual Exercise prompts during its four-week prayer routine. During the spiritual exercises, the first week is devoted to immersing the retreatant in an experience of God’s unconditional love while at the same time experiencing the pangs that come with recognizing one has hurt a loved one. Sister Arleen repeatedly confessed her own failings in her spiritual journals, her compunction all the more poignant as she continually returned to the realization of God’s love for her, “for nothing,” as she often wrote. The second stage of the Ignatian retreat involves acting on the desire to know more about the person of Jesus through reading the gospel stories and imagining oneself as a character in those stories. Sister Arleen’s expressed desire to gaze on the face of Jesus is consistent with this step in the spiritual exercises. During the third week of the spiritual exercises, the retreatant enters even more deeply into the experience of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. During Sister

\textsuperscript{427} Arleen Hynes, “Examination of Consciousness: Based on Ignatian Approach to Find God in All Things,” (1970s).
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
Arleen’s biblical meditations, particularly in the Lent and Easter seasons of 2003 and 2004, the suffering of Jesus became a focal point of her reflections. The tone in her journals is one of being caught by amazement at the miracle of love that made such a sacrifice possible. Finally in Ignatius’ style of prayer the fourth stage, which celebrates the resurrection, presents the retreatant with an opportunity to make his or her response to the experience of meditating on God’s love, on his or her own failings, and on Jesus’ sacrificial death. This period of the spiritual exercises involves the retreatant discerning God’s will for his or her life. The question in this final stage of the spiritual exercises concerns what one will do and what one is called to do.

For Arleen, though she was not formally participating in the spiritual exercises, her journals reflect her own grappling with these questions as she asked herself what area of her heart might be calling for conversion even at her advanced age. How must she change even now; what area of new life beckons her? Sister Arleen’s scriptural reflections recorded in her journals led her time and again to resolve to be more kind, forgiving, loving, to let go of hurt and anger, disappointment, and even anxiety about her children. She also acted on the strong sense that at eighty-seven years old, there was still work for her to do. Though Sister Arleen’s prayer did not necessarily proceed in the chronological periods or structured environment of the spiritual exercises, her concentrated attention on the biblical readings did prompt the movements of the heart that mark Ignatian spirituality. The scriptures read in this way acted as a dynamic font for Sister Arleen that spurred her to keep growing until the very end of her life. Her handwritten
notes on Ignatian spirituality end with a phrase that may or may not be hers, but which certainly expresses her spirit, “the Christian heart is a soul in song! The alleluia touched with sorrow.” 429

II. Transformative Power of Al-Anon Literature

A. Praying for her Adult Children

The sorrow that touched Arleen in these advancing years had much to do with the addictions with which many of her adult children wrestled. She grappled with her feelings of responsibility and guilt over these addictions and whether she had loved her children, especially her younger children, well enough. The literature of Alcoholics Anonymous as well as that of the related group Al-Anon, for family and friends of alcoholics, was another textual source that Arleen allowed to have a transformative impact on her in her last years of life. The principles of this self-help movement were among the texts she tapped to help her in making peace with herself and with her parenting mistakes, particularly in the years after Michael and Emerson’s deaths. In her final years, Arleen was making connections in her writing not only between the practice of lectio divina and poetry therapy, but also between her own spiritual life and these AA principles. She took a hard look at the how the alcoholism of others affected her as well as her feelings of responsibility for her children who struggled with it. How could she reconcile her long-time work in the area of bibliotherapy with the fact that some of her own children were still in need of healing? In private notes written to herself the year before her death, Arleen wrestled with feelings of inadequacy in raising all ten children, “Certainly for the first 6 there was love

429 Ibid.
and true good example—but as life got harder—more fatigue—you became less like the Little Flower and after Em died—neglected the Little Boys to build Biblio/Poetry therapy.”

For Arleen, some of the familiar feelings of helplessness that had been present when she was a young mother praying with the poem “Christ My Utmost Need” resurfaced as she reviewed her life at its end. The insight that she gleaned from Al-Anon was that what both she and those she loved addicted to alcohol or drugs share is something that everyone shares by virtue of being human, a powerlessness which the twelve-step programs say only a higher power might counter. Arleen’s journals reveal the understanding she was developing about the inherent limitations of her own role in her children’s recovery and healing. She repeatedly returned in her reflections to the supposition that her own dependence must be on God. For her part, she concluded that she could only hope and only pray that her own children would turn over their addictions to God. She hoped they would become dependent on God in their quest for well-being and health, rather than on anything else. During Lent in 2003, she resolved to fast for one week both for her own sins and for these needs of her children:

Fast in sorrow for your sins, fast, as Jamie Yeager said, for the alcoholics in your family who need to join AA—for their alcoholism and for their souls—to come back to God, that is the most important part of AA—dependence on God to help them—they don’t have to do it alone.

Arleen’s scripture reflections had led her to recognize that in her life it was only God who could help her and her children. Similarly, her readings of Al-Anon and participation in an Al-Anon group affirmed that stance. In 1973, Arleen had privately wondered if anxiety about her

431 Ibid., April 1, 2003.
children would ever abate, “Worried—concerned—Is that the role of every mother?”\(^{432}\) From the evidence of her journals thirty years later, it is clear that she was still grappling with how to channel those anxious thoughts. She tried to convince herself not to “indulge in dark thoughts and worry about Mary and Peter,” but to “turn their welfare over to God.”\(^{433}\) At times she cried out in prayer about one or another of her adult children; “Dear God, help him! Help me!”\(^{434}\) About Tim, she prayed earnestly:

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Help me keep my new resolve not to eat Desserts—except on weekends—for Tim to see a better way of life for himself—without alcohol or drugs—which in AA would bring him back to you—dear Lord—his Higher Power.\(^{435}\)
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As was Arleen’s habit in her scriptural journals in the last years of her life, she recorded how she understood God to be responding to her prayers, “Arleen dear, And you keep in mind you are powerless over being the one to change Tim; it is God’s work, my work. I love you and am always near.”\(^{436}\) She was continually reminding herself in her journals to do just that, “Turn their welfare over to God. Remove yourself. Your days of outwardly correcting your children are over—they are adults! Whatever they choose to do . . . Let Go – Let God.”\(^{437}\) She struggled with how to find the balance of staying concerned for her children’s welfare with realizing that she had no control over their choices or how what she called God’s “foolish plan for free will” would work out. As she reflected on her children using scripture and the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous she recorded what she believed God was revealing to her, “Dear Arleen, Trust in my

\(^{432}\) Arleen Hynes, (August 9, 1973).
\(^{433}\) Hynes, “Daily Journal on the Scriptures of the Eucharist.”
\(^{434}\) Ibid., October 28, 2003.
\(^{435}\) Ibid., October 16, 2003.
\(^{436}\) Ibid.
\(^{437}\) Ibid.
love for you and yours. Don’t judge them. Pray for them, let their good deeds bring them to my love and compassion.⁴³⁸ And she offered the Serenity Prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr and adopted by twelve-step programs, “God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; and Wisdom to know the difference.”⁴³⁹

She made an effort to use what she called Al-Anon attitudes toward the people in her life, whether alcoholics or not, who were vexing her. In her last years, she was having a difficult time accepting that her oldest son Denis, who now owned and maintained Kilfenora, had decided to rent out “The Little House,” no longer making it available to her and her sisters as a quiet place of retreat. The sisters used it less and less, especially after Arleen moved to St. Scholastica in December 2002. Arleen sought detachment, trying to let go of any attachment to this place, reminding herself in her journal, “Here we have no lasting place.”⁴⁴⁰ At an Al-Anon meeting she received two suggestions about how to use the Al-Anon slogan about letting go in this situation. She was advised to find another “place away” that she could go, even if just in prayer, that would bring her the same sense of stillness and quiet. She was also given the practical advice of creating a ritual for leaving the Little House, a last party there for her friends and all her sisters who loved it there. She wanted to leave it with gratitude, and with joy. This conscious effort not to control a situation over which she had no control was attributable in part to the insights she gained from the Al-Anon program. She wrote to herself a warning that she must avoid the

⁴³⁸ Ibid., October 20, 2003.
dreadful “M’s” of the co-dependent that she learned about from Al-Anon: Mothering, Managing, Martyrdom, and Manipulating.

B. Theoretical Interlude: Spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous

Arleen’s insights in her Al-Anon meetings about herself and a higher power fall very much within the tradition of the spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous. This tradition is founded on the belief that healing from addiction is only possible when persons recognize a need for a power outside of their own volition to change them. This dynamic is present in the Christian spiritual life, one in which grace is experienced as the antidote to sin. Jamie Yeager, Arleen’s nephew and an adherent to the principles of AA, recognized this connection when he noted that, “if Arleen is a saint, then so are a couple million alcoholics who know that their life is a miracle.”

In the AA program and related ones, the process of transformation is step-by-step rather than a one-time radical conversion. The program is built on a twelve step process that is repeated over and over in the recovery process. These steps are the essentially the same for the alcoholic, for those addicted to other substances or behaviors, and for those suffering alongside a person with an addiction:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

441 Jamie Yeager, Author Interview, Washington, DC, 2009
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.442

In these twelve-step traditions, the starting point of spiritual transformation is humility.

The first step of recovery is to admit one is powerless over the force of the addiction. In the AA literature, this is sometimes referred to as “hitting rock bottom,” a place from where there is no movement forward without some impetus and help from a power greater than one’s own, known in this tradition as a Higher Power. An important step in the recovery process in this model is humbly asking for assistance. Some of the slogans, which operate like mantras for those in a twelve-step program, speak to this sense of dependence on God’s power, “But for the Grace of God,” or “Let Go and Let God.” Often an immense sense of gratitude develops when this recovery process brings a change. The Al-Anon literature describes this process of growing in gratitude:

Gratitude enables us to savor the unrecognized good that surrounds us, no matter what the circumstances. As we become accustomed to noticing the positive aspects of our lives, we begin to recognize small, subtle gifts and cloaked opportunities when they appear in our day-to-day experience. Eventually, as we continue to practice, we actually do find something to be grateful for, even in painful or difficult situations. We replace our victim mentality with an attitude of gratitude. Instead of feeling drained, overwhelmed, and stressed by the circumstances we encounter, we begin to feel

empowered and capable of coping, even flourishing, because we have learned that our Higher Power can use every situation, every relationship, every experience, to enhance our lives and foster strength, faith, and personal growth. Thus, everyone and everything has a special gift to offer us. We need only open our eyes to see it.  

Though in a twelve-step program the first steps of recovery involve recognizing one’s powerlessness and turning to a higher power for help, the spiritual path of recovery is not at all a passive one. Other steps in the process, after turning over one’s will and one’s life, are very active. Those in this program are called upon to take a moral inventory of faults, admit those faults, be ready for God to remove them, ask God to remove them, make a list of people hurt by them, and seek amends from those same people. The process of a continued personal inventory is meant to be ongoing, coupled with constant prayer and meditation seeking God’s will and the power to carry it out. The spiritual awakening promoted by this recovery program is said to happen as a result of following these twelve steps and remaining conscious of them as a way of guiding daily practice. The twelve steps were articulated in the twentieth century, but they carry echoes of ancient spiritual practices. Traces of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of the mystical path can be detected in these recovery steps.  

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan spiritual writer, noted that the twelve-step programs capture many of the truths of Christian spirituality, including humility and grace and responsibility:

The spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous will go down in history as the significant and authentic contribution to the history of spirituality. It is genuinely a spirituality. What’s so exciting for me as a Christian is to see the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions stating clearly what we’ve been saying so feebly in theological language . . . Jesus never shamed people. But he did encourage them to take full responsibility for their mistakes.

443 Ibid., 78-79.
That’s the narrow and healthy road the gospel and the Twelve-Step programs make possible.445

After the death of Emerson, Arleen, as noted above, sought therapy from an eminent psychiatrist named Gerald May who brought a spiritual perspective to his practice. In addition to processing the grief of losing a son and husband in such a short span, Arleen sought May’s assistance in part because Emerson’s death brought her own identity sharply into question. Arleen’s notes and records do not refer to May’s professional expertise in addiction, though he later wrote a book that explored the connections between addiction and grace.446 May’s work begins with an assertion very like that of Saint Augustine’s oft-quoted one, “Our heart is restless until it rests in you.”447 Like Augustine, May acknowledges that at the heart of every human lies a desire for God:

After twenty years of listening to the yearnings of people’s hearts, I am convinced that all human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure. It gives us meaning. Some of us have repressed this desire, burying it beneath so many other interests that we are completely unaware of it. Or we may experience it in different ways—as a longing for wholeness, completion, or fulfillment. Regardless of how we describe it, it is a longing for love. It is a hunger to love, to be loved, and to move closer to the Source of love. This yearning is the essence of the human spirit; it is the origin of our highest hopes and most noble dreams.448

All human beings have this desire, May asserts, and all human beings are also subject to twin destructive forces, that of repression and addiction. As May describes them, repression hides desire, while the more powerful force of addiction attaches that powerful and natural desire

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447 *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, 43.
for God to the wrong things, “and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things, or people.” For May, there is only one force stronger than the twin forces of repression and addiction that hides or thwarts desire which is God’s grace, the “most powerful force in the universe.” Because every human being can succumb to the inclination to attach desire to the wrong ends, May observes, every human being is also in need of this grace. Addiction, May writes, is the human condition, “To be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace.” Though individual genetic heritage and environment will influence to what people become addicted, May maintains that there is a common denominator, “our basic humanity means we will be addicted.” The only hope, May believed, is an acceptance of God’s grace:

Grace is much more than a static possibility of love. It is an outpouring, a boundless burning offering of God’s self to us, suffering with us, overflowing with tenderness. Grace is God’s passion . . . Grace is the active expression of God’s love. God’s love is the root of grace; grace itself is the dynamic flowering of this love; and the good things that result in life are the fruit of this divine process.

If gratitude is the stance that most marks the recovering addict, it was also an aspect of this recovery approach that resonated deeply with Arleen. Arleen’s Al-Anon experience reaffirmed a truth for her that she had been coming to know at some level since her earliest days as an adopted daughter of Josie Dunne, that love cannot be earned or deserved. For Arleen, accepting love that neither she nor anyone else could ever be worthy of was an essential task and the foundation for a life of gratitude. Grace and gratitude derive from the Latin root *gratus.*

449 Ibid., 3.
450 Ibid., 4.
451 Ibid., 11.
452 Ibid., 65.
453 Ibid., 118-20.
Arleen often conjured the connection between the two in her letter’s frequent valediction: *Deo Gratias* captures both God’s grace and her gratefulness. For Arleen, constant gratitude took work; it relied on ongoing inner awareness that she cultivated in conversation with the texts of scripture, Al-Anon, and herself as she took an inventory of her entire life. Erik Erikson identified the crisis in late adulthood as the choice between despair and integrity. Reflecting on the whole of her life as she neared its end aided Arleen to live her last years with the integrity that Erik Erikson identified as emerging from a successful navigation of this life stage. Through writing her memoirs, she attempted to review her life in as thorough a manner as possible. In the process of her life review, she acknowledged her mistakes; she did not try to justify every action and decision. Her own life story became the last text that helped carry Arleen over her final threshold. It was a process of discovery that further revealed to her a truth about her life. Even though her mother had died in childbirth, God had never left her orphaned.

III. Transformative Power of Autobiography

A. Arleen’s Memoirs

It was in Arleen’s final ten to fifteen years of life when the writing of her life story became increasingly important to her. Erik Erikson’s schema proposes that the way to gain wisdom as an older adult is to successfully navigate the final life crisis between integrity and despair. Arleen’s effort to visit her memories did not seem to be just nostalgia, but a way of seeking a coherent picture as well as reconciling some of the more disturbing aspects. As I stood at Arleen Hynes’ graveside with a Benedictine sister who was very dear to Arleen, Sister Clara remembered how the writing of Arleen’s memoirs took on an urgent quality during these threshold years. She recalled that Arleen would suddenly break off a conversation with “Oh, I
need to go work on my memoirs.” Arleen’s intention was at least twofold. She was grappling for a deeper understanding of herself both for her own illumination and also it seemed for the benefit of her children and grandchildren. The need to explain her priorities and commitments, and her failures, seemed to drive this sometimes urgent process. She also seemed intent as she began dying to impart her undying gratitude for the things that saved her--for Josie Dunn, for Emerson, for bibliotherapy and for God.

In the preface to her memoirs about Josie Dunn, “Mama and We Twins,” Sister Arleen refers to the close relationship between the twins and their adopted mother, offering a clue to the reason for Sister Arleen’s attraction to community life. Theirs was an intimate bond:

The following is a story of a heartland—Eileen’s and mine. I can use ‘my’, ‘I’, ‘me’; but ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’ Eileen’s ‘her’s’ ‘she’ are all part of any story I can try to write about Mama and twins. The three of us are intimately, lovingly bound. Yet Mama always kept us aware that we twins were each a unique person.

Her memoir of the twins and their adoptive mother included memories of growing up in Sheldon, Iowa, their spiritual reading and their friendships. When writing this, she wrote to members of their old “gang” to check her impressions and her memories; and before her sister Eileen’s death in 1995 she consulted her twin sister, who wrote her own recollections of the woman they called “Mama.” An old friend from Sheldon, Iowa wrote, “I received your 1st draft of ‘the Gang’ and some about your Mama several weeks ago . . . Your memoir stirred up a lot of memories. I started writing feverishly about those memories. The words just flowed out of me and the more I wrote, the more memories came to mind.” Arleen also spent time reminiscing

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454 Sister Clara Antony, Author Interview, St. Joseph, MN, August 8, 2009.
455 Hynes, “Mama and We Twins.”
456 Jean Emerson, Sheldon, IA, August 2, 2000.
about and recording the early days in Kilfenora, building the house and building a family. In the end, “Mama and We Twins” was the most complete of the portions, while the other memories were handwritten drafts and individual sheets, some were typed and collected in something Arleen entitled “Loving Random Memories.” These collections of memories were meant as a way of sharing the meaning of her life with her family. They were also just a plain expression of her gratitude for her life. She wrote for others, so that they might know about Josie Dunn and Emerson and those who had shaped and formed their lives, but she also wrote to better understand herself and her own identity. Grateful as she was for her bibliotherapy work, she wondered in these times of looking long and penetratingly at herself at what cost, “But I rushed into creating something new, not knowing how to help my adolescent sons know themselves. So I lost myself (and them) in serving the patients . . .”

She wrote long personal letters to a few of her children, explaining her actions and her lapses and seeking reconciliation. She sought understanding, and possibly forgiveness, for her inattention to the younger sons when they needed her twenty years earlier. To Christopher, prompted by the death of a young man about his age of a heart attack, Arleen wrote:

What I want to tell you about is what became clearer to me than I had ever allowed it do so before. As I waited with the Dwyer’s to be with Corinne when they had to tell her, was memories of our Michael’s death. In the weeks’ since then, I have been facing more clearly than I ever have before. Em and I were not there for you and Timothy, or T. More. When Tim came home to tell us about Michael’s drowning. And because it was so shocking, I didn’t ask for details then, and thus have never really had a clear picture of what it was like when Tim came home, and then had to tell the Rowe’s. And no one knew where we were – we had gone to a movie (a late one) so no way to find us. I know Hilary and Theresa were there when we did get home because we couldn’t get into the overcrowded movie. So you ‘little boys’ were all alone. And how abandoned you must

have felt – when you needed your parents more than at any time in your life. And we were not there. And then Emerson died later, but I went to work a month after Michael died – and you must have certainly felt terribly, terribly that you had to face things alone. And you did. I am so very sorry! And nothing can make up for it. No wonder you had those terrible dreams for years! We need to talk about these things, tho you, too, have had to suppress the memories and the feelings of abandonment . . . I remember your telling me that you didn’t believe in God, and I did not argue, but felt so sad—and hopeless, because I knew I could not go on without faith in Eternal life—for Michael, for Em and for each one of us. That Faith is still my hope, since I believe in that, I can only pray more that you will be given that gift again. And, if you don’t believe, you will think that is not much. But it is all I can do – except tell you how very, very sorry I am to be so belatedly telling you I understand why you felt uncared for all those years. You are adult now so we will do the adult thing and each live with the re-opening of this pain, accept how difficult it all was then, and keep on going. I loved you then, and do so now.  

In a letter to Timothy, she also confessed her fault of not being attentive enough to others’ pain:

Back to what I had in mind with comparing myself with the righteous, pig-headed elder son was my own capacity to withhold compassion from other’s suffering—mental conflict, for ex., or a pain-filled life-style, as the prodigal’s had been. Or just being blind to others’ needs and being too stiff-necked to admit it. But pride, self-absorption in one’s personal pursuit of the right pattern of living, is what I regret most, so absorbed with self I fail to reach out to others.  

She also wrote some notes for a phone conversation she hoped to have with Tim, where she would acknowledge the pain, confusion and loneliness he must have felt around the time of Michael’s drowning:

I have been doing a lot of thinking about Mike’s death. I want you to know that Em and I thought that not being home when you came home that night was the worst possible thing--next to Mike’s drowning--that could happen. Can you bear to tell me about it again? Tim, dear, the awareness of how shocked you must have been when we weren’t home after the accident and the terrible police, must have seemed devastating! Tell me how you felt--and how rightfully angry you have been since--abandoned by us.

Arleen’s prayer for Tim was that he would recognize his parents’ love for him, “The other will be that absolute reality of your own conviction of self-worth and the hard work necessary to build and maintain your rightful self-esteem! Your essential task right now! God bless you dear, dear Tim.”

In addition to the writings she intended as a legacy for her family, Arleen’s private musings took on a reminiscent tone as she sought to integrate the various dimensions of herself and her life. Her journal entries and her memory scraps were ways Arleen was looking for the ongoing work of God in her life and in her identity. She liked Thomas Merton’s language of having been “found by God,” and this is how she described her current life and also understood her past life:

Thank you God, that I have been found by you. Reading Lives of the Trappists Today: Voices of Silence by Frank Bianco. Merton once wrote: ‘a monk is someone who seeks God because he has been found by God . . . something tells you this is where you belong.’ Deo Gratias. Yes, indeed. Sacred Heart Chapel is my true home.

A year before her death, she reflected on how being a mother influenced her life as a sister, “again today someone said, ‘You did that kind thing because you’ve been a mother.’ Other times nuns have said that to me. Think about it. A good meditation, a thank you for having been a mother.” It was a time of Arleen’s life for meditating on who she was, as a mother, as a wife, as a sister. All of this reflection took on an added importance as she neared the end of her life. In her final years, she was well aware of her own mortality and was preparing for it:

Marcelline died about a week ago—She had Parkinson’s so sometimes depressed but died in her sleep which seemed good to her children. Write and thank them for letting

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462 Ibid.
you know. This reminds me to pray for the Grace of a happy death—and I do mean ‘happy’ to go home to God—to be with Emerson and Eileen, Mama, Robert, all the rest (Michael). Above all, to Be with God, my Savior, my Beloved.465

Many of Arleen’s drafts of memoirs, random memories, and private musings have been integrated into this life story of Arleen in an effort perhaps to complete the process she started. She sought to see how God had worked throughout her life, her struggles, and the ways she changed and still needed to change, “Too late to change? No, until I will be too forgetful to remember.”466 As long as she had her memory, she believed she could still change. Perhaps in the same way, as long as she is remembered, her story can change others.

B. Theoretical Interlude: Spirituality of Aging

The process of reviewing one’s life is recommended to aging people as a way of integrating a life, as well as leaving a legacy to future generations. Arleen kept notes from a day-long writing workshop in April 1997 offered by Patricia Hampl who later published I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory.467 The subject of the workshop was writing memoirs of the spiritual life. Arleen was inspired from this writing workshop to trust her first person voice; she learned that people are hungry for the spiritual life. She took special note at the workshop of the exhortation of novelist Vladimir Nabokov, whose own memoir, Speak, Memory, was widely acclaimed.468 Nabokov advised writers, “Caress the detail, the divine detail.”469

466 Arleen Hynes, August, 1992.
Arleen was given further impetus in her memoir writing by an article from the Arlington diocesan newspaper that she clipped and attached to her notes from the Hampl writing workshop. The article encourages making a life review, and gave Arleen some ideas about how to approach it, “Everyone wants to be remembered after their lives on earth have ended, and for many seniors there is special urgency to create their own special legacy.”\footnote{Mary Carty, “Telling One’s Life Story Provides Powerful Legacy to Family,” \textit{Arlington Catholic Herald} (April 13, 2000): 19.} That sense of urgency was characteristic of Arleen’s approach, as was the process recommended in the diocesan article of plumbing one’s memory, to “revive long-forgotten memories, enable healing connected to painful events, and allow the author to celebrate one’s life and those of loved ones.”\footnote{Ibid.} To see the pages and pages of memories that Arleen drafted is to see that she took to heart the article’s advice:

> Another way to truly pass down something that will forever speak volumes about those things held most dear in life is to create a written record. Simply jotting down favorite memories and or/milestones in a notebook or journal gives children and grandchildren a concrete reference of parts of a loved one’s life and a sense of history about the family’s roots.\footnote{Ibid.}

Robert Butler, a gerontologist who was head of the National Institute on Aging and did much to advance the dignity of older age, led the way in advocating the importance of reminiscence toward the end of life. The reality of looking forward to death prompts a looking back on life. Rather than a tiresome trait of older people, a life review is a necessary developmental stage that helps to increase “candor, serenity and wisdom.”\footnote{Robert N. Butler, “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminscence in the Aged “ \textit{Psychiatry} 26 (1963): 66.} Butler concurred
with Erik Erikson that identity development is a lifelong process that continues in one’s declining years. A life review can lead to positive changes, particularly in someone naturally endowed with “flexibility, resilience, and self-awareness.”

In Arleen’s case, she was endowed with an openness to change, her faithfulness to her conservation vow. She believed that it was never too late for change, for conversion of heart, for reconciliation. In her later years, this trait may have become more pronounced, as is natural as one’s remaining years lessen:

The healing of memories depends on recognizing that there is no point in life too late for God’s call to new life. The theory that older people are set in their ways and cannot change has finally been exposed for the harmful stereotype that it is. In fact the later years create a special readiness for conversion. We no longer have the physical energy necessary to support resentments and conflicts, and we are less willing to spend our energy on things that do not matter. We have experienced more of life and are often ready to recognize our own limitations. We are facing the end of our lives and know the opportunities for healing and reconciliation are dwindling. For all these reasons the later years are times of special receptivity to God’s healing of our unfinished stories.

In Arleen’s case also, she viewed her remembering through the eyes of faith.

Remembering from this perspective takes on a sacred dimension, a desire to see one’s own life as a revelation of God:

Faith adds an essential dimension to our remembering. In faith we not only gather our memories; we recollect our lives before God. Our stories then take on new meaning as part of a larger story that embraces and redeems them. Such remembering is the biblical way of appropriating the past and the basis of religious identity. At each key juncture of her life, Israel retold the story of what God had done for her, how God had remained faithful in the midst of her infidelities, how God’s presence had sustained her in times of trial. By remembering, she made God’s love present again with power. Out of these memories arose new courage and hope that God’s promises would again be fulfilled. Like

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474 Ibid., 69.
Israel we also tell and retell our stories, since they have levels of meaning that cannot be completely captured in a single telling.476

IV. Chapter Summary: Crossing the Threshold to Wisdom in Older Adulthood: Arleen Chooses Integrity over Despair

Arleen’s life examination was an essential part of her crossing the threshold to the end of her life and to gaining wisdom. The text of her own life, the Al-Anon literature, and the daily scriptures all contributed to her increasing wisdom in her increasing years. She very consciously pursued wisdom and admired others who seemed to possess it. She recorded a passage from the Book of Wisdom in her journal, “Wisdom is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.”477 She wondered to herself if she had yet to become wise, “Sr. Celine seems to be an older person who is wise, not talkative, balanced. Your behavior at meals—not trying to make constant talk is fine, just Be.”478 Arleen urged herself to reread the whole chapter on Wisdom and to meditate on its qualities and to try to practice them. She knew she needed to be less set in her ways, less judgmental, less worried about the behavior of others. The response she believed she heard from God was indeed wise, “Arleen, I love you. You have been wise at times. Relax; it is my grace, not your achievement.”479

476 Ibid., 49.
477 “For in her is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, agile, clear, unstained, certain, never harmful, loving the good, keen, unhampered, beneficent, kindly, firm, secure, tranquil, all-powerful, all-seeing, and pervading all spirits, though they be intelligent, pure and very subtle. For Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion, and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity. For she is a breath of the might of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled can enter into her. For she is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness. Although she is one, she can do all things, and she renews everything while herself perduring; Passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets. For God loves nothing so much as the one who dwells with Wisdom. For she is fairer than the sun and surpasses every constellation of the stars. Compared to light, she is found more radiant; though night supplants light, wickedness does not prevail over Wisdom.” Wisdom 7:22-30 (NAB).
479 Ibid.
Arleen was able to hear these calming words because of her persistent effort in these years to seek integration and a reconciliation of the various strains of her life. She did not ignore those aspects of her life that brought pain and regret, but she consistently sought to let go the negativity that could accompany them. Even in her dying moments though, as described by her son Hilary, Arleen clung to life in what he understood to be a reluctance to leave any work of reconciliation undone. That there was still distance and misunderstanding between her and Timothy and her and T.More was a disappointment to her. But she had wisely accepted that the work of healing was God’s to complete, his grace not her achievement. As Erik Erikson describes this stage of older adulthood, it is a crisis between despair and integrity. Arleen’s transformative texts in these last years of her life appear to have enabled her to accept her own weaknesses and the unfinished business of her life with integrity. Evidence from her intimate journals in these years indicates that for Arleen it was her dependence on God for strength and wisdom that she found made it possible for her to cross this final threshold with dignity and grace.
Chapter 6: Spiritual Biography Revisited

Perfection, Perfection

I have had it with perfection.
I have packed my bags,
I am out of here.
gone.

As certain as rain
will make you wet,
perfection will do you
in.

It droppeth not as dew
upon the summer grass
to give liberty and green
joy.

Perfection straineth out
the quality of mercy,
withers rapture at its
birth.

Before the battle is half begun,
cold probity thinks
it can’t be won, concedes the
war.

I’ve handed in my notice,
given back my keys,
signed my severance check, I
quit.

Hints I could have taken:
Even the perfect chiseled form of
Michaelangelo’s radiant David
squints,

The Venus de Milo
has no arms,
the Liberty Bell is
cracked.

–Father Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B.480

480Kilian McDonnell, Swift Lord, You Are Not (Collegeville, MN: St. John’s University Press, 2003), 34.
I. Spiritual Biography and the Notion of Perfection

In Arleen’s later years, when she and Benedictine Kilian McDonnell developed a friendship based on their shared a love of poetry, she delighted in his poem “Perfection, Perfection” that playfully refuses a certain model of perfection. The genre of spiritual biography as offered here does something similar to the poem; it holds up for admiration and appreciation the way imperfections can make a life a work of beauty and grace. By training an eye on the spiritual life of the ordinary believer, spiritual biography as explored in this dissertation accepts human imperfection as an avenue for grace. Whereas hagiographic accounts of the lives of saints at times carry the implication that perfection might be attained through heroic human effort, spiritual biography as defined here acknowledges human imperfection as the opening for God’s grace to enter. Thus a careful study of a life reveals much about its human subject but also something of how God operates. The genre of spiritual biography looks for the ever-unfolding story of salvation as told through one human life, not shying away from the flaws and limitations of that life. Killian McDonnell’s poem on perfection echoes the lyrics of a Leonard Cohen song:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget the perfect offering
There is a crack in every thing
That’s how the Light gets in.481

The previous four chapters focused on the life of Arleen Hynes as an example of looking for the light, especially at transitional points, in an individual life. In her case, the place of various texts as light bearers was examined. In hagiographic studies, this attention to a single life is called a nominal approach. This concluding chapter takes a step back to reflect on spiritual

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biography as a genre, and consequently what this new genre can contribute to the study of spirituality. In hagiographic studies, taking in this broader view of the impact of sacred biographies is known as the realist approach.482

Realists in the study of hagiography tend to study the lives of saints, particularly medieval saints, to identify the various images of sainthood that people held. How the saints are described says much about the cultural consensus regarding what represented holiness many hundreds of years ago. Spiritual biography as a revival of hagiography has the potential to present or shape updated notions of sanctity, to be a “meditative enterprise undertaken by external observers as they reflect on the conditions leading to Christian perfection.”483 By treating biographical subjects who wholeheartedly pursue holiness but were by no means perfect in the sense of being free of fault or defect, spiritual biography might help refine a notion of perfection as it relates to holiness.

The Letter of James presents a nuanced notion of perfection that the genre of spiritual biography might advance. Though this epistle incorporates Greek ideas, the tone and content of the Letter of James is arguably the most Jewish of New Testament writings.484 Its author operates out of Hebrew perceptions of perfection found in the Old Testament which differ from the common contemporary understanding of perfection as indefectible. The Hebrew concept of

perfection may be closer to our contemporary notions of integrity and maturity.\textsuperscript{485} For the author of the Letter of James, wholeheartedness and walking in the way of God mark the life of perfection. This epistle operates out of this working definition of perfection that incorporates “the idea of wholeness, or completeness, whereby a being remains true to its original constitution.”\textsuperscript{486} Echoes of this biblical notion of perfection can be heard in the work of Thomas Aquinas in his description of perfect beings as those that fulfill an original purpose or design. One scholar argues that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, held ideas of perfection that draw from Aquinas’ idea of being true to one’s purpose.\textsuperscript{487} John Wesley indicated that sincerity might be as apt a word as perfection to capture the Christian ideal.\textsuperscript{488} He wrote various treatises and sermons on the subject of perfection as a state achievable by any Christian. For Wesley, perfection and sin were not opposites; he did not approve of the expression “sinless perfection.”\textsuperscript{489} Perfection was rather a state of being inwardly and outwardly devoted to God whose power to change a person was at work. In this understanding of perfection, it is God’s work of transformation that receives attention. Stanley Hauerwas captured Wesley’s understanding of perfection in this description:

Christians, for Wesley, are a pilgrim people undertaking an arduous but fulfilling journey. It is, therefore, unthinkable that those on that journey would not manifest some predictable and observable empirical change. Wesley’s doctrine of perfection, for all its difficulties, at least rightly denotes that there is an inherent contradiction to claim to be a Christian without such claim making a difference in our lives and how we live. The

\textsuperscript{485} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{486} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{488} John Wesley, \textit{A Plain Account of Christian Perfection} (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sanford, 1844), 32.
\textsuperscript{489} Ibid., 31.
affirmation of such a change after all is not a statement about our ability but the sovereignty of God’s grace over sinfulness.\footnote{Stanley Hauerwas, “Characterizing Perfection: Second Thoughts on Character and Sanctification,” in \textit{Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 124.}

The genre of spiritual biography as put forward here offers portraits of holiness not equated with flawlessness but rather with wholehearted openness to change in the spirit of John Newman’s pithy comments on perfection and change, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”\footnote{Walter E. Conn, \textit{Conscience and Conversion in Newman: A Developmental Study of Self in John Henry Newman}, ed. Andrew Tallon, Marquette Studies in Theology (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010).} The idea that Christian perfection is not a static state, but one with movement and change, resonates with the notion of spiritual biography offered in this dissertation. The genre of spiritual biography presents in narrative form the dynamic of a person loving God and neighbor in such a way that that person and the circumstances surrounding that person are changed. This inner movement of love, rather than any account of perfection or sinlessness, is what a spiritual biography as defined here would record. Spiritual biography as a successor to hagiography differs from it primarily in its post-Vatican II view of holy persons as sinners, “Since truly we all offend in many things we all need God’s mercies continually and we all must daily pray: ‘Forgive us our debts.’”\footnote{\textit{Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium}, ed. Pope Paul VI Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness (Boston Daughters of St. Paul, November 21, 1964), 40.} Spiritual biography, to be an effective genre for the study of spirituality in the twenty-first century, must emphasize through its narratives that the “way of perfection” is a humble recognition of faults as well as a continual openness to growth and change. To be holy and sanctified, in this model of spiritual biography, is not defined by the absence of mistakes but rather by a receptive stance marked by continual and sincere conversion.
Kathleen Norris, in *Amazing Grace: The Vocabulary of Faith*, includes a chapter on perfection in which she underscores its relation to change:

To be perfect in the sense that Jesus means it, is to make room for growth, for the changes that bring us to maturity, to ripeness. To mature is to lose adolescent self-consciousness so as to be able to make a gift of oneself, as a parent, as teacher, friend, spouse . . . Perfection, in the Christian sense, means being mature enough to give ourselves to others . . . To become fully ourselves as God would have us: mature, ripe, full, ready for what befalls us, for whatever is to come.493

Spiritual biography as a tool of the academic study of spirituality illustrates the way in which the spiritual life is the lifelong process of becoming, as Kathleen Norris says; “fully ourselves as God would have us.” Each person’s maturity, or perfection, will be unique to that person and his or her particular traits and life circumstances, “it is incarnate, therefore specific, particular.”494

During the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church moved away from the notion of a holy elite but recognized in *Lumen Gentium* the universal call to holiness, “therefore in the Church, everyone, whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification.’”495 Shortly after Vatican II, Arleen joined with a team of other Catholic lay writers and thinkers to draft and publish a thematic analysis of the church documents. Arleen was pleased to be able to write the section on holiness. She categorized the teachings on holiness found in all the documents into four themes:

1. all . . . are called to be holy;
2. God is the source of our holiness;

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494 Ibid., 79.
495 *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, 39.
3. in our daily life we find and carry out our holiness;
4. God made us free to choose holiness or not.\textsuperscript{496}

The genre of spiritual biography is based on the premise that all are called in their daily life to live out their holiness. Each person’s spiritual biography is thereby distinctive, growing out of a particular life experience. Yet though each person’s spiritual biography is unique, spiritual biography holds up the value of reading another’s story as a way to promote the universal call to holiness.

II. Spiritual Biography and the Universal Call to Holiness

Spiritual biography differs from hagiography in spiritual biography’s emphasis on perfection as the maturity or wholeness particular to an individual. In the medieval lives of the saints, it was common to draw upon repetitive motifs, freely borrowing from other stories to emphasize, to “distinguish saintly from ordinary piety.”\textsuperscript{497} These “traditional hagiographic motifs, conventional devices,” could include miraculous births, piety from an early age, heroic endurance of suffering, devotion to prayer, and selfless service of others, so that saints seemed to follow certain patterns.\textsuperscript{498} Narrators of saints’ lives did not worry about using “the same motifs and details, nor are they concerned about repetitions within their own stories. The reiteration of familiar events gives the tales both plausibility and immediate intelligibility.”\textsuperscript{499} Hagiographic accounts of holy lives presumed the criteria for sainthood found in a 1950s version of a Catholic

\textsuperscript{497} Szell, ed. \textit{Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe}, 297.
\textsuperscript{498} Ibid.
dictionary, “The possession of virtue rising to the heroic level, and the illustration of that virtue by miracles.” In traditional hagiographic works, saints were seen to have reached spiritual perfection by separating themselves from the material and carnal world by virtue of extraordinary compliance with the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, “saints were those who were recognized as having experienced so much reverence and achieved such a degree of purity that they had transcended the sinfulness of ordinary existence.” More recent views on saints are more expansive. One Catholic resource book from 1995 said that any person can be considered a saint, “who may reasonably be believed to have lived a good life and who, therefore, may be presumed to be enjoying eternal life with God.”

Spiritual biography defined here as a successor to hagiography turns away from the traditional motifs and patterns of saintliness and toward an examination of distinct, unique individual responses to the call to holiness. The more employed, the more the genre of spiritual biography has the potential to communicate that every life, no matter the circumstances or no matter how closely that life might resemble that of any other revered holy person, may contain luminal moments of transformation worthy of note.

Lawrence Cunningham suggests that a recovery and revision of the concept of sainthood in contemporary times might be useful in lifting up the myriad of lives that exhibit holiness:

When we describe persons of perspicacious sanctity today, we hasten to report that they are not ‘plaster of paris’ saints. The qualifier betrays how deeply we have been alienated

501 Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700, 4-5.
from the tradition of saints. When we speak of the martyrs of early Christianity, it is all too easy to conjure up visions of lions and sighing maidens. It is difficult to link in our consciousness the early martyrs with the many anonymous souls now languishing in the Gulags, prison basements, and ‘reeducation’ camps of the contemporary world.\(^5\)

Elizabeth Johnson, in *Friends of God and Prophets*, makes a similar point that the traditional language and belief surrounding saints does not translate well into our modern sensibility:

> Not only does this age deflate heroes, but the hagiography and iconography of many established saints render them remote and even singularly unattractive to contemporary concerns. Tales of their holy lives and images of their devout selves make them seem too perfect, too miraculous, too otherworldly, to eccentric to have anything useful to say.\(^4\)

Arleen herself consciously sought to avoid being seen as overly sanctimonious, “I am a deeply religious person. That is indeed the core of my existence, and thank God, always has been! But I hope not pious in the narrow, judgmental way.”\(^5\)

### III. Spiritual Biography and the Communion of Saints

One of the aims of this study is to revive and retool the genre of hagiography to include the writing of ordinary lives genuinely seeking holiness. As a genre, spiritual biographies can serve to level the playing field of the spiritual chain of command by choosing as subjects of study little known figures who sought to live with authenticity. The process of dismantling a hierarchy of holiness was given impetus by the Second Vatican Council’s embrace of a universal call to holiness; spiritual biography as hagiography’s critical descendant could continue it.

Rather than shy away from the use of the term *saint*, spiritual biography might reclaim its value

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in contemporary times. Nelson Mandela, when imprisoned in South Africa, wrote to his wife Winnie Mandela, “never forget a saint is a sinner who keeps trying.”

Spiritual biography as presented here does not contrast saint and sinner in the manner of traditional hagiography. Rather, as submitted in this treatment of spiritual biography, a saint is a person who in his or her lifetime was continually open to the transforming work of God, who lived out of gratitude for God’s gifts, and who listened for and sought to follow God’s specific calling in his or her unique circumstances. To study the lives of saints under this conceptual framework and through the lens of faith is to study God’s dynamic interaction with a person in his or her continual process of becoming who he or she was born to be. Paul’s letter to the Colossians captures the marks of a saint thus broadly defined; a holy one, God’s chosen and beloved, will be one with integrity, sincerity, single-minded devotion, humility, and all the other manifestations of holiness detailed in Paul’s letter.

According to author interviews with their children, Arleen and Emerson would have shared this egalitarian view of holiness. The nightly ritual of the litany of the saints in the Hynes household was meaningful because each member of the family was mentioned by his or her patron saint’s name and in connection with a desired quality. The saints were not seen as removed from the rest of humanity; it was their very humanness and uniqueness that made them

506 Nelson Mandela, Conversations with Myself (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2010), 212.
507 Colossian 3:12 NRSV, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as at the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
so interesting. Arleen and Emerson promoted the saints in that way, as guides and examples that could help each family member become a better healer, or writer, or artist, or whatever his or her calling might be. In becoming the fullest dimension of oneself, it seemed to at least some of Arleen’s children, was a way to point to the work of God rather than to elevate oneself. Arleen’s two oldest sons, Denis and Patrick, along with their younger brothers, would wryly refer to her during her lifetime as “our sainted mother.” And indeed, though joking about her sanctity, many of her children do adopt a broader notion of sainthood that includes Arleen in its definition. Her youngest son Christopher, said “saint” is the first word he associates with her, though he doubted that others would say the same. Qualifying a saint as “a human being, one who pursues holiness, not one who is perfect,” he offered that this “describes my momma to a tee.” Arleen’s son Peter, the sixth child, summarized sainthood in this way:

A saint is someone who consciously takes on the awesome responsibility of being a co-creator who by small and daily actions is dedicated to making the world a better, more loving, more compassionate space. So yes; my mother was a saint. But I think she would argue that there are many more saints out there than are narrowly defined by anyone religion’s sets of rules and beliefs.

Arleen’s fifth oldest, her daughter Brigid, had this to say about her mother and sainthood:

I am not sure how to define a saint since the classic definition of holiness leaves me kind of cold, and I am sure my mother would never think of herself as one, but when I tell my friends that my mother was a nun they would look at me and I would immediately say, ‘Oh not one of those down your knees, fire and brimstone, watch out what you do’ kind but someone who lived what she believed and taught us to do the same. What could be more saintly than that?

508 Susanna Hynes, Author Interview, Collegeville, MN, June, 2010.
509 Christopher Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, April, 2009.
510 Peter Hynes, Author Interview, Austin, TX, May, 2009.
Arleen’s son Hilary, the fourth child, offered this insight into Arleen’s spirituality and its relationship to sainthood:

Taking a clue from the Tibetan greeting NAMASTE which can be freely translated as ‘The god in me greets the god in Thee,’ or as the Benedictines say, in similar vein, ‘Let all guest be received as Christ,’ something Arleen would say often. This to me is the essence of Arleen’s approach to spirituality. She had the desire to foster the divine in herself with an acute inner attentiveness and to search it out and put her finger on the divine in others. It was her art and her gift, so from her inner practice she could extend the divine by searching for it in her interactions and her conversations with others—the divine become a self-fulfilling presence—a light in her feeding the light in others. Arleen could concentrate on and search out the divine and awake it as a presence in others and people would never forget her for it. She could appeal to the best in people in a very pure and simple way, not clouded by ego or desire, but a straightforward approach. I think of it as a leaping over the barriers we all construct in our need to protect ourselves from the world. There is a divine presence in everyone and a saint focuses on this with an inner persistence and the divine is then furthered in the world and miracles happen. So Arleen’s ability to focus her attention on the people she encountered and dealt with in her daily life was her practice and what made her stand out in people’s minds as somehow different and remarkable—a quality and giftedness not easily defined but nevertheless very much present and perceived. Hence, saints are examples of people who could get in touch with the divine in themselves and spread it around for others.512

The point of this exercise in presenting Arleen’s grown children’s views of sainthood is not to advance the argument that Arleen should be presented for canonization. The above is rather to illustrate the point that when the Second Vatican Council ushered in the universal call to holiness, it was an invitation for all to be part of the communion of saints. Spiritual biography as a genre not only illustrates the biographical subjects’ struggle for personal holiness and salvation, but also illustrates through the compelling power of the narrative itself how holy lives can call others to be their own best selves in relation to others and to God. As Elizabeth Stuart wrote in

512 Hilary Hynes, Author Interview, Burtonsville, MD, May, 2009.
Spitting at Dragons, saints “show us who we are . . . call us forth into our power in relation and strengthen our sense of ourselves.”  

Elizabeth Johnson echoes this notion of saint:

Saints are those who have drawn so close to the center of the circle that Uncreated Light streams through them into the world. And the closer people draw to them, the closer they get to the divine, an understanding that nourishes a resurgence of interest in the saints.

The mark of a true saint is that they draw others closer to God, both in their lifetimes and in the stories that are told of them after their deaths. The lives of saints ought to be written so that their readers might glance at the work of God in another’s life and begin to look for it in their own. Lawrence Cunningham defines a saint in a similar way, “A saint is a person so grasped by a religious vision that it becomes central to his or her life in a way that radically changes the person and leads others to glimpse the value of that vision.” The miracles of the saints have little to do with their own virtue or holiness, and more to do with the amazing fact that an ordinary, imperfect human being can be a revelatory agent of an extraordinary, perfect love. John Henry Newman wrote of the underlying power in the text of a saint’s life as a way of opening a window to the divine:

. . . in the life of a saint, we have a microcosm, or the whole work of God, a perfect work from beginning to end, yet one which may be bound between two boards, and mastered by the most unlearned. The exhibition of a person, his thoughts, his words, his acts, his trials, his features, his beginnings, his growth, his end, have a charm to everyone; and where he is a saint they have a divine influence and persuasion, a power of exercising and eliciting the latent elements of divine grace in individual readers as no other reading can have.

513 Stuart, Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood, 37.
514 Johnson, Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints, 15.
515 Cunningham, The Meaning of Saints, 65.
Spiritual biography as an emerging genre thus shares some traits with the study of religious art. Art historians use the techniques of artistic analysis when studying a great painting on a religious subject, just as spiritual biographers must use the tools of the social sciences when examining a subject. Yet any analysis of religious art would be incomplete if it did not take into account the religious meaning of the work of art. In the same way, a spiritual biographer views the subject of its study as a work with religious meaning. Renaissance religious art is able to prompt an evocative response in part due to its painting of familiar faces in the roles of the saints and of Jesus. The underlying message of this religious art as well as some religious poetry is that the communion of saints includes even ordinary familiar people. According to a Harvard English professor and author of *Blessed and Beautiful: Picturing the Saints*:

There are as many ways to be like Jesus as there are people. The communion of saints is not about the ‘election’ of the few, but the invitation to all to see glimpses of sublime possibility for themselves in the mirror images of other good, but not perfect, lives. Gerard Manley Hopkins captures the idea in poetry:

> For Christ plays in ten thousand place,  
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
> To the Father through the features of men’s faces.

Hopkins imagines a Christ who reaches out, extends himself; he is not a fixed point but a mover, a player with many shapes and features. The poet’s words disperse Jesus into what Christians understand as a the Mystical Body, the Communion of Saints, not a static lineup of old men in white uniforms but a living and lively crowd of individuals, lovely in the eyes of God and (why not?) of one another.  

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IV. Spiritual Biography and Subjectivity

Spiritual biography, as offered in this dissertation, is meant to be a genre in which it is acceptable to present a human life as lovely, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins cited above, without resorting to uncritical hagiography. As a tool of academic spirituality, spiritual biography enables a researcher to study spirituality as manifested in an individual life. In the case of Arleen Hynes, the subject involves the study of Christian spirituality, the living and concrete person in dynamic transformation toward the fullness of life in Christ. Studying spirituality in this way requires a heuristic lens of belief in Christ that guides the researcher. In the field of religious studies, the researcher brackets the question of the truth or falsehood of religious claims from his or her analysis; by contrast, in the fields of theology and spirituality, the hermeneutical process is based on what Bernard Lonergan described as the method of theology, the transcendental method. The scientific method relies on empirical data, which prompts hypotheses and predictions that can be tested in order to construct an accurate representation of the world. This method of study operates in the study of religion in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Lonergan saw a different method at work in the doing of theology and sought to explain that method in light of the scientific and historically conscious post-Kantian age. Borrowing from the scientific method, Lonergan acknowledged that the adequacy of theology depends on the integrity of its process. Just as a scientist makes observations, makes intelligent hypotheses, makes reasonable predictions, and takes responsible action in experiments, the theologian must be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible in the process of studying theology. For Lonergan, the objective criteria of theology lie in the cognitive process and the authenticity of the subject performing it. Unlike objectivity in
mathematics and science that depend on the objectivity of the investigator, a subject such as spirituality can only be performed through the subjectivity of the spirituality scholar who engages in an authentic pursuit of satisfactory answers in a dynamic process he called the transcendental method. Lonergan proposed that the one engaged in this process becomes converted, and when converted, possesses what Lonergan called graced subjectivity or transformed subjectivity, the fruit of which is genuine objectivity:

It was through his exploration of scientific methods that Lonergan’s attention was drawn to his own and our subjective operations. At the same time, he became increasingly sensitive to the fact that our consciousness is historical. Through these realizations he came to see the role that pre-understanding and interpretive filters play into the cognitive process. As a result of those discernments, Lonergan began to prize authenticity highly… Rather than despairing that we will ever understand another because of the increasingly differentiated universes of discourse developing in the world, Lonergan became convinced that mutuality and fruitful dialogue are best achieved when authentic personal subjectivity and collective intersubjectivity are operating in a more explicit manner.518

Secular scholars, as well as scholars of religious studies with personal faith commitments, may question whether any objectivity can emerge from this research approach just as scholars have criticized Bernard Lonergan for being too subjective. The use of experience, understanding and judgment as heuristic devices has a prominent place in the Catholic intellectual tradition as John Haughey’s Where is Knowing Going illustrates.519 This approach was employed to good use in Development, Values, and the Meaning of Globalization: A Grassroots Approach, which studies the values inherent in the narratives of various impoverished people throughout the world. The theological framework of this study is rooted in

518 John C. Haughey, Where Is Knowing Going?: The Horizons of the Knowing Subject (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 43.
519 Ibid.
the belief that an academic approach to studying the lives and values of others must begin with the others’ own descriptions of their experiences:

It starts with experience, not with the consideration of religious values in the abstract. It is a sustained attempt to understand the relationship between human beings and their creator or higher power, God. Those genuinely engaging in reflecting on the human problem can benefit from the fruits of that reflection, even if they do not share that worldview. The starting point of this sustained attempt is the stance of those who desire and seek wisdom, the deepest meaning of life, in whatever ways this relationship takes place; the stance of those whose concern is with the total human situation.520

Another building block of the research undertaken in this study of the values implicit in several different individual narratives is a spiritual framework; “this spiritual framework shapes the way we perceive and work with data about what goes on with the person.”521 In the research on poor people’s decision-making processes in light of globalization, the researchers adopted the methodology of interiority, in which they explored the data of these people’s lives from the perspective of the inner life:

When a researcher operates with what we might call ‘the research tool of the realm of interiority,’ she reflects on what is going on, in much the same way as those going through the Ignatian spiritual retreat reflect on themselves. The researcher uses her own data of consciousness to learn about the consciousness of the protagonist. Therefore one of the basic characteristics of this powerful spirituality tool is that it is empirical. It follows the same sequence of operations that any empirical study would follow. In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, where St. Ignatius insists that all the steps of the meditations be done in sequence, one begins with the basic data of the scriptural narrative under consideration. Basic data comes in through hearing or reading the story. Next, one tries to understand the text and then reflect on it, making some judgments of fact and value. All this occurs in the quiet realm of one’s inner self—one’s interiority. We follow this pattern of experiencing, understanding, judging, and then deciding and acting as we find it in the Exercises. This method involves a recurrent process in which the pattern yields cumulative and progressive results, new developments. It can even result in


521 Ibid.
spiritual renewal; the enhancement of one’s freedom to love. In the Jesuit spiritual framework, our method of research allows us to be ‘contemplatives in action.’

This theological and spiritual framework is employed in spiritual biography, which uses as much of the social sciences as possible to construct reliable and non-arbitrary accounts while also employing what Kees Waaijman called the mystagogic method to discern any divine-human encounter therein. At the root of Christian spirituality is the experience of God. Because Christian spirituality is based on experience; “lived spirituality and its academic pursuit go hand in hand. Everyday experience and its interpenetration by God is a reality at the heart of a study of spirituality today.” The genre of spiritual biography as proposed in this project embraces and advances the notion that an experience of God is possible;

God is found and known in the very fabric of life; He invites us to discover him there and find the fullness of life that only He can give. It is the role of applied spirituality to facilitate this process, to be a midwife to a new renaissance of human possibility and a new phase in global human development that can only occur through genuine encounter with God.

To the postmodern critics, a spiritual biographer will need to address the question of the validity of the texts studied. If a life is a revelatory text, should not the suspicion of texts also inform the study of a life? Texts, the argument goes, and the lives that comprise them, can be deceptive, perpetually referential, selective and essentially devoid of meaning. Literary criticism has demonstrated that rather than clarifying meaning, language and the texts that convey it can

522 Ibid., 53.
lead one astray and can be far removed from the reality of what is being described. In the case of the texts used to construct a spiritual biography, such as letters, journals, and interviews, can or should these be accepted at face value? These questions with respect to spiritual biography are valid. In response, the approach of Sandra Schneider to scripture as a revelatory text is analogous to what spiritual biography endeavors to accomplish. Schneider concedes that scripture bears all the limiting marks of a human construct and human language, yet still it has the power to reveal truths that are more than just words on a page due to the interactive spiritual relationship between the reader and the text. In human relationships, the other is always also limited, and yet still in interacting with a person one can come to see some spark of the divine in him or her. Spiritual biography adopts the premise that in another human life this type of recognition is possible, even given the failures and weaknesses of every person. In the case of the letters and papers of Arleen Hynes, a researcher who spends any time with these resources can reasonably conclude that they were genuine expressions of Arleen’s thoughts and beliefs rather than constructions meant to deceive others. Validating the sources for authenticity involves checking the entire seventy-year corpus, including her published work, for consistency, as well as verifying the written materials against others’ impressions and memories of her. As with any biography, especially where a complete autobiography has not been written, the written record provides the best source for making claims about a life. By necessity, unless or even if an autobiographical work has been completed by the subject, there is an interpretative process involved. In the case of Arleen Hynes’ spiritual biography, the research process involved identifying the texts most prominent in the various sources and looking for clues about the bibliotherapeutic impact these texts had on her actual life and on her decision to become involved in the mental health field of bibliotherapy.
The focus on the effect of the various texts identified in her spiritual development is only one angle with which to view her story, but it is an angle that nonetheless sharpens the focus on transformative reading, a process she highly valued and did much to further in her own personal life, her profession and her vocation as a Benedictine and a process at the core of the genre of spiritual biography.

This spiritual gift can probably be traced back to Arleen’s own need to know that she was loved unconditionally, just for being herself. She knew there was nothing she did to earn love, and knew how desperately she could not live without it. Josie Dunn’s adoption of her and Eileen as sickly and skinny babies confirmed for her the truth of undeserved love whose source was God alone. When a person can reveal that love to another in some way, they are revealing God. This is what the pursuit of sainthood entails, the single-hearted devotion to God, which naturally translates into becoming a channel of God’s love. Saints reveal to others God’s might, God’s mercy, God’s presence in a way that makes a sinner fall on his knees, not in reverence for the saint, but as a grateful response to God.

Arleen was not sure that she adequately communicated this understanding of holiness to her children, as a grateful acceptance of one’s dependence on God. In some private reflections, she wrote:

Who am I—Arleen McCarty Hynes? I don’t know—it’s always something I have turned away from. Am I afraid of the image? Not to love myself? Am I falsely shy about recognizing the merits that I know some people feel about me? What does Juanita really know, psychologically, when she says that she would be afraid to have her son love her as my boys say they love me? Is she right that I have held a false image of ‘holiness’ to them—rather than the reality of turning to God because I am so weak and unable to go on
without Him? . . . I hope not with all my heart—it would be too much to add that burden to the one of having been so over-critical of them that they do not love themselves.\textsuperscript{525}

Arleen worried that she had failed in that most basic mission of the Christian, to help others to see themselves as God sees them, beautiful and loved. It tore her up to think that her children might not love themselves, that she had been such an imperfect vehicle of God’s love that they were blocked from wholeheartedly receiving God’s gift of love. Henri Nouwen defined saintliness as “living without division between word and action. If I would truly live in my own life the word I am speaking, my spoken words would become actions, and miracles would happen whenever I opened my mouth.”\textsuperscript{526} But Arleen remembered that her words had sometimes been harsh and impatient with her own children, and that none of them knew how much she loved them, how much God loved them. Arleen regretted that she did not do a better job of showing her children they were loved, that she contributed to any insecurity they might have about their worth and that may have been a vestige of her own childhood, where she believed but wasn’t always certain that she was lovable:

I know Denis thinks I never had time to play with them—or any child. And I regret that now. I never did have time to play with the children, that wasn’t just because I was busy—and the specter of fatigue being constant and heavy over me always—but because I frankly know I hated to play with babies and children. I longed for intellectual conversation—ideas, exchange—this strange and great thrill of forming new thoughts and concepts. Mama thought that too—that the intellectual life and prayer were the highest challenges in the world. She never played with us; I’m sure she didn’t know how to either. And of course, we never did anything correctly enough for her either. Tho we told ourselves she must have loved us—she took us of her own free will. She didn’t have to—our own aunts, our mother’s sisters—said they’d take one of us but not the 2 when

\textsuperscript{525} Arleen Hynes, Reflections on Identity, August, 1992.
our mother died at our birth. But she always told us she wanted us both. So we knew—we said—that she loved us. But maybe we felt we were a disappointment to her.  

Arleen’s recognition of her flaws and her uncertainty about her self-worth in the years after Emerson’s death were mitigated in her later years as a Benedictine sister, yet they persisted in one form or another. As detailed in the previous chapter, Arleen spent considerable time in her last years seeking reconciliation and healing for any hurt or neglect she caused. She plumbed the scriptures, the Al-Anon literature, and a review of her own life to resolve her lingering regrets and to persist in gratitude. Even with her internal struggles, Arleen fixed her attention on others; she continued her devotion to assisting others to be touched and changed through poetry. It is this consistent trait that can be traced way back in Arleen’s life. She never wavered from her enthusiasm for both clinging to and sharing life-changing words with others. She fell head over heels in love, again and again, with various texts that could bring life. Her exclamation when she stepped onto the shadowed lawn of St. Elizabeths that first day—I have fallen in love again!—captures her stance at every major turning point of her life.

Though she expressed amazement that God would love her many times throughout her life, Arleen sought to accept that belief in God’s love with gratitude. The Gospel of John records Jesus saying; “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (John 15:9, NRSV). Paul urges the early Christians in his Letter to the Philippians to hold fast to the word of life (Philippians 2:16, NRSV). For Arleen, remaining in that love and holding fast to the word of life was not a static enterprise; rather, it involved a continual opening up to texts and people that would usher in the spirit. Arleen’s openness to being moved and transformed by the spirit was

contagious, and this is why those who knew Arleen described her in interviews as extraordinary, insatiable, delighted, vibrant, vital, catalyst, lover, and saint.

V. Arleen McCarthy Hynes: A Revelatory Text?

Whether Arleen’s narrative will be the kind of transforming influence that elicits latent elements of divine grace which John Henry Newman describes and which Arleen seems to have been open to during her lifetime depends on the response of each individual reader. On first blush, because she is not a well-known figure, her life might not seem the most obvious choice to a spiritual biographer seeking to retool hagiography for a new generation. Yet what makes Arleen unique is that the lens used to examine her life—the transformative role of text—might also apply to the text of her life. In other words, a slow, meditative reading of her life could have the same potential to change a reader as her poetry did for the patients of St. Elizabeths, the sisters at St. Benedict’s, and Arleen herself. It was a fortuitous confluence of themes that she herself practiced this form of transformative reading throughout her life. Those transitional times in her life in which certain texts carried her over the threshold to different life stages formed the structure for this study. This approach allowed for different layers of textual interpretation to be operative in this spiritual biography. The subject of this spiritual biography was a woman who pioneered a form of transformative therapeutic reading called bibliotherapy. Her own life reflected this form of deliberate reading, especially in times of great change. Her persistent pursuit of holiness meant that her times of transition were also times of a generous opening to the spirit. The subtext of all these themes is that the reading of her life is an exercise in applying the spiritual practice of lectio divina, and to a certain extent the mental health practice of bibliotherapy, to the text of her life.
Will everyone who reads Arleen’s life be changed by it? Was everyone who knew her changed by her? The answer is very likely no. There are possibly some who would scoff at the notion that her life could be told in the form of a spiritual biography, dismissing it as something that in their view an ego-driven Arleen would have sought were she alive. Her next door neighbor for many years in Collegeville, Jody O’Connell, said Arleen thought too highly of herself. Other Minnesota neighbors thought her too judgmental. Some of her own children, especially the ones still at home when Michael and Emerson died and Arleen went to work at St. Elizabeths, had great difficulty (and perhaps still have difficulty) forgiving her for her inattentiveness to their pain and self-destructive behavior during those years.

The story written here might not ring true for other reasons. Her life might in the end sound too much like those traditional patterns of sainthood, with its predictable motifs and conspicuous absences of ambiguity, which this work has attempted perhaps imperfectly to move beyond. This work’s structure, with its three transitional stages each with its three transformational texts, may seem to be forced. Has it been demonstrated that there is enough evidence to substantiate the claim that texts were transformative in Arleen’s life? Was she really always growing and changing, or did the same nagging inadequacies appear again and again throughout her life?

Others might decide that Arleen’s life was interesting and indeed holy enough to warrant a biography, even one that attempts to trace the role of texts in the spirit’s movement in her life, but that a spiritual biography overreaches. It might be seen as hubris to attempt to produce a text with transformative force; it smacks of claiming some sort of divine authority or authorship. Probably there is no other person as aware as I am of the humbling effect of setting out to write a
transformative text. If there is anything worthy of praise in these pages, it is another example of
the spirit flowing through an imperfect vehicle. To the extent that the work falls short of being a
revelatory text, it is my responsibility. To the extent that some hint of a God at work in Arleen’s
life shines through, it is grace. My hope is that God will carry this work to completion. I
remember the humbling reminder that Arleen perceived as a message from the Holy Spirit and
that she recorded in her journal a few years before her death; “It is my grace, not your
achievement.”\textsuperscript{528}

And this end is what a spiritual biography hopes to proclaim: that grace and mercy and
even perfect love do operate in the lives of ordinary people. A spiritual biography stands on the
belief that there is a God who does extraordinary things in the lives of people open to growth and
change, open to receiving God’s love in gratitude. A spiritual biography begins with a perception
that the universal call to holiness is for everyone, that holiness is a call for each person to receive
God’s gifts and to offer one’s own finite and flawed life in gratitude for those gifts. Tracing the
spirit in such lives is an effort to show that potentially all people can be pointers to God who in
the heart and mind of the believer is the source of all that is good and true and beautiful.
Ultimately the lens used in this dissertation was the lens of the spirit. To do the academic work
of spirituality is a rare gift in the academy as it begins and ends with a belief in a Trinitarian God
who creates, restores and sustains us. Deo Gratias.

Appendix A: Obituary for Arleen McCarty Hynes


Sister Arleen McCarty Hynes, who pioneered the use of bibliotherapy at St. Elizabeths hospital by engaging patients in literature as a process of healing and personal growth, died Sept. 5 of liver cancer at the Saint Scholastica Convent nursing home in St. Cloud, Minn. She was 90.


Hired in 1971 as a patients’ librarian at the country’s only federal mental health hospital, Sister Arleen expanded the library services offered there. She introduced a movie and a lecture series, provided a place where patients could listen to music and lent artwork for display in patients’ rooms.

“She made it a service center and a homey place,” said Kenneth Gorelick, a psychiatrist who worked with Sister Arleen at St. Elizabeths. “She just had this knack, this talent for enriching the lives of those she touched.”

She began exploring more deeply her interest in books as therapy, focusing on literature that stimulated the imagination rather than on didactic books. She discovered the work of New York psychiatrist Jack J. Leedy, who edited the book “Poetry Therapy: The Use of Poetry in the Treatment of Emotional Disorders” (1969). Sister Arleen’s attention turned to the fledging field of poetry therapy, with its use of metaphor, imagery, rhythm and other treatments.

“It began with some drug therapy I was asked to do at the hospital, and I got interested in therapy through reading, something like poetry therapy,” she recalled in a 1977 Washington Post article. “There was no place to train for it, so I taught myself. I started running classes in the evenings with maybe seven people, training librarians in the techniques.”

A charismatic woman with flashing blue eyes, Sister Arleen was a brilliant teacher, Gorelick said. In group sessions, patients were encouraged to read poems, short stories or essays and to discuss their own feelings and maybe write their own responses. Sometimes, she brought in objects – an autumn leaf or an engineer’s cap – to stimulate the senses.

“It has to be stuff they can relate to, stuff that appeals to their own human experiences,” she said. “What happens is that the patients learn to open up to each other, and also they get staff affirmation from the materials, they respond to it in their own ways.”

Sister Arleen became a prime force in establishing the National Association for Poetry Therapy, a leading creative arts therapy professional association, and she hired the first bibliotherapist at

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St. Elizabeths. In 1978, she was awarded the Dorothea Dix Award in recognition of her contributions at St. Elizabeths, and in 2002, she was recognized by the poetry therapy association.

Arleen McCarty Hynes was born prematurely May 3, 1916, in Sheldon, Iowa, with an identical twin sister. Her mother died giving birth to the pair. Her father raised their seven older siblings, and the twins were adopted and raised by an aunt.

After graduating with a library science degree from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn., she married Emerson Hynes. They built a house they called Kilfenora in the woods in Collegeville, Minn., near St. John’s University, where her husband taught philosophy and sociology.

A steady stream of visitors came to talk and laugh at Kilfenor, including relatives, monks and others associated with the college. The couple also hosted regular gatherings of the “Movement” – a collection of liberal Catholic artists, writers and thinkers, including activist Dorothy Day and novelist J.F. Powers and his wife, Betty Powers.

In 1959, the family, which included 10 children, moved to Arlington when Emerson Hynes agreed to serve as legislative assistant to his former classmate, Eugene J. “Gene” McCarthy, who had been elected to the U.S. Senate.

Sister Arleen worked with a study group on Vatican II and served on the National Council on Aging.

As the Virginia president of the American Association of University Women, she did a pioneering study on the role of women in 1962.

When McCarthy ran for president in opposition to the Vietnam War in 1968, Sister Arleen served as the head of Volunteers for McCarthy. The campaign took its toll on her husband, said family members, contributing to a stroke and in 1971, a fatal heart attack.

At 55, Sister Arleen went to St. Elizabeths, where her work engaged more than 100 patients a week. By 1981, she felt strongly the need to be a part of a spiritual community. She retired from St. Elizabeths and joined the Sisters of St. Benedict.

A son, Michael Hynes, died in 1970.

In addition to her daughter, of Chicago, survivors include eight children, Denis Hynes of Collegeville, Patrick Hynes of Arlington, Hilary Daley Hynes of Burtonsville, Brigid Hynes-Cherin of Washington, Peter Hynes of Cedar Creek, Tex., T. More Hynes of Winnebago, Minn., and Timothy Hynes and Christopher Hynes, both of Austin; 22 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.
Appendix B: Inspirational Quotes Etched on Kilfenora’s Walls
“Work is love made visible.” Kabril Gibran
“Who shall find a valiant woman?” Proverbs 31:10
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