


RESEARCH ARTICLE

History and Spiritual Formation: Baron Friedrich von Hügel's Spiritual Nurture

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Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925) viewed history as the crux of institutional religion. He also believed that our response to God needs to include all three “Elements of Religion”: the “Intellectual Element” (rational and theological), “Mystical Element” (experiential and devotional) and “Institutional Element” (sacramental, community, tradition and history). Given the role of history in the Baron’s “Institutional Element,” it is not surprising that history played a significant role in his spiritual nurture of five individuals. Prayerful reflection upon the historical Christ was central to Evelyn Underhill’s conversion. Learning about secular history broadened Gwendolen Greene, enabling her to appreciate Christian mystical texts more fully. Biblical history helped in the formation of Henri Garceau. However, von Hügel’s use of history in the spiritual formation of Juliet Mansel and his daughter, Gertrud, had mixed results, and is a reminder of the need to be attentive to both individual differences and maturity levels when using history for spiritual formation. This article builds upon prior research about von Hügel as a spiritual director through the inclusion of unpublished letters from several archives, plus focusing upon one area that has not been extensively discussed in previous studies: the role of history in the Baron’s spiritual nurture.

Keywords: von Hügel; Evelyn Underhill; spiritual formation; history; spirituality

Gwendolen Greene: “‘To sanctify is the biggest thing out.’ These words . . . express what he was, what he meant, what he wished most to do. His whole life lies in them. He tried to find truth, to teach us God, to sanctify our lives. He loved, and he wanted to teach us to love.”¹

These words from Gwendolen Greene highlight the centrality of spiritual formation in Baron Friedrich von Hügel’s life and work, particularly during his final decade of life. This article traces the role of history in the Baron’s spiritual formation of five individuals. History is not a commonly emphasized component in contemporary discourse about spiritual formation, but interestingly, engaging with history was a central component of Friedrich von Hügel’s spiritual direction. This is hardly surprising, given history was part of von Hügel’s three “Elements of Religion,” which was the controlling

¹Gwendolen Greene, ed., *Letters from Baron Friedrich von Hügel to a Niece* (London: Dent, 1927), viii–ix.

paradigm for his life. He viewed history as an essential safeguard and enrichment for mystical experience. Von Hügel wanted his spiritual directees to develop an expansive worldview and grow in discernment through reading the great spiritual figures of the past.

The Baron's use of history in formation was slightly different for each spiritual directee, highlighting different ways history can be utilized to support spiritual growth. For Evelyn Underhill, focusing devotionally upon the historic Christ led her to "encounter" Christ; for Gwendolen Greene, reading secular history enabled her to think critically and appreciate the contrasting worldview presented by Christian mystical writings; for Henri Garceau, exposure to biblical history and catechism gave rise to his confirmation. The Baron's formation of two young women also involved history but did not yield such positive results. These failures, however, can be primarily attributed to von Hügel's insensitivity to the developmental needs and personalities of both directees, and his provision of unsuitably difficult historical readings. Pressuring Juliet Mansel to make history her vocation and suggesting historical books to read while nursing on the war front was clearly counterproductive. Pushing his daughter Gertrud into the complexities of biblical historical criticism and leaning on her emotionally caused her breakdown.

This research contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, drawing extensively upon von Hügel's *unpublished* letters and diary entries provides a window into his formation of individuals that has not been captured in the existing scholarly literature. Second, no substantial discussion of the Baron's use of history to nurture individuals has been written to date. These five stories of von Hügel's spiritual direction are uncovered from original research from several British archives: University of St. Andrews, Special Collections, Downside Abbey archive, King's College London archive, The House of Retreat Pleshey archive, plus two British family archives.

This article builds upon previous research about von Hügel as a spiritual director by Douglas Steere² and Ellen Leonard.³ Both scholars provide penetrating observations but have relied entirely on published letters and acknowledge "room" for further research of the Baron's spiritual counsel.⁴ Though Hinson, Maeder, Mitchell, and Maddock emphasize the value of von Hügel's soul care, they only provide general overviews, include no unpublished letters or diary entries as source material, and do not focus upon history in the Baron's soul care.⁵ Johns' recent chapter, entitled "Historically

²Douglas Steere, *Gleanings* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1986), 55–71; Douglas Steere, *Spiritual Counsel and Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 1–34.

³Ellen Leonard, *Creative Tension. The Spiritual Legacy of Friedrich von Hügel* (Scranton, PA: Scranton University Press, 1997); Ellen Leonard, "Traditions of Spiritual Guidance. Friedrich von Hügel as a Spiritual Guide," *The Way* (July 1991): 248–258; Ellen Leonard, "Friedrich von Hügel's Spirituality of Empowerment," *Horizons* 21, no. 2 (1994): 270–287.

⁴Steere, *Gleanings*, 21. Similarly Joseph P. Whelan's book, *The Spirituality of Friedrich von Hügel* (London: Collins, 1971), and the unpublished thesis by Peeters about Gwendolen Greene similarly draw upon published letters only: G. Peeters, "Friedrich von Hügel en Gwendolen Greene: Themata uit Letters to a Niece" (Lic. diss., Catholic University of Louvain, 1970).

⁵Michael Maeder, "Being Human—A Study of Friedrich von Hügel," *Sisters Today* 44, no. 4 (1972): 183–197; Michael Hanbury O.S.B., "Baron von Hügel's Growing Fame," *Pax* 329 (Autumn 1972): 73–76; E. Glenn Hinson, *Spirituality in Ecumenical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 161–176; Keith Mitchell, "Avuncular Counsels: von Hügel and His Letters to a Niece," *Month* 29 (1996): 68–71; Keith R. Maddock, "Following the Light: Prescriptions for Spiritual Guidance from Friedrich von Hügel," *Presence* 9, no. 1 (2003): 8–14.

Ungrateful,” highlights von Hügel’s critique of a lack of history in the writings of George Fox, but does not mention this concept in the Baron’s own spiritual direction.⁶

In our increasingly complex world, the study of history is more important than ever. History has the potential to provide us with both perspective and wisdom through learning from figures more prayerful than most moderns, observing how they approached similar challenges. Also, seeing the big picture historically can help us more understand the present. But in recent decades, history has sometimes been viewed as an “irrelevant” luxury.⁷ At a time when the importance of history is often downplayed, sidelined, or diminished, it is timely to consider the role of history in spiritual formation.

Introducing Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925)

Baron Friedrich von Hügel was described in his day as the “most learned man living” and a “religious genius.”⁸ But despite these accolades regarding his academic acumen, the Baron’s biographer, Bedoyère, argues that von Hügel’s scholarship and learning were the least of his claims on posterity. “Far beyond them” was his contribution as a “unique personal explorer and guide into the deepest things of the spirit” and his “special genius . . . offering help and guidance to so many.”⁹ The Quaker philosopher, Douglas Steere, echoes this view, describing von Hügel’s “spiritual counselling” as the “central axis” setting the frames for his intellectual contribution, thus he should be “chiefly remembered . . . as a guide and encourager of souls.”¹⁰ The Baron’s own debt to his spiritual director, Abbé Huvelin, and the seventeenth-century scholar-saints, provided some of the impetus for his desire to similarly enrich others’ lives. His “supreme interest” lay in “souls and their growth.”¹¹

Von Hügel’s childhood involved immersion in rich contexts, full of history. His father was a Rhineland Baron in the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic service, so von Hügel lived in Florence for his first eight years. The Baron reflects upon how he developed a vivid sense of a “mysterious divine Presence in the churches of Florence. Thus historical religion was with me . . . from the first.”¹² His next decade was lived in Brussels, then he spent most of his adult life in London. This cosmopolitan upbringing awarded him fluency in several languages. The Baron never attended school, so his own formal, historical knowledge was gained through home tutors, plus his own wide reading as a gentleman-scholar, with the inherited title, Baron of the Roman Empire. Though he never attended University, von Hügel was awarded honorary doctorates from the Universities of Oxford and St Andrews, plus an invitation to present the Gifford lectures. Von Hügel’s lack of formal education helped him develop an originality in his thinking, plus a freedom from fads in scholarship that can occur in particular locations. C. C. J. Webb acknowledged the Baron’s “more free and individualised

⁶See Chapter 11 in David. L Johns, *Quakering Theology* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2016).

⁷For example, see W. Woodward and R. Smithers, “Clarke Dismisses Medieval Historians,” *The Guardian*, May 9, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/may/09/highereducation.politics>.

⁸Michael de la Bedoyère, *The Life of Baron von Hügel* (London: Dent, 1951), xi; *Journals of C. C. J. Webb*, 7 Dec 1888–23 Jun 1890, Bodleian Libraries, Archive of the Webb Family (CMD ID 8670), MS. Eng. Misc. e. 1139.

⁹Bedoyère, *Life*, xii, xiv.

¹⁰Steere, *Spiritual*, 5.

¹¹Evelyn Underhill, *Mixed Pastures* (New York: Books for Libraries), 233.

¹²Edmund Gardner, ed., *The Reality of God and Religion and Agnosticism* (London: Dent, 1931), 80.

flowering of his intellectual and emotional, richly human nature.”¹³ Von Hügel’s delicate health forced his scholarship to be balanced with rest, daily walks, conversations, church visits, and deep prayerful reflection. This provided his writings time to percolate, allowing, in his words, the opportunity for “living and growing into it.”¹⁴

History and the Three “Elements of Religion”

Von Hügel declared he could not live without a religion “full of history.”¹⁵ This conviction is clearly revealed in his *magnum opus*, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, published in 1908.¹⁶ He chose to portray a “large-souled pre-Protestant, post-Medieval Catholic,” Catherine of Genoa.¹⁷ Von Hügel’s motive was to have “long, close contact with a soul of most rare spiritual depth” who presents the “greatness, helps, problems and dangers of the mystical spirit.”¹⁸ He insisted that history possesses a “method, type and aim” quite different from the physical sciences, with an “irreplaceable function” in the development of the “fullest spiritual life,” including its “consolidation” and “growth.”¹⁹ The Baron wanted to discover how a soul who had developed such a taste for God, still makes room for the historical, institutional, and intellectual elements in her religious life.²⁰

In volume I, von Hügel outlined his “Three Elements of Religion,” and this became an organizing principle for both his life and his spiritual direction. Crudely put, the “Three Elements” are the “Intellectual Element” (rational and theological), “Mystical Element” (experiential and devotional), and “Institutional Element” (church involvement, the sacraments, community, tradition, and *history*). The Baron argued that having all three elements operating in creative tension is necessary, and to omit one element impoverishes our response to God. Von Hügel was a living example of the need for an “active, intellectual, and mystical life.”²¹ Even though his two-volume tome has the Mystical Element in its title, von Hügel spent more time discussing the Institutional Element, and history is a fundamental aspect of that element.

History and the “Institutional Element of Religion”

Earlier, in his 1905 paper “The Place and Function of the Historical Element in Religion,” von Hügel argued that though the natural sciences have “greater clearness” and “transferableness,” the historical sciences have “indefinitely greater vividness, depth and reality.”²² He believed that religion requires “close and inexpressible” relations with history; we need to include the historical for religion to “express itself,” so it

¹³Webb Journals, Mss Eng Misc d1117.

¹⁴Bedoyère, *Life*, 191–192.

¹⁵Lawrence Barmann, *The Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel and Professor Norman Kemp Smith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 282.

¹⁶Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (London: Dent, 1908).

¹⁷Von Hügel, *Mystical*, vi.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Von Hügel, *Mystical*, viii.

²⁰Steere, *Spiritual*, 169.

²¹Gwendolen Greene, *Two Witnesses* (London: Dutton, 1930), 144.

²²Edmund Gardener, ed., *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion. Second Series* (London: Dent, 1921), 33–34.

needs to be studied “according to the method, categories, and ideals of History.”²³ The Baron believed all genuine religion requires “really happened Historical Facts and Persons,” thus Christianity’s greatness resides in its “all-pervasive and persistent Incarnational trend”; “God, the Eternal Spirit, here reveals Himself to us, and touches us, in Duration and through Matter.”²⁴ This idea of historicity was most evident in von Hügel’s focus upon the historical Jesus of Nazareth, as outlined in an essay on Christ: “Our souls are only awakened to the presence of spiritual realities when a contingent and historical stimulus from without excites them. . . . The central affirmation to which we adhere is the Incarnation of God in man—and this is in a unique and definitely historical manner.”²⁵

In his first volume of *Essays and Addresses*, the Baron reiterated that Christianity is the “original awakener of the deeper Historic sense,” given the centrality of the incarnation.²⁶ He even dedicated his volume to Dante “in lively gratitude for inspiration and support throughout some sixty years of spiritual stress” and emphasized how the “Golden Middle Age markedly deepened” our “apprehension” of what it is to be human.²⁷ In his biblical articles, von Hügel also emphasized the necessity of rigor coupled with freedom in historical criticism.²⁸ History and the Institutional Element were also highlighted in his second book, *Eternal Life*, published in 1912.

History and the Cultivation of “Eternal Life”

In *Eternal Life*, von Hügel not only provided a meticulous history of “Eternal Life,” but he emphasized history as the “crux” of Christianity. He wrote, it is “only in and through History, only by means of concrete happenings in time and space,” that humanity can awaken and apprehend God.²⁹ One of the aims in his spiritual nurture was helping people cultivate an awareness and sense of this abiding presence of God, as the primary means to growth. In describing the soul, which “practises and experiences Eternal Life,” von Hügel implicitly suggested that being aware of God’s presence is something that can be nurtured.³⁰ Von Hügel wrote that the functioning of Eternal Life in the believer requires “Duration, *history*; Space, Institutions; Material Stimulations and symbols, something sacramental.”³¹ The Baron clearly held the conviction that history is important in spiritual growth.

Von Hügel wrote that to experience Eternal Life is to live a qualitatively different life; it is the experience of “a Living One . . . Who, touching me, the inferior, derivative life, can cause me to live by His aid and for His sake.”³² Von Hügel’s idea that “intimations” of eternal life can be experienced in our present lives if we are spiritually alive points to

²³Gardener, ed., *Essays*, 34.

²⁴Friedrich von Hügel, *Eternal Life: A Study of Its Implications and Applications* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1912), 342.

²⁵Bedoyère, *Life*, 165–166.

²⁶Friedrich Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, First Series (London: Dent, 1921), xvi.

²⁷Von Hügel, *Essays I*, v.

²⁸For example, “The Historical Method and the Documents of the Hexateuch,” *The Catholic University Bulletin*, Washington, DC (April 4, 1898), 198–226 + 7 appendices; “John, Gospel of St.” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. 15 (1911): 452–458.

²⁹Von Hügel, *Eternal*, 342.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 390.

³¹*Ibid.*, 392–393, italics added.

³²Von Hügel, *Eternal*, 385.

his understanding of the mystical element of religion.³³ He believed the indwelling of eternal life gives us a double sense of reality, for we live in two worlds, the seen and unseen, and this double sense will “make us profoundly concrete, *historical*, incarnational, ontological, real.”³⁴ This idea of experiencing eternal life now is a crucial concept underlying von Hügel’s theology of spiritual formation, and history clearly plays a crucial role.

The Role of History and Mysticism in von Hügel’s Life

History and mysticism were significant for von Hügel, both in the context of Catholic modernism and in his life more generally. Despite his desire for “elbow room” and freedom in critico-historical studies of scripture from as early as 1884 and his subsequent modernist involvement, it was the Mystical Element rather than the Historical Element that was most operative throughout the Baron’s life. Recent scholarship, such as Talar’s *Modernists and Mystics*, highlights the “incongruous combination” of modernism and mysticism in von Hügel, who looked *forward* in terms of historical critical studies of Scripture, but simultaneously was constantly looking *back* to the past mystical tradition of the church; he was a modernist with a “mystic turn.”³⁵ Another recent commentator, Stoll, explores the importance of mysticism and “religious experience” in von Hügel’s life, similarly emphasizing the influence of historical mystics plus Protestant contemporaries such as William James and Ernst Troeltsch.³⁶ Kallistos Ware highlights the importance of the Mystical Element for the Baron, not simply in terms of the “subjective experience,” but also as the “objective truth which that experience mediates”; hence mysticism requires “an expression of theological fact” concerning God, as revealed historically in the incarnation.³⁷ So we see some streams of contemporary scholarship highlighting this weaving together of both mysticism and history in von Hügel’s lived reality.

Earlier commentators have similarly emphasized the importance of the mystical element in the Baron’s life and writings. Barmann argues we can only truly see von Hügel if we consider him in a “larger context” than Catholic modernism.³⁸ He contends that it was the “mystical dimension” that most “attracted” von Hügel, enabling him to “flourish”—informing and guiding his critical biblical studies, which were just one aspect of his “over-all pursuit of God.”³⁹ Similarly, Leonard emphasizes the necessity to see the Baron’s critical biblical study alongside his study of mysticism, given that the “creative tension” and “friction” of his attempts to integrate the three elements

³³Lawrence Barmann, “The Modernist as Mystic,” in *Catholicism Contending in Modernity*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 237.

³⁴Von Hügel, *Eternal*, 368, italics added.

³⁵William L. Portier and C. J. T. Talar, “The Mystical Element in the Modernist Crisis,” in *Modernists and Mystics*, ed. C. J. T. Talar (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), xi, ix.

³⁶Christian Stoll, “The Modernist Interest in Mysticism. Friedrich von Hügel’s Contribution to the Discourse on ‘Religious Experience’ around 1900,” *The Downside Review* 139, no. 2 (2021): 115, 105–121.

³⁷Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, “Baron Friedrich von Hügel on the Mystical Element of Religion: Has the Baron a Message for Us Today?” in *Mystical Theology and Contemporary Spiritual Practice*, eds. Christopher C. H. Cook, Julianne McLean, and Peter Tyler (New York: Routledge, 2018), Ch. 1.

³⁸Lawrence Barmann, “Friedrich von Hügel as Modernist and as More than Modernist,” *Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (Apr. 1989): 211.

³⁹Barmann, “Modernist,” 221–223.

lie at the heart of his spirituality and are part of his spiritual legacy.⁴⁰ Kelly also argues that von Hügel stressed the primacy of the mystical element, but never lost sight of the fact that religion is always “mediated and has an external historical component of God addressing his people in words and deeds, in flesh and blood.”⁴¹ Sherry highlights the importance of God’s transcendence for the Baron, hence the necessity for religion to be dependent on “historical facts” to safeguard against subjectivism; God has “acted in history,” hence the “happenedness” of historical facts.⁴² A recurring underlying conviction for von Hügel was that the eternal is mediated through events, hence the Mystical Element is both an encounter and historic actuality.

History was always vividly operative in the Baron’s life, and the historical/institutional element of religion was particularly significant for him as a Catholic living in England. Von Hügel represented European Catholics who had brought their international flavor and breadth to English Catholicism.⁴³ But Anglican-Catholic controversy had already emerged powerfully during the nineteenth century. Von Hügel was in correspondence with John Henry Newman during the very years when we see William Gladstone’s *Rome and the Newest Fashions in Religion* and John Henry Newman’s *Reply to Mr. Gladstone’s Pamphlet*.⁴⁴ Alongside these church controversies, the Baron also operated in a context when historical biblical criticism was beginning to shake religion’s traditional authority. As church attendance began to decline, mysticism began to flourish.⁴⁵

The Revival of Mysticism

In von Hügel’s day, the growing emphasis on critical historical analysis of scripture was coupled with a revival of interest in mysticism. Houston views this turn toward mysticism as a “cultural reaction” to the Enlightenment’s rationalism, which had “suppressed the human spirit” through emphasizing “thinking rather than living.”⁴⁶ In 1899, W. R. Inge’s Bampton Lectures were published as *Christian Mysticism*, followed by the Baron’s two-volume tome, *The Mystical Element of Religion* in 1908, then Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* in 1911. International names promoting mysticism at the time included the American Quaker, Rufus Jones; the Swedish Lutheran, Nathan Söderblom; the German philosopher, Rudolf Otto; and the American psychologist, William James. This shift became the first “reinvention” of mysticism since the seventeenth century when Michel de Certeau had enabled mystical texts to emerge as a distinct class.⁴⁷ The experiential was again beginning to be taken seriously, but past misrepresentations of mysticism meant scholars were careful to make the distinction between “abnormal” and “normal” mystical experiences, explicitly distancing

⁴⁰Leonard, *Creative*, 3–4, 157.

⁴¹James J. Kelly, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel’s Philosophy of Religion* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1983), 213.

⁴²Patrick J. Sherry, “Von Hügel’s Retrospective View of Modernism,” *Heythrop Journal* 28, no. 2 (1987): 180.

⁴³Leonard, *Creative*, 17.

⁴⁴See SAUL, ms2897.

⁴⁵Jane Shaw, *Pioneers of Modern Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2018), 6.

⁴⁶James Houston, *Joyful Exiles* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 64.

⁴⁷Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Making of Modern ‘Mysticism,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (June 2003), 275, 279.

themselves from theosophists and occultists.⁴⁸ Von Hügel was deeply disturbed by theosophy and spiritualism, and was vividly aware that religion that neglects the historical can produce “emaciated and twisted stereotypes and patterns of emotional religion.”⁴⁹ Though he emphasized intuition and the experiential, he always recognized the “place of history as a science” with its “purifying and deepening role,” and emphasized historical revelation.⁵⁰ As Steere notes, von Hügel planted “the nail-marked foot of Jesus Christ” in the “door of any such excess” that demanded a “reckoning.”⁵¹ Also, the Baron believed we can only live “deeply and faithfully” in the ‘Present’ if we are profoundly and affectionately rooted in the Past,” for we are “only awakened, by the Past,” hence religion requires “factual happenings . . . contingencies in time.”⁵² So von Hügel brought the life of the spirit into creative tension with the historical, through a meticulous exploration from all angles coupled with a prayerful learning posture, open to whatever truth there was to find. Central to this work was the Baron’s ongoing reliance on historic models in mysticism. History, for von Hügel, meant attentiveness to the Community of Saints. On All Saints Day, he would “look up” at the “glorious, touching company”; he was animated by those “heroic souls” of former times.⁵³

Von Hügel’s Formation through Historical Figures: “One Torch Lights Another”

History was key to the Baron’s ongoing personal integration, as he was inspired by saintly models who had lived before him. It is hardly surprising his daily devotional reading included à Kempis’s *Imitation* and Augustine’s *Confessions*.⁵⁴ Von Hügel’s devotional life, with its rich dependence on these historic readings, enabled him to grow in openness and prayer, so that the mystical could truly flourish in his life.⁵⁵ The Baron believed “souls—all human souls—are deeply interconnected,” hence the human need to be rooted in a community of faith, particularly in the historic “invisible” church.⁵⁶ Von Hügel called this the “sacred torch race across the ages” whereby “one torch lights another.”⁵⁷

The primary “torch” for von Hügel was Abbé Henri Huvelin (1838–1910), who confirmed his pursuit of the mystical dimension. The Baron wrote, “I learnt all I know from Huvelin.”⁵⁸ The Abbé led von Hügel towards “large-souled,” seventeenth century, French scholar-saints such as Fénelon, Grou, and de Sales, who became powerful models regarding spiritual nurture.⁵⁹ Von Hügel later reflected, “I have been immensely helped by the St. Francis de Sales-Fénelon-Grou type and hence have worked to put

⁴⁸Schmidt, “Making,” 290.

⁴⁹He assembled a reading list for a Vicar whose parish was “much infected by Spiritualism.” Barmann, *The Letters*, 143; Steere, *Spiritual*, 7.

⁵⁰Leonard, “Traditions,” 250.

⁵¹Steere, *Spiritual*, 26.

⁵²Gardener, *Essays*, 65, 124.

⁵³Greene, ed., *Letters*, 72.

⁵⁴Holland, ed., *Selected Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel 1896-1924* (London: Dent, 1927), 203.

⁵⁵Barmann, “Modernist,” 223.

⁵⁶Holland, *Selected*, 269.

⁵⁷Friedrich von Hügel, “The Catholic Contribution to Religion,” *The Student Movement* 51: 51-53; Greene, ed., *Letters*, xv.

⁵⁸Greene, *Letters*, xv.

⁵⁹See Wrigley-Carr, “The Mystical Theologian: The Influence of Abbé Henri Huvelin on Baron Friedrich von Hügel,” *The Downside Review* 131, no. 465 (2013): 184.

these helps within the reach of others also.”⁶⁰ The Baron was constantly aware of wanting to learn from the “great minds of the past.”⁶¹ He believed that “standing upon their shoulders” he would be able to “see still further than they did,” but on his “own feet alone” he would “certainly see much less far than any of them saw.”⁶² But this was not simply hagiography. These historical figures provided von Hügel with powerful examples of the mixed life of historical scholarship and mystical experience, which became central to his life.⁶³ Recognizing how the Quietist movement had devalued historical, incarnational Christianity, the Baron looked to what Lash calls the “forgotten tradition of ‘wholeness’” of pre-Reformation Catholicism as a correction.⁶⁴ His historical work on St. Catherine of Genoa revealed the limitations of a mysticism that did not give enough attention to the institutional.⁶⁵

The Baron repeatedly highlighted the importance of history as a safeguard to mysticism in his spiritual direction. As a gentleman scholar, von Hügel had time to provide spiritual direction and was highly sought after. It seems the Baron’s insights were in demand because he could “penetrate” and “vivify” souls and “discern” spirits, and he possessed a “spiritual persuasiveness” that pointed to the reality and “loveliness of God.”⁶⁶ Of the five spiritual directees discussed in this article, Underhill, Garceau’s parents, and Mansel’s grandparents requested his guidance. The other two directees, Greene and Gertrud von Hügel, were invited to read with von Hügel.⁶⁷ We now turn to examine von Hügel’s spiritual direction of five individuals, particularly focusing on the role of history in their formation.

History and Christ: Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941)

Evelyn Underhill: “I owe him my whole spiritual life.”⁶⁸

Evelyn Underhill was not brought up on religion, and though confirmed an Anglican at boarding school, it had meant little to her.⁶⁹ She read philosophy books in her father’s library as well as making annual trips to Italy where encounters with religious art and architecture gradually opened up for her the unseen, mystical reality. Around 1903, she became a member of an occultic brotherhood, the “Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn,” but by 1905, she had lost interest and left the group. In 1907, Underhill

⁶⁰Friedrich von Hügel, “Fénelon’s ‘Spiritual Letters,’” *The Tablet* 83. 2821 (2 June 1894): 858.

⁶¹Gardner, *Reality*, 23.

⁶²Ibid., 22.

⁶³Harman Grisewood, *One Thing at a Time* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), 95–96.

⁶⁴Nicholas Lash, “Modernism, aggiornamento and the night battle,” in *Bishops and Writers*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Wheat Hampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977), 67; Portier & Talar, “Mystical”, 5.

⁶⁵Leonard, *Creative*, 70.

⁶⁶Underhill, *Mixed*, 230.

⁶⁷The Baron’s earlier involvement in Catholic Modernism has blindsided some commentators concerning the value of the Baron’s spiritual direction. For example, Fenton describes it as “sinister”, “inept”, “undesirable”, “hopelessly faulty. . . strikingly ignorant”, capable of causing “serious spiritual harm” and “not. . . acceptable”. Fenton’s reactive assessment was made before Vatican II when authors connected to Modernism, like the Baron, were somewhat “rehabilitated” Joseph C. Fenton, “Von Hügel and his Spiritual Direction,” *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 133 (1955): 113–114, 126; Joseph C Fenton. “Von Hügel and Ecclesiastical Authority,” *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 133 (1955): 37.

⁶⁸Charles Williams, ed., *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill* (London: Longman, Green & co, 1943), 196.

⁶⁹Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill. Artist of the Infinite Life* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991), 8.

went on a retreat at the Franciscan Convent of Perpetual Adoration at Southampton. Gradually “the net closed in” as she was “driven nearer and nearer to Christianity” and was “converted” quite suddenly, convinced that Catholicism would be her home. But her fiancé’s opposition halted her conversion and she wandered for over a decade without a Church home and experienced “spiritual troubles.”⁷⁰ During the war she “went to pieces” for her abstracted, disembodied mysticism could not sustain her through the war’s harsh realities.⁷¹ While researching Jacopone da Todi in 1918, Underhill started to perceive the limitations in her neo-Platonic worldview, encountering a Christocentric spirituality that began to take her beyond her philosophically based Theism.⁷²

Underhill had been a successful writer in Christian mysticism for many years by the time she asked von Hügel to help with her “spiritual views” and “practices” in 1921.⁷³ Von Hügel replied he had been praying and longing for her to be readied by God.⁷⁴ Being vividly aware of Underhill’s wide influence and readership, he hoped she would become “more harmonious and more deep in herself” so she would do “much pure good” rather than in his words, “a little harm mixed with some good.”⁷⁵ Straight away he asked Underhill to write a report concerning “where she stood,” then responded with a “rough set of rules and proposals.”⁷⁶

Von Hügel diagnosed Underhill’s affliction with “pure mysticism,” which had led to her drifting towards a vague “inwardness.”⁷⁷ The Baron recognized Underhill had read and thought a great deal, leading to an excess of the Intellectual Element, coupled with a spirituality disconnected from the historical Christ and the church. Von Hügel believed she needed “deintellectualising,” for too much blood was lodged in her brain,⁷⁸ plus she required balancing through the Institutional Element, particularly with a Christocentric focus. Her mysticism needed to be brought into tension with both the institutional and historical, so history became a key component in von Hügel’s development of Underhill’s Christocentricity. History would provide the essential “corrective against the delusions of a false Mysticism.”⁷⁹ For the Baron had a “horror of Pantheism” and believed we escape it “through Christ,” thus he emphasized a “transcendent immanentism something that we do not make but find.”⁸⁰

Underhill had known von Hügel for a decade before asking him for spiritual direction in 1921. They first met in 1911, when von Hügel visited her to discuss her book, *Mysticism*. It is striking that even at this early stage, the Baron’s critique highlighted Underhill’s lack of attention to “institutional, *historical*. . . religion.”⁸¹ Two months

⁷⁰The House of Retreat Pleshey Archive (hereafter cited as PA), Menzies Unpublished MS, XI, VIII, XI.

⁷¹St Andrews University Library Special Collections, Letters from F von Hügel to Evelyn Underhill, ms5552 [hereafter SAUL]; D. Greene, *Fragments from an Inner Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1993), 20.

⁷²Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone Da Todi, Poet and Mystic 1228–1306* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1919).

⁷³Greene, *Letters*, 174.

⁷⁴Steere, *Gleanings*, 64.

⁷⁵Greene, *Letters*, 174.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Greene, *Fragments*, 27.

⁷⁸Cropper, *The Life of Evelyn Underhill* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Publishing, 2003), 75.

⁷⁹Gardener, *Essays*, 54.

⁸⁰Greene, *Letters*, xxxvi; Gardner, *Essays*, 121.

⁸¹Underhill had sent von Hügel the book with the inscription: “To the Baron von Hügel this is offered with gratitude and deep respect by the writer.” HugB828.U7, Special Collections, St Andrews University (SAUL); Cropper, *Life*, 45, italics added.

later, Underhill wrote: “I have become the friend (or rather the disciple and admirer) of von Hügel. He is the most wonderful personality I have ever known—so saintly, so truthful, sane and tolerant. I feel safe and happy sitting in his shadow.”⁸²

In the following decade, we see several mentions of Underhill in von Hügel’s diaries. Many of these contacts involve his encouragement to take history seriously. For instance, von Hügel answered her questions about “New Testament Mysticism,” dropping in written articles to her.⁸³ In 1913 after Underhill published *The Mystic Way*, von Hügel wrote her an encouraging note, saying, “[H]ow carefully you seem to have borne in mind the all important place and function in religion of liturgical acts, of the Sacrament, of the Visible, of History.”⁸⁴ Von Hügel provided occasional encouragement to Underhill over the following six years, until he was invited to be her spiritual director.

From 1921, von Hügel spiritually directed Underhill twice a year via letter, providing explicit direction and had her write a report each six months. He “purposely” decided not to see her in-between, despite the fact she lived only a short walk from him.⁸⁵ Underhill came to von Hügel with a Unitarian mindset with no practices of Christocentric prayer and with only a distant respect for the Incarnation.⁸⁶ A focus on the historical Christ was key in her transformation from her “pure mysticism.” The Baron told her that some historical happenings are required in Christianity, so he encouraged her to gently drop her nonhistorical approach, inviting her to view Christ as the revelation of God. She was to try to develop a religion of a “definitely historical kind” that includes Christ’s life and death.⁸⁷ Gradually, Underhill came to the point of being able to write to von Hügel:

Historical values in religion. Yes! I now fully and solidly accept your position. . . . The main historical happenings . . . especially the Passion—are absolutely necessary to Christianity as I understand it. . . they now mean a great deal more to me. Also as regards Holy Communion, the historical link comes in strongly, and at least part of what it seems to me . . . is the feeling of being linked with, and doing the same thing as all the others who have really cared, right from the beginning—and through them, stretching back to the beginning, too.⁸⁸

Von Hügel wrote in response that he was “delighted” with her “growth here.”⁸⁹ Thereafter Underhill made history part of her Rule of Life in 1921: “Try to set about humble, full, definite development of principle of God found in history, here and now . . . and make this part of the rock of personal faith. Realise that all powerful and personal religion requires some historical happenings as essential to its completeness. Strive to eliminate a merely philosophically based Theism in favour of real Incarnationalism.”⁹⁰

⁸²Williams, *Letters*, 199.

⁸³Von Hügel’s Diary, SAUL (hereafter cited as “D”) 10/12/1912; D:10/12/1912, Special Collections, St Andrews University.

⁸⁴Cropper, *Life*, 52, italics added.

⁸⁵Greene, *Letters*, 175. However, Menzies argues that Underhill did visit him on several occasions, given she was so relieved to find someone who understood her. PA, Menzies Unpublished ms, IX.21.

⁸⁶Cropper, *Life*, 99.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 79–82.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 100.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 85–86.

The Baron urged Underhill to “feel the factualness, the happenedness [sic] of our Lord, of His Passion, and of the Holy Communion” and thus “feed and articulate the Christocentric movement.”⁹¹ She was to try to work “wholeheartedly” making “Historical Happenings” the “chief beams” of her “spiritual edifice, part of the rock, known and willed at all times of your faith” for such belief he deemed “necessary.”⁹² Underhill was told that God manifests Himself through “historical happenings,” through Christ in the manger and on the cross; it was crucial to “gain” that incarnational mindset, by “at least thinking of Our Lord at Holy Communion.”⁹³ But Underhill found it impossible, declaring she could not “do” Christo-centric devotion.⁹⁴ The Baron was firm, arguing that her “hopelessly Theocentric mind and practice” required Christocentric devotion; she should try to nurture a “sensible, contingent, historical, incarnational current,” since it had been “starved, and if she could not pray to Jesus as “God Incarnate,” she should simply pray to “God Unincarnate” affectionately pondering “Nazareth, the Lake of Galilee, and/or Calvary, where so much love was shown . . . for God and by God.”⁹⁵

Gradually, a shift began to occur from Underhill’s “purely mystical, philosophic” stance, to a more “Catholic Incarnational” spirituality and practice; “the two currents being gradually interwoven, with special care given to the Incarnational and Sacramental,” given it had been “specially starved.”⁹⁶ By 1922, Underhill began to “bridge the gap between theism and Christian devotion,” and felt her “universe” was “all in one piece again” with the “transcendental and incarnational currents . . . woven together,” but Underhill admitted the “incarnational current” was still weak.⁹⁷ With time, the “Christocentric side” nearly dominated, becoming “deeper and stronger.” She wrote to the Baron with joy:

I never dreamed it was like this. It’s just beginning now to dawn on me what the Sacramental Life really does involve: but it is only in flashes of a miraculous penetration I can realise this. . . I have never known before such deep and real happiness, such a sense of at last having got my real permanent life and being able to love without stint where I am meant to love. It is as if one were suddenly liberated and able to expand all round. Such joy that it sometimes almost hurts. All this, humanly speaking, I owe entirely to you.⁹⁸

In 1927, looking back, Underhill wrote of how prior to meeting with von Hügel, she had been a “convinced Theocentric,” a “Unitarian” who thought Christocentric language and practice “sentimental and superstitious” and had “no experience” of Christ. She continued: “Somehow by his prayers or something, he compelled me to experience Christ. He never said anything more about it—but I know humanly speaking he did it. It took about four months—it was like watching the sun rise very slowly—and then suddenly one knew what it was.”⁹⁹

⁹¹Ibid., 99–100; ms5552:39, SAUL.

⁹²ms5552/1, SAUL.

⁹³Ibid. Von Hügel similarly said it “will ever give us a religion sufficiently lowly, homely, humbling.” ms5552/1, SAUL, 5/11/1921; Greene, *Letters*, 174.

⁹⁴Cropper, *Life*, 74.

⁹⁵Ibid., 81.

⁹⁶Ibid., 86.

⁹⁷Ibid., 95.

⁹⁸ms5552, SAUL, 42–43.

⁹⁹Williams, *Letters*, 26.

Thereafter Underhill found her experience of God centering with “increasing vividness” on Christ; the New Testament, which she had never been able to “make much of” or meditate upon, became “full of things never noticed,” becoming “more alive and compellingly beautiful.” Holy Communion became more “wonderful.”¹⁰⁰

Though Underhill is unequivocal about the positive value of the Baron’s spiritual direction, questions remain concerning the place of patriarchal “obedience” in this nurture. Sarah Coakley identifies ways that gendered relationships often include roles of “power” and “submission.”¹⁰¹ Though Underhill appears to accept von Hügel’s insistence that she needs “deintellectualising,” at times his language as spiritual director indicates forceful control. For example, “So long as you choose to remain under my Direction, you will, please never think of any confessions.”¹⁰² He was similarly authoritative when instructing her about retreat attendance: “I do not recognise your right (given that you choose to have me for your spiritual advisor) to go without consulting me.”¹⁰³ Underhill does not appear to be uncomfortable, declaring in a facetious way, “I have kept on my collar-and-chain.”¹⁰⁴ Despite this throwaway line, the Baron’s dominance toward Underhill appears to sometimes have authoritarian and somewhat suffocating overtones. It is worth balancing this, however, with von Hügel’s repeated more freeing words to other directees to ignore unhelpful advice: “Leave out all that does not help you.”¹⁰⁵ So perhaps von Hügel was unusually forceful and assertive with Underhill, who told Menzies the Baron could be severe: “You should see *my* old man.”¹⁰⁶

Despite these lingering questions, Underhill spoke in glowing terms of von Hügel’s “rich and balanced vision”¹⁰⁷ and the “depth of the riches which he had to bestow” as “father of souls.”¹⁰⁸ The importance of history and the incarnation was central to von Hügel’s formation of Underhill, helping her gain a Christocentric focus that she retained for the rest of her life. Inclusion of instruction about Christ’s historical life during spiritual direction is hardly surprising. What is less usual is the inclusion of *pagán* history, as evident in von Hügel’s nurture of Gwendolen Greene.

Secular History and Spiritual Formation: Gwendolen Greene (1878–1959)

Gwendolen Greene: “To my Uncle I owe, under God, all I see.”¹⁰⁹

Gwendolen Greene was the second daughter of the British composer, Sir Hubert Parry, and Lady Elizabeth Hubert, and was von Hügel’s niece. She grew up among the “Souls,” amidst the heart of late Victorian artistic and musical society with dinner party guests like Beatrix Potter, Oscar Wilde, and numerous composers.¹¹⁰ Greene was an accomplished violinist who married the baritone singer Harry Plunket Greene in 1899.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell’s, 2002), xii.

¹⁰²Ms5552.37, SAUL.

¹⁰³Cropper, *Life*, 97.

¹⁰⁴Ms5552.53, SAUL.

¹⁰⁵Greene, *Letters*, x.

¹⁰⁶PA, Unpublished Menzies MS, IV.21.

¹⁰⁷Underhill, *Mixed*, 225.

¹⁰⁸Evelyn Underhill, “The Essence of von Hügel,” *The Spectator* 141 (Dec. 1928): 823.

¹⁰⁹Gwendolen Greene, *Mount Zion* (London: Dent & Sons, 1929), xi–x.

¹¹⁰Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1964), 219.

They had three children, but the marriage was abusive, so she left him in 1919. Three years earlier, the Baron had invited Greene to read with him. Greene reflects, "I welcomed this reading, and we started . . . with a history of Rome."¹¹¹ Von Hügel nurtured Greene until his death in 1925. His nurture is captured through seventy-seven of the letters he wrote to her (117 in total), published in *Letters from Baron von Hügel to a Niece*, plus entries in his daily diaries during these years. In her thirty-eight-page "Introduction" to the volume, Greene adds her perceptive reminiscences. After the book was published, Greene received letters from people all over the world asking her how to "live" the letters. Her book, *Mount Zion*, was her attempt to answer their questions.

The Baron was explicit about his nurture of Greene primarily through history. He wrote: "I want to teach you through history. History is an enlargement of personal experience, history pressing the past. We must have the closest contact with the past. How poor and thin a thing is all purely personal religion! . . . You must get a larger experience—you gain it by a study of history. . . . I want you to learn about the great souls that lived through all those tracts of time. . . . Religion to be deep and rich must be historical."¹¹²

Through an immersion in history, von Hügel sought to help Greene avoid an "individualistic, sectarian, single Bible-texts, point of view," for he told Greene, "You cannot get these great questions solved . . . except through much history, institutions, Church appurtenances."¹¹³ Greene describes first hand the Baron's method: "He wanted to try and strengthen my character, feed my soul: and I was to learn through history."¹¹⁴ This historic approach to spiritual direction through engaging freely and rigorously with *secular* readings appears to have been fairly original. Certainly, Greene's subsequent spiritual director, Father Bede Jarrett, did not utilize this method.¹¹⁵

Von Hügel began Greene's historical education with a great deal of pagan history, beginning with Roman history and poetry, and the persecution of the Christians, then moving onto Greek historians and philosophers.¹¹⁶ Von Hügel had very clear reasons for beginning this way. First, he wanted to help Greene develop a large, historical world-view as a basis for later introducing Christian readings. Second, he wanted her to recognize the factuality and historicity of Christianity against the backdrop of ancient Rome.¹¹⁷

Third, his desire was that Greene understand the context and background within which Christianity arose in order to help her see more clearly the differences between Gnostic and Pagan thinking and the Christian thinking that followed it. He hoped that

¹¹¹Gwendolen Greene, *Two Witnesses* (London: Dutton, 1930), 93–94.

¹¹²Greene, *Letters*, xiv.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, xi.

¹¹⁵Simon Tugwell O.P. and Dom Aidan Bellener, eds., *Letters of Bede Jarrett* (Bath, UK: Downside Abbey & Blackfriars Publications, 1989), 103–104, 110. Father Jarrett was Greene's spiritual director from 1926 until his death in 1934.

¹¹⁶The readings included, Boissier's *Histoire du Paganisme*; Juvenal, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*; books by Caesar, Cicero, Lucretius, Virgil, Tacitus, Horace, Livy, and Pliny; Wiseman's *Fabius*; Allard's *Persecutions*; and Prudentius's *Cathemerinon*. They also read Greek books: Bury's *History of Greece*, Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Thucydides, Gilbert, Murray, Croiset, *Iliad, Odyssey*, Hesiod, Minucius, Felix (Octavius), Socrates, Plato (*Phaedo, The Republic, Four Socratic Dialogues of Plato*), Thucydides (*The Sicilian Expedition*); *Speeches*, Minucius Felix, Pindar, Whitley (*Companion to Greek Studies*), Aristotle, and Plotinus.

¹¹⁷Greene, *Letters*, 37.

when she later read religious books, they would “penetrate and purify a whole mass of not directly religious material and life,”¹¹⁸ and that she might recognize the difference between Socrates’s tone and the teaching of the Christians.¹¹⁹ He told Greene that exposure to Gnostic works was designed to “bring home the reality, the irreplaceableness, of Christianity” and to “protect” her through the “self-expansion we can attain by history, from the Esoteric Buddhists, the Spiritualists” and “Gnostics of our day.”¹²⁰

Fourth, von Hügel felt that intertwining this “double current” of the “directly religious” and “directly not religious” would help Greene be less reactionary to issues.¹²¹ Such a “double current” was designed to enable Greene to critique the “windy impulses” and “wild rootlessness” of politicians. Von Hügel wrote: “The habitual living in a world steeped in history, in knowledge of the human heart—your own, first and foremost, and, above all, in a sense of the presence, the power, the prevenience of God, the healing Divine Dwarfer of our poor little man-centred, indeed even self-centred schemes.”¹²²

Fifth, exposing Greene to this intertwined history was to help her become “self-trained in the fruitful art and virtue of gathering roses amidst thorns, and of discerning jewel eyes in a toad’s head. I want my niece to end up becoming such a discriminator.”¹²³ Sixth, von Hügel wanted Greene to be able to see the big picture historically so she could more fully understand the present. He commented, “I am trying to get such words as ‘Rome,’ ‘Athens,’ etc. to mean a great rich world to you.”¹²⁴

When von Hügel finally introduced Greene to Christian writings,¹²⁵ she complained that they made nonreligious subjects “insipid.”¹²⁶ Von Hügel replied, “Ignore, and vigorously . . . react against, this mentality,” encouraging her to continue pursuing this “double current” of religious and nonreligious reading.¹²⁷

The Baron also nurtured Greene through historical spiritual writings. Greene reflected that she “learnt of the true spirituality of great Christian souls, and was taught something of the practice of religiously consecrated and devoted . . . hidden historic lives, hitherto utterly unknown” to her.¹²⁸ For example, Greene “never forgot” the “spiritual ancestry” of Huvelin, who she spoke of with reverence—“those brave spirits who owe their formation to Huvelin”—practicing “silence and stillness.”¹²⁹

As well as sending Greene books and articles, von Hügel also taught her how to read historical works. Lamenting the “excess of analysis over synthesis” in his day and the

¹¹⁸Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 138.

¹²⁰Ibid., 38.

¹²¹Ibid., 80.

¹²²Ibid., 20–21.

¹²³Ibid., 41.

¹²⁴Ibid., 15.

¹²⁵For example, Tertullian and Augustine’s *Confessions*. He also wanted Greene to read about the church within the Roman Empire; the church’s triumph over Paganism and Gnosticism; and about hermits, monks, and the largest minds among Roman Empire Christians. Christian writings included Faber, *Spiritual Conferences*; Jerome, *The Fathers in the Desert*; Father Walker, *The Psychology of the Spiritual Exercises*; Cure d’Ars, *Life of the Cure*; Aquinas, *Ethicus*; Wicksteed, *The Reactions, St. Thomas Aquinas*; St Thomas, *God and His Creatures*; Dante, *Paradiso*; Elizabeth Leseur’s *Journal*; Bernard, *Canticle of Canticles*.

¹²⁶Greene, *Letters*, 61.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Greene, *Two*, 95.

¹²⁹Harman Grisewood, *One*, 95–96.

focus on microscopic enquiry rather than “to become and to be . . . to adore and to will,” the Baron emphasized that to “see things in the large and upon the whole . . . is what we all require.”¹³⁰ Von Hügel also helped Greene adopt a “frame of mind” when reading, particularly Christian books, so she would “grow in insight, love and fruitfulness.”¹³¹ He told her the “chief reason why so few minds grow in their outlook” after early adulthood is that they are “so busy, pompously affirming to themselves and others that they don’t and can’t see this or that” that they “harden down” into their “narrow, stuffy little world.”¹³² By contrast, von Hügel encouraged Greene to be “very humble, very certain that there exist oceans of reality—of things and laws beautiful, true, good and holy, beyond this our present insight and operation.”¹³³ He also taught Greene a “double system of annotation” to make “the reading sink ever so much more lastingly” into her.¹³⁴ He suggested Greene write on fly leaves at the beginning of books points she loved or had learned from, then write on the fly leaves at the back of books what she had not appreciated or objected to.¹³⁵

Despite Greene describing these discussions and letters from the Baron as the “greatest privilege and joy” and that if she has “learnt anything, it is from him that I learned,” it is worth highlighting the asymmetrical, patriarchal aspects of the relationship.¹³⁶ The physical organization for face-to-face meetings reflects this reality. Von Hügel told her, “Sit on a footstool here, by me, Daughter; and I will try to give you . . . interior things,” so she always sat on the “same little low chair.”¹³⁷ He believed that “people always listened best when they did something with their hands” and was “never quite comfortable speaking to a woman unless her fingers are busy meanwhile.”¹³⁸ So Greene would always sit quietly knitting during sessions. This is a vastly different model from more contemporary models of spiritual direction where the director provides “attentive listening” and asks perceptive questions.¹³⁹ Clearly the Baron’s deafness was a factor here, making normal dialogue difficult, which might also account for his preference for writing letters of spiritual direction.¹⁴⁰ Maude Petre confirms that talks with von Hügel were “mainly monologues” but adds, “But what monologues! They seemed to have been divined beforehand, and now to have the one purpose of satisfying your special need of the moment, a need of which perhaps you had never been fully aware until that moment.”¹⁴¹ Despite this, Greene reflects, “I always felt like a child with my uncle, and I never attempted to be anything else.” This is further reflected in him addressing his letters to her as “My ever darling Gwen-child” or “darling Child mine,” closing with “Loving old, Uncle-Father.”¹⁴² But we sense Greene’s frustration

¹³⁰Greene, *Letters*, 134.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 22–23.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 23.

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴Greene, *Letters*, 22.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, xliii.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁸Graduate Theological Union Special Collections: 92-7-01: 16/10/1924; Greene, ed., *Fragments*, 27.

¹³⁹See Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 1992), 13.

¹⁴⁰Cock described von Hügel’s deafness as “a severe and painful barrier to sustained social discourse.” Albert Cock, *A Critical Examination of von Hügel’s Philosophy of Religion* (London: High Rees, 1952), 2.

¹⁴¹Maude Petre, *von Hügel and Tyrrell* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1937), vii.

¹⁴²Greene, *Letters*, 189, 88, 75.

at being silenced when she wanted to express her desire to convert to Catholicism: “I do blame myself for not showing him. . . . I was so used to listening and accepting, not explaining.” The fact that she “blames” herself for not speaking up when she was told that her role was to listen is slightly troubling; surely the Baron’s role as spiritual director was to carefully attend to Greene and draw out *her* concerns and longings, rather than lecture her.

So though von Hügel introduced his niece to secular history, expanding her understandings so she could more fully appreciate the wonders of Christian mystical writings when they were later introduced, her being silenced in their interactions in addition to her positioning as a child raise questions around the effectiveness of his approach. Another directee that the Baron introduced to secular and biblical history was Henri Garceau.

History and Education: Henri Garceau (1904–1930)

Lady Mary: “You are too tired for the boys tonight, you have worked too hard.”
 Von Hügel: “No, let them come: they are one of my most important works in life.”¹⁴³

Von Hügel’s love for children was expressed through his endless commitment of time and devotion as spiritual guide. As Bedoyère observed, the Baron “loved the chance of educating aright to God . . . minds still unspoilt.”¹⁴⁴ Between 1915 and 1923, von Hügel gave spiritual nurture to Henri Garceau and to his brother, Gilbert, from 1919 until von Hügel’s death.¹⁴⁵ The Garceau brothers lived across the square from the Baron in Vicarage Gate, London. Their mother and aunt were both child prodigy pianists, famously known as “the little Doustes,” and were summoned by royals to perform.¹⁴⁶ Henri Garceau’s father was in the French reserves and was recalled to France in 1914, so von Hügel became a father figure in Garceau’s life. In 1915, the Baron had been asked to undertake their son’s catechism so he gave Henri thirty-minute, biweekly lessons on Wednesday and Saturday evenings.¹⁴⁷ Von Hügel described this spiritual nurture: “I am having . . . a boy of twelve—to instruct in religion. . . . I have . . . to clothe the selections in childish imagery, illustration . . . and then he understands what I say.”¹⁴⁸ Throughout the following eight years of von Hügel’s diaries, we see constant mentions of his lessons with Garceau and the content covered, including biblical history.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³Edouard Garceau, *The Little Doustes* (London: Frederick Muller, 1935), 281.

¹⁴⁴Bedoyère, *Life*, 259.

¹⁴⁵Von Hügel nurtured other teenage boys including Leo Ward plus Charlie Temple, who he loved as his “own son.” ms37194/51a, SAUL, 8/7/1921.

¹⁴⁶Juliet Mansel had singing lessons with Garceau’s aunt (D:8/2/1914), and Hildegard von Hügel received piano lessons from Garceau’s mother (Garceau, *Little*, 279).

¹⁴⁷D:4/6/1915; D:1/10/1915.

¹⁴⁸Holland, ed., *Selected*, 236.

¹⁴⁹For example, they discussed “questions of *Catechisme an Diocese de Paris* with Shakespeare’s 7 Ages of Man.” He covered the following topics: “Nature and supernature”; “grace, sanctifying and actual”; “Actual grace”; “questions on Prayer”; “the ‘Our Father’”; “Baptism”; “Holy Eucharist”; “Real Presence”; “the Mass”; “Mass Vestments”; “Commandments of God”; “Theological Virtues”; “Faith”; “Hope”; “Charity”; “Commandments of Church”; “Confession”; “Cain and Abel”; “the Feast of all Saints”; “Samuel anoints David”; “David and Abigail”; “Holy Trinity, the Angels, Man, the Fall”; “mortification and suffering”;

Garceau's school education had been with private tutors but the Baron felt he should attend school. After interviewing headmasters, he chose St. Paul's School, prepared Garceau for the entrance exam, and paid his school fees. Von Hügel took a thorough interest in Garceau's school reports, went through notes given by his teachers, helped him prepare for his Latin and Greek exams, and always noted Garceau's exam dates and results in his diary.¹⁵⁰ He often took Garceau on educational outings to London museums and galleries, such as the British Museum, as part of this historical formation.

After an initial five months of meetings, von Hügel took Garceau to the priest for confirmation and his first confession.¹⁵¹ At his first Communion, von Hügel wrote to Garceau affectionately: "It is for love that He touches you. . . so that by loving Him more and more you may be increasingly happy. . . the heart of Jesus, so gentle and humble, will help you all your life."¹⁵² Garceau joined von Hügel in his pew for Mass, and von Hügel became Garceau's godfather when he was confirmed in February 1923.¹⁵³ For Garceau's eighteenth birthday, von Hügel bought him a silver watch with the inscribed words "Ad hoc" to remind him of the principles he had sought to instill.¹⁵⁴ Garceau's mother wrote: "The Baron wished to give him something that would be a constant reminder to the lad of those principles of work and morals upon which his youth had been built up: a perpetual souvenir for those 'happy hours' during which his preceptor had watched the unfolding of the man whom he desired to shape."¹⁵⁵

Von Hügel had sold his father's gold watch chain to buy the watch, thereafter wearing only a leather guard.¹⁵⁶ The following year he gave Garceau a Douai-Rheims English Bible for his birthday.¹⁵⁷ In October 1923, Garceau gained a scholarship to Cambridge and von Hügel's meetings with him ended, but he still loaned him books.¹⁵⁸ Garceau's father twice thanked von Hügel "most cordially" for his son's nurture.¹⁵⁹ Tragically, just five years after the Baron's death, Garceau was killed at age 26 while playing football. His father's pain was vividly expressed through the words, "Our eyes remain to us for weeping!"¹⁶⁰ But von Hügel's spiritual nurture through history did not always yield such positive results, as evident in his nurture of another schoolchild, Juliet Mansel.¹⁶¹

"O.T. Questions"; "joy, suffering"; "Annunciation, Visitation"; and "preparation for Confirmation." At Madam Garceau's request, von Hügel "dwelt explicitly upon sex life appearing in the [Bible] stories."

¹⁵⁰D:25/12/18; Garceau, *Little*, 281. von Hügel wrote to the Headmaster about Garceau receiving extra exam tuition and joining the Officer Cadet Corps. (D:2/3/19; D:21/12/18; D:8/3/19). Von Hügel wrote Catechism questions (D:13/6/19), and Old Testament and Greek exams for Garceau, posting them to him while on his summer holiday (D:20/6/19, D:30/7/19).

¹⁵¹D:17/4/1916; D:30/6/1916.

¹⁵²Garceau, *Little*, 283–284.

¹⁵³D:8/5/1918.

¹⁵⁴D:30/10/1922.

¹⁵⁵Garceau, *Little*, 284.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵⁷D:9/10/1923. Garceau gave von Hügel simple gifts like a chicken (D:20/1/1922) and a pot of Devonshire cream (D:4/5/1921). Von Hügel often gave Garceau a pound for Church going (D:6/4/1921).

¹⁵⁸D:31/5/1924; 21/6/1924; 3/10/1924. Von Hügel also taught Gilbert Garceau, and also organized his first communion and confession (D:25/12/1920).

¹⁵⁹D:26/12/15; 14/12/17.

¹⁶⁰Garceau, *Little*, 300.

¹⁶¹Von Hügel's nurture of Mansel was only second in quantity to that of Greene.

History and Vocation: Juliet Mansel (1893–1982)

Von Hügel: “I so love to give you, or to do for you, things . . . that rejoice and expand you.”¹⁶²

Juliet Mansel was the granddaughter of Adeline Chapman, an Anglican friend of von Hügel’s. Mansel stayed with the von Hügel’s during holidays while she attended The Abbey School, High Wycombe, and her young life was the “greatest concern” to the von Hügel family.¹⁶³ Looking back on her life at age fifty-eight, Mansel described herself as a “shy, moody child” who suffered from an “uneasy upbringing by parents” with “little stability” due to “ever-present money troubles and conflicting loyalties.”¹⁶⁴ By marked contrast, Mansel’s relationship with von Hügel involved reading with him each evening (when staying overnight), coupled with his “extraordinary understanding” with no detail of her life “too small for his attention.”¹⁶⁵ Mansel recalls how the Baron “took this raw girl under his special care, guiding her in her studies, opening her eyes to the spiritual life and giving her . . . his deep understanding and fatherly love.”¹⁶⁶

Von Hügel’s relationship with Mansel can be traced through the letters he wrote to her; twenty-eight of the seventy-nine letters mentioned in his diaries, are still extant. We also have the Baron’s copious diary entries about Mansel (1909–1924). Von Hügel’s interaction with Mansel was particularly extensive between 1909 and 1911, when Mansel lived in the von Hügel home during vacation periods while attending school. In mid-1910, von Hügel suggested they write to each other fortnightly.¹⁶⁷ As early as 1909, von Hügel talked with Mansel about the possibility of studying history at the University of London.¹⁶⁸ Having assessed Mansel’s “solid, well-balanced reason,” the Baron held academic expectations and hopes for Mansel, so he encouraged her “not to sulk, or drift” but to throw herself into schoolwork.¹⁶⁹

When he learned Mansel was going on a trip to Rome, von Hügel wrote five long papers for her on “a fruitful trip to Rome.”¹⁷⁰ In these papers, von Hügel was quite prescriptive about the exact pages of texts he wanted her to read and how to study Roman history, geography, and ideas. For example, “Read also carefully with the notes at the end, and learn by heart, the verses of Ennius, in the Latin Anthology.”¹⁷¹ Similarly, “Make notes of everything that specially strikes or puzzles you . . . when we meet I should explain to you whatever is at all foggy in your mind.”¹⁷² He also encouraged Mansel to examine ancient coins, asking her to observe the heads on them.¹⁷³

¹⁶²ms37194/18a, SAUL, 4/10/1910.

¹⁶³D:24/4/1909. Mansel attended Wycombe Abbey from September 22, 1909–December 20, 1910 (Email communication, Tina Cunningham, Archivist, Wycombe Abbey 24/2/2011). Juliet Mansel, “A Letter from Baron von Hügel,” *The Dublin Review* 222, no. 452 (July 1951): 1.

¹⁶⁴Mansel, “Letter,” 1.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷D:2/6/10. We see the high priority von Hügel placed on Mansel when he put off meeting with Crespi to read Browning with her (D:17/4/1910).

¹⁶⁸D:19/12/1909.

¹⁶⁹ms37194/18a, SAUL, 4/10/1910.

¹⁷⁰Paper 1-ms37194/11, SAUL, 4/4/1910; Paper 2-ms37194/12, SAUL, 7/7/1910; Paper 3-ms37194/15, SAUL, 20/8/1910; Paper 4-ms37194/23, SAUL, 20/4/1911; Paper 5-ms37194/23, SAUL, 20/4/1911&15/2/1912.

¹⁷¹ms37194/23, SAUL (15/2/1912).

¹⁷²ms37194/23b, SAUL (9/5/1911).

¹⁷³ms37194/20:1, SAUL (19/10/1910).

In a similar way to the study of history encouraged in Greene, the purpose of studying Roman history was to help Mansel to eventually develop a Christian worldview. Von Hügel wrote:

Keep your mind, when you can, simmering in combinations of the facts, and dwelling upon the lessons, of this Roman history period. You will see how intensely modern, still in the throes of being born, the problems, helps, complications given and left to us by Rome are, when we come to Christianity and the Church in conflict with, and then taking over, the Roman Empire. But for this I trust you are able to understand all my allusions.¹⁷⁴

Mansel was encouraged to “penetrate a little into the souls, the motives, the spirit of these . . . early Republican Romans, who thus acted and who thus built.”¹⁷⁵ Similarly, the Baron emphasized:

We need not wonder at the slow and costly, but sure and unique, humanising power of such long occupation with Roman studies. . . . We shall never then fully understand our own spiritual and mental origins and the forces that still are, so largely, moulding us, unless we come to have some true, living insight into, some real touch with, Rome, in its original Italic instinct; in its Hellenised phase; and its Christianised spirit and activity.¹⁷⁶

Gradually, however, despite the Baron having repeated discussions about the possibility of studying history at King’s College London, it became evident that Mansel was not interested.¹⁷⁷ In 1922, von Hügel had to adjust and he “agreed” to eighteen months training as an actress.¹⁷⁸ The fact that von Hügel uses the word “agreed” in his diary perhaps indicates some sort of control, perhaps an implicit desire for “obedience” as her spiritual director. Mansel asked von Hügel to convince her grandmother that pursuing acting was an acceptable path.¹⁷⁹ Von Hügel was a safe confidant, as Mansel lived through her “growing pains” of discerning vocation and love life, and they had many “long talks” about her “plans, social & scholastic.”¹⁸⁰ When she became secretly engaged, Mansel confided in the Baron, too afraid to tell her father.¹⁸¹

But as Mansel matured, relational intimacy with von Hügel decreased, and from 1919, she was disinterested in Christianity. Von Hügel suggested they read together every Friday, but following this initiative, Mansel arrived over an hour late, having “done little or no reading.”¹⁸² The Baron invited Mansel to spend time with them at Clonboy in the summers of 1920 and 1922, but after accepting, Mansel cancelled, having found a better offer.¹⁸³ Von

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ms37194/20/1, SAUL (19/10/1910).

¹⁷⁶ms37194, SAUL (23/6/1910).

¹⁷⁷D:3/4/1912. D:24/3/1912; D:25/3/1912; D:6&10/4/1912.

¹⁷⁸D:22/3/1911; D:22/3/1911; D:23/2/1922; D:18/3/1914.

¹⁷⁹D:3/4/1912. Von Hügel knew that “Adeline [was] very full of a profession for Juliet.” D:17/5/1914.

¹⁸⁰ms37194/22a, SAUL, 23/12/1910; ms37194/30a, SAUL, 3/4/1912.

¹⁸¹D:19/5/1912; D:20/5/1912; D:21/5/1912.

¹⁸²D:23/2/1919; D:2/4/1919.

¹⁸³D:18/8/1919; D:6/9/1919; D:7/9/1919. In 1920, Mansel went to Clonboy and von Hügel read with her until Greene arrived, then he shifted his attention from Mansel (14-17/7/1920). In 1922, Mansel went on holiday with von Hügel (D:8/8/1922).

Hügel's diaries reveal that his relationship with Mansel declined further in the years 1920–1924: “Juliet telephoned herself off from lunch with us today”;¹⁸⁴ “Juliet did not turn up for night”;¹⁸⁵ “I went out . . . waiting for her . . . giving her up.”¹⁸⁶ In 1921, von Hügel noticed Mansel smoking.¹⁸⁷ He thought her “broken down . . . nerve-health” resulted from her “heroic war work,” when in fact it was an “unhappy, love affair.”¹⁸⁸ But at times Mansel still turned to von Hügel: “She wrote piteously for my company so I went off at once.”¹⁸⁹

In the midst of Mansel's depression, von Hügel told Mansel that her healing would come through returning to Christ.¹⁹⁰ He mentioned Mansel's “true” and “false self,” reminding her of four years earlier, when she had returned to Communion after having drifted:

Oh! I just loved that . . . the humility and frankness and, above all, the sense of need of that dear strength not your own. . . . I want you to be doing all the wise things, all that will help you get well . . . that incident represents your permanent deepest self . . . whatsoever brings . . . articulation to your deepest self will directly promote recovery.¹⁹¹

Von Hügel emphasized the link between spirituality and emotional health, urging Mansel not to think she should get well first and then consider religion. This would be putting “the cart before the horse. We require harmony and happiness as a cause precedent to health and operative towards health.”¹⁹² Von Hügel emphasized that “at His feet you get your strength . . . with little peaceful turnings to Christ.”¹⁹³ Through engaging with Christ, she would

. . . get a unity and drama, a reality and awakens, a depth, steadiness and tenderness into your life which nothing else ever can or will of itself supply . . . simply nothing you could ever do will give me so complete a joy as if you . . . restart . . . building up of interior unity in the daily watch and ward against the false self.¹⁹⁴

Von Hügel closed his letter describing how fishmongers slit soles from head to tail, leaving the fish “truly broken up.” Similarly, “human souls . . . do not even begin to attain to their true identity . . . until they are divided up—until the spirit within them begins to discriminate itself against the petty self.”¹⁹⁵

His closing words provide a window into his attempts to encourage Mansel: “In the Scottish rivers the salmon will leap and leap. . . . Jump, Child, jump: I jump with you,

¹⁸⁴D:9/12/1920.

¹⁸⁵D:28/6/1922.

¹⁸⁶D:15/7/1924.

¹⁸⁷D:5/5/1921.

¹⁸⁸Georgetown University Archival Resources, Tom Burns' Papers, GMT-110610, Unpublished postcard to Gwen Greene, 8/1/1921; D:10/1/1921.

¹⁸⁹msIX1272, Downside Abbey Archive (hereafter cited as DAA), 28/12/1920, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/a/A13530200>.

¹⁹⁰Holland, ed., *Selected*, 321–323.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁹²*Ibid.*, 321–323.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴Holland, ed., *Selected*, 323.

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*

look we both manage it!”¹⁹⁶ But perhaps the Baron’s attempts to urge her to jump up “into the higher reaches” suggest implicit pressure plus his lack of acceptance for her present state. We repeatedly read in the Baron’s diaries of his hopes she will return to faith. For example, his eager anticipation that Mansel would “communicate next Sunday,” which never occurred.¹⁹⁷ Later that year he described Mansel: “Looking well, full of the acting. But spoke as tho’ rel[igion] had not been growing.”¹⁹⁸ The following year, von Hügel sadly observed “no sign of religion.”¹⁹⁹ It seems the Baron was unable to celebrate and accept Mansel’s life choices and provide unconditional love and acceptance. As early as 1911 he had written, “You . . . have . . . become part of my true self, and whom . . . I will cherish to help to grow.”²⁰⁰ But perhaps he was unable to see past his own hopes to enable this young woman to live her own dreams and decisions concerning vocation and religion.

Despite these critiques, as a woman in her late fifties, Mansel reflected, looking back and writing in the third person:

The infinite pains, the immense time that Baron von Hügel gave in teaching this girl of fifteen the way to study and the way to pray still fills her, now an elderly woman, with astonishment and a sense of her unworthiness. With him every detail of her life, every facet of history or literature or art, was a means of apprehending the existence of God. The presence of God was virtually his only preoccupation, and all subjects, whether intellectual or banal, led him back to that preoccupation.²⁰¹

But despite Mansel confessing that von Hügel was “opening her eyes to the spiritual life,”²⁰² his choice of historical gifts was not always appropriate. In 1922, Mansel’s mother returned to von Hügel the two volumes of Ranke’s *Weltgeschichte*, which he had given Mansel for her twenty-first birthday.²⁰³ Another unsuitable book choice was *Gifts of Civilisation*, a lecture on the Brahman “Vedas,” for Mansel’s sixteenth birthday. Despite this, Mansel’s mother thanked von Hügel for “helping” her daughter, in “matters where she herself knows not how.”²⁰⁴ However, the Baron’s original letters to Mansel provide visual evidence that at some stage in her life, Mansel felt angry, resentful, and resistant to the Baron’s attempts to mold her.

Originals of von Hügel’s letters to Mansel reveal her negative reaction toward his nurturing control. The same light-blue pencil is used on several letters, including one written as late as 1921, presumably indicating that all of the letters were annotated over a similar period in the early 1920s. In several letters, we see light-blue pencil crossing out of von Hügel’s terms of endearment for Mansel. In the 1921 letter, the words “Sweet” and “My Sweet” are crossed out²⁰⁵; two 1911 letters have “my Darling” and

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷D:6/1/1921.

¹⁹⁸D:4/11/1921.

¹⁹⁹D:7/1/1922.

²⁰⁰ms37194/29a, SAUL.

²⁰¹Mansel, “Letter,” 2–3.

²⁰²Ibid., 2.

²⁰³D:1/11/22. The volumes in SAUL have a cross through the inscription: “Juliet Mansel, on the twenty-first birthday from her fatherly old Friend, Friedrich von Hügel.”

²⁰⁴D:11/2/10.

²⁰⁵ms37194/50a, SAUL.

“Sweet” crossed out, a large cross through each page, plus a line through the sentence, “I am looking forward hugely to your week here in December”²⁰⁶; similarly, von Hügel’s 1910 letters bear the same light-blue pencil crossing out markings.²⁰⁷

Kelly’s interview with Mansel in 1974 sheds some light on this negative reaction. Mansel reported that von Hügel did not seem to appreciate her pain at her fiancé’s death, or the “change the war had wrought on her,” since the Baron was “basically unaffected” by the tragedy of war.²⁰⁸ Kelly wrote, “Juliet spoke in a rather reserved way about von Hügel, not as though he were a friend . . . and indicated that while she had been utterly changed by the war experience, he still related to her as before . . . it didn’t seem to have affected him or his manner of relating to her—or . . . his spiritual advice.”²⁰⁹

Beatie similarly critiqued von Hügel for sending Mansel letters during the war, “filled with suggestions of things to read,” when Mansel was “up to the middle in mud nursing at the front.”²¹⁰

Our current pandemic reminds us of the traumatic effect of Spanish Flu at the end of World War I. As a nurse, Mansel probably would have witnessed incredible devastation and pain. In a similar vein, Bedoyère wrote that von Hügel’s “spiritual insight” and “feelings” were unaffected by the war: “Contacts with phenomena and problems outside his personal and individual spiritual quarrying were either treated academically . . . or else rather naively.”²¹¹ The Baron appeared to be blindsided by his own inclinations and attempted to control Mansel’s decisions through an implicit requirement of “obedience” to his approval of her life choices. Mansel’s reaction perhaps reveals how terms of endearment became painful reminders of a complex, pressuring, patriarchal relationship. Sadly, a naïve attempt at spiritual formation through history failed due to inappropriately advanced historical readings as well as a lack of consideration of Mansel’s developmental needs, temperament, and need for autonomy. Tragically, a similarly counterproductive attempt at formation through history occurred through the Baron’s nurture of his daughter, Gertrud von Hügel.

History and Trying to Accelerate “Growth”: Gertrud von Hügel (1877–1915)

Baron von Hügel: “Our dearest eldest daughter . . . the one I tried most extensively to help and to *make grow*.”²¹²

Gertrud von Hügel was the Baron’s oldest daughter and his “sympathiser, companion,” and “confidant.”²¹³ Von Hügel described her as the “soul closest” to him in his “intellectual work, plans and trials,” hence her early death in 1915 left a “void” nothing could replace.²¹⁴ Von Hügel nicknamed her “True,” describing her as

²⁰⁶ ms37194/29b/c, SAUL; ms37194/256a, SAUL. An additional letter similarly has crosses across several pages in the light-blue pencil plus a line through the words “Sweet” and “My Sweet.” ms37194/6a/b, SAUL.

²⁰⁷ ms37194/17a, SAUL, 28/9/1910; ms27194/18a, SAUL, 4/10/1910.

²⁰⁸ Kelly, *Baron*, 211.

²⁰⁹ Email communication with James Kelly, January 17, 2011.

²¹⁰ J. W. Beatie, “The Sense of the Infinite in the Philosophy of Religion of Friedrich von Hügel” (PhD diss., Université Catholique de Louvain, 1969), 39–40.

²¹¹ Bedoyère, *Life*, 280.

²¹² Holland, *Selected*, 225, italics added.

²¹³ Gertrud von Hügel, *Saint Bernadine of Siena* (London: Dent & Co, 1906); ms37194/36, SAUL.

²¹⁴ Holland, ed., *Selected*, 225; Bedoyère, *Life*, 288; ms38776/2/7, SAUL

a “religious genius” who was “awake to modern conflicts,” yet this “awakening” came at a cost.²¹⁵

The Baron uses the phrase “make grow” when describing his intentions with Gertrud von Hügel, which perhaps indicate a forceful impatience. The Baron desired a conversation partner as he grappled with intellectual questions, but he introduced his daughter to religious problems beyond her years, tragically causing her personal breakdown in 1897. The Baron later sorrowfully reflected on how he had “selfishly” “leaned” on Gertrud, the “one” he should have “carried” and “guarded” but instead had “dropped.”²¹⁶ He recognized he had been too “engrossed” in his own problems, so had unthinkingly “leant, too directly” upon her “sensitive soul.”²¹⁷ Some of his discussion with his daughter occurred while he was engaged in the Catholic Modernist crisis, hence the issues naturally centered around historical criticism of Scripture. Forgetting he was 25 years her senior, coupled with his daughter’s complex “richness of character,” von Hügel poured out on her his “impressions, irritations,” as he would have with a “contemporary who had already fought through his battle.”²¹⁸ He later lamented the “pace” he took “thoughtlessly” and “selfishly” with Gertrud, due to his “thirst for intellectual and heart sympathy.” He had “put difficulties and criticism so over abundantly and prematurely before” her, hence they naturally took on “much bigger dimensions” in her mind.²¹⁹ He confessed to Gertrud he “did not realise what he was doing” to her “young, impressionable mind.”²²⁰ It is unclear exactly what actually happened, but it seems that von Hügel’s daughter had a breakdown of sorts and then she had a period of time apart from the family, receiving spiritual direction from both George Tyrrell and Abbé Huvelin to help her heal.

Von Hügel never ceased to feel the “keenest regret” at having placed “more “strain” upon her mind and heart than she could “bear.”²²¹ This error was the “biggest cross” of his life: “I . . . put out my True’s spiritual eyes. I . . . so strained and perplexed that very sensitive young soul . . . bereft her for years . . . of all peace, of all conscious faith.”²²² He had “presupposed too much maturity, too much carrying power.”²²³ Von Hügel described it as “miserable, blind work” and wrote to his daughter apologizing for his “unwisdom” in forgetting her youth and “individualities,”²²⁴ plus the inappropriate “pace and quantity” of his teaching: “The tumultuousness of my tone, the pouring out of my mind, impressions, irritations . . . the pace I took thoughtlessly, selfishly, from thirst for intellectual and heart sympathy. . . I have, alas, put difficulties and criticism so over-abundantly and prematurely before you.”²²⁵

Von Hügel repeatedly confessed his guilt regarding his daughter’s breakdown in health to his close friends. He identified his “triple fault” here: “dwelling so constantly and freely on the detailed humanities in the Church; drawing out and giving full edge to religious difficulties; [and]. . . making too much of little intellectual and temperamental

²¹⁵ms38776/8, SAUL, 10/4/1911.

²¹⁶Petre, *Von Hügel*, 21.

²¹⁷ms37194/37a, SAUL.

²¹⁸msIX1272, DAA, 6/1/1898.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Ibid.

²²¹Holland, *Selected*, 251.

²²²Greene, *Letters*, 122.

²²³Ibid., 177.

²²⁴Greene, *Letters*, 123; msIX1272, DAA, 6/1/98.

²²⁵msIX1272, DAA, 6/1/98.

differences between himself and most Catholics, near relations included.”²²⁶ Fortunately, Gertrud von Hügel returned to faith, and just before her death, the Baron recorded “every trace of the braininess and of self-mirroring which undoubtedly hid, for a while, her deeper self, had thoroughly disappeared. . . . these last 5 months revealed her, more and more, not as a brain, but as a soul, deliciously childlike, delightfully humorous, elastic and fresh.”²²⁷

Following her death, von Hügel described Gertrud’s “deepest gifts and graces” as having “blossomed into a most touching, most generous profusion.”²²⁸ Despite the positive ending, his daughter’s breakdown was a scar von Hügel carried into all of his subsequent spiritual direction relationships.

But despite this, we see a recurring error whereby von Hügel incorrectly assessed what was appropriate for a directee’s age and stage, misjudging their “ripeness,” hence overstraining directees with advanced historic readings or practices.²²⁹ He spoke of how much he “loved” youth, then he would discover “with pain” that he had “put too much upon them!”²³⁰ He confessed, “I often make that sort of mistake.”²³¹

Even though the Baron described spiritual growth as “slow,” arguing that “a spirituality of the little-by-little is not an enfeebled spirituality” and that stampedes and panics are of no earthly use,²³² he impatiently tried to force the pace with several spiritual directees. At one stage the Baron was “straining” Greene’s “brain,” but he later reminded her of Sabbath rest,²³³ and that even when unwell, “What a lot we can grow spiritually” and become “solidly anchored” in God’s peace through “resigning ourselves” to resting and doing nothing.²³⁴ But despite glimpses of a “leisurely” spirituality, at times he still pushed quite hard, and clearly his attempts at accelerating Gertrud’s growth were counterproductive.

Coda

Contemporary discourse about spiritual formation rarely highlights history as a key element in spiritual nurture. A critical examination of von Hügel’s spiritual formation of five individuals reveals the central role of history, though it operated differently in each case. A focus upon the historical Christ transformed Evelyn Underhill from a vague mysticism to experiences of Christ, and thereafter her writings became more Christocentric. Gwendolen Greene was enriched, broadened, and became more discerning through the Baron ushering her into secular history, then Christian historical writings thereafter. Exposure to biblical history was formative in Henri Garceau’s decision for confirmation. In these three cases, the directees were enriched; however, questions remain about the hierarchical, patriarchal nature of his direction and his implicit desire for obedience. The Baron’s attempts at the spiritual formation of Mansel and his daughter, Gertrud, were less productive, but these outcomes indicate both personal and contextual factors the Baron did not consider sufficiently in his spiritual nurture. In

²²⁶Petre, *Von Hügel*, 21.

²²⁷ms37194/37a, SAUL, 23/8/1915.

²²⁸Holland, *Selected*, 222.

²²⁹Greene, *Letters*, 78.

²³⁰Holland, *Selected*, 201.

²³¹Greene, *Letters*, 78.

²³²von Hügel, *Eternal*, 375; Holland, *Selected*, 143.

²³³Greene, *Letters*, 179.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, 179, 183.

particular, he was insensitive to the developmental needs and personalities of these two young women, and he chose inappropriately difficult historical readings. The Baron found it difficult to look beyond his own dreams of Mansel becoming a historian and was not sufficiently attentive to her needs for affirmation, acceptance, and freedom. Complicating the mind of his daughter, Gertrud von Hügel, with the complexities of historical criticism of scripture, leaning on her emotionally, and trying to accelerate her “growth” led to her breakdown and loss of faith. Though the Baron was adamant that personally, he could not have a religion without much history, clearly that was not the case for all his directees. More discernment on the *attrait* of each directee, plus alternative approaches to soul care were required, as well as listening to their needs and desires, and empowering them to make their own choices. This article has only examined the Baron’s soul care of five individuals, but his spiritual direction reached way beyond this tiny sample. We close with affirming words from Evelyn Underhill, regarding the broad impact of his spiritual nurture. She argued he possessed “a spiritual creativeness; a capacity for reaching, penetrating, vivifying souls, which did not stop short with those who knew him in the flesh. . . . The full number of his spiritual children will never be known; nor the extent to which his generously given advice, teaching and support are ultimately destined to fertilise the most distant corners of the Christian field.”²³⁵

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²³⁵Underhill, *Mixed*, 230.

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