

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



COMMUNITY NOTES

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Sister Benedicta SLG

FORGIVENESS OF SINS
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MEDITATIONS ON JOY
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WALTER DE LA MARE'S QUEST
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BOOKS
Sister Christine SLG
John M. Kerr

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COMMUNITY NOTES

ON February 5 the refurbished Warden's House at St Isaac's was blessed according to the service provided in the New Zealand Prayer Book. It was a happy occasion, as the letter describing the event shows:

Everything I write is really very inadequate to describe all that the Blessing has meant to us. You need to have been here to really take a full part in the preparations that led up to the Blessing. Invitations were given over the phone or when we met people—no formal written ones. In the end over fifty people came.

Guests were invited for light refreshments at 4 p.m., and at 5 p.m. we had Evening Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book led by the Sisters, followed by the Blessing. Joseph Land, Chairman of the Trustees, welcomed everyone, and Monsignor Brian Arahill, representing the Roman Catholic Bishop Pat Dunn, gave a super homily on journeying and healing; the chapel was full of praise, prayer and expectation. Some guests had been present for the Dedication of the Chapel in 1990, so it was especially good to be able to welcome them again.

The Blessing started outside the house then proceeded inside to the Welcome Room, cells, common room, dining area, kitchen, bathroom, laundry and library, ending in Chapel. Bishop John Paterson said the blessings, and Bishop David Moxon sprinkled the holy water. At one point the whole procession had to backtrack in a tiny passage as the bathroom had been omitted. When we reached the laundry one bishop was heard to murmur to the other, 'Is this an advertisement for Fisher and Paykel?' Our new machines are that brand, and the name is very prominent on them. The final prayer in chapel was taken from the writings of St Isaac, then we sang, to the tune of 'All people that on earth do dwell', the Maori blessing, 'Ma te marie a te Atua'.

Most guests departed after the ceremony, but a few stayed for a leisurely supper before setting out on long journeys home. Many would meet again the next day at the Waitangi Day Commemorations in Waitangi.

Diana Pulvermacher joined the Novitiate at Epiphany, and we expect Val Sherratt to join us on March 20. At Fairacres we are now in the midst of packing up and moving out of the Old Convent and St Mary's prior to the start of the building renovations on April 7. It is providing an ideal

opportunity for all of us to assess what we need to keep and what can be usefully discarded, both at a community and a personal level. We would remind you that because of the scale of this work—renewing the plumbing, electrical rewiring and new roof tiles—we are not able to have guests staying until October. We shall also have two issues of the *Chronicle* rather than three, the second one at Christmas. On page 18 we give details of the FLG Retreat, and would be glad to hear as soon as possible if you are planning to attend.

* * * * *

How many times in your life have you radically revised your world view? When I was about thirteen I had a theory that life went in four year periods: the first four were taken up with the initial impact of having arrived in this world; the next four gave me more space around things, so that there was room to separate them out a bit and my memory retained, for instance, sunlight through the window, the colour green, splinters in my fingers and grit in my knees, the shape of people's faces and the feel of their moods. But when I was eight something altogether different happened. I was standing outside by a brick wall, with well-trodden ground at my feet, the garden full of airy sky ahead and children playing ball not far away, when I came upon a new kind of knowledge. Inner space. Being different *inside* from all that is outside of me. I discovered that at any time I could stop, re-focus, and experience the special feel of this. And the next four years, crowded with people and events, were given to alternately remembering and forgetting this vital secret.

At thirteen, it felt as though life was again becoming a full-time task and I must just yield unreflectively to it. And some time after that I discarded the four-year theory. Perhaps I had been right to distinguish between experience, recognition, breakthrough, and integration, but the timing between these stages turned out to be less predictable. Shakespeare identified seven major changes which we go through in a lifetime. We get a new skin every seven years. Christian writers help us to make sense of major changes in our lives by picturing steps on a ladder, stages of a journey, stations on the way of the cross, mysteries of the life of Christ and the liturgical cycle. In other belief systems many life-times, extending through a hugely expanded timescale, can be called upon to accommodate what will not fit accountably into one life-time; 'soul age' can be postulated to explain why some of us are life-long children and others display in infancy the wisdom of ripe old age.

And there have been times in my life when I seem to travel through every possible stage several times in a single day.

We see ‘through a glass darkly’ and so much depends on how we read what we see. In the last Community Notes I wrote mostly of outward changes in the life of the Community. Here I want at least to notice that newness of life in Christ requires change of a different order if we are to grow to maturity. Renewal of the mind in Christ (Rom 12:2) opens to us a way of looking which takes its character, in the end, from the end—not from our own position but from God’s knowledge and love of us (cf I Cor 13:12). To reach that we will have to modify our views, question our assumptions and accommodate new insights again and again.

In the language of the fourth gospel, it will be like being born again, even entering into the womb a second time. And surely not just twice. This letting-go of the view of things that we have built up, making room for God’s way of seeing things, has much in common with forgiveness; and when Jesus was asked about how many times we should be expected to do that, he put it well beyond cautious calculations of any kind. Our SLG Rule states clearly that there is more to it than the oft-repeated experience of a kind of death and a kind of re-birth. Rather, through this repetition, we are to grow into a disposition and a way of being which becomes constant: ‘All shall endeavour to unite themselves with our Lord’s offering by the daily dying to self, that all their actions, thoughts and words may be permeated with the spirit of sacrificial love. This is the necessary condition of that risen life in which [we] are called to dwell with Christ.’

Two questions arise from these observations. How are we learn such a blessed condition? And how, in the midst of changes which in themselves may be either good or bad, are we to discern what is good? Sometimes in the Community Sisters protest that what is old may be better than what is new. How are we to judge wisely? How, particularly in relationships, are we to disentangle truth from falsehood? I was asked recently whether, in a silent community, we have ways of checking and checking out our fantasies about other people. Often in a family the way is through conversation and day to day interaction of a kind which is not always available to us. We certainly know from painful experience that absence of speech can invite and feed our projections and anxieties—but the same experience teaches us to bear in mind that we may be mistaken. Silence, the stilling of fantasy as well as speech, in a time and a place where the number and complexity of things crowding in upon us can be reduced, sifts us and what we make of the world. We need a place in which things can show themselves as they really are. Here is a description of such a place:

The poustinia must be almost stark in its simplicity and poverty. It must contain a table and a chair. On the table there must be a bible. There should also be a pencil and some paper...drinking water, a loaf of bread...Prominent in the poustinia is a cross without a corpus, about six feet by three feet, which is nailed to the wall, and an icon of Our Lady in the eastern corner with a vigil light in front of it.

(Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Poustinia*, pp. 52–53)

It helps if it can be a physical place, the corner of a room or even a large cupboard will do. But the ‘poustinia’—the cell of self-knowledge, the place where what is not real can fall away—is essentially a place of the heart and as such it can be entered any where and at any time. Catherine de Hueck Doherty says of it, ‘I don’t mean a place to be afraid of, but a place where fear will come in occasionally and dwell with you...’ Anxieties and projections are not banished but known. There is room in such a place, however small and bare, for the totality of our experience, everything.

Today Bishop Richard has blessed a new altar in the sanctuary at Fairacres. It has been designed for us by Alan Doig and most beautifully made, in pale close-grained ash wood, by Hugh Harrison. Like a poustinia, like the monastic cell, it is bare, a place of essentials, of encounter with God, which we return to daily. Here everything can be held, hallowed, and released. We watched as Bishop Richard poured out the oil of chrism and then we prayed with him, ‘May the holy God make this altar be for us a visible sign of the mystery of Christ, who in his self-oblation released upon the world the aroma of salvation.’ Whatever is good in our experience will have a whiff of that fragrance of Christ, dilating us and drawing us to its source.

ROSEMARY, MOTHER SLG

KEEPING LENT

*The University Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent
Preached at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford*

SISTER BENEDICTA SLG

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an-hungered. And...the tempter came to him.(Matt. 4:1-2)

TODAY is *quadragesima*, the forty days, *caput jejunium*, the head of the fast, the beginning of Lent. What is it all about? Is it a six-week period of repentance, of fasting, of giving things up? Is it a preparation for Easter? A commemoration of Christ's forty days in the wilderness? Or of Moses and Elijah? Of Israel's forty years in the desert? Is it a numerical calculation of infinitely involved permutations and significances, whose problems have been added to rather than simplified by the addition of the days from Ash Wednesday to Lent I, not to mention the complexities of Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima Sundays? It can be all of these; it is a time with many and rich layers of meaning. Today, I would like to consider some of these layers, and in peeling off the skins of the onion I hope to find a sweet core, without discarding the skins in the process.

First of all, the choice of the gospel for this day, about Christ in the wilderness, seems to have been used consistently since the fourth century, though it is not the obvious piece of scripture to choose for this period. It contains the number forty, and the commentaries of the Fathers, who delighted in numerical calculation and its significance, revolved a great deal around the significance of this forty, to which was often added the number fifty, for the following fifty days from Easter to Pentecost. As St Augustine says:

The number ten...which pervades all life, enlarged four times, that is multiplied by the number which pertains to the body, makes the number forty; whose corresponding divisors added together make fifty. For one and two and four and five and eight and ten, which are parts of the quadragenary number, added together make fifty. Accordingly, the time in which we grieve and mourn is represented by the quadragenary number; the state of blessedness in which shall be our joy, is represented by the celebration of fifty days, that is from Easter to Pentecost.

This may sound somewhat complex, but it is nothing compared to the nuances connected with the number seventy, for the days from Septuagesima

to Easter. And that is a simple affair when we consider the amazing convolutions of arithmetic and its meaning required in finding the date of Easter, and therefore of Lent, each year. Numerology seems today an abstruse affair; the use of arithmetic, the second means after writing by which man expresses and explores his world, is not popular when connected with religion, perhaps to our loss. Whatever it was for the ancients, and however entrancing in itself, it may not be our primary concern during this particular forty days.

But secondly, the point Augustine was making about forty and fifty introduces another aspect of Lent, perhaps more appropriate: Easter is here seen as the pivot between Lent and Pentecost, between mourning and joy, between Old and New Testaments. For centuries this link was explored through the arrangement of the public readings of the Bible during Lent; these were readings intimately linked, emerging from their solemn beginning in the pastoral concerns of the city of Rome and papal station churches to involve all Christendom. The sections read during Lent moved from Israel in the desert to Christ in the wilderness, from the story of the first creation towards the new creation, from the first Passover to the new Pasch. This was not the single yearly celebration of the early church of an event out of time, but a drawn-out recapitulation of the history of salvation. Such a sequence of readings seems at present lost to us, but surely the central idea of linking Lent with the Scriptures remains. Moreover, this linking through Lent and Eastertide of Old and New Covenants was, by the ninth century at least, given expression on Easter night both by a recapitulation of the readings of Lent, and by the visual image of a procession coming out of the darkness of Adam cast out of Eden to the new banquet of the redeemed, led like Israel in the desert, by the light and the cloud of the paschal candle.

This image of the forty days linked to the forty years as the pilgrimage of the new Israel, both in Lent and through life, is still most deeply sensed, and the hymn which preceded this sermon, 'Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,'¹ exactly reflects such an understanding. Guided by God through 'this barren land', we go through the desert of this life as Israel was led out of captivity. For us also, 'the fiery, cloudy pillar' of God's presence leads us. We are fed by the 'bread of heaven', which is no longer manna but the 'true bread that cometh down from heaven', and with the water of baptism from the side of Christ on the cross, fulfilling the type of the 'crystal fountain' of water struck from the rock by Moses. We are led no longer to

¹ *New English Hymnal*, No. 368

‘the verge of Jordan’ and ‘Canaan’s shore’, but to the great stream of death, the way into the new heaven and earth. John Hughes’s great music aptly sets off the magnificence of the words of William Williams with their ancient sense of the spiritual and moral meanings of the scriptures: such a hymn suggests that this typological approach is by no means out of date.

As well as the numerical and scriptural aspects of Lent, it is often proposed that Lent should be filled with the remembrance of the two ways in which it was used in the early church: for the preparation of candidates for the great moment of baptism at Easter, and for the equally serious preparation of the public penitents, who during these days from Ash Wednesday anticipated their no less public reconciliation. These two aspects of Lent in themselves hardly affect us, and in fact must have soon ceased to have their original significance. To pray one’s way through Lent alongside the last preparations of catechumens for baptism, for instance, has a somewhat anachronistic air. It must have happened that in the fourth century itself the large numbers of candidates for baptism soon diminished; after the Peace of the Church there were clearly no longer a large number of unbaptised adults, but instead congregations of believers. Again, Lent alongside the public sinners, the excommunicate, preparing for public reconciliation during Lent, has also a fanciful air about it. The system of public penance was long ago replaced by private reconciliation, excommunication by a more personal and private repentance. But Lent can indeed still be seen as a pilgrimage towards Easter, with thoughts of baptism and repentance always before us as well as already accomplished, though perhaps now these historical layers must bear a more interior meaning.

But it is as baptised Christians that we now approach Lent. Already in the fourth century Lenten sermons put the stress not on preparation for baptism or for reconciliation, but on Lent as a special time for baptised Christians to be with Christ in the wilderness, to begin to be what they already are by baptism. St John Chrysostom was very clear on this point:

When the Lord had been baptised in water by John, he was then led by the Spirit into the desert...Not alone is Christ led by the Spirit into the desert, but so likewise are all the sons of God who have within them the Holy Spirit. The temptations of the devil are specially directed against those who have been sanctified...

How then is the mature, established, baptised Christian to experience Lent? The theme most usually associated with Lent today is not arithmetic, typology, baptism or forgiveness; Lent is often reduced to being what it is called in the liturgy, *jejunium*, the fast. Moreover, this is most often seen as

a chance to pull yourself together, to make resolutions; to do something, however small, with a rather Pelagian understanding of self-discipline and almsgiving. It is customary to speak of penance, fasting, doing without, a time of unusual effort, corresponding failure and consequent gloom. Dr Pusey, preaching at Christ Church on the first Sunday in Lent in 1875, was particularly severe with the undergraduates before him in this matter of the use of Lent to emphasise serious Christian commitment:

You who are here today profess by your being here that you do not belong to these classes of the proud and sensual, and yet I fear there is hardly a law of God, scarcely a word of our Redeemer, which if you look it in the face, see what it means, what it requires of you, you could pretend to yourselves that you were even in the way of keeping it.

He classed his congregation of young undergraduates, perhaps too flatteringly, all things considered, with ‘a certain poor heathen’:

He was a heathen when he made a heathen prayer and knew not God; probably it is the one prayer for those who neglect to turn to God now...It is that raven cry, ‘O Lord, make me chaste only not yet.’

In another sermon on ‘lukewarmness’, he left the parallel with Augustine of Hippo behind and begged the same men, in impassioned terms, to begin ‘well-regulated fasting’ by foregoing

one material self-indulgence which was absolutely unknown forty years ago and if foregone would feed Christ in some thousands in whom he is an-hungered: that is, your cigars.

This abstinence may not be so demanding now as it was then, when cigars had only fairly recently reached England from Cuba, after the British campaign there in 1810, but at least they were urged to do something both possible and practical. The effect, as well as being mildly comic for us, is also deplorably negative. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that Christians so often give the impression of just giving up, of being against life and joy and for misery and loss. No serious-minded man would suppose that Christian life and its epitome as expressed in Lent can be easy, but because it is a serious matter it does not have to be a gloomy one. We are not pretending in Lent that Christ is not risen from the dead; the light of Easter shines through the whole of Lent so that it is a bright season, of lightness, of running the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus. The Anglo-Saxons, for all their enthusiasm for Roman ways, stubbornly and without argument preserved this sense by their use of the words ‘Easter’ and ‘Lent’, words with a different connotation from the universal *Pascha* and *Jejunium*. Easter they took from

Eostere, goddess of spring; and Lent was their word for spring itself. This sense of life and energy about Lent seems to me vital in our approach to these forty days. ‘Now God be thanked,’ we might say with the poet Rupert Brooke who was commenting on a different battle, ‘who has matched us with his hour...as swimmers into cleanness leaping.’

Perhaps we should say that aware of the rich layers of numerology and scriptural exegesis, of the rites of baptism and reconciliation, of the asceticism of fasting and almsgiving, nevertheless we now look forward and not back. ‘Not what thou art, nor what thou hast been seeth God with his merciful eyes, but what thou wouldst be,’ says the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Lent is no romantic reflection on the past but a moment of eager adventure now. Bede exclaims, ‘Behold, this wondrous and most profitable time of our Pasch is now approaching.’ Lent for him was not an imaginary and depressing replay but the whole serious and glorious matter of salvation. The point of the gospel reading on this day is not to show a past event of Christ, baptised by John and then led into the desert by the Spirit of God, where he was with the angels and the animals, alone for forty days, and fed by the word of God, then tempted suddenly, awfully, at the end. The man Christ Jesus is Adam, is ourselves, outside Eden, in the desolation he has made, receiving there the new gift of redemption. This desert experience, the solitude for the forty days of aloneness before God, of living at the limits of human existence, near to the beasts and angels, has, I suggest, a central importance for us. This response with delight to the opportunity Lent gives to know ourselves in the silence of God is found particularly in the literature of early Christian monasticism. When St Benedict says that the life of a monk is always Lent, he means that condition is a privilege, not a bore. Anselm called it *pondus cantabile*, a burden to be borne singing.

If I may, I will take one instance of this ‘wondrous and most profitable time’ from the monastic tradition. It is a story from the desert about a very good man and a very bad woman indeed. Zossima, the good man, was a well-educated monk; in fact, he had reached a point in his life where he believed he could not find anyone more good and clever than himself. On the first day of Lent, he went out, as did the rest of the community, to spend the forty days alone in the Judaean desert. As he walked along on his own he saw a shadow out of the corner of his eye, and following it he met Mary, a former prostitute from Alexandria. He was the first human being she had seen for forty-seven years. She told him her story, an account of consistent and eagerly chosen lust—the pattern of the easy choices of all mankind—and of the equally dramatic change of heart that came to her in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by the simple discovery that you can’t have

everything; that what you have made yourself is what you are. On that momentous day she had found she could not enter and venerate the True Cross with the pilgrims. Shocked to the centre of her soul, she sought no counselling, no confession, no after-care, no instruction, no good works; she immediately took herself into the desert, crossing the Jordan. She then lived alone in all the anguish of reality before God. When Zossima heard her story he wept for himself, not for her, seeing his self-righteous efforts at discipline for what they were, attempts to buy Christ, whose only joy is the heart broken open towards the freedom of his love. And so he saw the sinful woman coming towards him by the fitful light of the moon, and she was walking lightly on the waters of the river.

Perhaps the wilderness shows us that Christ is too simple for us, that the gift of God is not complicated but utterly simple—not easy but simple. Though Lent could be approached through numerology, baptismal images, echoes of penitence, fasting, almsgiving and especially the scriptures as the way into Easter, they have meaning only when discovered in a stillness that is quiet enough and simple enough to receive God as a gift.

To enter into silence could, of course, be the reverse of life-giving; there are some silences which are negative and destructive. But the true stillness of the wilderness is not idleness or contempt; it is an entry into another kind of converse, to know yourself within the light of the mercy of God. It is, I suggest, as necessary in a university as in a monastery. Lent rarely coincides with vacation, but this is not entirely a pity. It can remind us that there is always a need to refrain from reliance on our busy activities and works. The praying man has to stand back, in order to let God be God and to be known by him, and this is our desert. There is the parallel need of any scholar at any stage to be silent before the text and let it be itself in its context and speak, and that also is our desert. The fact of Lent during term underlines this permanent need; this stillness poises us to receive the gift called insight. It is an attitude that is then confirmed by the silence of the long vacations which are not holiday (whatever undergraduates wistfully imagine), but the space needed for thought and deep consideration, when we can be free for the night of understanding. Truth I suppose to be our aim here, and perhaps the hardest truth to know and to communicate is the fact that our talking and writing is not the great matter we think it, unless it is held within the vast stillness of God. This knowledge out of silence is not an easy way to know truth, but for it we have the greatest exemplar of all. As Guigo the Carthusian puts it, 'Without form or comeliness, weak and nailed to a cross, thus is truth known.'

This building has held many moments of the silent reality before God

that comes within the desolations of pilgrimage. They have always issued into glory, from Duns Scotus and Robert Grosseteste to the fire set alight for our country through the preaching of John and the hymns of Charles Wesley, to Pusey, Keble and Newman, and the parting of friends. An archbishop stood here at the determining point of his life, claiming truth at the last in a startled silence, before being carried into the Broad to die, 'an honest man who knew himself to be a contemptible sinner in a world of sinners,' as Diarmaid MacCulloch says in his recent biography, *Thomas Cranmer*.

Let me end with some words that contain most of all that sense of serious but eagerly chosen pilgrimage through 'this barren land' of Lent and of life, to the verge of Jordan and Canaan's shore, with the underlying truth that such pilgrimage is not darkness and then light, but a wilderness which is always blossoming in resurrection:

Then said Mr Valiant-for-Truth: I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles that I have been at to arrive where I am.

Mr Standfast said: I see myself now at the end of my journey my toilsome days are ended. I am going to see that head which was crowned with thorns and the face which was spit upon for me...He has held me, and hath kept me from mine iniquities; yea, my steps hath he strengthened in his way.

The last words of Mr Despondency were, Farewell night; welcome day! His daughter, Much-Afraid, went through the river singing, but no one could understand what she said.

But glorious it was to see how the upper region was filled with horses and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players on stringed instruments, to welcome the pilgrims as they went up, and followed one another in at the beautiful gate of the City.

(John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*)

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

JEREMY SHEEHY

IN the early church forgiveness seemed so important that it found its way into several of the credal formularies. In the Apostles' Creed we profess belief 'in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting', and in the Nicene Creed (which should more properly be called the Creed of the Council of Constantinople) we confess that 'we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins'. That the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins should be inserted so firmly in the Creeds clearly affirms that for the early church it was not something taken for granted. Doctrines were asserted in the Creed, generally speaking, because some group or other had denied them. In our society the place of forgiveness and the nature of forgiveness is perhaps misunderstood, but the expectation of forgiveness is well-nigh universal. And it comes as a surprise to us to realise that there are religions and philosophies and cultures in which forgiveness is not expected and does not have a part.

We are called to forgive one another, and this duty arises out of our solidarity in sin, our shared, mutual, common standing in sinful acts, sinful words, and sinful thought. It is because I sin that I am called to forgive those who sin against me. It is because you sin that you are called to forgive those who sin against you. As Jesus said to those who wanted to condemn the woman taken in adultery, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And because we are in solidarity in sin, our duty to forgive each other is unconditional. Christian practice has always been to teach that the Christian duty to forgive those who trespass against us is unconditional. We are taught this in the pages of the gospels by example. I ought to forgive sin against me, whether or not I believe the perpetrators to be repentant. I forgive those who sin against me because I am a sinner myself, not because they are repentant and sorry for their sin. And to forgive a sin is not to let it be to the relationship you have with the sinner as if it had never been. To forgive is not forget.

God's forgiveness of us rests not on shared sinfulness, but on his pure and unalloyed holiness. The mystery of the forgiveness of sins (because it *is* a mystery that God can forgive us our sins, simply by the token of our repentance) is the mystery of God's holiness and grace. Graham Greene's novels frequently reflect upon the mystery of the forgiveness of sins. At the end of *Brighton Rock*, which is about the gangster society of that south coast resort, a wise old priest says to a young girl, 'You can't conceive, my child,

nor can I or anyone...the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God.' God's forgiveness does not need to be merited or earned by us, and it does not need to be deserved, but it does need to be accepted, and the acceptance of forgiveness from God is what we call repentance. People often find this difficult because to believe yourself forgiven by God you must also have to be willing to forgive yourself. I have had people say to me, 'But you see, Father, I just can't forgive myself.'

But if we are honest, there is another reason why we find it difficult to be forgiven by God, and that is that we would rather he excused us. But whilst to forgive is not to forget, neither is it to excuse. To forgive is to acknowledge that what was done was sinful, and to accept forgiveness is to acknowledge that one has sinned. That is an inevitable part of repentance, because forgiveness is not a matter of excuse. That is why accepting forgiveness can be difficult and painful, for it wounds our pride and threatens the cocoon of self-esteem within which we would rather live. To accept another's excusing of our sin is comforting and panders to that self-esteem. To be forgiven by another is to be known for what we are, and true forgiveness, offered and accepted, is bracing, and cuts away at that self-esteem, and it can bring us nearer to real self-knowledge as it hurts our pride. To excuse a sin is really to say that it was not sinful. To forgive a sin is really to allow that it was sinful. Only sins can be forgiven.

G. K. Chesterton's detective priest, Father Brown, once had to teach some people this lesson. Someone they knew was supposed to have done something which they did not really consider to be wrong. Thinking themselves enlightened, liberal people, they took it upon themselves to lecture Father Brown on the duty of Christian forgiveness. One of them said to the priest, 'Surely the true Christianity is that which knows all and pardons all; the love that can remember...and forget.' Inspiring words, no doubt, but then the group of friends and acquaintances discover that what has been done is not the minor excusable peccadillo which they had thought, but a nasty, dastardly, wicked, murderous trick. Suddenly their Christian charity and their ideology of forgiveness disappears. 'There's a limit to human charity,' says one. 'I wouldn't touch him with a bargepole myself,' says another. 'Hang it all, if you think I'm going to be reconciled with a filthy viper like that; I tell you I wouldn't say a word to save him from Hell,' says a third. And so the priest then has to describe to them the difference between excusing a sin and forgiving it. Father Brown then says to them:

You must forgive me if I was not altogether crushed by your contempt for my uncharitableness today; or by the lectures you read me about

pardon for every sinner. For it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes.

He explains that the church is in the business of preaching the forgiveness of real sins, saying:

We have to touch such men, not with a bargepole but with a blessing. We have to say the word that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness to console those who really need consolation; who do things, real indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend...the mean and revolting and real crimes.

To forgive is to acknowledge sin. The poet Heine is supposed to have said on his deathbed: '*Dieu me pardonnera, c'est son métier.*' God will pardon me, that's his subject, his line, his stock-in-trade. Heine meant it as a cynical statement, but it is indeed true. God's *métier*, God's subject, God's stock-in-trade, is forgiveness of our sins. Forgiving our sins is what he delights to do. That is the amazing mystery of the forgiveness of sins.

Jeremy Sheehy is the Principal of St Stephen's House, Oxford.

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MEDITATIONS ON JOY

PAUL MONK

JOY derives from the ability to accept the 'now' for what it is, without discontent or wishing to relinquish it as a thing perceived to be imperfect. The rejection of any 'now' given us by God is also a rejection of God, since God made all our time. This explains why joy is a fruit of the Spirit—Christ is in us and is happy with the moment, and we are in communion with God

*

The joyful person accepts that the happiness of 'now' is made specially for him by God; hence that 'now' has a sacramental quality. He is able to enjoy the full flavour of his happiness since no resentment is present within him: he is doubly blessed.

*

Joy follows from love: only those who know and love Him who is Love can have a real and complete joy: only those who are a housing of Holy God can know the joy inherent in God's Spirit,

*

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, yet happiness is not included in the list of fruits. Happiness is a natural consequence of pleasure. The pleasure will be God-given and allowed to exist because God allows it, which is why happiness is not confined to just those on whom the Spirit lights. Joy is the ability to be happy precisely because happiness is possessed. Everyone can be happy, but the clarity of vision to be happy at happiness can only be given by the Spirit ; and joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

*

Joy then is the happiness caused by the experience of happiness, hence it is correct to say that those who are happy at happiness gain enjoyment from it. It is directly because joy is derivative that it is so fickle, so continually in motion, and so delightful a thing. The true meaning of 'enjoyment' can be discerned after considering words such as encourage (to give courage to) or empower (to give power). Enjoyment, then, is not passive, as suggested by common parlance, but is active. Enjoyment is the giving of joy rather than the acceptance of joy.

*

The Christian who is joyful in adversity is also humble. This follows since the extent of happiness, albeit meagre, is acknowledged and treasured

without a grievous want of more. A humble acceptance of happiness won't ask for a greater happiness. This is why those who suffer can often be more joyful than those for whom the concept of suffering is alien, as they live in quiet and opulence.

*

To enjoy happiness is to accept the extent of happiness allocated and to expect no more. The person who enjoys happiness is joyful. This person whose happiness is in direct proportion to his need, is well qualified to experience joy. He will not analyse his happiness since joy, being spontaneous, cannot withstand the heat of inspection.

*

The person who is not joyful may experience happiness, but he wants greater happiness. He is not content with the portion he has already; he wants more. Such greed is sin.

The person who has a crumb of happiness but wants more is proud. Being ambitious he is not satisfied for long. No sane person grasps what he does not feel entitled to but this person considers himself to be more aware of his needs than is God. Such pride is a sin and the Spirit is not found in him.

This person thinks he is worthy of greatness and tells God a mistake has been made. This antagonism with God—who is love—refutes the claims of love, and joy is lost. This is why the grace of contemplation cannot be demanded: the contemplative's immersion in God—actually being within the One who is Love—cannot be claimed as a right, since love is a thing to welcome rather than subject to the laws of want.

*

The person who has a great happiness, but knows himself to be unworthy in its receipt, is both blessed and humble. He is the forerunner of the mystic, for only the mystics appreciate truly the nature of such surplus. The mystic, with characteristic sacrifice rededicates his excess by joyfully giving it back to God as a potent prayer.

The mystic's joy is greater than that experienced by others since he is not only happy at his own happiness, he is happy just to be and happy at the happiness of others. Although better placed to see the God of Love in action, the mystic is also more keenly aware of his own sinfulness which, in all justice, should separate him from the workings of the same Holy Spirit which inspired his happiness.

*

So what is joy, what is this wondrous thing? On analysis, joy becomes neither no more nor less than a facet of God's Holy Spirit in us; an imprint of his personality within us.

*

The psalmist continually exhorts the faithful to 'rejoice'. And what is rejoicing but an active statement of the verb 'to have joy'. The person who is to be happy at his happiness has joy; the person who is willing to be happy at happiness enjoys it; and the person who strives to be happy in response to his own happiness will rejoice in it.

Paul Monk lectures for the Department of Chemistry, Manchester Metropolitan University, where he is also head of student pastoral care

WALTER DE LA MARE'S QUEST

JOE GRIFFITHS

And still would remain
My wit to try...
All words forgotten—
Thou, Lord, and I.
(The Scribe)

Walter de la Mare's writing life began in the decadence of the 1890s, shortly after Nietzsche had announced God's death. It continued until 1956, with God still intimating that news of his death was premature. During those sixty years de la Mare persisted in what Luce Bonnerot, his best critic, calls his 'aventure spirituelle', to find, 'Earth's everything, Heaven's everywhere', as he phrases it in 'Winged Chariot'.

His output was huge, including novels, stories, poems, anthologies, essays, criticism, and reviews. He is remembered as a poet of childhood, a teller of ghost stories, or a writer whose work evokes past periods better than it does the twentieth century. Such popularity has deflected attention from the spiritual quest which is central to his writing.

Theresa Whistler read all his work in preparation for her fine biography, *The Imagination of the Heart*, and found throughout 'the tang of authentic spiritual experience'. Some may recall from their schooldays the taste of this in his poem 'The Listeners,' who fail to answer the Traveller's question, 'Is their anybody there?' Or, perhaps, in the similarly inconclusive encounters of his short stories, such as 'The Riddle', where existence itself remains enigmatic, as the reader decides whether the forbidden chest into which children venture represents life or death.

The *frisson* that comes from such ghostly literature will probably ensure its continuing popularity. Predictably, the appetite for the Gothic seems to grow as the taste for more wholesome art declines. Yet Ruskin reminds us that Gothic, in another sense, is a sign of individual, spiritual vitality. He contrasts the work of the medieval craftsman with that of the Victorian machine operative, the gargoyles of old cathedrals with the 'accurate mouldings' of his own time. De la Mare's admiration for medieval art is evident, for instance, in the title of the epigraph at the head of this article.

This should not be mistaken for nostalgia. Rather, he employs the form of the ghost story, or the perspective of a previous age, as an oblique way of exploring some of life's most disconcerting questions. Through what they encounter his travellers, seekers and pilgrims force the attentive reader

to look behind the present century's deification of materialistic and utilitarian values, to query its trust in a narrowly scientific rationalism, and to confront the presence of evil in a world where death is always present.

His short story, *All Hallows*, has the spooky trappings of an empty cathedral at night as its setting. The title may suggest a Hallowe'en tale, but the accompanying quotation from Richard Hooker reminds us that 'the hallowing... must consist in the shape or countenance which we put upon the affaires that are incident in these days.' From the conversation between the naïve sightseer, awed by the presence of the cathedral, and the knowing but mysterious verger, the reader slowly realises that the story is exploring how an age without religious faith can have any hope of sanctification, in the verger's words, 'how close to the edge of things we are: and how we are drifting.'

The only hope of hallowing lies in the human link between the two men, since those responsible for the cathedral appear more interested in the preservation of its fabric than in the assault upon its values by the forces of a modern dark age. How are Christian values to be located in a world without Christian belief? The question has a contemporary resonance in the recent comments on the teaching of morality and spirituality in schools.

Russell Brain records a conversation when de la Mare spoke of his visit to St David's Cathedral. He was perplexed by a man in gaiters asking him, 'Are you one of us?' His own answer to this question is given in a letter to Edward Wagenknecht, '...the Christian and Catholic idea of man and the universe is the richest, profoundest, most imaginative and creative, beautiful and reasonable conception of any I have knowledge of... Therefore... it is... most likely to be true.'

Sometimes the reservations implied in this remark are more evident than is the admiration for Christianity. The search for a purposeful maker leads to anguished dismay at his absence from 'The Miracle', where nature's bounty seems no more than a 'vain quest', and the miracle is not one of resurrection, but of human persistence in a hostile world:

Rejects delight, ease, pleasure, hope;
Seeking in vain, but seeking yet,
Past earthly promise, earthly scope,
On one aim set:
As if, like Chaucer's child, he thought
All but '*O Alma!*' nought.

The reference to Chaucer expresses a wish for belief in the miraculous creator, rather than a committed faith in him.

His writing stems from a dialectic between what he observes as an awesomely absorbing world enclosed by mortality, and what his intuition and imagination tell him is a presence that suggests survival and continuity. His description of the impulse behind lyric poetry captures the interplay of these opposites:

An insatiable delight in life haunts it, and the keen mortal regret that stalks in life's shadow. It springs from a height of living, however transitory, a tension of spirit, a sense of wonder and mystery, a faith in all that is held most dear, a hope and hunger for an unknown that transcends the known.

(Introduction to *Behold, This Dreamer*)

This results in poems which probe experience with repeated questions in the search for an answer. 'Who's there?' cries one of the lost revellers in the black comedy of 'The Feckless Dinner-Party', as the ominous butler, Toomes, leads them from their hilarity to oblivion: 'My God! We've lost our way!'

Even at their most bleak, his best poems leave open other possibilities, refusing to surrender to dissolution and death:

1st Stranger: Who walks with us on the hills?

2nd Stranger: I cannot see for the mist.

*3rd Stranger:*Running water I hear,
 Keeping lugubrious tryst
 With its cresses and grasses and weeds,
 In the white obscure light from the sky.

2nd Stranger: *Who walks with us on the hills?*

Wild Bird: Ay!...Aye!...Ay!...

(Who?)

The bird's (Spirit's?) cry could be an expression of grief, but it could also be an affirmation of a meaningful presence. Readers may recall whom the 'third stranger' turns out to be on the road to Emmaus in St Luke's gospel. The poem was published a year before *The Waste Land*, where the same episode is invoked:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

Searching for what endures beyond death led him in his seventies to explore ideas of a redemptive love. 'All that we are is in our love,' he wrote in the introduction to his last anthology, *Love*, in 1943. It is this theme which dominates his longest poems, 'The Traveller,' published in 1945, and 'Winged Chariot' in 1951. They are an astonishing demonstration of his

creative courage in affirming his belief in the power of a loving God within life.

The former is a narrative poem in which the eponymous hero seeks 'Impassioned love, its goal beyond the grave'. Near the end of his journey he senses 'a presence' in the world,

Past human understanding to conceive;
Of virgin innocence, yet source of all
That matter had the power to achieve
Ere Man created was, ere Adam's fall.

At the point of death, he is described as 'A son of God', 'From whose clear gaze a flame divine burned through'. His final word is, 'Alas'...

And then the night-tide of the all-welcoming grave...
Inn at the crossroads and the traveller's rest...

The 'cross' here is no more than a parting of the ways between body and soul, with the grave a temporary resting-place from the soul's recurrent journey. Survival is Hindu or Buddhist, not Christian, reincarnation, not resurrection.

'Winged Chariot' is a meditative poem in which time drives the poet, as it did Marvell, to realise his love. The poem has a marginal commentary of quotations, such as the two from the medieval English lyric, *Quia Amore Languet*, in which Christ seeks to convince the errant human soul of his enduring love. These frame the final eleven sections where de la Mare comes closest to an acceptance of the Christian vision. He recalls how 'Scripture tells' of the incarnate Christ in the stable, mentions the 'carking Cross', and finally quotes Christ's words from *Quia Amore Languet*:

...Long thou for love never so high,
My love is more than thine may be...
Ours is that wine; that water clear and cool;
That very vineyard; and the troubled pool;
Wherewith to fill the thirsting spirit full.

His spiritual odyssey leads him to accept Christian love in revelation, in poetry, and above all in the joys and tribulations of ordinary life. Realising that the quest was 'our' shared one is remarkable, as most of his previous travellers were solitaries.

Joe Griffiths taught English and Religious Education in Liverpool Schools, Colleges of Education and University for many years. In 1991 he retired from his post as Director of Continuing Education at Liverpool Hope University.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE JESUS PRAYER by Simon Barrington-Ward. Bible Reading Fellowship, 1996, £3.50. ISBN 0745935095.

Since the publication of *Franny and Zooey* in the 1960s many people have been aware of something called 'The Jesus Prayer,' but what it is and how it is used has remained a mystery. And so it would have remained for Bishop Barrington-Ward if he had not, almost inadvertently, been introduced to it at an Orthodox monastery in Essex. Once known and used in its proper setting, it became for him an entry into contemplative prayer which he is eager to share with us. The regular repetition of 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,' with or without a knotted prayer cord, stills and directs the active mind and allows the unceasing prayer of the Holy Spirit its place in our hearts

After telling of his personal encounter with the Prayer he gives a brief theological outline of the traditional teaching on its use, followed by several chapters on its development in conjunction with hesychasm in Orthodox Christianity. Amongst Western Christians hesychasm, or the prayer of quiet, is still not much understood as a way of contemplative prayer; our tradition is either of 'active' meditation that precedes practical works, or prayer that is in itself a ministry of intercession. So it is encouraging to read that for those who use the prayer regularly

The stream of the loving purpose encapsulated in the prayer seems gradually to be uniting the prayer with all the tragic struggles of our world and of wounded nature itself. It seems to make the person praying a part of that movement of new creation.

Intercession then comes naturally into the constant tidal action of the prayer. (p.72)

The metaphor of water, and of a river more specifically, which is implicit at the end of this quotation, is a recurring theme in the book. It is a good metaphor for the flow and reflow of life within the Trinity, and of the continual outpouring of God's love which we claim in our plea to the incarnate Lord for mercy. Many will have learned to add 'a sinner' to the prayer, and this aspect of Orthodox spirituality is perhaps the most difficult to translate into Western thought. The repentance implied is here almost equated with recollection of mind, whereas in the hesychast tradition it becomes part of the armoury of one who engages in spiritual conflict, with a knowledge that it is only the mercy of Christ that can save me. Of course,

any means we use of knowing Jesus will inevitably produce ‘joy-creating sorrow’, *penthos*, but it may not always be helpful to link the Jesus Prayer as closely to Bible study as the author does. However, for anyone who has been reared to suspect the use of either a rosary or of repetitive prayer will find that Bishop Simon’s exposition gives a legitimate place to both.

Hesitations about saying the Jesus Prayer privately might be overcome in a group, as they were for Bishop Simon. He gives detailed and useful suggestions for this way of praying together, including the adaptation of the prayer as a form of intercession for the world.

Inevitably, with our own best-selling Fairacres Publication, *The Power of the Name* by Bishop Kallistos Ware, (alas, the title is twice incorrectly cited) in the background it is difficult to write an objective review of *The Jesus Prayer*. Perhaps this is not possible in any case if one uses the prayer as the mainstay of one’s own meditation, nor if one has met the living Lord through it. However, as a comprehensive introduction of an ancient method of prayer which will keep one’s whole being attuned to the love of God, it is difficult to think of a better.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN THE LIGHT OF MICHAEL POLANYI’S THEORY OF PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE: A PERSONALIST THEOLOGY by Joan Crewdson. Toronto Studies in Theology, Vol. 66, Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter, 1994. £59.95. ISBN 0773491503.

Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) was one of this century’s genuine polymaths, a person of tremendous integrity and breadth of competence, an intellectual who worked against the fashionable narrow reductionism of his time. After service as a doctor in the First World War, he carried out research in physical chemistry, first at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin and then as Professor of Physical Chemistry at Manchester University. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1944. In 1948 his interest in problems in social philosophy and epistemology led the University of Manchester to establish a Chair in Social Studies for him.

Polanyi had great respect for the potential of the international scientific community as a model of a free society motivated by love of truth and pursuing it within a self-disciplined framework of professional excellence. Belief in truth as a transcendent reality ultimately worth pursuing was seen by him as a fundamentally religious commitment, if not a specifically Christian one, Polanyi’s writings portray science as an activity in which the whole person serves truth by submitting to its standards in an

expression of a proper humility. His theory of *personal knowledge*, the title of perhaps his greatest book, is more than a philosophy of science, it is a compelling theory of what it is to be a human being. Joan Crewdson's scholarly and fascinating study shows that it is also a theory capable of effectively exploring and clarifying the doctrinal concepts of Christian theology.

'God and the created order form a single personal order of reality with evolution, in some sense, as a creative dialogue in which things come to be in response to an Environment that is always there, though always beyond, and forever making new and surprising disclosures to expanding consciousness as creaturely capacity to know the Other increases.' Among the attractions of Polanyi's thought is his approach to the unity of the knower and the known, subject and object, self and the world and his conviction that meanings, values, relationships and moral commitment are integral to scientific knowledge. This theme of oneness may resonate with Christian mystical writings, but is not, in itself, an attempt to express such insights.

Joan Crewdson, a former Research Fellow in Sir Alister Hardy's Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford, is right in understanding theology, too, as being grounded in personal being. She develops Polanyi's idea that explanatory systems are hierarchical, with the theological, in a broad sense, as the most ultimate and inclusive. There is a dialectic which operates between experience and theory, between frame and focus, which applies to scientific apprehension of the world and to our knowledge of God. 'God is the object of religious consciousness, experienced existentially, though knowledge of him is mediated through circumstances and things that belong to this world' (p.115). Dialectical theology 'best avoids the one-sided effects of doing theology only from below (the method of natural theology) or only from above (the method of revealed theology). The former works from God's immanence in the world and the latter from his transcendence from the world. God is not half-immanent and half-transcendent but fully both' (p.114).

What Joan Crewdson has done, and for which we must be extremely grateful, is to show how the personalist philosophy of Michael Polanyi gives a 'both-and' metaphysic needed to hold together a credible theistic view of reality and a humanly worthwhile scientific enterprise. This is an excellent, though densely argued and difficult book, interpreting the profound and difficult thought of a great man.

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Copies of this book are available at £25.00, postage and packing included, from the author, 12 Cunliffe Close, Oxford, OX2 7BL.

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These two essays, and a series of letters she sent to a novice trying her vocation to the religious life, introduce us to a gifted writer, director, and theologian whose teaching sprang from a life of profound prayer.

A. M. RAMSEY who died in 1988, was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961 to 1974. This essay was first given as the Centenary Lecture at King's College, London, in 1975, to mark the anniversary of Evelyn Underhill's birth.

A. M. ALLCHIN, Warden Emeritus of the Sisters of the Love of God, is an Honorary Professor of the University of Wales, Bangor. His essay was given as an address at the Underhill Celebration in Washington DC in 1990.

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enumerates in his second letter to the Corinthians. The challenge they present will shape a lifetime of ministry.

SYDNEY EVANS, who died in 1988, was Dean of King's College, London from 1956 to 1977, when he was appointed Dean of Salisbury Cathedral. Andrew Linzey and Brian Horne have also edited a collection of his sermons, entitled *Prisoners of Hope* (Lutterworth Press, 1990).

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