FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

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COMMUNITY NOTES

IT IS traditional in Advent to meditate upon 'the four last things': heaven and hell, death and judgement—strange thoughts to occupy the minds of those waiting for a birth. But sometimes having a body at all, let alone the astonishing facts of human conception and child-bearing, can strike us as strange. For instance, I see an unregarding face in the mirror and, caught unawares, only realise afterwards that I was looking at myself. If the oddness is manifest even to ourselves, whatever might it mean for God to take flesh? Infinite surprise? The first languageless, dumbfounded cry of Christ translates in Scripture, if you will, into a sky ablaze with angels and the sound of the heavenly host. 'What gift can the human race make to God who has made all things?' asks an Orthodox liturgical text, and replies, 'A virgin mother'. Bonhoeffer, asking the same question, wondered boldly whether humanity does not give God something which to him would be entirely new, the experience of being human. And with that human embodiment heaven and hell, death and judgement.

In the Community we have been thinking about 'last things' and in consequence about these bodies of ours, in a different context. We have been asking whether members of the Community who wish to may be allowed to carry organ donor cards, indicating that on their death they would like their bodies to be available for transplant surgery. We have been wondering about cremation rather than burial for those who would choose to be cremated if that were possible. We have been wondering whether it is right for us as members of a religious community to have a choice in these matters. More than once when 'organ donation' has cropped up on an agenda there has been a swift protest along the lines of, 'It is very generous of someone to want to give us an *organ*, but plainsong is very much better without accompaniment, and whatever would we do with an organ in our chapel, even if there was room for it?' It is so easy to misunderstand, isn't it? Laughter breaks the tension and is not a bad way to begin. We are wrong-footed, caught out in uncertainty and embarrassment, by these 'last things'. Yet, paradoxically, the more deeply we ponder them, the more light-hearted we can become.

Those for whom this world is all that there is or can be must take it deadly seriously, but Christians look elsewhere for their ultimate hope. Taking our cue from the great prologue of St John's gospel we can meditate on history along these lines:

> The end of the world is, therefore, always present in death, appearing in many different forms and faces. Historicity is not really an attribute of the world as such. Historicity is present where the Creator acts in and on the world. Only

> God, in manifesting himself, truly brings about history, just as he alone can give life.
>
> Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, p.35

So much follows from this fundamental affirmation: only God can give life, so only God can rightly take life. Our bodies are gifts received, we are stewards, not owners. Death is the final yielding back, for which Christian life, and especially the call to monastic life, prepare us. Our living and our dying together make a whole, they are not to be separated and we are responsible in this life for moral and reverent treatment of our own bodies and those of other people. The religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience recognise and underline this. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are the highest expression of the unique personal life which God bestows, 'the sacrament of the soul' as one writer has put it. And we are destined for eternal life.

In our present culture with its extraordinary development of medical and scientific knowledge and its technological mastery, organ transplant enables doctors to relieve suffering and prolong life. Furthering this can be seen as an act of Christian compassion and stewardship. Cremation rather than burial is now very common practice, especially in our crowded cities where cemeteries are full. Choosing to be cremated can be a protest against a sub-Christian preoccupation with the cult of death. There are also sub-Christian reasons why one might choose these things. Secular culture may overvalue techniques for prolonging life, in an illusion of having achieved the power to bestow 'eternal life', and an evasion of death and despair. Cremation, too, may be an expression of despair, of not being able to face death. The funeral customs observed in our Community spring from agelong Christian assumptions, but we may have a responsibility to 'baptise' practices of different origin by entering into them with Christian faith and in a Christian way.

In a world in which violence, fear and greed are so apparent, moments of birth and death open up to us possibilities of awe and tenderness, to be expressed gently in the simplest and most direct of ways—a long look, a light touch, biding the time, and, for the most enduring and personal moments, probably no words at all. How we do it matters so much.

You will be wondering what we decided. Sisters who wish to may carry an organ donor card, but for the moment our long-established customs when a Sister dies remain unchanged and will be the same for all of us, including burial, usually in our plot in the cemetery not far from Fairacres. We are blessed to have rites of passage which help us to look towards God together and affirm what is central to our vocation as Sisters of the Love of

God. At the heart of this vocation is the mystery of the Incarnation, containing the whole of life and holding the promise of an open heaven, clear midnight and life eternal.

Community News

The things that form our life continue, both the rhythm of the daily timetable and the highlights that remind each of us of God's faithfulness in calling us to this Community and our faith in responding to his particular love for us. On 25 April, the feast of St Mark, Jennifer Foster was clothed as a Novice, taking the name Sister Eve of the Promise of God. The previous week Sister Hilda Mary of the Holy Spirit, the most senior member of the Community, had died on 18 April at the age of 92. With her many memories died, including what it was like in the 1930s and 40s to embrace the narrowed daily life and large inward vision of the Community under the guidance of Father Cary SSJE and Mother Mary Frances. Professed in 1936, she would have known many of the founding members of the Community, including Sister Muriel whose account of life in the Cowley Road is amongst the earliest of our records. Her own most treasured memories went back to life in the Leicestershire mining village of Coalville, where her father was the pit manager. She remembered what it was like to play under the table at home with her twin sister, Frances, and out in the bright green meadow with a stream running through it; what it was like to be taken down a coal mine—secretly, because it was bad luck for a woman to go down the mine—and to have a basket of coal tip black dust all over her frock. In 1946 she became a member of the house at Burwash and remained there, with a few intermittent spells at Fairacres and Boxmoor, until it closed in 1989. To remain contentedly in one place, faithful to the Rule and timetable for almost two generations, was a remarkable witness in this restless age. That faithfulness continued quietly and doggedly to the end, and many of us will long remember her gaze as she looked up from her walking frame, or looked towards the altar at mass, or bestowed her amazing smile.

We experienced another death during the renovations, when Sister Irene Mary of the Sacred Passion died early in the morning on 1 August (our Dedication festival at Fairacres) just as Night Office was concluding with a solemn Te Deum. Before coming to Community in 1955 she was secretary to two successive bishops of Glasgow, John How and Francis Moncrieff, and retained her love of and links with Scotland, as well as her meticulous rectitude and dry humour. Even in the last months, when Parkinson's disease and old age became an endless frustration for her, there was never any question but that the set of her veil should be worthy of the vocation of which

it was a sign.

There have been other beginnings as well as these endings. On 27 May, Catherine Hamilton was received as a Postulant. Two more Novitiate events followed in the autumn: Val Sherratt was clothed as a Novice on 15 October, the feast of St Teresa, taking the name Sister Valerie of the Divine Thirst, and Brenda Davies was received as a Postulant on 12 November. And Oblate Sister Ann made her Life Promises on 18 October, St Luke's day. Elsewhere you will read the appreciation of Kathleen Barrett, one of the oldest members of the Fellowship of the Love of God, who died on 28 November. As you will note from the Associates list, several other more recent members of FLG have died since the spring, amongst them Lee Holland, who died tragically when a pheasant flew in front of his motorbike in a country lane. He was a well-known homeopathic physician in Oxford, instrumental in setting up a college in London to train homeopaths, and is greatly mourned by a wide circle of friends and colleagues.

At the beginning of our Chapter week, on the evening of Michaelmas day, Bishop Richard Harries of Oxford, our Visitor, ordained Sister Barbara June to the priesthood in the chapel at Fairacres. There were Sisters who did not feel able to participate in this ceremony, but as Mother Rosemary remarked in an address to us on the eve of the event:

> Publicly and outwardly things will happen, and be seen and interpreted in various ways. But there is a new and previously unknown inward experience ahead of us too, one which will belong to the Community as such, and to all of us whatever our individual convictions. I see this unknown, which tomorrow we will begin to know, as a trust and hidden treasure, though it is likely to be long before we can be articulate about it.

At present Sister Barbara June ordinarily celebrates the Eucharist at Fairacres once a fortnight on a Wednesday. She is attached to the parish of Cowley St John for training purposes and this involves monthly participation in a Sunday service and occasion other events. At the Bishop's request this will last for the next two years as is customary, but he and we are clear that after that her ministry will continue to be within the Community in whatever way this may develop.

By the time you receive this I will be in New Zealand, in the middle of a six-week visit to the Sisters at St Isaac's. Sister Alison Kathleen is returning to England in December, a pioneer of the venture with Sister Sarah for the past two years. While I am there I will be the third resident Sister, to be replaced in January by Sister Anne who will join us during the month. We look forward, with some amazement, to having a short time together at St Isaac's before I return.

So from both sides of the world, but always within the Love of God, we send each of you our Christmas greetings, and wish you every blessing for 1998.

ROSEMARY, MOTHER SLG

The Renovations

When we informed you at the beginning of the year that there would be only two issues of the *Chronicle* during 1997, due to extensive building renovations in the Old Convent and St Mary's, I doubt any of us could have envisaged what this would mean to our daily life here. It would be satisfying to be able to tell you that the builders had completed the work by the proposed contract date in September, but builders of that ilk would be in the order of the miraculous. As I write at the beginning of December four or five men turn up daily to finish snagging lists and repaper and paint the Old Convent. Alas, we were unaware that the original, very old, distemper on the walls was extant, and would react unfavourably with modern adhesives and emulsions. Anyone who has converted and refurbished an old building may have met a similar problem. The sight of peeling paper two months after the fresh and attractive decorating is complete is a disheartening experience. However, we are assured that all workmen will have gone by the time this journal is in the post, and that they will not be expecting to stay for Christmas dinner.

Peeling walls may be disheartening, but the sight of light, bright rooms throughout the area after the indescribable chaos of dust and dereliction between April and August brings a lifting of the heart and spirit. The new dark-red tiles on the chapel and St Mary's roofs are quietly handsome, and we were informed that the original steel girders and wood rafters erected in 1923 are in splendid condition. This says much for the quality of Paul Waterhouse's design and the work of the original builders. We are secure—on a material level, at least—in the knowledge that the electrics are safe and the heating and plumbing to a high standard. And visitors can now traverse the cat-run safely, with adequate light at night.

Because we had access through the cloisters and corridors during the works, the men became part of our life in a way we had not experienced during the other building projects of recent years. There was a temporary site-access door just outside chapel for several months, so that they and we were aware of two very different ways of life interacting for several hours every day. Of course there was great curiosity on their part, and genuine puzzlement, about our way of life. 'What do you actually *do* here, anyway?' was a question more than one of us was asked. A question not usually put at

the most opportune time, as one was probably en route to chapel after the bell had rung for Office.

Scripture is much concerned with building and buildings especially centred on the Temple at Jerusalem, which has its heavenly counterpart in the New Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation. Material buildings, created from the stuff of earth which God took upon himself in the Incarnation, are the finite background to the digging and delving we must each do in our prayer in Christ. But as we use the tools provided for that task—the Word of God, the sacraments, the daily round, fellowship with our 'even-Christians'—we become ever more acutely aware that 'unless the Lord builds the house, their labour is but lost who build it.' Our whole welfare is in his hands, and so we make our return of praise and thanksgiving to him knowing that his blessings of love always far outweigh our most strenuous efforts and fullest offering.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF TEARS:
Penthos in the Writings of Abba Isaiah

ROBERT PENKETT

> A voice is heard in my ears, describing the hell which lies before me, because, in truth, I have not yet purified my heart. The wounds have scarred my body, but there is no stench so that I may yet seek healing. I hide the wounds of the arrows from people and cannot bear the doctor removing them. He has prescribed ointments for my wounds but I am not sufficiently strong-hearted to endure their astringency. The doctor is good. He seeks no compensation from me but by reluctance prevents me from visiting him. But when he comes in order to heal me, he finds me eating those things which worsen my wounds. He implores me to stop immediately but the pleasure of their taste deceives my heart. After I have finished eating I feel full of remorse but my remorse is not sincere. When he sends food to me, saying, 'Eat in order that you may be healed,' my bad habit does not allow me to accept it. In the final reckoning I do not know what I shall do.[1]

If it were not for mention of hell and purification in the sentence which introduces this passage, it might come as something of a surprise to discover that what the writer is describing with such vivid imagery here are the feelings of someone facing spiritual death because he has not confessed his sins, nor, therefore, received the assurance of God's forgiveness. This description of the sinner's awareness of his sins and self-abasement which, with its references to astringent ointments, could so easily be mistaken for part of a homily by Bernard of Clairvaux, is in fact from one of the works attributed to the desert father, Abba Isaiah (d. 489/91). His *Logoi*, or *Discourses*,[2] from which this passage is taken, are concerned with the training and development of the monk in all the different stages from novice to solitary. They cover a vast variety of concerns, from practical details of day-to-day living to some of the deepest things of the spiritual life, a large number of which relate to repentance. In addition there are several *apophthegmata*, or sayings, of Isaiah, a few of which are included in the *Alphabetical Collection*.[3] These also deal with the spiritual life, and represent a vitally important link in the transition from the earlier oral tradition of

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[1] Abba Isaiah, *Discourses*, ch. 14, 'Acts of mourning'.

[2] *Του οσιου πατροσ ημων αββα 'Ησαιου λογοι κθ'*, ed. by Fr Avgoustinos, Jerusalem, 1911, Volos, 1962.

[3] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection*, trans. by Sr Benedicta Ward SLG, Cistercian Publications 59, Kalamazoo, 1975 (1984), pp. 69–70 (Hereafter referred to as *Sayings*).

sayings to the later written tradition. Some of his teaching is included in later Egyptian and Palestinian works, most notably in the writings of Barsanuphios, John the Prophet, and Dorotheos. Abba Isaiah's *Discourses* were recommended reading for religious by Theodore of Studios, the late eighth/early ninth century Byzantine monastic reformer. There are also extensive references to his work throughout the vast eleventh-century corpus of ascetic writings, the *Synagoge* of Paul of Evergetinos, giving an indication of the influence and popularity of this fifth-century monk.

In recent decades there has been a growing appreciation of Abba Isaiah as a spiritual writer, yet the only writings available in English translation at present are the twenty-seven brief discourses, *On Guarding the Intellect*, with which the *Philokalia*, a major collection of ascetic and mystical Orthodox writings, opens,[4] and the small handful of his sayings mentioned above.[5] In his own day, the Abba was greatly sought after and the history of the dissemination and study of his *Discourses* indicates a lasting and almost universal respect for his teaching.[6]

Travelling from Egypt, where he had been educated and trained as a monk, Abba Isaiah settled in Syria, at first near Eleutheropolis, then at Beit Daltha near Gaza. It was almost certainly at the latter, whilst directing the nearby monastic community through his disciple, Abba Peter, that the work of collating the *Discourses* was carried out. As the first generations of desert fathers passed away, the Egyptian and Syrian monks of the fourth and fifth centuries began to write records of the lives, rules, sayings, histories and teachings of their spiritual ancestors. Within two hundred years the manuscripts with which we are familiar had been written: the *Lives* of Antony the Great and many other Fathers of monasticism, the *Rules* of Pachomius and Basil, collections of sayings and histories, spiritual writings including the *Praktikos* and *Chapters on Prayer* of Evagrius Ponticus, and accounts of monastic life such as Cassians's *Institutes* and *Conferences*. They were beginning to have a deep influence on monasticism, emphasising

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[4] *The Philokalia*, trans. and ed. by G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard and K. Ware, London 1979ff, Vol. 1, pp. 21–28.

[5] The first complete English translation by John Chryssavgis and Robert Penkett of Abba Isaiah's *Discourses* is forthcoming.

[6] The original Greek Text of the *Discourses* is known to exist in at least fifteen manuscripts, dating from the late fifth/early sixth to nineteenth centuries. Doubtless, too, there are further copies of the Greek text as yet not identified. In addition to the Greek text, there are versions in no less than seven other languages, including Syriac, Arabic, Coptic and Latin.

in particular the spiritual value of the desert life. Amongst these works were some of the finest examples of ascetic lives and spiritual writings ever written, and it was to this rich and varied literary tradition that the *Discourses* of Abba Isaiah contributed so much.

Within this tradition much attention was paid to repentance, a central aspect of the monastic life. We may recall the sayings associated with, and the writings on the subject by, Macarius the Great of Scetis, who had visited Antony; Theodore, a favourite pupil of Pachomius, whose eyesight was endangered because he had wept so much; Arsenius, of whom it is written, 'he had a hollow in his chest channelled out by the tears which fell from his eyes all his life while he sat at his manual work,'[7] and, 'through much weeping his eyelashes had fallen out;'[8] the fourth- or fifth-century monk, Poemen; and the Fathers whose sayings have come down to us in the *Anonymous Collection* of *apophthegmata*. Indeed, it is not possible to over-emphasise the importance with which not only the desert fathers but the Eastern Church as a whole regarded repentance. Eastern monastic writings on the subject are numerous, continuing throughout many centuries. Abba Isaiah's writing on repentance, however, has an unprecedented significance in that it no longer consists solely of pithy sayings, or even of more extended passages within longer writings, but of comprehensive theological and spiritual analyses of the subject lasting several chapters, accompanied, as we have seen, by profoundly moving imagery. One of the *logoi* from the first part of the *Discourses* and the whole of the second are concerned with repentance, and we soon find that compunction, the piercing of the heart at the memory of sins committed, is given a fundamentally important role to play here.

In his chapter on virtues, Abba Isaiah lists compunction, using the Greek word *penthos*, as one of three ascetic practices which the monk should follow:

> There are three practices which can be acquired with work: that a person may always observe his sins; that he may feel compunction for them; and that he places death before his eyes.[9]

Of these, however, the monk is told, 'Do not deal with each matter equally but, rather, busy yourself in compunction for your sins.'[10] The primacy of

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[7] *Sayings*, p. 18.
[8] Ibid., p. 19.
[9] *Discourses*, ch. 9, 'On Virtues'.
[10] Ibid.

compunction was not new. On being asked by a brother for a word, Abba Poemen replied, 'The Fathers put compunction as the beginning of every action.'[11] Similar echoes sound not only throughout the Isaian corpus, but also throughout a great deal of later ascetic writing and practice; indeed, so deeply ingrained was compunction in Syriaco-Christian spirituality, for example, that monks living in Syria became known in Greek as *penthountes*, the ones who mourn. Such tears, however, have nothing to do with crying as such, which may be superficial and transitory, but are the exterior expression of a deeply-felt sense of remorse, a living-out of the Psalmist's phrase, 'Those who sow in tears sing as they reap' (Ps. 126:5), and the beatitude, 'Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted' (Matt. 5:5).

Abba Isaiah develops ideas on compunction already expressed. Abba Poemen had said, 'Compunction has two sides: it is a good work and a good protection.'[12] Another desert father, Peter the Pionite, taught that, 'Compunction is absolute master. One cannot protect oneself where there is no compunction.[13] In the *Discourses* we read that compunction drives away all evil from the soul which is at peace with itself,[14] and heals it from within.[15] Moreover, if a monk continued to observe his sins, he would guard his soul and all that had been built up through compunction:

> If you hold your sins before your eyes, you will find yourself resisting the One who wishes to overturn you because of the thought that you are justified. You preserve the building constructed by compunction.[16]

On the other hand, Abba Isaiah argued, monks who ignored their sins were to be less respected than prostitutes:

> If we have so much to suffer from our enemies, it is because we do not know our sins well enough; we ignore the very thing which causes us to mourn. If compunction revealed our sins to us and enabled us to truly observe them, we would be ashamed to look prostitutes in the face because they are to be more respected than ourselves. They commit their sins with effrontery because they do not know God.[17]

Isaiah's criticism is an apt one when we recall stories recorded by Abba John

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[11] *Sayings* p. 176.
[12] Ibid., p. 172.
[13] Ibid., p. 201.
[14] Op. cit., ch. 16, 'On the joy that comes to the soul which desires to serve God.'
[15] Ibid., ch. 23, 'On perfection'.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., ch. 26, 'Recorded by Isaiah's disciple, Abba Peter, who had heard it spoken by his master'.

of the Cells[18] and Abba Serapion[19] of prostitutes who, full of compunction, converted from their former way of life to become religious.

Abba Isaiah also describes some specific circumstances when compunction is absent and in so doing uses another striking image. 'To render evil for evil,' he writes, 'is to be far away from compunction.'[20] The harm caused by 'paying evil back for evil' (Rom. 12:17) is referred to in one of the *apophthegmata* attributed to Isaiah: 'When someone wishes to render evil for evil, he can injure his brother's soul even by a single nod of the head.'[21] Feeling distressed when being insulted is also cited by the Abba to show that compunction is not present: 'If someone insults you and you are distressed, compunction is not truly there.'[22] Elsewhere, Isaiah argues for the usefulness of insults for the novice: 'Nothing is so useful to the beginner as insults. The beginner who bears insults is like a tree that is watered every day.'[23] In these instances Abba Isaiah uses the Pauline image of the 'old man' (cf., Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9f) who has not accepted the new life offered by Christ:

> All this shows that the Old Man is living and that he prevails because there is nobody there to fight him and that there is no true compunction.[24]

The third and perhaps most powerful image used by Abba Isaiah is that of a prisoner experiencing compunction before his death:

> A criminal does not rejoice when he is locked in prison. He cannot do as he pleases because he is iron-bound. He cannot teach another person because he is locked away in wooden stocks. He cannot recall what it is like to be at rest because he lives in pain. He does not enjoy his food because his neck is also bound. He does not think about committing further crimes but weeps with a painful heart because he had sinned entirely. He says about all the wrongs and punishments he faces, 'Yes, I deserve these,' and is always considering what his end will be like… As he is being dragged towards execution, his face grows dark; no one speaks up on his behalf for fear of torments. He confesses all that he has done.[25]

It is an image which finds an echo in the writings of John Climacus:

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[18] *Sayings*, pp. 105–6.
[19] Ibid., pp. 226–7.
[20] *Discourses*, ch. 23, 'On perfection'.
[21] *Sayings*, p. 70.
[22] *Discourses*, ch. 23, 'On perfection'.
[23] *Sayings*, p. 69.
[24] *Discourses*, ch. 23, 'On perfection'.
[25] Ibid., ch. 14, 'Acts of mourning'.

> When you pray and plead, tremble like a convict standing before a judge. The way you look and the disposition of your heart may overcome the anger of the just Judge. He will not turn away from the widowed soul standing before Him, burdened with sorrow and wearying the Tireless One.[26]

Such sorrow that through sin one has turned oneself away from the love of God has, of course, never been the exclusive reserve of the few but may be experienced by all. In his *Discourses* Abba Isaiah offers, possibly for the first time, a theology of tears, and does so with powerfully dramatic imagery which may also serve to deepen and enrich our own spirituality.

Robert Penkett is a member of the Fellowship of the Love of God. This article is part of a paper read at the Cistercian Studies Conference, Kalamazoo, Michigan in May 1997.

[26] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. by C. Luibheid and N. Russell, Classics of Western Spirituality, London and New York: SPCK and Paulist Press, 1982, p. 137.

THE ORDINATION OF SISTER BARBARA JUNE SLG

St Michael and All Angels 1997

BISHOP RICHARD HARRIES

THE COLLECT for St Michael and All Angels begins, 'O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order…' SLG is normally a community of 'wonderful order;' and being a creature of routine I love it. I like the day to have fixed points; I enjoy a formal procession, two by two, into meals. And I imagine most of us enjoy a regular rhythm of life and worship, or we would not be here; I can, therefore, appreciate the disruptive effect caused by your building programme. But here we are again in the wonderful order of this worship: angels, women and men together.

In the beginning, according to Genesis, all was *thohu wa vohu*, 'without form and void.' Then God breathed life into existence, gave form to the formless, a shape to the void. So it is that everywhere in nature there is pattern. We look at a leaf or a crystal and are awed by the beauty of its form. So it is in the microcosm and the macrocosm; mathematics is reduced to a few elegant formulae and mathematical physicists marvel at the symmetry of the universe as a whole. But what is true in nature is not true in human communities, for with us order has become disorder, rule has become misrule, pattern has cracked into chaos. But yet again, Christ has restored that original order; through his death and resurrection all things are once again taken up into the wonderful order of service to God and one another. Priesthood, because it is a sharing in Christ, is a sharing in that joyful, restored pattern of relationships.

Of course, it is Christ himself who is our one true priest and the whole Church shares in his priesthood. But we have people ordained to the priesthood to symbolise, sacramentally enact and elicit that priesthood of Christ in which all his people share. We rejoice today that Barbara June is to be so ordained.

As our great High Priest, Christ ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25), and our prayers are, strictly speaking, his prayers in and through us. Within a contemplative community like SLG this gives a particular richness, resonance and depth to the meaning of ordination. For whereas within a parish the priest is, as it were, a visible reminder of the importance of prayer, here the prayer is already present and priesthood is a visible reminder that all prayer is priestly, a sharing in the priesthood of Christ himself. The priest in solidarity with her people lifts heart and hands

and Christ sacramentally present to the Father. So she focuses the prayers and hopes and longings of all her people gathered round the eucharistic table.

We love order; but the order of nature is never static. It is the combination of random mutation and a steady environment that brings about new possibilities and new forms in evolution. So within the Church of England, guided as we believe by the Holy Spirit, we have new possibilities and fresh gifts now afforded by the ordination of women to the priesthood. All metaphors have their limitation, all analogies break down, so I'm not, of course, suggesting Sister Barbara June is a random mutation. But you get the point. It is the entry of something new into a steady, stable community that makes possible fresh forms of life.

There is another aspect of this evening which is no less momentous; a member of the Community, a Community which until now has been composed of lay people, has been ordained to the priesthood. If we thought only in secular terms it would be natural to think that it is the Reverend Mother who should be ordained; she would be the one to preside at the Eucharist. And in a parish it is very easy to confuse the categories. For the vicar chairs the PCC and generally runs the parish as well as presiding at the Eucharist. But Sister Barbara June's ordination brings it home to us that priesthood is not synonymous with executive or administrative presiding and leadership. Ordained priesthood—a mysterious calling which Sister Barbara June has heard for many years, a mysterious gift which she has received with sensitivity and humility—ordained priesthood is one of being alongside us. Christ is eternally one of us in our vulnerable, frail humanity. Behind the altar there is Christ our brother, now sharing his priestly humanity in one of his sisters. Saint Theognotos, who wrote a work on the priesthood variously dated from the eighth to the fourteenth century, wrote: 'As an angelic order it requires of us an angelic perfection.' I am not quite sure what he meant. He can't, surely, have wanted to suggest that the laying-on of episcopal hands would render Sister Barbara June immaterial and invisible. I don't know what he meant. For she remains human, and through this priesthood is to become ever more at one with our broken, disordered humanity that in Christ, in whom God and man are joined never to be unjoined, she may lift us up to the Lord. So she focuses all our prayers, so she reminds us that our prayers are a sharing in the priestly prayer of Christ.

THE VINEDRESSER

Address at the Clothing of Sister Valerie of the Divine Thirst SLG
Feast of St Teresa of Avila 1997

ERIC SIMMONS CR

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2)

THE PROSPECT of trying to say something on this day's feast in such company as this is daunting enough. What on earth can I possibly say to you about Saint Teresa of Avila and her teachings? The idea is absurd, not to say presumptuous. However, as is often the case, Scripture has come to the rescue.

In the edition of the Missal which we use in our house in London, the Gospel for today's feast is the beginning of our Lord's discourse on himself as the Vine, the True Vine of Israel. 'I am the true vine,' he says to his disciples, 'my Father is the vinedresser.' And we are the branches, branches which must be pruned if we are to bear fruit, branches which must remain grafted into the vinestock if we are to go on living. Without him, cut off from him, we have neither life nor fruitfulness.

As I read our Lord's words, particularly his remarks about the necessity of being pruned, I found myself thinking of that famous incident in Saint Teresa's life when on one of those exhausting journeys around her various convents, the covered wagon in which she was travelling overturned. She was thrown out onto the rough and muddy track, and as she lay there, bruised and shaken, she heard a voice saying to her, 'This is how I treat my friends.' To which she, with consummate and robust forthrightness, replied, 'And that, Lord, is precisely why you have so few of them.'

Our Lord's remarks about pruning remind me of that current figure of speech, 'putting in the knife'—although it is probably not an expression which would be in much use in sixteenth-century Spain. It is a most unpleasant and sinister turn of phrase; it generally means something like, 'just when you think you have reached rock-bottom, you find that there is more—and worse still—to come.' I think that Saint Teresa, pitched headlong out of her wagon, might have appreciated the force of the expression. And as we hear our Lord telling us that if we are to be alive with his life—we abiding in him and he in us—if we are to bear the fruit of his life in our lives, then we must be prepared to be pruned, we must be prepared for the Vinedresser to put in the knife.

When you think about this operation of cutting out part of a living tree or a living plant in order to make it stronger or more fruitful, you realise just how extraordinary the whole exercise is. How did human beings come to realise that there is this connection, that if something that is alive is cut out more fruit will be produced? It is worth bearing in mind that the practice of pruning is not a recent invention, not a discovery of modern horticultural practice. Pruning was well established as an exercise of good husbandry in our Lord's time. Human beings have known about this extraordinary practice for a very long time. Indeed there are references to pruning in the Old Testament. The good gardener knows that whatever is weakening a tree or hindering it from attaining the full beauty and fruitfulness of which it is capable is best cut out. But it has to be done with wisdom, with understanding and with complete control. The knife must be clean and sharp; it must be applied in the right place and at the right season, and it has to be done with a surgeon's precision.

Sometimes such treatment, particularly when we ourselves are on the receiving end of it, may seem—as it seemed for example to Job—harsh and unfair, merciless and cruel. We might well be inclined, like Teresa, to point out to the great Vinedresser that really, this time he is going too far. In our bleaker, more jaundiced moments we wonder how anyone could ever suppose that Christianity is a religion of comfort, when for all our fidelity and service all that we seem to be given by way of return is discomfort and pain. And indeed, we are told quite bluntly that when we have done everything that is required of us, we are nevertheless unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).

Furthermore, it has to be said that it isn't always easy to regard the discomforts and disappointments of life which come our way as God's secateurs, God's pruning knife. As often as not 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' seem too random, too meaningless, to be interpreted as having any purpose behind them at all. It is difficult to see how they could ever have anything to do with the bringing forth in us of the fruit of the Spirit.

Only faith can hold to the hope that it might be so, that the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, that the discomforts and pricks that we feel in the common life of our religious communities, are part of God's purposes of pruning so that we might in the end be alive with his life and bring forth his fruit. We can only remind ourselves of what we believe to be the infinitely fruitful consequences of Christ submitting himself to be stripped and crucified, to be pruned right back, and with Jeremiah we can only pray, 'Correct me, O Lord, but in just measure; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing' (Jer. 10:24).

CIIR CONFERENCE, BRUGES

SISTERS CHRISTINE AND BARBARA SLG

MEMORIES are tricky things. Compounded of facts learned, emotions felt, prejudices and thought patterns assimilated before conscious choice was made, general temperament, the people one meets and relates to—the same experience will become as varied in the reporting as the number who were present at the event. Therefore, reflections about a conference on the theme 'The Eucharist and Unity, Gifts of the Spirit', attended by delegates from European and American religious communities of four or five different denominations, will have different emphases, different pre-conceived assumptions, different pains and joys. Indeed for two of us from the same Community it will have been a different experience. However, we are agreed that it was a very good one, and a conference well worth attending.

These meetings which began twenty years ago, had their origin in the conviction of Father Martin de Zabala, a Spanish priest from Bilbao, that the religious communities have a task and privilege to work for the unity we already share in Christ. The conferences are held biennially in various places in Europe. This year we travelled to the Benedictine monastery of St Andrew on the outskirts of Bruges. The monastery was founded primarily to train men to work in the Congo, where there is still a house, but became best known outside Belgium for its work on liturgical reform in the 40s and 50s, paving the way for the major reforms of Vatican II. The monks also run a boys' school, using their dormitories in the summer holidays for conferences and other groups. The women were accommodated in the school, a particular experience in itself, especially as the area is renowned for its mosquitoes, and the windows were not screened.

Someone from SLG has attended the conference (officially known as the International and Interconfessional Congress of Religious, or CIIR) whenever possible. All previous delegates have agreed that this is an important gathering for religious, which crosses the divisions of history and traditions, for we meet primarily at the point of our common consecration to God under lifelong vows or promises. But to consider the implications of the Eucharist in the life of the Church and our lives in community, with the painful history of the Reformation at the back of our discussions, was a daring development. However, when it became evident that nearly all of us were from the Protestant and Catholic traditions, we could recognise that we had been given an opportunity to contribute to the healing of some of the prejudices we hold, consciously and unconsciously, concerning the Eucharist. Usually the delegates include several religious from the Orthodox

Church, but this time, apart from a Belgian nun of the uniate Melkite Church, only Metropolitan Serafim Joanta, the Romanian Bishop for southern Europe, attended, to give a paper on the Orthodox understanding of eucharistic unity. So we were to face the pain and experience the joy of celebrating the Eucharist together within and across the divisions we have ourselves created.

The daily Eucharist in the monastery church was celebrated on the first day by the Bishop of Bruges, Mgr Vangheluwe. It followed the first paper presented by Dom Emmanuel Lanne OSB, a monk of Chevetogne. He had ended his paper thus:

> Knowing that the common celebration of the Eucharist will be the definitive sign of reconciliation and of a full unity recovered, the Pope invites all of us to dispose ourselves to what he calls, 'the sacrifice of unity'. It consists of withdrawing from the altar in order to be reconciled first with one's brother, then God can accept the prayers offered in the peace.

This statement set the cat among the pigeons and the plenary discussion which followed was heated and angry, especially when it became clear that the Catholics would be communicating at the Eucharist an hour later. The current Catholic teaching is that anyone who comes to the altar in good faith may receive the sacrament; but the non-Catholics were left confused and unsure whether they should communicate, or would be allowed to. In consequence some sat in the body of the church rather than the choir, and at the time of communion most of the Anglicans held back.

After the mass the conference organisers held an anguished post-mortem with the bishop. It was then announced that for the duration of the conference we were welcome to communicate at any Eucharist we wished. So we had the rich and blessed experience of nearly everyone receiving the sacrament at the other Catholic mass, and again at the Lutheran and Anglican Eucharists. Would that it could continue outside a four-day conference. There has never been inter-communion at a CIIR conference before; it was a rich foretaste of the Church as it can and should be, enough to make one pray and long even more for real unity amongst the denominations.

The following days were equally rich, full of the tough thinking which accompanies the knotty problems of ecumenism. The memories surface again, this time of strong Belgian coffee and chocolate biscuits in the 'Hof' in the afternoons, where we met and talked before joining our discussion groups. In these we struggled to listen and understand, and more than once heard the passionate cry, *'C'est une scandale!'* The subjects for discussion followed the themes of the papers given in the mornings. As well as those of Dom Emmanuel and Bishop Serafim we heard Schwester Anna-

Maria, the Prioress of the German Lutheran community of Christus Bruderschaft at Selbitz, expounding Luther's eucharistic doctrine, which she considered in the light of current ecumenical dialogue. Her paper was preceded by a Bible study for the plenary session on 1 Cor. 16:17, led by Pastor Helmut Jehle, from the community of Castellar Ring. He had invited us to think more deeply about our understanding of the Eucharist and its demands in our lives today. For most Christians the Eucharist ends after its celebration, without the connection between the Eucharist and life being made apparent.Where, Pastor Jehle asked, is the Body of Christ visible after we finish the Eucharist? He wondered if we are thinking deeply enough in our ecumenical discussions about the real demands which the Lord's Supper places before us, and the fruits we are meant to manifest through and by it.

Father Nicolas Stebbing CR prepared an equally challenging study on John 17:11–19, which we used in our discussion groups. Coming at the end of the week, it was a place to sum up and reflect on the material we had already received. This study was followed by a paper from Brother Bernard SSF, reflecting on his experience of thirty years of ecumenical dialogue, and on current Anglican ecumenical consultations with various denominations. The decision of the Church of England to ordain women has greatly influenced our relations with other churches in ways both positive and negative. In the discussion groups afterwards it quickly became evident that people are keen to know how we are managing to stay together with such diverse views within the C of E. There was also an underlying sense that our experience is being mentally filed away for future reference.

In addition to the main papers, there were evening forums, when any of the delegates could address the assembly on topics dear to their hearts. These included Father François-Luc Moës OSB, who described his experiences in Rwanda during the early 90s; Sister Karin Johansson from Sweden showed a video of the work of her community with asylum-seekers, who live alongside the sisters; Pastor William Showalter recounted the history of the Community of Jesus in Massachusetts; and three members of an ecumenical group in Bruges, which meets for prayer once a month, gave an account of how they began and had grown. In his paper Br Bernard SSF had stated that, 'Ecumenism is a kingdom matter, not just a "churchly" one.' These forums gave us brief glimpses of the Kingdom and of the Church which is a preparation for it.

We may have begun the conference with a call to withdraw from communion until we were reconciled with our brethren, but we ended with a reminder and exhortation from Bernard which sent us home encouraged in our vocations:

We as religious in the various churches have a unique opportunity to witness both to the unity and diversity of the Body, to loyal obedience and prophetic courage. We are committed to growing in the *agape* which hold us in *koinonia* despite the pains. Getting on with each other, despite our differences, is the stuff of our everyday life. And there is the truth of love as well as the love of truth. The magnitude of the difficulties drive us back to the fundamentals of the Trinity in Unity, the saving work of Christ crucified and risen, the power of the Holy Spirit, and every means of grace God provides. We are fortunate in our opportunities for contemplative prayer which make our life and work possible. We may see ourselves as part of 'the invisible monastery of prayer for Christian unity', of which Paul Couturier spoke. And when we come together across the divides, each of us must act in loyalty and conscience; but, above all, in love.

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IN MEMORIAM KATHLEEN BARRETT

1900–1997

NOT LONG AGO I heard someone remark, thoughtfully and without acrimony: 'There's really very little to be said for old age'. Many would concur with that, but the opposite can also be true. For those who knew Kathleen Barrett, and there can be few now who knew her as a young woman, there was a vast amount to be said for old age, as she lived it, carried it off, laughed at it and reaped its riches.

No one, thank God, can lay down the conditions for their entry into this world, or regulate the course of their journey through time. If, as William Blake believed, 'we are put on earth a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love', the life that ended on 28 November this year had learnt its lessons well.

Kathleen Maude Barrett, belonged to a generation nearly extinct in Europe as in Britain, of women cast in the heroic mould, who came to maturity through two barbaric wars, and having survived rending experiences of disappointment and loss, gave themselves unreservedly to the service of the stricken community around them. Fortified by a profound faith, they could watch society hurtle through one change after another with such rapidity that, seen in retrospect, their childhood lives seemed to have unfolded on another planet.

Kathleen was endowed with good looks, a beautiful singing voice, intelligence, humour and abundant energy. She trained as a Norlands nurse, and while still in her twenties, she tested what she believed to be a call to the religious life in the Community of St Peter at Horbury, attracted by its work for disturbed adolescent girls. After a severe illness she left during her novitiate, as she said, 'rather the worse for wear'. Soon afterwards she returned to nursing children for a few years before joining the Charterhouse Settlement in Bermondsey in 1932. There she found her real vocation when, long before the Welfare State had come into being, she worked in some of the most forlorn situations of ignorance and deprivation which prevailed in the thirties, remaining there until the end of the Blitz in 1941. For the next few years she continued to gain training and experience in youth and social work, chiefly in Norfolk, until 1949 when she was appointed Diocesan Moral Welfare Officer in the diocese of Canterbury and made her home in the city for the second half of her life. If that daunting designation today evokes an image of the stuffiness and pomposity which we associate with a bygone age, in Kathleen there was never the faintest whiff of either. While there are still

Bermondsey children, now grandmothers, who remember the Kathleen of those days, and who corresponded with her, that whole swathe of her active and professional life with its bold initiatives, its flair for education, its practical compassion, its frequent stark confrontations with the tragedy of abused and abject lives, belongs now to the social history of the places in which she served in London and in Kent.

In her retirement Kathleen seldom spoke of those times, to me at any rate, except at a tantalising tangent. She would quickly revert to her own childhood and youth, never in a hankering, wistful way, but as if to gain some perspective for the views she held about the present, in order as often as not to modify them, to admit points of view totally novel and to find it all fascinating and baffling at the same time.

One Horbury link which she retained was with Sister Teresa Mary, who had transferred from St Peter's to our Community, where Kathleen continued to visit her. So our real knowledge of Kathleen dates from 1958 when she became a member of the Fellowship. As the years wore on she found that this link nourished and intensified the hidden side of her life; she came to identify deeply with the Community and its aims without ever saying much about it; and with a number of the sisters who came her way for one reason or another—pre-eminently with Sister Jane—she formed bonds of friendship.

It was her gift for friendship which stood out above all. Age for Kathleen was immaterial, except perhaps that she had a special tenderness and enthusiasm for young people. Not long after their move to Canterbury, she and a close friend, Anita Bennett, with whom she had shared two rooms in Bermondsey, pooled their diminutive resources to buy the tall thin white house at the corner of St Paul's and Monastery Street, which was their joint home until Anita died in 1973. After Anita's death Kathleen embarked on a new career as a landlady, and began to take in a series of lodgers, mostly from the University—boys only, no girls—an enterprise which was to enrich her life beyond all expectation. Kathleen's preference was for young Christian lodgers, who would perform light domestic duties and defend the magic house against intruders and wasps.

For a magic house it was and it had long been the setting for the prodigal expense of Kathleen's gift for friendship. Its four walls held more of the disclosures of human hearts and predicaments than will ever be known. Kathleen, for all her vivacity and wit, was often, at least in her later years, very quiet when more than one person was present. She had an unduly modest estimate of any contribution she could make to a general conversation, especially if 'clever' people were engaged in it. But besides

that, she knew how to hold her peace and how to listen intently before she did speak, often with the directness of a deep compassion. Her discretion was total and it enfolded and permeated the velvety stillness of a house which often rang with laughter. 'What *is* a counsellor, exactly?' she once asked, and did *not* go on to say, as she might have done with perfect truth, 'I've been counselling most of my life without ever calling it anything.'

Which of her friends cannot recall the excitement of walking along the quiet street and knocking at the faded green door, knowing it would open to reveal Kathleen's extraordinary smile? It was quite a small smile, not a wide beam, but from somewhere deep inside her it seemed to enter and appropriate her whole face, the corners of her eyes, her forehead and chin. As surely as St Seraphim's habitual words of greeting were, 'My joy!' Kathleen's smile said the same

This openness and welcome to people extended to the difficult world they had to inhabit, to the incursion of quite startling ideas about behaviour and the conduct of life. To all that puzzled her she responded with an unfailing readiness to understand. And if she couldn't understand, to love and to pray. 'Handing the whole thing over to God', was as characteristic of Kathleen as the clarity and swiftness which informed her own personal decisions.

Humbly and exuberantly thankful, always an interceder, especially at night, Kathleen was proud only as a daughter of *ecclesia anglicana* and perhaps also as a citizen of no mean city. She worshipped both at her local parish Church and in the Cathedral which she loved. It was quite an experience to trot behind Kathleen like a sort of page as she piloted her battery car into the Precincts and swerved grandly through the North door to her parking-place under the great roll of the Archbishops. As her inner life deepened in its search she was inevitably drawn into the spiritual conflict where a sense of humour is an indispensable weapon. One evening after a particularly strenuous tussle with the Father of Lies she told him, 'Well, I'm going to have a day in bed tomorrow and I suggest you do the same.'

Frugal and elegant, forthright and gentle, traditional and contemporary, convinced and questioning—even if it were possible neatly to sum up Kathleen and put her in a frame, there would remain an unapproachable mystery. About two years ago, Kathleen was mildly lamenting the fact that now, in her mid-nineties, she was being let down by various parts of her body so that she couldn't do all she wanted to do. I asked her, out of sheer curiosity: 'And when you're really old, what happens in the heart?' In a flash, without an instant's pause for reflection came the answer: 'You love without bounds!'

For a life that spanned the century we are now racing to leave behind us, what greater consummation could be desired?

SISTER ISABEL MARY SLG

BOOKS

TRIUMPHS OF THE SPIRIT IN RUSSIA by Donald Nicholl. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995. £9.95. ISBN 0 232 52191 3.

'One showing is worth a thousand theories.' This quotation of Father Pavel Florensky is the guiding principle of this book which, in contrast to an academic work, has something in it for us all. Its author, a distinguished Roman Catholic layman and ecumenist, died in May 1997. As Adrian Hastings comments in his obituary, 'Donald was more the teacher than the scholar. [Apart from one exception] all his published writings were born out of an attempt to help the less scholarly to understand reality. It is for the wider human community that he wrote and taught rather than for academe' (*The Tablet*, 10 May 1997).

The theme of this book is the response of a group of nineteenth-century intellectuals to the individualism and technocracy of the West, which they regarded as a disaster for the human spirit. In reply they turned to their own roots in the traditional faith and culture of the Russian people. No matter how daring and prophetic the thought of these visionaries might be they never lost touch with their roots among the 'holy folk' of Russia.

Donald Nicholl's four models are taken from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and include the *staretz*, St Seraphim of Sarov; the supramoralist, Nikolai Fyodorovich Fyodorov; the writer Fyodor Dostoevsky; and the scientist and martyr Pavel Alexanderovich Florensky. Their lives span a hundred years from the birth of Fyodorov in 1829, to the death of Florensky by firing squad in 1937. Western readers will probably be more familiar with the names of Seraphim and Dostoevsky than with those of Fyodorov and Florensky.

The well-loved Seraphim is the first of the author's models, whom he compares at one point with St Francis of Assisi, as did A. M. Allchin in his essay, 'Wholeness and Transfiguration'[27]. In the forests and labour-camps of Sarov he was remembered long after his death in the legends of the

[27] Included in *Wide As God's Love*, edited by Jane Osborn and Sr Christine SLG, New City Press, 1994. Available from SLG Press.

people. At his canonisation in 1903 and after the re-discovery of his relics in 1990 throngs crowded the streets to do him honour. But in Donald Nicholl's view, compassion, joy and resolution were only pointers to the secret of his holiness. This lay rather 'in the fact that Seraphim, more than anyone known to history, embraced the truth that Christ has abolished death; and so, even now, amidst this world and the flesh, Christians are already called to live the risen life in communion with God and all his saints… Everything in Seraphim's life, his capacity for joy, for silence, for healing and gentleness, for freedom and peace and the capacity to serve as a light for others, all come from the risen life which he had embraced' (p.58).

Although Nikolai Fyodorov, the author's second model, was regarded by some eminent contemporaries as the greatest thinker of his age, he was no calm philosopher but an angry prophet. He too lived in voluntary poverty, first as a teacher in village schools, then as a librarian in Moscow. There he insisted on being paid only the minimum salary and never being promoted. Yet his corner of the catalogue room attracted leading intellectuals and came to be described as 'the spiritual centre of Moscow'. His chief work, *The Philosophy of the Common Task*, was not published until after his death, giving no opportunity for revision of his more bizarre views

'Supramoralism' was the term coined by Fyodorov to express his vision of brotherhood, of the working together of everyone to heal all disrelatedness, making the world what it ought to be. In this task, which would utilise all the forces of nature, the learned would not be separated from the ignorant, the rich from the poor, the past from the present. Fyodor was convinced that 'one learns to understand only by doing' and it is only 'the one who *does* the truth who comes to the light' (p.98). For him the fullness of life was revealed through the Orthodox Liturgy, especially that of the Easter season. In the transfigured faces of the worshippers he saw the promise of an Easter for all creation; nevertheless this was dependent, in part, on human effort. For though, 'as a work of God it is already finished; as a work of man it is not yet finished' (p.107).

Despite the strangeness of some of his practical proposals, there is a modern ring to his thoughts on the importance of genealogy, ecology, and modern values in work and social conditions. He was, for example, before his time in recommending the use of sun, wind and water to provide the energy needed for science and technology.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Donald Nicholl's next model, reflected in his life, as he did in his writings, the vices, temptations, betrayals, despairs and unbelief of his age. But he also showed how these could be transformed into a force for good. No matter how dissonant the beginnings or chaotic the

journey, a good end could illuminate all that had gone before. The years spent in a Siberian labour camp for his political views taught him the compassion which he later extended to all the disadvantaged—women, children, animals and indeed the whole creation. However, it was not until the last ten years of his life that he found true stability and freedom, largely through his second marriage.

From 1871-1881 he devoted his energies to the promotion of *sobornost*, that is, mutual forgiveness and reconciliation amongst all classes of Russian society, uniting them across the barriers of age, wealth and education. For despite his fears for the future, Dostoevsky put his trust in traditional spirituality, depending on those moments of *umilenie* (compassion, loving-kindness); in the insights of *iurodstvo* (foolishness for Christ); in 'the people's seemingly inexhaustible capacity for suffering and forgiveness; but, above all, [in] the figure of "the Russian Christ"' (p.173). His last and greatest novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, expressed a new spirit of freedom and joy. This was reflected at his funeral a short time after, which was attended by throngs of people. 'This was no burial', wrote someone present, 'it was a celebration of life, the resurrection of life' (p.174).

Only a few months later the assassination of Tsar Alexander II would usher in a reign of repression, culminating eventually in the Bolshevik revolution. Even after this catastrophic event traces of the older spirit remained in the hearts and minds of individuals, amongst whom may be numbered the author's fourth model, Father Pavel Florensky. Educated as a scientist, he was ordained priest in the Orthodox Church in 1911. Unlike some other intellectuals he remained in Russia after the Revolution. He worked on technical projects until 1933 when he was arrested (on the verge, it is said, of inventing a primitive computer). He was executed by firing squad outside Leningrad in 1937.

So varied and specialised were Florensky's gifts that Donald Nicholl attempts to offer only gleanings from his thoughts and beliefs. This reviewer is at an even greater disadvantage. In brief, Florensky proposed a model of the universe which imitates the love and communication which exists between the persons of the Trinity, as an alternative to the mechanised, externalised and individualistic society that he saw around him. And he challenged that world to choose between the Trinity and madness. Themes discussed in this chapter include natural science, theology, art and semiotics (the science of signs). Florensky believed that life on this earth was a symbol, real in itself, but depending for its ultimate reality on the promise of another mode of life containing the whole of the past within it. If the symbol was judged to be the sole reality it became an illusion, shut in on itself. He said:

‘It is only in books that the bounds of personality are fixed, since in reality everybody and everything is so closely interwoven that separation is only approximate, with continuous transition taking place from one part of the whole to another part’ (p.190).

Donald Nicholl completes his work by recording signs of the Spirit among ordinary Russians during the years preceding the Revolution. Through examples and anecdotes he traces their traditional characteristics: the simplicity of their Christian discipleship; the importance of the Liturgy in their worship and in the sanctification of their daily lives; their spontaneous sense of brotherhood and compassion towards those in distress, shown on occasion even to their enemies. It all sounds somewhat idealistic, by-passing perhaps the dark side of the Russian soul. How, for example, did these ‘holy folk’ react towards the millions of Jews who had lived in their midst for centuries, waiting in terror for the next pogrom? To them the events of 1917 must have come, at least initially, as a release.

In the last chapter of this book the author records the names of some of the martyrs and confessors of the post-Revolutionary period, many of whom are virtually unknown in the West. The witness of their lives and the fascinating tales that they had to tell seem scarcely believable except to those who have travelled in those parts and experienced minor miracles for themselves. The danger nowadays is that with every variety of Western religion flooding into post-Communist Russia, the country will not be able to rediscover its own soul. Religion is not a marketable commodity like a bank or a beefburger. So we must be thankful that it is a respected Roman Catholic who has chosen to affirm these traditional spiritual and human values of the Russian spirit, of which the West still stands in need. There is indeed something in this book for all of us.

SISTER EILEEN MARY SLG

GOD IS AN EARTHQUAKE: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe, by Santha Bhattacharji. Darton , Longman and Todd, 1997. £8.95. ISBN 0 232 52140 9.

Margery Kempe is experiencing something of a rehabilitation and I sometimes wonder if she owes this partly to the extraordinary respect and devotion now accorded to Julian of Norwich. Both were Norfolk women and lived about the same time, Margery being the younger of the two by some years. What is more, Margery tells us that she was ‘commanded by Our Lord to go to an anchoress who… was called Dame Julian’, and her account of the ensuing meeting makes it abundantly clear that the two women got on well

together. Julian, it would seem, recognised Margery's integrity and reassured her that the Holy Spirit dwelt in her soul. She also told Margery not to be afraid of what other people said about her, for in enduring the contempt and adverse judgement of others she would be all the more worthy of God's love.

Julian's commendation is the more powerful coming as it does from a deeply reflective and self-aware anchoress who could not have been more dissimilar to the turbulent Margery. As Santha Bhattacharji's fascinating study shows, Margery was certainly not drawn to a life of seclusion. On the contrary she seems to have been helplessly caught up in the hurly-burly of town life, the excitement of disputation and the risky adventures of long-distance travel. She was without fear in the face of authority and was quite capable of putting bishops and even archbishops in their place. Dr Bhattacharji is not, however, even remotely a hagiographer. She makes it plain that Margery was a most difficult woman who often seemed to be totally self-absorbed and without awareness of her impact on others. Her continual weeping in public which frequently disrupted church services, her outspokenness, her apparent inability to keep her mouth shut if she saw something of which she disapproved—all these characteristics and many others must have driven some of her contemporaries wild with indignation and it is not surprising that she had many enemies and on a couple of occasions came near to being condemned for heresy.

Dr Bhattacharji does not flinch from showing us Margery as the impossible woman she was. Indeed the whole book is in many ways a mine of information for those who would discredit her and confine her to the footnotes of spiritual history as mad or self-deluded, or at best, uninspiring despite all her noise. It is all the more remarkable therefore that the book purposefully and irresistibly draws the reader to a very different conclusion. In our age when God himself is often seen as vulnerable, Margery's eccentricity, her inability to control her weeping, her almost obsessional honesty, are all seen to be the inevitable outcome of her deep identification with the sufferings of her Lord. Margery cannot control herself because she is taken up into the woundedness of God and sees the reality of the deep mysteries of life and death all around her. She could not be ignored because she made a spectacle of herself so that God could be revealed. This was not of her choosing but the vocation to which she was called, literally screaming.

This is a most compelling book. At times it reads like a novel, at others it has the qualities of humorous literary criticism. (I love the suggestion that at one point in a conversation with Margery, Jesus sounds as if he is rehearsing the Athanasian creed). At others again, it has all the excitement of an impassioned scholarly debate. When we reach the end we

are left in no doubt that the God of earthquakes, both external and internal, loved Margery. It is also a tribute to Dr Bhattacharji's beguiling text that we, in turn, can love this infuriating medieval eccentric and perhaps discover in her writings a sense of the overwhelming presence of God in the day-to-day comings and goings of ordinary human beings in the streets of a provincial town. And that presence is as true for us at the end of the twentieth century as it was in medieval Norfolk. Julian was right to greet her 'even Christian' with such warmth and affirmation. We continue to have need of Margery's perception of reality and to be turned upside down by it.

BRIAN THORNE

DOMINIC by Vladimir Koudelka, edited and translated by Simon Tugwell OP. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997. £12.95. ISBN 0 232 52068 2.

It is a pleasure to see another, very substantial, contribution to the research into our Father Dominic's life and work, which, under the direction of Simon Tugwell OP, has been continuously taking place at the Historical Institute of our Order in Rome. Father Vladimir Koudelka, of Czech origin, worked in the Institute for a number of years. His work, *Dominikus* was published by the Swiss Province of the Order but has taken time to reach us in English after what Tugwell describes as 'curious obstacles' finally overcome by the publishers. This book is part of the ongoing 'return to sources' that religious orders undertook after Vatican II.

Because Dominic himself left no writings, and because the early brethren were very slow in writing down anything about him, he is a comparatively unknown figure to people today. Francis of Assisi's personality, on the other hand, has a romantic appeal to many disparate groups and traditions. Dominic's name has often been wrongly attached to moments of history, such as the Inquisition. It is worthy of note that it only came into existence in 1234, at least twelve years after Dominic's death, and then as an attempt to substitute law for violence and pyromania. In the first instance its administration was secular. It was not in this way that Dominic dealt with heretics, but rather by dialogue and disputation.

'Dominic,' say Koudelka in his preface to the German edition, 'had the grace of the spoken, not the written, word, but his word was backed by the harmonious richness of his personality, by his experience of God and by his practical wisdom. All these elements can be seen clearly in the sources' (p. vii). It is in opening up the sources still further for us, and introducing them in such a way as to enable the reader to understand the complex situation of Dominic's time and to set him more clearly in his place, that

Father Koudelka has rendered a service both scholarly and human. The texts from the sources have been arranged thematically: the Personality of Dominic; Speaking with God; Speaking of God; Dominic and Women. The themes are introduced by Father Koudelka, and Father Tugwell has included some additional material not available at the time of the first edition, as well as writing his own introduction to the sources. This dovetails well into the following fifty-two pages of Koudelka's painstaking historical *mis-en-scene*. Through these notes we meet Dominic as a man of synthesis and are led through some of the ambiguities of the emerging apostolic life and the various controversies that arose in its development. They enable one to get one's bearings in the textual sections which follow. This setting together of the work of two contemporary scholars is a considerable feat of co-operation in brotherhood and research. Simon Tugwell's ongoing work in the *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* and other publications continues to help us understand the genesis of the Order.

What is the picture of Dominic that emerges for me, a woman Dominican of the last years of the twentieth century, who has seen the 'changes' through? I see a man of God, whose life of continuous prayer (*aut cum Deo, aut de Deo*, as he told his followers they were to speak) was able to bring to birth, like a midwife, the first known clerical, itinerant, apostolic Order. Having begun under the 'protecting veil' of the Augustinian Rule, it was transformed, through the support of successive Popes friendly to its aims, from a diocesan preaching group and then into an Order with a world-wide mission. What was new was that itinerancy was blended with conventual life. Because Dominic was sensitive to the times he was able to demonstrate that such a blending was possible. The form of poverty practised in his time, technically termed mendicancy has passed, as have the particular heresies Dominic was dealing with. Itinerancy, however, remains, and can be seen as a form of penance for today, for it makes one dependent on others in a very real way. Study, which replaced the manual labour of the monastic life, was the factor which brought the Friars into the universities, and has kept them there, but never to the exclusion of other ministries. Dominican friars, and now sisters who have belatedly caught up with this charism of the Order, are to be found in the interstices of numerous ambiguous situations where informed dialogue is needed, occasionally even in parishes. But from the beginning the priories were seen as centres of preaching rather than of administration. From its inception the Order was international. By the time of the second General Chapter in 1221 there were already twenty-five priories, and five nationalities amongst the friars waiting to be sent out from Bologna. In our day Timothy Radcliffe OP, the Master General, has charge

of friars in five continents. Women Dominicans vastly outnumber the friars, and like lay Dominicans or Tertiaries, are engaged in every conceivable kind of charitable work. But their history is outside our scope here. Dominic's care for women seems to have extended especially to the 'marginal' ones. Women converts from Albigensianism were housed at Prouille in southern France, which became the first monastery of nuns, and a centre of support for the brethren. In Madrid Dominic gave his brother, Mannes, the duty of caring for the nuns; at Bologna he provided buildings for them. In Rome, as well as visiting the poor women recluses who lived in the walls near the churches, he played a large part in the reform of rather lax monasteries of women, gathering a fervent group at San Sisto. He insisted on silence, poverty and enclosure, in keeping with the cultural ethos of the period. Amongst the many famous Dominican women Cecilia, with her colourful description of Dominic, is mentioned in this book—though her other anecdotes are the product of her rather too vivid imagination, says Tugwell. And so too is Diana of Bologna, who was dragged from the monastery by her family, but finally returned and is remembered for her remarkable spiritual friendship with Dominic's successor, Jordan of Saxony.

I see in Dominic an ardent lover of the Lord, most of all. His Spanish temperament may seem over-ardent for our days and in northern climes, but the constancy of his prayer must be an example for all times. The section on the origins and reporting of the 'Nine Ways of Prayer' (pp.79ff.) with new illustrations by Juliet Pannett, is a little treasure in itself.

This book is a mosaic, carefully edited, the texts placed in context, and should be of interest far beyond the confines of the Dominican Order. We thank Simon Tugwell wholeheartedly for enabling the English translation to be made available.

SISTER PATRICIA MARY ENGLAND OP

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, edited by F. L. Cross. Third edition edited by E. A. Livingstone, OUP, 1997. £70.00, pp.1786. ISBN 0 19 211655 X.

The third edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* was published on Maundy Thursday of this year, forty years after the first edition of 1957, and twenty-three after the second edition of 1974. It has gone from strength to strength. Radically revised, expanded and enlarged, with bibliographies brought up to date and set in type now clear enough to read comfortably, the *Dictionary* is more than ever an indispensable work of reference to what has remained, or become, significant in the history of the

Church.

The excellence of the first edition was primarily due to the character of Frank Leslie Cross, an Anglican priest and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford from 1944 until not long before his death in 1968. Elizabeth Livingstone, his assistant on the first edition of the *Dictionary*, and his successor on the second and third, wrote an account of Dr Cross for the second edition, and included in the third, which conveys exactly the kind of deep, quiet scholarship underlying the original edifice.

But if Dr Cross was the right man to lay the foundations, Dr Livingstone—as she became in 1989 when Archbishop Runcie conferred on her a Lambeth DD—has proved to be the right woman to carry the *Dictionary* through times of change in the Church 'unparalleled in any similar time-span in modern history,' as she writes in the Preface to the present edition. Later in the Preface, after noting that the first edition 'was largely the personal work of the Revd Dr F. L. Cross,' Dr Livingstone writes: 'The third edition is more of a corporate effort, with a larger number of scholars contributing their expertise. To all of them I am immensely grateful, and it is to them that the *Dictionary* owes whatever merit it may have.'

This is properly modest, but it is not precisely true. It is to Dr Livingstone's perspicacity, spiritual no less than academic, that the third edition owes its excellence, as those scholars who have worked most closely on the *Dictionary* with her would undoubtedly agree, and as a short comment by Ephrem Lash, on receiving his copy of the *ODCC*, also testifies:

> No praise can measure up to the enormous task that Dr Livingstone has so successfully accomplished single-handed; not the least of her accomplishments being her ability to get anyone who is anyone in the field to lend a helping hand. The roll-call of international scholars that occupies two and a half pages of the Preface, not to mention the official list of contributors, is vivid testimony to the admiration and deep affection in which Dr Livingstone is held throughout the Christian scholarly world. (*Sourozh*, May 1997)

This is a lovely personal tribute to the editor of this great work. But it is also a tribute to that roll-call of international scholars who have contributed to provide a sense that the *Dictionary* is wrought equally from love of research and love of the Church.

Yes, £70 is a lot to pay, and may put it out of the reach of many. But for those who buy books anyway, it may be a question of foregoing half-a-dozen paperbacks over a period of time and putting the money saved into this permanent treasure. Anyone who learns to refer to this work as to a trustworthy and endlessly interesting friend will not regret any sacrifices

made for the sake of acquiring it.

In her Preface to the new edition, Dr Livingstone repeats the saying of Gregory the Great which she used in the second, that the 'Scriptures provide water in which lambs may walk and elephants may swim,' to which she adds, 'the *Dictionary* has to provide for a similar range of users.' Likewise I will repeat my comment on that thought, which readers of the *Fairacres Chronicle* who go back to 1974 may recall: 'If at times one has the impression that provision for the elephants exceeds that for the lambs this is nothing in comparison with the fact that the *Dictionary* provides water in which the lambs may learn to swim—or at least splash about—in the elephants' end.

SISTER EDMÉE SLG

GOD, WHERE ARE YOU? by Gerard Hughes. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997. £9.99. ISBN 0 232 52226 X.

To speak as one friend to another is to share our deepest and most intimate thoughts and memories. When that friend is God, this conversation or prayer is known as a colloquy. Gerard Hughes has set his autobiography and reflections on his life in the midst of such a colloquy. What may have begun as the story of seventy years or so, becomes a history of spiritual searching and struggle. Through his theological reflections the questions that are common to all humanity are faced and explored. In his description of vocation and priesthood, the challenges today for the Catholic and the Jesuit are addressed honestly. The reader has a sense of being invited in, to share intimate and personal thoughts and doubts of someone who is a widely read and well respected spiritual guide and writer. This is both valuable and thought-provoking, and gives insight into Gerard Hughes' spiritual walk with God. It is an interesting, amusing and absorbing 'long read'.

His story starts at the age of three with the memory of being in his bedroom and shouting 'GOD', to which the reply was a deafening silence. The search was on! For a boy brought up as a Catholic, today some might say strictly and narrowly, God was limited to the many compulsory services, religious school lessons and fondly-remembered family prayers. The search continued through the formative years of a convent schooling and Jesuit education in Scotland and via an initial austere idea of God, seen as 'forbidding yet attractive'. When about sixteen, he confided to his trusted sister Marie, to whom the book is dedicated, that he would be a doctor and a pilot in the War; but it was not to be. At eighteen he responded decisively to his calling. In 1942 he set off on the long road of training to become a Jesuit

priest. The early chapters cover these formative years. He looks back with critical insight at the way he was trained, the prejudices he held, and the absurdity of much that was taught and expected of the novice in those days. Despite the effect of those times, he remained aware that God had something else in store for him. First vows in 1944, followed by further time at St Beuno's, now the well-known Ignatian spirituality centre in North Wales, seem to have brought a darker spiritual experience, 'the dark side of God,' as he terms it, with a sense that his prayer had little connection with real life. He describes this through an often-recalled image of riding a bicycle without a chain. There was a realisation that his notion of God was abstract and remote. This insight is like a shaft of light in the dark as he reflects that our prayer too can become an alternative to hard thought and hard work.

Those outside the religious life may not realise the sacrifices it involves, particularly in the loss of family. The early times contained difficult farewells and painful partings when his mother and sisters in particular visited him. Inevitably throughout this life story there are significant people and significant losses. In the depth of depression his sister Marie committed suicide, which had a profound effect on Gerard, who loved her deeply. Such was his training and upbringing, however, that it was thirty years before he was able to recognise and share his feelings following her death. The death of mother, brother, sisters, involvement in a serious car accident in South Africa in which close friends were injured and killed, left their mark and a sense of guilt, searching for answers. He asks, 'God, were are you in these events?', and realises that the answer is not always certain, but is characteristically vague yet amazing. His travelling in later years took him to Australasia to meet people who became very relevant to this spiritual journey. Despite the richness of his life Gerard Hughes describes the time he spent with Aborigines as the 'most liturgically chaotic and spiritually moving I have ever experienced'. However, his reflections on this do not provoke the 'Ah! Ah! Yes! Yes!' moments so readily in the reader as do many other events and shared thoughts.

There is a gentle humour as the book continues, and important discoveries made and understood. The academic years in Heythrop and Oxford give some idea of how it felt to train as a Jesuit priest and spiritual director, not a journey for the faint-hearted. Did it really take sixteen years? But the importance of vigorous academic questioning is not avoided, and doubts about God and faith are explored with a frankness which is helpful for others on a similar journey of faith. He writes of belief, of suffering, of uncertainty, of loyalty, of change both in the Church following Vatican II, and in his own ideas of God. His early years as a parish priest are described

as uninspiring, undemanding, and boring, followed by a period of dark doubt. Through these times, and in the description of his years working in a hospice, then as a school teacher and university chaplain, we are gently led along his spiritual path in which there are many turns, side-roads and interesting lay-bys, until we are arrive at St Beuno's, the place through which Gerard Hughes has become best known. In the late 70's he was responsible for making the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius more widely available to Catholic and Protestant laity. He also introduced the eight-day and short retreats to a variety of people, from lapsed Catholics and Communists to Protestants and priests. The move from the early narrow view of the Church to a generous openness and freedom is almost breathtaking in its impact and potential.

The author is a traveller and adventurer at heart, and takes the reader with him, so that we, too, want to go there to visit. We want to join the pilgrim, see, hear, smell, touch and taste the goodness of seeking God, to understand a little more, and to realise that for us as for the author God, whose answer echoes 'down the arches of the years,' is always greater than anything we can think or imagine.

'God in our darkness drawing us to light, God in our sinfulness offering us healing, God in our self-deception leading us into truth'—as the colloquy ends, so we are invited to walk with Gerard Hughes for some part of his spiritual journey. It is an invitation well worth accepting.

JOHN EDMONDS-SEAL

GOING FORTH, A Practical and Spiritual Approach to Dying and Death by Bill Kirkpatrick. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997. £10.95. ISBN 0 232 52237 5.

This latest book by Bill Kirkpatrick has three distinct sections. In the first he shares generously from his own personal experience, making it clear that at their going forth he sits with people of many different faith traditions or none.

He sits with them as a vulnerable, sensitive human being, helping them to articulate their questions about living and dying. He sits as a Christian priest. He sits not in judgement, but within the mystery of life and death. He sits, sensing when to speak and when to keep silent, when to give and when to receive in mutual trust. He knows the cost of being with the dying, he knows the uniqueness of each soul as it goes forth.

From this wealth of personal experience he moves in the next two sections to its practical application. Part Two is an anthology of readings,

songs, prayers and poems suitable for a funeral or memorial service. These could form the basis for a personal anthology and help us to realise that it can be salutary to meditate on our own going forth.

Part Three brings together the names and addresses of many organisations who minister to the dying, their families and friends. These pages reflect the breadth of the author's contacts and provide a valuable resource for all concerned with care in the community as well as providing a focus for prayer.

The cover is especially evocative. A painting by Pat Craddock, it shows a tiny motor boat on a mountain lake. As I looked at it I remembered the bereaved mother of a twelve-year-old daughter. As part of working through her post-bereavement trauma, she volunteered to be with children and families in a similar situation. She was sitting beside the hospital bed of a six-year-old Maori boy in a coma. The child woke suddenly and said, 'I see Jesus coming, and he is coming in a canoe.' He then lay back and died peacefully. Bill's book shows us that sharing in such peaceful joy at another's going forth is a privilege and unexpected blessing.

SISTER ANNE SLG

WAIT AND TRUST by Angela Ashwin. Eagle, 1997. £5.99. ISBN 0 86347 208 7.

This little book is designed to lead us into the stillness of God, and it admirably fulfils its purpose. But, how sad that it is necessary! We live in such a noisy and stress-filled environment, as I realised recently when I was spending some time away from Fairacres while the building renovations were in progress. The first two weeks were occupied in 'busy-ness', doing this and that and feeling guilty because I was not properly busy Likewise so many of us feel guilty if we have spare time, and fill it up with 'useful' activities.

So I would recommend you sit still and read this book slowly, then put the teaching it contains into practice. Waiting and trusting are very important in the spiritual life, and we must be careful not to continually rush about implementing our newest and latest ideas. We all have this tendency, and it is not good for us. We must put down deep spiritual roots. We do well to use the material provided in this book, and in particular, the 'Pathway into Silence, which forms its introduction.

SISTER ELLINOR SLG

Angela Ashwin has written a companion volume to this one, Wait and See, *ISBN 0 86347 207 9.*

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press

Esther de Waal, *Living With Contradiction, an Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality*, £5.99.

From James Clarke/Lutterworth

Mary Beasley, *Mission on the Margins*, £7.99.
R. L. Brett, *Faith and Doubt, Religion and Secularisation in Literature from Wordsworth to Larkin*, £25.00.

From Darton, Longman and Todd

A. M. Allchin, *God's Presence Makes the World*, £9.95.
Peta Dunstan, *This Poor Sort, A History of the European Province of the Society of St Francis*, £19.95.
Cardinal Basil Hume, *Basil in Blunderland*, £7.95.
Robin Bruce Lockhart, ed., *Listening to Silence, an Anthology of Carthusian Writings*, £7.95.
John Main, *Silence and Stillness in Every Season*, £9.95.
John Nelson, ed., *The Arms of Love with St Thérèse of Lisieux,* £7.95.
Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak, A Spiritual Journey* (Memorial Edition), £9.95.
Ian Petit, *God Is Not Angry, The Truth That Sets Us Free*, £5.95.
Sheila Upjohn, *Why Julian Now? A Voyage of Discovery*, £7.95.

From Fount

Angela Ashwin, *From Pain into Prayer*, £6.99.

From Hodder and Stoughton

Esther de Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, £7.99.

From SCM Press

Christopher R. Campling, *The Food of Love, Reflections on Music and Faith*, £9.95.

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