


GOD	LOVES	THE	
AUTISTIC	MIND		
		PRAYER GUIDE	
			FOR THOSE ON THE SPECTRUM
FATHER			AND THOSE WHO LOVE US
MATTHEW	P. SCHNEIDER, LC		

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## APPENDIX A

### What Is Autism?

I THINK THAT most of my readers picking up this book already have a decent understanding of autism, but I figured a brief overview might be needed for some readers. If you live with this condition or have a family member who does, you probably already understand the basics. However, I can see religious professionals reading this book as their first book on autism.

Many conditions are characterized by a single trait. For example, someone who is Deaf can't hear or someone who is a paraplegic can't move his or her legs. Autism, however, is a combination of traits rather than just one. As a person needs some traits, but not all traits for a diagnosis, almost every trait that is observable externally is missing in some autistics. I think it is important to describe it both from outside using the standard diagnostic manual and from inside as people on the spectrum experience it.

According to the DSM-5, an autistic person should have some traits in at least three areas. The first area is: "Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts."<sup>108</sup> This means, for example, not reading social cues, difficulties in eye contact, awkwardness in reciprocal communication, difficulty maintaining relationships, or difficulty in speaking. This last can be anything from the stereotypical flat affect to being non-verbal. The second area is: "Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities."<sup>109</sup> This criterion includes

repetitive motor movements (stimming or flapping), insistence on sameness, very obsessive or limited interests, hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity, and fascination with certain light and movement. This criterion indicates that an autistic person must have some of these traits, and many of us don't manifest every aspect. The final criterion makes sure that the prior two are properly attributed to autism: they must be present from an early age (although they can become more evident due to later situations), they must cause impairment in ordinary life, and they must not be better explainable by intellectual disability.

The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network has a good summary of autism from the perspective of autistic individuals rather than clinicians. It begins, "Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us. Autistic people are an important part of the world. Autism is a normal part of life and makes us who we are."<sup>10</sup> They note that we all experience autism differently, but have a few similarities. I summarize their list, adding in how I personally experience it.

- Autistics have different sensory processing. This might be that bright lights are painful or that we love it super bright. I think this is often a smaller range as I tend to like the brightest office but also am generally the first to put on sunglasses when outside. This can also be in how we like certain sensations like a weighted blanket, moving back and forth on a rocking chair, or repeated hand movements. Repeated actions are often called fidgeting by others, but we prefer stimming, as it is behavior done for the sensory stimulation provided—not due to nervousness as fidgeting often is. An autistic person who is over-stimulated will have a strong reaction such as a shut-down or meltdown. A meltdown may seem like a tantrum to

some outside, but it is a non-voluntary response to being overwhelmed, while a tantrum is a voluntary act of trying to get one's way.

- Autistics think differently. This may include intense interests, oddities in focus, or executive functioning difficulties. Executive functioning involves decision-making, scheduling, planning activities, starting and finishing tasks, and organization. Executive functioning issues explain why we prefer routines. I personally don't need a precise routine, but I need a schedule in advance. Any change with a notice of less than forty-eight hours would create a significant challenge for me.
- Autistics move differently. Often, we have challenges with coordination or things like controlling voice volume. As noted above, had the DSM-5 existed in the 1980s, this issue would have led to a childhood diagnosis for me.
- Autistics communicate differently. This varies a lot, as some like me generally sound neurotypical at first, but then you might notice my intonation is just off "normal." Others have trouble speaking at all, so they use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), which takes various forms such as a picture board on their iPad.
- Autistics socialize differently. Most people get social rules subconsciously and they assume others do—so much so, that most neurotypicals can't even explain half the social rules but follow them without thinking. I can follow a lot of social rules, but in so doing, I'm making a conscious effort in things others do subconsciously. Other autistics have trouble even following social rules at all. In socializing, most people rely subconsciously on what is called theory of mind to intuit what the other person is feeling/thinking. We often have issues with

intuiting what neurotypicals are feeling or thinking. Many of us can attest to being better able to “get” non-verbal cues when with fellow autistics than in the wider society.<sup>111</sup>

I think that both perspectives help us view autism from inside and outside. If we know what it is from outside, we can better recognize it. If we know what it is from inside, we can better sympathize with or help an autistic person. You will notice a fair amount of overlap in the definitions, but the external definition tends to focus more on relations with others while the internal definition focuses more on thinking and sensory differences. As the psychological definition is for diagnosing autism as a disorder, it focuses more on the negative aspects. On the other hand, the internal definition includes things that are neutral or positive as well. We might have a unique and unusual focus, but if we can parlay that into an academic or research career, that focus becomes a strength. Or for example, I think having to do theory of mind consciously helps me in posting online, as it is easier to bring something we consciously do in face-to-face conversation over to a social media post, than what is sub-conscious in face-to-face interaction.

## APPENDIX B

# Basic Catholic Prayers

### The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

### Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

## Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

## Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

## Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

## Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins, because of your just punishments, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.

*Contrition can also be expressed in your own words, such as:*

Jesus, I ask your forgiveness for my sins. I am sorry for offending you. Please help me to avoid all sin in the future.

## Prayer to Saint Michael

Saint Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

## Angel of God

Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom God's love entrusts me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

## Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

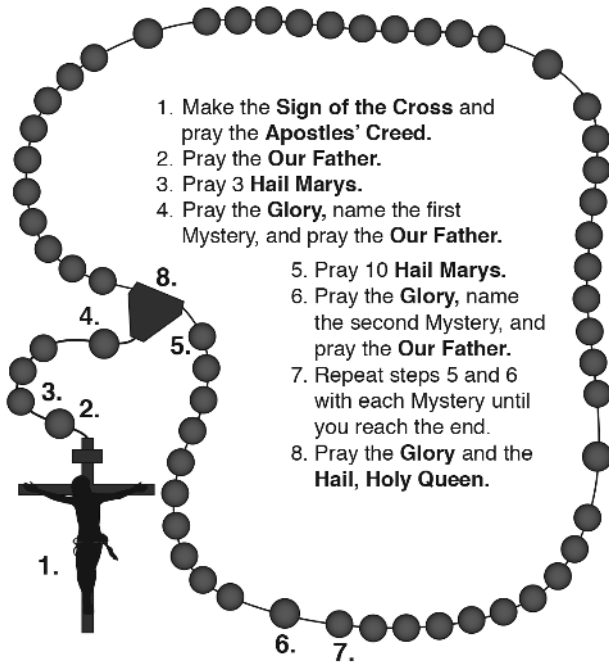
## How to Pray the Rosary

Begin the Rosary by making the Sign of the Cross; then, while holding the crucifix, pray the Apostles' Creed. On the beads of the small chain pray one Our Father, three Hail Marys, and one Glory Be. Next, announce the mystery and pray one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and a Glory Be. This completes one decade. All the other decades are prayed in the same manner, while pondering the mystery for each decade. Pray the Hail, Holy Queen at the end.

### JOYFUL MYSTERIES

*(Usually prayed on Mondays and Saturdays)*

1. The Annunciation of the Angel to Mary
2. Mary Visits Her Cousin Elizabeth
3. The Birth of Jesus at Bethlehem



1. Make the **Sign of the Cross** and pray the **Apostles' Creed**.
2. Pray the **Our Father**.
3. Pray 3 **Hail Marys**.
4. Pray the **Gloria**, name the first Mystery, and pray the **Our Father**.

5. Pray 10 **Hail Marys**.
6. Pray the **Gloria**, name the second Mystery, and pray the **Our Father**.
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 with each Mystery until you reach the end.
8. Pray the **Gloria** and the **Hail, Holy Queen**.

4. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

### LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

*(Usually prayed on Thursdays)*

1. The Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ
2. Jesus Reveals His Glory at the Wedding at Cana
3. Jesus Proclaims the Kingdom of God and Calls Us to Conversion
4. The Transfiguration of Jesus
5. The Institution of the Eucharist

## SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

*(Usually prayed on Tuesdays and Fridays)*

1. Jesus Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane
2. Jesus Is Scourged
3. Jesus Is Crowned with Thorns
4. Jesus Carries the Cross to Calvary
5. Jesus Is Crucified

## GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

*(Usually prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays)*

1. Jesus Rises from the Dead
2. Jesus Ascends into Heaven
3. The Holy Spirit Descends on the Apostles
4. Mary Is Assumed into Heaven
5. Mary Is Crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth

## APPENDIX C

# Method of Mental Prayer

*(For a fuller treatment of this method, see pages 26–30.)*

**1. Concentrate:** I enter God's presence by setting aside other activities and concerns and calling to mind that I am going to converse with God. If I like, I can pray a particular vocal prayer that can begin this time of prayer.

**2. Capture:** In this stage, I grasp the material which I will be praying about during the meditation. I pick up the Bible or a spiritual book and read a section, and then go back over it slowly.

**3. Consider:** Now I move from simply reading a text to entering into it. For example, by using my senses to imagine the scene (from Scripture or the life of a saint), or by reflecting on a truth of the faith described in the passage.

**4. Converse:** Start a dialogue with Jesus to connect my meditation to my life. I might ask him questions, or consider whether he is asking something of me, or thank him for being close to me.

**5. Commit:** Now I make some small resolution from what I prayed about and offer it to Jesus.

**6. Contemplate:** I spend a good amount of time just being in God's presence, not thinking about a particular passage or asking God for anything, but just being there with him.

## APPENDIX D

# Advice for Autistic Penitents and Those Who Hear Their Confessions<sup>112</sup>

Autistics make up 1.5 to 2 percent of the population. I'm one of that group.

As awareness of autism grows, more pastoral sensitivity to our particular needs is also developing . . . even if slowly.

It is rare that we see information on how we autistics can best go about preparing and making our Confession, or how priests should hear our Confessions. We are not too radically different, but a few accommodations or adaptations can help us immensely in this sacrament.

Since I've gone public about being autistic, I've gotten a number of questions from both autistics and priests about dealing with certain autism-specific situations in the confessional. I hope to provide a few quick pointers below for both sides of the screen.

### Preliminary observations

The basic issue with autism is that our brains are wired differently from 98 percent of the population. In some things, this is advantageous: we often are great at long-term memory,

detail-oriented work, or logic. However, it creates some difficulties. Much of the wiring issue is a lack of certain connections. For example, in the instant between you seeing someone and your conscious awareness of seeing them, your brain filters the images for facial expressions and social cues. That filter is lacking or weak for us autistics. Some of us have learned to compensate, consciously or semi-consciously, but the conscious filter takes a lot more work and usually is not as precise as the subconscious filter.

Many stereotypical autistic behaviors such as stimming (fidgeting, rocking, hand-flapping, etc.) are attempts to regulate our bodies due to how we receive emotional or sensory brain signals. When we have a meltdown or shutdown, this is not a willful action, but rather our brains simply shutting down due to overload, much like a car “overheating.”

By adulthood, many of us have realized when this “overheating” is coming on, and what causes it, so with effort we can avoid the shutdown, or generally keep it less disruptive for others, with mechanisms such as hiding in our rooms. When I feel a shutdown coming on, for example, I go to my room and rock on my rocking chair with deep pressure for an hour, as I’m incapable of doing much else.

## Realizing what is sinful

As sin requires a willed choice, we autistics need to become aware of the limitations due to our condition and not accuse ourselves of sin when our actions have been involuntary, or voluntary, but motivated by the recognition that a certain action might be needed in order to avoid something worse, even if it annoys those around us.

Misreading someone's emotions is not sinful unless we intentionally do it. Not looking someone in the eyes is not a sin, especially if this is necessary for self-regulation. Stimming is not a sin. Having a meltdown or shutdown is not a sin. Many times we don't even realize we are being rude, unless we are told so by others.

Nonetheless, we should attempt to cope with our condition in the most charitable way. For example, I used to stim by clicking a pen repeatedly, but several people told me that the sound annoyed them. Thus, I switched to a more silent stim that accomplishes the same goal.

Autistics often tend toward scruples, but as a fellow autistic who is also a moral theologian, let me give you a rule of thumb: If you're not sure if one of your autistic traits is willed, it probably isn't.

Unless we are intentionally rude, we are probably not at fault, so no need to confess it. Likewise, for priests hearing an autistic person's confession: you may have to explain to them that certain things—like unintentional rudeness—are not sins.

## In the Confessional

As a fellow autistic, I'd generally recommend you start off by mentioning to the priest that you are autistic. Then, if he hears you confessing "lack of charity," such as "avoiding eye contact" or "annoying others with my actions," he can help you evaluate if in your case there is any lack of charity here. (Even for non-autistics, behaviors related to what is socially acceptable may not have any moral bearing, i.e., they are simply not sinful, even if they are not "socially acceptable.")

And by the way, fellow autistics, if you struggle with eye contact, I'd really recommend confession with a screen—so long as you don't need augmentative and alternative communication or something similar. Priests, please realize that autistics often find eye contact difficult or painful, so please don't insist on it. We tend to be honest to a fault, so we aren't looking away to deceive you.

Almost everyone gets nervous in confession. This includes autistics, but added to the regular nervousness is our extra sensory or social difficulties. This often leads us to stim more during the sacrament, to regulate these emotions and sensory issues. If you are autistic, have no fear about stimming in the confessional. Priests, please just realize that stimming is a natural part of being autistic and don't worry.

Some will have challenges speaking. The Church teaches that the penitent must communicate—not specifically speak—their sins to the priest, so using a written note or other non-verbal communication works. Some will have a laptop equipped with pictures for AAC (augmentative and alternative communication). If you are autistic, don't feel bad handing the priest a note or typing on AAC if you can't talk, even if you are verbal at other times. Some autistics also know sign language. (However, most priests don't know sign, so you may need an interpreter who is bound to the seal as strictly as the priest. I've started to learn sign to help people who need it for confession, but I am far from being able to understand a confession in sign.)

Some who have low functional IQ or extreme communication issues will need to use a visual list of sins where the priest can ask, "Did you X?" while pointing to a picture of X, to which the autistic penitent can nod or shake his or her head.

Priests: If anything comes up where you need to question an autistic penitent, please be concrete and/or illustrate what you

mean with an example. “Did you want what someone else had so badly that you wished it was taken from them?” is far clearer to us than “Were you jealous?”

While this limited space doesn’t allow me to go into more, I hope this initial advice can help both autistics and those who hear their Confessions. I am not omniscient, but being one of the few who is both a priest and autistic, I think I have something unique to offer on this question!

One final recommendation: As autistics tend to be anxious—they have an anxiety diagnosis at a much higher rate than the general population—advice on how to deal with anxiety is usually also helpful.

# Notes

## Introduction

“In fact, we are nearly twice as likely as anyone else (1.84 times) to never attend church, and not attending church is more likely for us than for persons with any other condition.”

1. See Andrew L. Whitehead, “Religion and Disability: Variation in Religious Service Attendance Rates for Children with Chronic Health Conditions,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57, no. 2 (2018): 377–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12521>. As compared in this study, those with the following conditions were more likely to attend church at least occasionally: ADD/ADHD, developmental delay, learning disability, oppositional defiant disorder, depression, anxiety, speech problems, hearing problems and a brain injury.

“Also, autistics are significantly more likely to be atheists and agnostics, or to make their own religious system.”

2. See Catherine Caldwell-Harris et al., “Religious Belief Systems of Persons with High Functioning Autism” (CogSci 2011, Online: Cognitive Science Journal Archive, 2011), 3362–66, <http://csjarchive.cogsci.rpi.edu/proceedings/2011/papers/0782/paper0782.pdf>.

“We found strength of religious faith to be a significant predictor of FQOL [Family Quality of Life].”

3. Thomas L. Boehm, Erik W. Carter, and Julie Lounds Taylor, “Family Quality of Life During the Transition to Adulthood for Individuals With Intellectual Disability and/or Autism Spectrum Disorders,” *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 120, no. 5 (September 1, 2015): 395–411, <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-120.5.395>.

“For many parents of children diagnosed with ASD, religion is a means of coping that endures. The importance of religion appears to continue throughout the lifespan, while other sources of support may wane in significance.”

4. Susan L Moerschbacher, “An Exploration of Parental Perceptions of Inclusive Services and Supports Provided by Faith Communities for Children Diagnosed with Autism and Their Families” (Doctor of Education, Lakeland, FL, Southeastern University, 2019), 18–19, <https://firescholars.seu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1042&context=coe>.

A 1999 study in Ireland quoted many parents of autistic children: “I always prayed, it helped me cope”; “I prayed all the time, my faith kept me going”; “Prayer was the only thing that helped”; “Prayer helps, I would have gone crackers if I didn’t pray”; “Even though I was mad with God I still kept praying”; and “Prayer is all we have at the end of the day.”

5. Patricia Coulthard and Michael Fitzgerald, “In God We Trust? Organised Religion and Personal Beliefs as Resources and Coping Strategies, and Their Implications for Health in Parents with a Child on the Autistic Spectrum,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 2, no. 1 (May 1, 1999): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674679908406329>.

However, when they looked at autistic brains in the same scans, they were all different from the neurotypical brains, but also from each other, such that researchers couldn’t even figure out a good way to group them.

6. See Avital Hahamy, Marlene Behrmann, and Rafael Malach, “The Idiosyncratic Brain: Distortion of Spontaneous Connectivity Patterns in Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *Nature Neuroscience* 18, no. 2 (February 2015): 302–9, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.3919>.

This is how most of us with such brains prefer to be called, by margins of between 2:1 and 4:1 depending on the survey.

7. I cite several surveys in this post: Matthew Schneider, “Christians, Please Call Us Autistic, Blind, and Deaf,” *Through Catholic Lenses* (blog), October 17, 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2019/10/christians-please-call-us-autistic-blind-and-deaf/>.

If some Catholic term still seems hard to grasp, I recommend the dictionary Father John Hardon composed, which is searchable online

8. [www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary](http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary).

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER ONE

# Types of Autistic Prayer

Vocal prayer refers to a prayer where a specific predetermined set of words is said aloud or in silence.

9. For a selection of prayers, see Appendix B.

“It is most important that the heart should be present to him to whom we are speaking in prayer.”

10. CCC 2700.

He also notes that repetitive movements similar to the stimming of autistics also tend to create similar patterns of blood flow in the brain.

11. See William Stillman, *Autism and the God Connection: Redefining the Autistic Experience Through Extraordinary Accounts of Spiritual Giftedness*, Kindle (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2006), chap. two: Surrendering to Serendipity.

“To enter on the contemplation now on my knees, now prostrate on the earth, now lying face upwards, now seated, now standing, always intent on seeking what I want.”

12. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Elder Mullan (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1914), 48 (par. 76), <https://archive.org/details/spiritualexercis00ignauoft>.

“His body [the body of the one praying] should also take up the position most suited to recollection.”

13. Joseph Ratzinger, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation—Orationis Formas,” October 15, 1989, para. 26, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19891015\\_meditazione-cristiana\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19891015_meditazione-cristiana_en.html).

“One who is about to enter upon prayer ought first to have paused awhile and prepared himself to engage in prayer throughout more earnestly and intently, to have cast aside every distraction and confusion of thought.”

14. Origen, *On Prayer*, trans. William A. Curtis (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2001), chap. XX, <https://ccel.org/ccel/origen/prayer/prayer>.

“To pray is to be with God.”

15. Charles de Foucauld, *Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, ed. Jean-François Six, trans. J. Holland Smith (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1964), 85.

“Some physical exercises automatically produce a feeling of quiet and relaxation, pleasing sensations, perhaps even phenomena of light and of warmth, which resemble spiritual well-being. To take such feelings for the authentic consolations of the Holy Spirit would be a totally erroneous way of conceiving the spiritual life.”

16. Ratzinger, *Orationis Formas*, para. 28.

“This human way of learning in three dimensions is a wonderful asset for sharing the faith with children with disabilities, impairments, and neurodivergences. Unlike the speech or reading or heavily language-based ways of teaching that fail to engage the attention or enable the interaction of children with disabilities, this prayer corner is a meaningful way to build the practice of hoping in God.”

17. Summer Kinard, “Accessible Prayer Corner Tutorial,” Summer Kinard, March 28, 2019, <https://summerkinard.com/2019/03/28/accessible-prayer-corner-tutorial/>. (Note: Summer Kinard is Orthodox, so the focus is on icons, not statues—I make it either/or here.)

There are various related methods for a structure to mental prayer including *Lectio Divina*, Ignatian Contemplation, the method of Saint Sulpice, and Father John Bartunek’s method.

18. These methods can be found in many sources. Some from whom I take elements are: John Bartunek, *The Better Part: A Christ-Centered Resource for Personal Prayer* (Algonquin, IL: Ministry23, LLC, 2011), pt. I; Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise On Ascetical And Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis, 2 edition (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books & Pub, 2001), 330–39; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life : Prelude of Eternal Life*, trans. Timothea Doyle, vol. 1 (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1989), 446–53.

The steps are there to help us, not to mandate a strict rule that must be followed rigorously. With practice, they tend to simplify and become more fluid.

19 For a summarized outline of this method of mental prayer, see Appendix C.

“No man short of a contemplative will ever reign like a despot over his vast hordes of distractions. He is a happy man, and has done much, who sets up a constitutional monarchy among them.”

20. Fredrick Faber, *Growth in Holiness or The Progress of the Spiritual Life*, 15th American edition (text from: John Murphy & Co., Baltimore, MD, 1890) (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1990), 349.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Deeper Prayer for the Autistic Christian

What is different between autistic prayer and neurotypical prayer? I think we can call this difference the autistic prayer-ridge.

21. I give a talk related to the content of this chapter on YouTube on my channel Autistic Priest called “The Autism Prayer Hump.” It can be found at: <https://youtu.be/HypFRsZ0jGo>.

I hope it is all comprehensible, but some may want to accompany it with a systematic work on the spiritual life.

22. Two possible options are highly recommended: *The Spiritual Life: A treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* by Adolphe Tanqueray, SS, or *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Preludes to Eternal Life* by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. Also recommended are the books by Father Thomas H. Green, S.J., which are more basic: *Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer*, and *Experiencing God: The Three Stages of Prayer*.

Even Temple Grandin, one of the most famous autistics in the United States, said she believed in God more as a principle and moral code than as a person.

23. Cf. Temple Grandin, *The Way I See It: A Personal Look at Autism & Asperger's* (Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, 2015), 196–98. Grandin has addressed this topic multiple times in different works and conferences, any of which could be cited.

“For many people with autism, religion is intellectual rather than emotional activity.”

24. Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism*, Expanded Edition (New York: Vintage, 2006), 223.

In my teens, as an autistic young man, I went in the other direction, finding Kreeft and Tacelli’s *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.

25. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, Reprint edition (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1994).

We take the good desire of wanting young people to have an emotional religious experience of the holy, and we focus on that as the motive of religion without realizing that other factors might be more effective.

26. See Paul Dearey, "Do the Autistic Have a Prayer?," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13, no. 1 (February 3, 2009): 42–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228960802581420>.

"Parents of typically developing children reported that their children's questions were more theological in nature. Children asked about creation and suffering and many other topics, some of them controversial topics frequently in the news (which was absent in the population of children with autism). About 50 percent of the questions children with autism asked were more personal.... All of the questions asked by children with autism were about their own sufferings (a classmate's death) or perceived shortcomings in religion."

27. Valerie Boles, "Understanding the Religious Experience of Children with Autism in the Catholic Church: An Overview of Contextual and Behavioral Factors" (Saint Francis University, 2019), 16–17, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Running-head%3A-RELIGION-AND-AUTISM-1-Understanding-Boles/37313ec05b056ae25e8b640a6f68f979aa3384a4.2019>

"Children with autism spectrum disorder were four times as likely to ask questions related to their own personal spiritual experience than those who were typically developing."

28. Fredrick Faber, *Growth in Holiness or The Progress of the Spiritual Life*, 15th American edition (text from: John Murphy & Co., Baltimore, MD, 1890) (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1990), 349.

“more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest.”

29. Augustine of Hippo, “Confessions,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, trans. J. G. Pilkington, vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), bk. III, chap. 6, par. 11, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110103.htm>.

God is so far beyond sensory images that the images fail to grasp how wonderful union with him is.

30. See John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, ed. Benedict Zimmerman, trans. David Lewis (London: T. Baker, 1906), 112 (Bk. II, Chap. XII, par. 5), <http://archive.org/details/TheAscentOfMountCarmel>.

Kelly, an autistic young lady...

31. I communicated with a number of autistic individuals in preparing this book to get a wider perspective of different autistic prayer experiences. I asked them all permission to use their content but promised them anonymity. Kelly is a pseudonym and whenever an autistic individual appears without a last name or footnote, the name is a pseudonym for one of these anonymous testimonies and the quotations are what he or she told me.

Often people give Aquinas’ five proofs for the existence of God, which are good; however, they are not the only proofs.

32. Cf. Kreeft and Tacelli, *Handbook*, pt. 2: God pp. 45–101.

On his blog, AspiePriest noted that during his formation he was thought to be dishonest about his past, since he had done so little wrong.

33. See aspiepriest, “MMPI-2,” *Aspiepriest* (blog), June 24, 2016, <https://aspiepriest.wordpress.com/tag/mmpi-2/>.

“Such aesthetic solutions do nothing to reflect the adoration that is due to the God who reveals the mystery of his divinity.”<sup>3</sup>

34. Dearey, “Do the Autistic Have a Prayer?” 46.

He explained how the grammar is different.

35. Cf. Rochelle Barlow, “Sign Language Sentences: The Basic Structure,” *ASL Rochelle*, 2019, 2013, <https://aslrochelle.com/blog/sign-language-sentences-the-basic-structure>.

As an example, we might note that “sign” and “sing” are written similarly, while an ASL signer might notice that “Russia” and “brag” are similar, as they both involve hands on hips.

36. Cf. Brenda Cartwright, “Signs That Are Close . . . But Not the Same — Set 1 | Signing Savvy Articles,” *Signing Savvy*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.signingsavvy.com/blog/173/Signs+That+Are+Close...+But+Not+the+Same+-+Set+1>.

For example, a Catholic publisher developed kits to help make sacramental preparation more accessible.

37. Cf. “Adaptive Learning Kits,” Loyola Press, 2020, <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/special-needs/adaptive-learning-kits/>.

Aimée O’Connell and Father Mark P. Nolette have created an online community with *Autism Consecrated: The Mission of St. Thorlák*.

38. <https://autismconsecrated.com/>.

It is interesting to note that Aimée takes Saint Thorlák, an Icelandic bishop, to likely be autistic and has written a biography of him.

39. Aimee O’Connell and John C. Wilhelmsson, *Thorlák of Iceland: Who Rose Above Autism to Become Patron Saint of His People* (San Jose, CA: Chaos to Order Publishing, 2018).

“The Church cannot exemplify ‘the full humanity revealed in Christ,’ bear witness to the interdependence of humankind, or achieve unity in diversity if it continues to acquiesce in the social isolation of disabled persons and to deny them full participation in its life. The unity of the family of God is handicapped where these brothers and sisters are treated as objects of condescending charity. It is broken where they are left out. . . . How can the Church be open to the witness which Christ extends through them?”

40. Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi, 1975, “Report of Section II: What Unity Requires,” in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, ed. Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Grand Rapids, MI: World Council of Churches/Conseil Oecumenique des Eglises, 1997), 112.

“I’m not just trying to help them out on a one-way channel that comes back and helps me; I want to help them become good, to help them to give back as they can.”

41. Matthew Schneider, *How to Live Catholic Social Teaching: Interviews at the Catholic Social Ministries Gathering 2016* (Washington, DC, 2016), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyAWX3PrHnA&ab\\_channel=FrMatthewP.Schneider%2CLC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyAWX3PrHnA&ab_channel=FrMatthewP.Schneider%2CLC).

“Making good laws and breaking down physical barriers is important, but it is not enough, if the mentality does not change as well, if we do not overcome a widespread culture that continues to produce inequalities, preventing people with disabilities from actively participating in ordinary life.”

42. Pope Francis, “Message to Mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities” (Vatican, December 3, 2019), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191203\\_messaggio-disabilita.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191203_messaggio-disabilita.html). I did a longer analysis of this speech in my blog: Matthew Schneider, “Pope Francis: The Disabled Can Be Ministers, Not Just Ministered To,” *Through Catholic Lenses* (blog), December 4, 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2019/12/pope-francis-recognize-accompany-the-disabled/>.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Myths about Autism and Prayer

“Heavenly Father... give these parents wisdom and angelic help in their care for their children, help the child’s siblings to be patient and to grow in self-giving love, grant these families our special support and give them friends who understand and love them.”

43. Prayer for Those with Autistic Children (EWTN, 2011), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHxcHeWTorA&ab\\_channel=EWTN](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHxcHeWTorA&ab_channel=EWTN).

“I command your daughter to be set loose from every demonic oppression, of any autism spirit, in Jesus’ name.”

44. Prayer Against Autism: “Prayer for Autistic Children,” “Deliverance Prayers for Kid with Autism” (Kay ElBlessing, 2014), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e9\\_E9ehbSE&ab\\_channel=KayElBlessing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e9_E9ehbSE&ab_channel=KayElBlessing).

“I bind the spirit of autism,” and “You are healed and delivered of autism.”

45. *Prayer for Autism: Journey to Breakthrough* (Rosetta Daniels, 2016), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVZHxunhnVg&ab\\_channel=RosettaDaniels](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVZHxunhnVg&ab_channel=RosettaDaniels).

“God, I break autism right now... . We thank you God for your anointing power that’s flowing right now and breaking autism.”

46. Prayer for Healing of Autism—John Mellor Ministry of Healing & Miracles (John Mellor, 2014), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoyT6PTAljY&ab\\_channel=JohnMellor](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoyT6PTAljY&ab_channel=JohnMellor).

“Autism is from Satan. It’s demons.”

47. Autism Healing and Deliverance Seminar (Becky Dvorak Healing And Miracles, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpUfZcOoc1g>.

“We see many people set free from demons and healed and one of them was a young girl nine years old who had autism, and that young girl with autism and a lot of other problems... one night in the meeting, my friend Michael just prayed for her and that spirit just left her.”

48. Torben Søndergaard, Torben Søndergaard on Facebook Watch (Torben Søndergaard, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?t=12&v=161526937551710>.

“Do I believe autism could be demonic or influenced by something and people can get healed of it? Of course, I do. I believe people can get healed of every kind of sickness; I believe in a God who created heaven and earth; I believe God can heal everyone.”

49. Torben Søndergaard 51:55 of [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9uFHcovw8o&t=2982s&ab\\_channel=TheLastReformation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9uFHcovw8o&t=2982s&ab_channel=TheLastReformation)

I remember the stinging comments that Christians have said to me: “Nobody knows what causes autism, but it seems obvious that demons are involved somehow.” “I’m not sure how much demons are involved with autism.” “Demons cause autism.”

50. Every one of these people meant well, but their words were destructive instead. You can’t suggest to an autistic person (or to the parents of an autistic child) that demons may cause autism without causing great harm and distress by your words.

Rebecca Giles, “Is Autism Demonic?,” *Christian Autistic*, April 17, 2020, <https://rebeccagilesart.wixsite.com/christianautistic/post/is-autism-demonic>.

“I felt as if my autism was a barrier between me and God, as if I must make a choice between being Christian or being autistic.”

51. Rebecca Giles, “Is Autism Demonic?,” *Christian Autistic*, April 17, 2020, <https://rebeccagilesart.wixsite.com/christianautistic/post/is-autism-demonic>.

Why does this generation have autism and hyperactivity? ... Adultery, masturbation, homosexuality, porn, if you are addicted to these, I say to you in the name of God ... when you get married and have children, there is a high possibility of bearing these types of children. They lead an animal-like life. They copulate like animals. They bear children like animals. Therefore, those children also, will be like animals.

52. Patsy McGarry, "Invitation to Priest Who Blames Autism on Parents 'Should Be Withdrawn,'" *The Irish Times*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/invitation-to-priest-who-blames-autism-on-parents-should-be-withdrawn-1.3917042>.

The best estimates currently put autism at 60–90 percent genetic.

53. Cf. Joachim Hallmayer et al., "Genetic Heritability and Shared Environmental Factors Among Twin Pairs With Autism," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 68, no. 11 (November 2011): 1095–1102, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.76>.

Fortunately, bishops in Canada and Ireland have canceled events where Father Valanmanal was to preach his message, and he himself canceled a trip to Australia when a similar result seemed likely.

54. Cf. Matthew Schneider, "Autism Is NOT Due to Parental Sin, Fr. Valanmanal," *Through Catholic Lenses* (blog), July 23, 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2019/07/autism-is-not-due-to-parental-sin-fr-valanmahal/>.

"It was misinterpreted and misunderstood."

55. Matthew Schneider, "Fr. Dominic Valanmanal, Please Stop Attacking Autistics UPDATED," *Through Catholic Lenses* (blog), November 18, 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2019/11/fr-dominic-valanmanal-please-stop-attacking-autistics/>.

Even non-verbal autistics or those with several learning disabilities disagreed with a cure by 75 percent and 69 percent respectively.

56. See “11,521 People Answered This Autism Survey. Warning: The Results May Challenge You,” *Autistic Not Weird*, October 1, 2018, <https://autisticnotweird.com/2018survey/>.

She hopes that as he gets older, he will be able to describe it better to her.

57. Cf. “What Does My Autistic Son Get Out of Prayer?,” *Psychology Today*, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/all-families-are-not-alike/201812/what-does-my-autistic-son-get-out-prayer>.

“Belief in God depends on theory of mind.”

58. Matthew Hutson, “Does Autism Lead to Atheism?,” *Psychology Today*, May 30, 2012, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/psyched/201205/does-autism-lead-atheism>.

A lack of verbal ability should not take away the thought that this person can pray.

59. See Dearey, “Do the Autistic Have a Prayer?,” 42.

“Throughout history, many saints and people of heroic virtue suffered from mental illness of one sort or another. If we do not recognize this fact, we run the risk of uncharitably and unjustly stigmatizing those who suffer from depression.”

60. Aaron Kheriaty and Fr John Cihak, *Catholic Guide to Depression*, Kindle (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2012), Introduction.

William Stillman has written three of the most popular works on the topic of autism and spirituality.

61. William Stillman, *Autism and the God Connection* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2006); *The Soul of Autism: Looking Beyond Labels to*

*Unveil Spiritual Secrets of the Heart Savants*, Kindle (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2008); *The Autism Prophecies: How an Evolution of Healers and Intuitives Is Influencing Our Spiritual Future*, Kindle (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2010).

“Children . . . , as the purest of innocents, often perceive spiritual experiences only because they haven’t yet been conditioned *not to*”

62. Stillman, *Autism and the God Connection*, chap. three: “Speaking in Silence.” This is also quoted positively indicating the spiritual depth from autistic simplicity in: Olga Bogdashina, *Autism and Spirituality: Psyche, Self and Spirit in People on the Autism Spectrum*, Kindle (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013), 50–51.

He quotes a dad speaking about his then three-year-old autistic son Matt leaving his Batman action figures before Mary.

63. See Stillman, *Soul of Autism*, chap. seven: “Prince of Peace.”

His official website title, “Autism Whisperer and Psychic Visionary.”

64. Stillman, “Autism Whisperer and Psychic Visionary | William Stillman,” accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.williamstillman.com/>.

“It was necessary for me to create my own divine byway to attain authenticity and harvest the spiritual reserve to which I was entitled.”

65. Stillman, *Soul of Autism*, chap. eight: “Pathways to Spiritual Wellness.”

Two particularly problematic sections are about reincarnation and Reiki.

66. “Reiki is a Japanese spiritual practice where hands are laid close to a person but not touching them, so that, according to practitioners, the universal life force is transferred. Christian theology and all scientific

evidence say that such universal energy does not exist as similar calming, non-reiki activities produce as much help for patients.” M. S. Lee, M. H. Pittler, and E. Ernst. 2008: “Effects of Reiki in Clinical Practice: A Systematic Review of Randomized Clinical Trials,” *International Journal of Clinical Practice* 62 (6): 947–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1742-1241.2008.01729.x>.

“Before this incarnation I chose to be born with a disability. I wanted/needed to experience being dependent on others to live. In my other lifetimes I have ruled, led, and taught others.”

67. Stillman, *The Autism Prophecies*, chap. seven: “Casting the Net.”

He quotes a mother named Tricia about her family’s experience of Reiki, which he sees as completely positive.

68. See Stillman, chap. two: “The Art of Healing.”

Getting specific in his final book, Stillman endorses *A Course in Miracles*, directly endorsing one of its heresies—that the physical world is an illusion.

69. See Stillman, chap. one: “The Mechanics of Miracles.”

“I do not presume to be writing about—or representing—*all* persons on the autism spectrum; this is why I have always been careful to use the words *many*, *most*, and *some*, not *every* or *all*.”

70. Stillman, chap. six: “A Remarkable Revelation.”

He argues that the increase in diagnoses is to satisfy the world’s need for “more love, compassion, and tolerance.”

71. Stillman, *Autism and the God Connection*, chap. one: “Making Miracles.”

“I wouldn’t be at all surprised if, within the next five to ten years, the statistics of autism’s incidence in children doesn’t leap to 1 in 10.”

72. Stillman, *The Autism Prophecies*, introduction.

“Neither the Scriptures nor the Christian tradition as a whole speak of the natural world as based on ‘universal life energy’ [as Reiki claims] that is subject to manipulation by the natural human power of thought and will.”

73. Committee on Doctrine of the USCCB, “Guidelines for Evaluating Reiki as an Alternative Therapy” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 25, 2009), para. 9, [https://www.usccb.org/resources/evaluation-guidelines-finaltext-2009-03\\_0.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/evaluation-guidelines-finaltext-2009-03_0.pdf).

“An adequate Christian discernment of New Age thought and practice cannot fail to recognize that... it represents something of a compendium of positions that the Church has identified as heterodox.”

74. Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Jesus Christ The Bearer Of The Water Of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age” (Vatican, February 2, 2003), sec. 1.4, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20030203\\_new-age\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html).

“The fundamental difficulty of all New Age thought is that this transcendence is strictly a self-transcendence to be achieved within a closed universe.”

75. Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Jesus Christ The Bearer Of The Water Of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age” (Vatican, February 2, 2003), sec. 6.2, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20030203\\_new-age\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html).

## PART TWO

### Meditation 1: God Sees the Whole of Me

To Greg and his wife, autism had become “not so much an adversity to overcome as much as it was something that was the core of their children, ingrained in their personalities and infused in their very beings.”

76. Greg Willits, “Our Own Unique Crosses,” in *Special Children, Blessed Fathers: Encouragement for Fathers of Children with Special Needs*, ed. Randy Hain (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2015), 80.

“If a cure for autism was discovered, wouldn’t you *miss* some part of your child’s personality that was caused by autism?”

77. Willits, 82.

“Disabilities do not embarrass God. Rather they are for our salvation and to reveal the glory of God.”

78. Summer Kinard, *Of Such Is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2019), 18.

### Meditation 2: Jesus Loves Me as an Autistic

“I am seriously thinking about the fact of why an autistic person is called to life. It is really worthwhile thinking about this. I thought that there could be no meaning to this call for autistic people, the mentally defective and the mad. But I have second thoughts. And this is not my opinion. Now I fight for an autistic life. I believe that it has a meaning. I alert all autistic people not to lose faith in their lives. Autistic people are as important as other

people. I cry out: the autistic manage to love, to think, to believe in God, to be ashamed. They are sensitive people. They weep in loneliness.”

79. Andrzej Kiciński, “The Theological Foundations of Religious Education for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” in *Proceedings of the XXIX International Conference: The Person with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Animating Hope*, vol. XXIX.3, Dolentium Hominum (The Person with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Animating Hope, New Synod Hall, Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, 2014), 83.

### Meditation 3: Jesus Wants My Heart

“Our feelings of inadequacy can make us forget that being called is not about being worthy. It is about being loved. None of us is worthy of our sacred baptismal vocation to be Christ for others.”

80. Marie Paul Curley, *See Yourself Through God’s Eyes: 52 Meditations to Grow in Self-Esteem* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2009), 24.

### Meditation 5: The Good Shepherd

In 2013, researchers interviewed seventy-eight autistics active in the Dutch Reformed Church and found that, on average, they had more negative views of God than did equally active neurotypicals.

81. Cf. Hanneke Schaap-Jonker et al., “Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Image of God as a Core Aspect of Religiousness,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 145–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2012.688005>.

## Meditation 7: God's Peace Overpowers

“Understanding that fear was created by God for our protection will allow us to accept fear as God's design, versus resisting and running from it. It will also bring us closer to the original purpose of fear, which is worship.”

82. Sarah E. Ball, *Fearless in 21 Days: A Survivor's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* (New York, NY: FaithWords, 2018), 18.

## Meditation 10: Seeing God in Creation

Dan 3:35, 52.

83. Some Bibles will list this as Dan 3:57, 74.

## Meditation 13: In God's Eyes, Being Autistic Is Not Wrong

“This originality of Christianity is expressed in the fact that whereas people with autism are seen as weak and sick by other people, before God, instead, they are great because of what they are.”

84. Kiciński, “The Theological Foundations of Religious Education for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” 85.

“Happy [autistic] people are the ones who have satisfying work in their lives that's connected to an area of strong interest. I realize it's difficult for a lot of parents to understand that their child with ASD may derive greater happiness through work or hobbies than through pure emotional bonding, or that marriage

or family may not be the top of his list of priorities. It's still happiness, nonetheless."

85. Temple Grandin and Sean Barron, *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism*, 1st edition (Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, 2005), 46.

## Meditation 15: My Autistic Identity in Jesus

"It takes more work to communicate with someone whose native language isn't the same as yours. And autism goes deeper than language and culture; autistic people are 'foreigners' in any society... . You're going to have to learn to back up to levels more basic than you've probably thought about before, to translate, and to check to make sure your translations are understood."

86. Jim Sinclair, "Don't Mourn For Us," Personal, Jim Sinclair's Website (via Wayback Machine), Originally "Our Voice, Volume 1, Number 3, 1993," 1993, <https://web.archive.org/web/20030118011731/http://web.syr.edu/~jjsincl/dontmourn.htm>.

## Meditation 16: God Has Wonderful Designs for Me

"What should, therefore, strike us when Jesus invokes God's providential care for birds and plants is that he does not focus on God's care for productive harvests, and does not use the example of doves or lambs, which could be used in religious worship. His examples involve things with no utility or value (grass and lilies) and things which would be considered unclean (ravens), and he indicates that God cares for and clothes these things in ways that exceed any human ascription of worth."

87. Grant Macaskill, *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology, and Community* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019), 78.

## Meditation 17: Imperfections Are Not Sins

“When I was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at age thirty-six, I understood—perhaps for the first time—that I was human. I understood that my years of struggling with certain issues weren’t due to a lack of perfection but an abundance of humanity. I learned that I did have some boundaries and some limitations and that I was indeed human. The journey from weakness to strength is one that requires the traveler to accept limitations as well as appreciate progress.”

88. Lamar Hardwick, *I Am Strong: The Life and Journey of an Autistic Pastor*, Kindle (Little Elm, TX: eLectio Publishing, LLC, 2017), 136.

“Loving self doesn’t mean that we are blind to our faults, but that we accept ourselves as we have been created by God, and we take care of ourselves with gentleness and compassion.”

89. Curley, *See Yourself Through God’s Eyes*, 44.

## Meditation 20: Prayer Without Words

The sinner’s prayer.

90. The ‘sinner’s prayer’ is a common evangelical prayer said at the moment of accepting Jesus into your heart, such as at an altar call. There are several common variations.

“It may seem to be a paradox to say that we can love and follow the Word of God without words. Yet, for many people, prayer must often or always be without speech.”

91. Kinard, *Of Such Is the Kingdom*, 157.

## Meditation 22: The Validity of My Personal Autistic Prayer

Even though we are a small portion of the population, they found much greater variation between different autistic brains than in the neurotypical population.

92. See Hahamy, A., Behrmann, M. & Malach, R. The idiosyncratic brain: distortion of spontaneous connectivity patterns in autism spectrum disorder. *Nat Neurosci* 18, 302–309 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.3919>

## Meditation 23: A Different Viewpoint Can See God

I found a Catholic community through some message boards, most notably OneRock Online Forums.

93. The original seems lost to time but an archived version from 2002 is available on the Wayback Machine. <https://web.archive.org/web/20021213092003/http://board.onerock.com/> (The Wayback Machine also indicates it went offline between 2005 and 2014, with the associated Zine turning into a blog disappearing after 2008). My username—in case any readers remember this message board—was OLoS for “Our Lady of Siluva,” a lesser-known apparition in Lithuania that converted a town from Protestantism to Catholicism.

“The internet has been used effectively as a prosthetic device by individuals with ASD. Free from distracting environments that make communication more difficult and freer from demands for eye contact and reading social cues, autistics took to the internet to have their voices heard, a phenomenon compared with the development of American Sign Language among the deaf.”

94. Katie Terry, “Neurodiversity and Autism Spectrum Disorders: Grounding for Social Work Education and Praxis” (Doctor of Social Work, St. Paul, MN, St. Catherine University, 2019), 6, <https://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=dsw>.

## Meditation 25: Our Senses and Imagination Lead Us to God

Gibson later confirmed that they just couldn't artistically fit all the wounds from the Shroud into the movie.

95. Cf. Jenny Cooney Carrillo, "Gibson, Me—The Passion of the Christ: The Passion of Mel," *Urban Cinefile: The World of Film in Australia*—on the Internet, February 26, 2004, <http://www.urbancinefile.com.au/home/view.asp?a=8559&s=Interviews>.

The proprioception.

96. Proprioception is the awareness of the position of the parts of and movement of our body. It is generally considered part of the sense of touch: often touch is split into several senses, including this. This is related to "vestibular stimming" which is mentioned in meditation no. 18.

## Meditation 27: Beyond Just Emotions

"Most people are subconsciously afraid of digging too deep. Our culture has taught us to remain superficial."

97. Hardwick, *I Am Strong*, 71.

## Meditation 28: Praying for Others

A few years later, Gladys had healthy twins.

98. This story is adapted from: Patricia Treece, "The Many Miracles of Solanus Casey," *Catholic Exchange*, November 14, 2017, <https://catholicexchange.com/many-miracles-solanus-casey>.

## Meditation 29: Mystical Contemplation

“When you pray, it’s just God. You leave yourself behind bit by bit and enter the inner sanctum (power up the CB in your private CB closet). This is where I just wait and the focus is God. That’s when he tells me things. It took a lot of regular practice to be able to clear my mind, and if I stop praying for a week or more, it takes a minute to find my center again. There is a physical feeling that comes from deep communion with God.”

99. “Do You Think Prayer Is Real? Your Opinion? Wrong Planet Autism Community Forum,” Discussion Board, Wrong Planet, January 29, 2012, <https://wrongplanet.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=188137&start=32>.

## Meditation 34: Dealing with Social Situations

“Peter is only pretending not to know Jesus, and really Peter knows and loves Jesus.”

100. Quinton Deeley, “Cognitive Style, Spirituality, and Religious Understanding: The Case of Autism,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13, no. 1 (February 3, 2009): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228960802581479>.

## Meditation 35: The Humility to Accept Misunderstanding

“But his laugh lights the room and he has taught me the meaning of unconditional love, faith that there is a reason for all that comes to us, grace and the sanctity and glory of all life. Regular Mass was too much for him—the number of people, the volume of the singing, the length, the looks of disapproval for making

involuntary sounds from the other parishioners . . . but we found the Adapted Liturgy at a parish in Portland, OR and we were forever changed. Once a month a special Mass is held—lights are low, singing and music are beautiful but not overwhelming, it is a small group of people—and most magically of all . . . our special loved ones can be themselves. If they speak out or yell or move strangely people smile and don't judge. We can celebrate difference and pray for strength without pity but with smiles. Garrett goes to this liturgy and SMILES—he lays his head quietly on my shoulder and just \*is\* and in that moment I know God is with us.”

101. Janice L. Benton, “Animating Hope in Christian Communities throughout America,” in *Proceedings of the XXIX International Conference: The Person with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Animating Hope*, vol. XXIX.3, *Dolentium Hominum* (The Person with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Animating Hope, New Synod Hall, Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, 2014), 92.

He offers a solution where we ask “the neurotypical to clearly state his or her feelings and the depths of those feelings, and what actions would alleviate the distress; or for the person with an ASD to ask exactly what he or she can do to help the person feel better.”

102. Tony Attwood, *Been There. Done That. Try This!: An Aspie's Guide to Life of Earth*, ed. Craig R. Evans and Anita Lesko, 1 edition (London ; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014), 289.

## Meditation 42: A Sacramental Worldview

“I have watched you waste your entire life waiting to be loved by someone who will never love you!”

103. O'Connell, Aimee, *Thorlák of Iceland: Who Rose Above Autism to Become Patron Saint of His People* (San Jose, CA: Chaos to Order Publishing, 2018), 210.

“I, [name], take you, [name], to be my wife/husband. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life.”

104. USCCB, “The Exchange of Consent,” from the *Rite of Celebrating Matrimony*, copyright © United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <https://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-marriage-vows/>.

## Meditation 50: The Resurrection: A World Without Disability

“In what has until relatively recently been a glaring absence of overt autistic representation—both real and fictional—it’s no accident that many autistic people have found resonance in portrayals of artificial humans and electronic beings. Our own—more subtle—technology use forms bonds and becomes the subject of self-deprecating jokes. But the links to our autism aren’t always clearly drawn. I feel technology—both the idea of using technology, and the idea of, on some level, being technology—is a crucial part of any understanding of autistic culture, but no aspect of this discussion is easy to define.”

105. A. C. Buchanan, “Cyborgs, Luddites and To-Do List Apps: An Autistic Use of Technology,” in *Knowing Why: Adult-Diagnosed Autistic People on Life and Autism*, ed. Elizabeth Bartmess (Washington, DC: The Autistic Press, 2018), 139.

“Since interpreters from a disability perspective emphasize the social reality of people with illness and disability and their frequent exclusion from the domestic, religious, and social life of the community, they keenly notice aspects of the healing narratives that point to the healed person’s inclusion into the community after they are healed. Inclusion, incorporation, and liberation are

repeated themes as these interpreters read the narratives. Several use the adjective ‘full’ to describe the person’s ability to participate in the community after they are healed.”

106. Bethany McKinney Fox, *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 89.

## Meditation 51: The Autistic Disciple

“One who is learning or has learned. In the New Testament the word describes any follower of Jesus’ teaching.”

107. Cf. Disciple at [www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary](http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary).

# Appendices

“Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.”

108. American Psychiatric Association and DSM-5 Task Force, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 50.

“Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.”

109. American Psychiatric Association and DSM-5 Task Force, 50.

“Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us. Autistic people are an important part of the world. Autism is a normal part of life and makes us who we are.”

110. Autistic Self Advocacy Network, “About Autism,” Autistic Self Advocacy Network, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/about-autism/>.

Many of us can attest to being better able to “get” non-verbal cues when with fellow autistics than in the wider society.

111. Cf. Autistic Self Advocacy Network, “About Autism.”

## Advice for Autistic Penitents and Those Who Hear Their Confessions

112. This piece first appeared as: Fr. Matthew Schneider, LC, “An Autistic Priest with Advice for Autistic Penitents and Those Who Hear Their Confessions,” *Aleteia*, October 23, 2019, <https://aleteia.org/2019/10/23/an-autistic-priest-with-advice-for-autistic-penitents-and-those-who-hear-their-confessions/>.

# Bonus Material for the Audiobook of *God Loves the Autistic Mind*

## Bonus Chapter: My Journey with Byzantine Prayer Practices and Tips on Eastern Rite Prayer for Autistics

The one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: JESUS. The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity the Word of God hands it over to us and we can invoke it: “Jesus,” “YHWH saves.” The name “Jesus” contains all: God and man and the whole economy of creation and salvation. To pray “Jesus” is to invoke him and to call him within us. His name is the only one that contains the presence it signifies.

1. CCC 2666. References to Ex 3:14; 33:19-23; Mt 1:21; Rom 10:13; Acts 2:21; 3:15-16; and Gal 2:20.

If you want an image of the awkwardness, check out a public domain example of a famous icon in the bonus material .pdf or search “Virgin of Vladimir” icon.

2. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virgin\\_of\\_Vladimir.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virgin_of_Vladimir.jpg)



This is not simply a retreat where you pray for a few hours, but a complete self-emptying.

3. Cf. Catherine Doherty, *Poustinia: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer*, 3rd ed, (Combermere, ON, Canada: Madonna House 2000), 111.

You are forced to confront the silence and live in it, to make silence a time of communication with the Lord, not “the mere absence of noise.”

4. Doherty, *Poustinia*, 6.

Fr. Bob Wild describes it as “A *quieting* of all the noises arising from your superficial needs, addictions, fantasies, wayward desires, and so on.”

5. Robert Wild, *Madonna House as Divine Milieu*, (Combermere, ON, Canada: Madonna House 2015), 113.

This should be a journey inward, a pilgrimage into your heart where you discover the one who, Augustine notes, is “more inward to me than my most inward part.”

6. Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110103.htm>.

“When you enter the poustinia, you enter the orbit of God. You hold his hand. You are free to give in to the temptation, to flee from the poustinia or to resist. There is nothing to guide you except what is within.”

7. Doherty, *Poustinia*, 104-105.

## Bonus Meditation: Praying with Jesus the Good Shepherd

One point a few people have noted about my original book is that I offered a six-step way to do mental prayer

8. Cf. pages 25–30 of *God Loves the Autistic Mind* (print edition)

It also notes that a good shepherd “leads his flock away from dangers and into safe pastures. He is also committed to the welfare of each one of his sheep that he is willing to die for them.”

9. Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch (edd.), *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2024), 1908.