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COMMUNITY NOTES

JUST occasionally I have been in the right place at the right time, and known it. This was obviously the case in York Minster earlier this summer for I was sitting in front of the Great East Window as the sun came up. The prayer and silence of the place was as hospitable to the silent watchers (Carmelites, Poor Clares, Benedictines and others) as we to it. And there was time, on the longest days of the year, morning after morning, to know that to be so, and to be renewed and refreshed by it.

To begin with I found that it was enough that the growing light was held in a frame of stone and metal, though I could make no sense of the fragments of colour and form. Then I realized that I was being regarded, from somewhere in the middle of the window, with a distinctly fishy look–I could make out a whale, and found myself contemplating the fifth day of creation. Encouraged by that clue I examined the separate lights more closely, and the panes of scarlet, blue and gold, illuminated in turn, began to tell me their story of how it was in the beginning. I began to trust what my eyes were seeing and recognized some old friends, the four-and-twenty elders around the throne, long familiar from a Christmas card kept in my Office book. I realized that what I was looking at in the lower part of the window was what the seer of Revelation described, and that the image that recurred again and again was indeed Christ enthroned in glory. Later I learned that at the apex of the window, beyond the range of what I could make out, God the Father was depicted with the letters alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

The wonder of being in the right place at the right time was not just York Minster in the early morning but the integration of that moment with all of the past that contributed to it. As if everything–but really *everything*–was for the sake of each new moment, and anyone who, like myself, might wander in and taste it for the first time. It made nonsense of fears about the future. It was, to use an expression we use often in SLG, ‘all meant’.

Sr Diana has given her impression of the conference we were attending in an article later in this *Chronicle*. When I was asked

what it was about, over a cup of coffee with no chance for more than a one-word answer, I floundered a bit and said, 'Mysticism'. The next time, a little better prepared, I said, 'Christ'. And the wise friend who asked me responded, 'Ah. Deep then.' Yes, but the depths depend upon our being there, and that is where the experience which I have described comes in. Such moments of presence can reveal that all moments are 'meant', not in a fateful or constraining way, but because they are shaped by context and connectedness, yet are at the same time complete and unique.

I do not know if this is a peculiarly Christian experience of time, probably not. We can, though, allow it to illuminate central tenets of the Christian faith for us: the incarnation of Christ when eternity broke into time completely; his passover, and ours; the age to come already present in the Holy Spirit, who holds for us all meanings, and all hope. Christians rightly lay claim to the proper reason for celebrating the millennium, but if what we say of Christ's birth is true, we dishonour him by celebrating only that historical moment two thousand years ago. We are challenged to value time for the sake of the one who is beyond time, and to live in uncertainty without fear because he has promised to come at the end of the age. In the Great East Window scripture from Genesis to Revelation comes alive and dies each day as the sun's light moves over it. By implication, and in the faith of the craftsman who conceived and made the window, the whole passage of history and pre-history waxes and wanes in the light of the Son. The window depicts time and space in relation to its alpha and omega, which is God: a *great window* indeed. And the immediate effect of its compelling beauty is to make us stand still and look toward the east, whence Christ will come.

Trying to live our whole lives it that context and light is made easier by certain events, of which birth and death are the most obvious. Sr Eileen Mary died here at Fairacres on 6 July; she had had a heart attack in her hermitage at Bede House on Whitsunday and been taken into Maidstone hospital. After three weeks there she came back to Fairacres for convalescence, but became increasingly tired. She realized that she would not be able to return to Bede House and she simply let that, and then the other 'great

transition', happen to her. Submission was never her style, but in this case she did not rage. Indeed it could be said that she went 'gentle into that good night', though she hardly expected that. In April this year she wrote a letter to a friend in bereavement:

> Perhaps we all look forward to a time when we shall be serene and settled, when most problems will have been solved and perhaps we feel that we can really live then. But at any rate people like you can see and value each experience as it comes along and so grow through it. Now that I've been here as a hermit for ten years, I might be thought to have reached some settled place. But as one goes through the seventies the great transition draws nearer, and may happen at any time. It would be so good if one could quietly put oneself into God's hands, and yet with my temperament, I fear that I shall kick and scream every bit of the way….

Many will have known Sr Eileen Mary through her writings, including some of the earliest Fairacres Publications, and latterly her book *Door through Darkness, St John of the Cross and mysticism in everyday life*, published by New City. In the late sixties she was Novice Mistress; on laying down that office she visited Orthodox monasteries in Romania and established links there which she retained and valued to the end of her life. Our Sisters who visited Romania this summer returned with gifts and greetings for her. Many again came to know her while she was Sister in Charge at Bede House. That period was followed by another ecumenical venture, when she went to Belfast as one of the founding members of the Columbanus Community of Reconciliation with Fr Michael Hurley SJ. This led in turn to the very significant time she spent as a hermit in County Donegal. The concerns and struggles of Ireland and of Eastern Europe were deeply in her heart and prayer. Both, it seemed, were in crisis at the time of her death. The All Saints Sisters of the Poor, our near neighbours in Oxford, very generously allowed us to use their beautiful chapel for the funeral requiem. Although we were sad not be able to use our own chapel, due to the building work in progress there, it did mean that a large congregation of friends could join us for a most appropriate and memorable service. Fr John Scott, the chaplain at Bede House, presided; Deacon Alex

Popesçu chanted the gospel in Romanian and Fr Alan Harrison gave the address.

Sr Elizabeth of the Word of God Incarnate was clothed as a Novice on St Mark's day, which this year was 26 April but is ordinarily 25—Anzac Day—and we were glad to welcome her niece as a representative of her New Zealand family for this, the last occasion before work began on the Chapel. But we made a virtue of necessity and found a happy alternative to the chapel at Fairacres for the Clothing of Patricia as Sr Patricia Clare of the Grace of God at First Vespers of the Feast of St Thomas on 2 July. For this we (including a small busload of nuns and novices from Fairacres) were made most welcome by the Sisters at Boxmoor who had skilfully adapted familiar customs to local usage and prepared a fitting feast to share with Patricia's friends in the garden afterwards.

Having touched on news from Bede House and Boxmoor, I must also mention St Isaac's. Sr Anne was blessed as Sister in Charge of the Community at St Isaac's on Easter Sunday, and she has since been joined there by Sr Clare and Sr Tessa: all three Sisters are much enjoying the continuing life there.

Sr Margaret Theresa and Sr Judith successfully accomplished their car journey across Europe to the CIIR Conference in Moldavia. Sr Judith commented that the driving was ten times easier than a trip from Oxford to Staplehurst! They received heart-warming and generous hospitality at every stage and made many friends. We are hearing about it gradually as they allow themselves time to assimilate the experience; but it is already evident that Sr Margaret Theresa has lost her heart to Romania.

The building work at Fairacres has been going well, with only minor hitches, such as more extensive damp than we had realized and trouble with the drains which necessitated digging up the lawn and putting it back again afterwards, which was accomplished very skilfully. After some foreseeable controversy about the colour-scheme for redecorating chapel, we are now looking forward to seeing the end result. We have postponed our dedication festival from 1 August to the end of the month so that we can celebrate it in chapel itself, freshly painted, freshly lit and

ready to resound afresh with the praises of God.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

LAW AND GOSPEL

A Homily preached at Fairacres on the 10th Sunday of the Year, 6 June 1999

JOHN BARTON

IN Lutheran biblical interpretation it is an established principle that the Bible contains two things: law and gospel. 'Law' is the declaration of God's judgement on human sin; 'gospel' is the proclamation of his saving power through Christ. But it is not that some passages contain law and others gospel—as, in the simplest way, one might imagine the Old Testament to be all law, and the New Testament to be all gospel. Rather, each and every passage of the Bible, when properly interpreted, contains both elements. The gospel is never proclaimed without revealing the need of sinful human beings to be forgiven for their transgression of the law; but equally, the law, and human failure to obey it, is never announced except in the context of God's gracious word of pardon and forgiveness. The dialectic of law and gospel corresponds, Lutherans believe, to a central fact about God himself: that he saves us even as he judges us, and judges us even as he saves us. Or, as our own John Donne once put it, 'If some king of the earth have so large an extent of dominion in north and south, as that he hath winter and summer together in his dominions, so large an extent east and west, as that he hath day and night together in his dominions; much more hath God mercy and judgement together'.

Matthew 9:9-13, on the call of Matthew from the custom-house, is a good illustration of what Lutherans mean by this overarching principle. The tendency to identify ourselves with one of the two groups involved in the story is irresistible, and it has been normal for Christians to identify with those whom the self-righteous Pharisees criticise, that is, with Matthew the tax collector and his friends. Jesus, we know, accepted and admitted

to table-fellowship (a powerful thing in Judaism then as now) those who were regarded by pious Jews as socially unacceptable: the ritually impure and the morally compromised, including tax collectors. There is then a tendency to make this an illustration of a (to Christians) terribly obvious point, that God has pity on those whom society condemns, and in the process to turn these people into sinners indeed, but rough diamonds: people whose heart was in the right place even though they may not have been conventionally religious. Jesus, we tend to feel, saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and in the same way also saw through the superficial sinfulness of those the Pharisees despised, and discerned the basic goodness of their hearts. So, we may think, he will do the same for us, and emerge on the side of those like ourselves who may do wrong at times, but whose hearts are in the right place. But that is to make stories such as this banal. Tax collectors were not basically nice people despised by the self-righteous; they were thoroughly sleazy people, who bought the right to collect taxes because they could add their own cut and thus prey on ordinary people. They were entirely undesirable characters. We know that Jesus was hated by some of his contemporaries, not because he thought that such people could be forgiven if they repented of their wicked ways—all Jews believed that—but because he scandalously accepted them *before* they had repented. Their repentance in some cases certainly followed: we're not to imagine that Matthew went back to his extortionate ways after Jesus had called him. But the acceptance came first, and this was totally scandalous. The divine mercy as seen in Jesus' acceptance of Matthew and his like is the purest form of gospel: the good news that absolutely no-one is outside God's forgiving love, however terrible they are. It is not nice sinners that God loves, but nasty ones—real sinners, not just people the self-righteous could misunderstand as such. But the message for us is that we must know ourselves also to be real sinners, and that is where 'law' or judgement comes in. We are not to let ourselves off the hook by thinking of ourselves as basically good-hearted people who go a bit astray, but are to acknowledge that we do really sin; yet we acknowledge that, not in order to despair, but rather to

rejoice that, in St Paul's words, God has consigned all humankind to disobedience, yet so that he may have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32).

Law and gospel are also present together if we take what may be a healthier reading of the passage, and try to see ourselves not in the despised tax collectors but in the Pharisees. The Pharisees were by no means so black as they are painted. They took the law of God with utter seriousness, and I think the best analogy in Christian culture is with a group like the early Methodists: people who, living wholly in the world, nevertheless bound themselves by a strict rule to live out methodically the kind of ordered and examined life which is pleasing to God. They certainly did not think that God would accept them without repentance, and they repented often and sincerely, observing the sacrificial system that in Judaism was a test of one's seriousness about one's own sins. They suffered, however, from what I once heard described as 'the quiet indomitable pride' that is the besetting fault of self-consciously religious people—keeping God's law and fearing his judgement, but allowing no place for him to break through their system and surprise them with unexpected demands or (which is worse) with unexpected mercy. They had not understood the helplessness of the joy that comes from the gospel: the knowledge that one is received and forgiven freely and without conditions. And so they failed to see the point of Jesus' attitude to gross sinners, feeling it to be softness on sin and an implicit slighting of their own diligent attempts at law-keeping. But the God Jesus came to proclaim keeps no accounts, and is not much impressed with human virtue. From his vantage-point even the best of us are, as the Victorians used to say, not much better than we ought to be. For he has consigned all humankind to disobedience: yet so that he may have mercy upon all. And the ultimate sin of the Pharisee in all of us is to refuse the free offer of salvation because we want to deserve it. Yet even that sin God can cure, since he sent his Son not to call the virtuous, but sinners: even tax collectors and even, even, Pharisees. As Donne continues, 'he can bring thy summer out of winter, though thou have no spring. Though in the ways of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been

benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, damped and benumbed, smothered and stupefied till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the sun at noon to illustrate all shadows, as the sheaves in harvest to fill all penuries, all occasions invite his mercies, and all times are his seasons.'

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FIFTY YEARS OF DEBATE ON 'WELFARE'

DOROTHY HOWELL-THOMAS

IN DECEMBER 1942 William Beveridge published his *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services.* On 20 July 1943 William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, chaired a public meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster, entitled 'Conditions of Security', at which Beveridge explained the principles and aims of the Report. Temple, whose friendship with Beveridge was of long standing, had been deeply interested in the ideas and principles which underpinned the Beveridge Plan. His own *Christianity and Social Order* had appeared early in 1942, and it is clear how close his thoughts about a post-war society based on social justice, from his own Christian point of view, were to those of the great Report. The Archbishop invited a few friends and relations to attend that meeting, as well as his small Lambeth staff, of which I as his secretary was one.

Over fifty years, several generations and historical contexts later, it is necessary to remind oneself that the Beveridge Report was revolutionary, not so much in overturning the centuries-old Poor Laws, for these had already begun to be eroded by the early beginnings of contributory health and unemployment insurance. It was revolutionary in that it proposed a *universal* social insurance—all contributed, all could benefit in certain clearly defined circumstances. In his attack on poverty, Beveridge's aim was to cushion, by a flat-rate system of benefits obtained as of right (that is, National Insurance) the person who, in a society of full employment, temporarily or accidentally lost his capacity to earn—old age pensions being a somewhat different matter.

In the debate on the Report in the House of Lords, William Temple spoke in support of its philosophy.[1] His principal grounds were these:

Firstly, **Hope**. To a generation that vividly remembered the indignities of the Poor Law and the effects on families of the Means Test in the unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s, '[the Report] has excited a degree of hope with regard to the future such

as has not been raised … for something like a generation, at any rate'. I experienced that hope and excitement as a social science student at the London School of Economics (which a legacy from Temple had made possible), where the Report was the immediate object of our study and discussion; while its resulting legislation became for many of us part of our professional lives.

Secondly, **Universality**. In the language of his time, Temple welcomed the Report because it promised 'a greater form of national fellowship and unity than we have ever had before …. ' And one of the great divisions in society 'is mainly at this point of security'. He thought that this universality could 'give a sense of responsibility to the State in *all* sections of the population'.

Thirdly, **Basic security**. That House of Lords speech was a long one, and it is tempting to quote Temple on a number of points, as well as in the correspondence which he carried on with his critics.[2] I especially like ' … any threat of unemployment as distinct from leisure (the difference between the two being the possession of money) is quite a serious diminution of liberty'.

Of course societies never stand still and several factors early in its history began the destruction of the elegant universality of the Beveridge scheme. One was the inevitable survival within it of part of the old Poor Law:[3] this was the introduction, along with the National Insurance, of the means-tested National Assistance, as it was then called—inevitable because a number of people did not at first qualify for cover by the insurance scheme, and National Assistance became, in effect, the former Poor Law 'relief'. Then Beveridge's scheme was based on the premise of full employment (his sequel to the first Report, *Full Employment in a Free Society*, published in 1944, never received the same attention). For a time, 'full employment' did prevail. But in the economic and political conditions of the ensuing years, it became an impossible dream. Piecemeal legislation for the 'relief' of poverty—and, it must be recognised, people's rising expectations of what constituted poverty—was unavoidably introduced until the multiplicity of 'welfare' benefits led to present complaints about the whole system.

One measure in 1970 marked, in my opinion, the real end of the Beveridge philosophy: the introduction of Family Income Supplement—called by some a development and by some a betrayal of that philosophy. By a means-tested supplement to earnings, it took us right back in history to the reaction which had led to the harsh Poor Law of 1834 and the deep psychological effect which that Poor Law had on the mind and soul of the British people for a number of generations. For as well as the economic and social factors which have brought us to our present pass, there is a whole set of intangibles, of attitudes, of swings in the climate of opinion, which prevent the clear thinking that is necessary for a new start. Attitudes and opinions are deeply and unconsciously formed by the prevailing terminology: words, their meaning changing over time, can have a distorting, even pernicious effect on public opinion.

Take first the very term 'welfare'. It did not originally mean what it has come to mean in this country, copied I believe from its use in the USA. 'The Welfare State', if it meant anything, was a State in which the citizens enjoyed a basic degree of well-being, through measures freely accepted by a democracy. Today no one will deny that it has a derogatory sense, because it denotes the means-tested 'assistance', not earned through the contributory National Insurance. To be 'on welfare' goes right back to the 'relief of paupers'. Even though the benefits now cover many subsidies and not only sums of money in emergencies, and even though the attitude is mostly unconscious, it creates and sustains deep social divisions. It encourages a moralistic judgement on the part of the better-off, who talk of a 'dependency culture'. I had turned with some hope to Frank Field's magisterial article 'What Then Is Unthinkable?' in *Crucible,*[4] and found that he too had fallen into the word-trap. Although he gives solid economic reasons for resisting a means-tested social security, he comes dangerously near to the concept of 'the deserving and the undeserving poor', notably in his fear that 'means-tested welfare teaches people the benefits of dishonesty and bad behaviour'. After all, income tax is in effect a means test; but fraud and

evasion are hardly unheard-of, though never as relentlessly hunted and exposed as benefits frauds.

Secondly, if the misuse of the word 'welfare' has led to a whole range of intangibles, it may be thought that taxation at least is a reality. Naturally, no one likes to be taxed and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. Nevertheless it is true to say that there are attitudes towards taxation which, if they cannot be taught, can at least be promoted if there is a general consensus of opinion about public expenditure. In effect everybody pays some form of tax, for example, the indirect taxes; so the idea that 'those on welfare are on it at the tax-payer's expense' both reinforces and promotes the great social division of today's Two Nations.

It is not within the competence of this article nor is it its purpose to suggest practical remedies. But as a general principle it would seem that to encourage the acceptance of a realistically graduated income-tax is the first step towards healing the social divide. Some years ago the idea of a 'negative income-tax' was mooted, centralising the whole welfare system through the Inland Revenue. That would involve a huge change in practical terms, which might not be beyond our technology; but also political and ethical decisions about a minimum income which might be beyond our present way of thinking.

Many people had hoped that some new, contemporary social security scheme would emerge with the turn of the century—a scheme based on social justice but for which the practical means were acceptable today. For this it would be necessary to promote a climate of opinion which wants justice and community; Temple's 'national fellowship' in modern terms. Some Christian thinkers believe that on many key issues, notably taxation, the government 'lingers behind public opinion'.[5] Present policy on 'welfare reform' seems at this stage to be dealing with administrative changes in present benefits. One hopeful sign in all discussions is the recognition that it is unemployment that lies at the root of social exclusion. But can our leaders reinterpret in our contemporary context the words of an Archbishop of Canterbury spoken fifty-six years ago: 'the hope of a universal scheme

expressing our national fellowship and unity and supplying the foundation of security to the free structure of our life'?

Notes

1 Hansard, Lords, 315-320, 25 February 1943.
2 Archbishop William Temple Papers, Lambeth Palace Library, vol.5
3 For background to the Poor Laws, see for example, *London, a Social History* by Roy Porter (Hamish Hamilton, 1994).
4 *Crucible.* The quarterly journal of the Board for Social Responsibility, January-March 1999
5 Ibid. 'The "New Politics" and the "Old Religion": Conflict, Co-operation or … ?' by Kenneth Leech.

Dorothy Howell-Thomas,who was editor of Crucible *1967-73 and has served on the Board for Social Responsibility, was for many years a social worker in the personnel department of Selfridge's Department Store.*

THE MARTYRDOM OF LIFE AND LOVE

JOHN SCOTT

THE publication, five years ago, of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters from prison to his fiancée Maria von Wedemeyer was a reminder that the death of martyrs has its effect on and can be influenced by family and loved ones. In every generation this will be felt in different ways; and in the accounts of the martyrs in the early Christian centuries we can find some strikingly contrasting attitudes. These texts are not without their problems; some exist in widely varying versions, and others owe a great deal to pious invention. However, there are good reasons for ascribing basic authenticity to the martyr acts which will be mentioned here. In many cases the stories presented to us are built simply on the records of the trials and executions of the martyrs. For that reason *The Martyrdom of Saint Perpetua* is particularly valuable, as the account of death in the amphitheatre is preceded by Perpetua's own diary account of her imprisonment, her God-given visions and her trial, and by the visionary experience recorded by Saturus, Perpetua's own instructor in the faith.

Saint Perpetua was martyred with her companions at Carthage in North Africa in the year 203. It seems unlikely that a major persecution was in progress, but a group of catechumens was identified, arrested and seems to have been united in holding to the faith in which they were being instructed. Nonetheless Perpetua, who came from an influential family, found the transition from house arrest (during which she was baptised) to prison very shocking: ' … we were lodged in the prison and I was terrified, as I had never before been in such a dark hole. What a difficult time it was! With the crowd the heat was stifling; then there was the extortion of the soldiers; and to crown it all, I was tortured with worry for my baby there … '

Bribery by the deacons obtained some relief for the martyrs, but it took some time until arrangements could be made for Perpetua and her child (who was young enough to be at the breast) to be together: ' … At once I recovered my health, relieved as I

was of my worry and anxiety over the child. My prison had suddenly become a palace, so that I wanted to be there rather than anywhere else.'

Perpetua was blessed in many ways; although her father, who is presented as a pagan, was horrified by her faith and obstinate refusal to evade martyrdom, the rest of her family seems to have been at least sympathetic to Christianity, and she had a brother who was a catechumen. Even more than that, she received four visions in all, which strengthened in turn her, the family and her companions for the coming ordeal of death at the Games in the public amphitheatre.

When the martyrs were called before the proconsul, the trial consisted of a simple question: 'Are you a Christian?' But before this could be put to Perpetua, her father staged a dramatic intervention: ' … [he] appeared with my son, dragged me from the step, and said: "Perform the sacrifice—have pity on your baby!" ' Perpetua only reports that the proconsul picked up on this, himself saying: 'Have pity on your father's grey head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors'. If that suggests that the proconsul was concerned for the family, his next action shows that he viewed the appeal to the baby's welfare to be just a way of resolving a troublesome case: 'When my father persisted in trying to dissuade me, [the proconsul] ordered him to be thrown to the ground and beaten with a rod'.

Perpetua was deeply troubled by this, 'sorry for father, just as if I myself had been beaten'. Nonetheless, she and her companions, now sentenced to death, return to prison 'in high spirits'. But she has not forgotten her baby; she asks for its return, and her father refuses; 'but as God willed, the baby had no further desire for the breast, nor did I suffer any inflammation; and so I was relieved of any anxiety for my child … ' Perpetua takes this as a sign that it is right to proceed to martyrdom; her death will be within God's will and her family, and particularly her son, within his providential care. Admittedly, she can do little to assuage her father's grief; the final glimpse of him is on a visit to his daughter in prison: 'he threw himself on the ground and began to curse his

old age and to say such words as would move all creation. I felt sorry for his unhappy old age'.

Against that, in her visions, Perpetua has seen her brother Dinocrates, who died of a facial cancer aged seven. He appears to be suffering, and she takes this as a heavenly reminder to pray for him. This has its effect; a further vision shows the cancerous scar healed and Dinocrates happy and playing. Much might be said of the suggestive baptismal detail in these visions, but Perpetua's familial concern, rooted in her faith also, is what can stand out here. Almost the last view of her before death is at a conversation with her brother and another catechumen in the amphitheatre: 'Stand fast in the faith and love one another, and do not be weakened by what we have gone through'.

The account of Saint Perpetua's Passion is important for the insights which it gives into the spiritual and emotional responses of a martyr; without her personal commentary she might have appeared as hard-hearted, contemptuous of her father's distress and heedless of her baby's welfare. Nonetheless, the text has some curious gaps. We are told about Perpetua's family, and that she is a respectably married woman, but there is no mention of her being a widow and no mention of her husband at any point in the story.

One of Perpetua's companions is Felicitas, who has often been taken as her slave, although the text does not say this. Already pregnant when imprisoned, Felicitas may lose her place with the other martyrs, as Roman law forbids pregnant women to be put to death—the sentence is considerately delayed until after childbirth. 'And so, two days before the contest, [the martyrs] poured forth a prayer to the Lord in one torrent of common grief. And immediately after their prayer the birth pains came upon her.' This might be providential, but it was also painful; the child was a month premature. Sadly we know almost nothing of Felicitas' emotional reaction, so as to compare it with that of Perpetua. But when mocked in labour by one of the prison guards, Felicitas replies: 'What I am suffering now, I suffer by myself. But [in the amphitheatre] another [i.e. Christ] will be inside me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him'.

Does Felicitas sound more hard-hearted here than Perpetua, or has she simply accepted the martyrdom that is now so close? Again, there is no mention of the father of her child, but the narrator of the martyrs' passion is careful to indicate that, although Christians may go bravely to death, they still display proper human love and care: 'And [Felicitas] gave birth to a girl; and one of the sisters [i.e. Christians of the congregation in Carthage] brought her up as her own daughter'.

Perhaps from forty years earlier than, or just conceivably from fifty years after Saint Perpetua's death, we have the account of the martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papylus/Pamfilus and Agathonicê at Pergamum. This exists in Greek and Latin versions, but both attribute to Papylus in his interrogation a particular claim about family.

'The proconsul asked: "Are you wealthy?" Pamfilus replied: "Yes, very." "Do you have children?" asked the proconsul. "Many indeed", replied Pamfilus. But when he said this, someone in the crowd shouted out: "He means he has children in virtue of the faith of the Christians." And indeed Pamfilus admitted that he had spiritual children in every province and every city.' In the Latin version we are told that Carpus is a bishop and Pamfilus a deacon, which might give more background to the claim here about spiritual fatherhood.

In the Greek version Agathonicê seems to be a bystander, who sees the glory of the Lord as Carpus dies, burnt at the stake. Taking this as a call from heaven, she rushes forward to martyrdom as well: 'The mob shouted out: "Have pity on your son!" And the blessed Agathonicê said: "He has God who can take pity on him; for he has providence over all. Let me do what I have come for!"' If this is all by sudden inspiration, the Latin version presents a scenario closer to that of Saint Perpetua's more considered confession. Here Agathonicê is arrested with the other two and is clearly a disciple of theirs: '[Agathonicê said] "I am a Christian … If I am worthy, I shall eagerly desire to follow the footsteps of my teachers." While the crowd cried out to her: "Have pity on yourself and on your children", the proconsul said: "Look to yourself; have pity on yourself and on your children, as the

crowd cries." Agathonicê answered: "My children have God, who watches over them. But I will not obey your commands, nor will I sacrifice to demons."'

To what extent is the crowd moved by concern for her children? Agathonicê's assertion to the proconsul is: '"But this is what I have come for, and this is what I am prepared for, to die for Christ's name"'. When the crowd's reaction is again recorded, it focuses on Agathonicê alone: 'she removed her clothing and gave it to the servants. But when the crowd saw how beautiful she was, they grieved in mourning for her.' It is, of course, Agathonicê who dies, and not her children; and the crowd may be bewailing the incomprehensible intransigence of Christians. However, in the Greek version the crowd reacts differently, questioning the authorities' attitude: 'Those who witnessed [her death] lamented it saying: "It is a terrible sentence; these are unjust decrees!"' Here as with Saint Perpetua, we have, of course, the frustration of not knowing anything about the fate of the children involved.

A hundred years after Saint Perpetua's death, three women were martyred at Saloniki. The account of their trial begins by reporting that they had already fled together as a group to the mountains because of the persecution under the Emperor Maximian (and perhaps for ascetic reasons also): 'these women who had adorned themselves with virtue, following the precepts of the gospel, abandoned their native city, their family, property and possessions because of their love of God and their expectation of heavenly things'. Clearly then, they anticipated that involvement with family could only be a threat to their way of life and witness.

When arrested, two of the three were sentenced to be burnt to death, but the youngest, Irenê, was initially only imprisoned because of her youth. However, she was brought up for trial again, after having been found to have lied about the existence of Christian scriptures in her possession. The prefect questions her about the possible implication of others: '"Was anyone else aware that the documents were in the house where you lived?" "No one else", said Irenê, "saw them, save almighty God who knows all things. But no stranger. As for our own relatives, we considered them worse than our enemies, in fear that they would denounce us.

Hence we told no one."' Whether that fear was well-founded or not, Irenê's comment marks a very different attitude towards family, one that she underlines in further questioning by the prefect: '"Who supplied you with bread?" Irenê answered: "God who supplies all men." "Was your father aware of this?" asked the prefect. Irenê answered: "I swear by almighty God, he was not aware; he knew nothing at all about it."' This does not, in the light of earlier answers, seem to be a strategy for protecting her father, but rather a simple description of the degree of withdrawal from ordinary life that the group believed to be required of them.

During the same persecution Saint Irenaeus, bishop of Sirmium, is in very close contact with his family. He is, in fact, being tortured when they turn up: 'His children kissed his feet and begged, "Father, have pity on yourself and on us!" Then the married women [or, his wife] urged him to yield, weeping for his youth and his good looks. He was hard pressed by the weeping and mourning of all his relatives, the groans of his servants, the wailing of neighbours, and the crying of his friends.' Meanwhile the prefect Probus plays on this: '"Give up this madness of yours, yield to their tears, think of your youth … "' Irenaeus is then kept in prison for a time, and brought out before Probus for some more persuasion. Interestingly, the bishop defends his decision, and perhaps strengthens his own resolve by speaking of his own childhood: '"I have a God whom I learned to worship when I was a mere child …"'—presumably he believes that his own children should thus be able to be steadfast just as he is.

Probus, though, sticks to emotional appeal: '"Do you have a wife?" asked Probus. "No", replied Irenaeus. "Do you have children?" asked Probus. "No", replied Irenaeus. "Then", said Probus, "who were the people who were weeping at the last hearing?"' Insisting that he has no family, Irenaeus responds to Probus' final appeal: '"At least offer sacrifice for the sake of your children!" Irenaeus replied: "My sons have the same God as I do. He can save them. You simply do what you are commanded"'. The narrative of Irenaeus' trial presents a plausible account of a Christian deeply torn by his loyalties, so much so that he appears to resort (wholly implausibly) to denying that he has a family as

his means of entering into Christ's gospel teaching (see St Matthew 10.37, St Luke 14.25). Yet the claim lasts only for a moment; perhaps it has fulfilled its necessary role of enabling Irenaeus to remain steadfast even to death.

Saint Phileas, bishop of Thmuis, is martyred at about the same time, yet is presented as more impervious to the threats and appeals of the authorities and his supporters. The prefect Culcianus seems to have some knowledge of Christianity and some aversion to sentencing Phileas. Discussing conscience with him, he asks: '"Why then do you not respect your conscience touching your children and your wife?" Phileas replied: "Because my conscience with respect to God is higher. For the sacred and divine scripture says: You shall love the Lord your God who made you."' An early indication of steadfastness is given by Phileas when he refers to Socrates: 'When he was being led to his death, even with his wife and children present, he did not turn back, but eagerly embraced death.' The implication is obvious: if a pagan can behave like that, a Christian bishop is hardly likely to do less.

Culcianus goes on raising objections and questions: '"Do you wish to die in this way to no purpose? … Was Paul God? … " and then offers freedom: "I shall release you as a favour to your brother."' All this is interspersed with comments from the lawyers, who are trying to find a way out for Phileas: '[They] said to the prefect: "He has already offered sacrifice [to the image of the emperor] in the council-chamber." "Surely I did not offer sacrifice," answered Phileas … Culcianus said: "Your miserable wife is looking at you." Phileas replied: "… he who has called me to the inheritance of his glory can also call her."'.

So we are given a group scene, where the question of identity of family is raised and given a more specific answer than in the account of Saint Irenaeus' trial: 'The lawyers, the clerks, together with the curator and all of Phileas' relatives, embraced his feet and begged him to have regard for his wife and concern for his children. But it was like water wearing away a rock. He rejected what they said, claiming that the apostles and martyrs were his kin.' By contrast, a Roman tribune present then berates them all for their folly in trying to change Phileas' mind; and is, for his

pains, sentenced to death along with the bishop. Yet even at this point, hope springs up in the familial breast. Phileas' brother, one of the lawyers, shouts out that the bishop requests a stay of execution. The prefect calls everyone back, but is disappointed: '"I made no appeal," said Phileas; "God forbid! Pay no attention to this most unfortunate man."' Were all this not a matter of life and death, the trial of Saint Phileas could easily seem comic; yet it highlights the perplexity felt by many Romans (and by some from Christian families) in the face of the fundamental principle that Christians worship the one God alone.

Of course, these are the stories of those who persevered, not of those who discreetly hid, or faltered, or wholly abandoned the faith. To give perspective, we can look at the church in Carthage during the persecution under the Emperor Decius (250-251), which was far more organised and general than any previous attack on Christians. Even allowing for the rhetoric of Saint Cyprian, then bishop of Carthage, it is clear that the church came very close to collapse, with Christians in huge numbers denying their faith.

Yet that is only the first part of the story. Until then, the general Christian consensus had been that there was no forgiveness for those guilty of apostasy. When the first blast of persecution was over, however, the church was promptly besieged by those who had denied their faith, now seeking re-admission to it. The story of the dissension and jealousies thus provoked is a lengthy one, to which St Cyprian's voluminous correspondence bears witness. Nonetheless, the episode effected a change in the Church's pastoral practice, and not least because of the pressure of the numbers involved. Those who had denied, but wished to return to the faith, were put under a form of discipline and could, in due course, be re-admitted to the sacraments. The Carthaginian church could boast of its tradition of martyrs: Saint Perpetua and her companions, Saint Cyprian himself in a slightly later persecution; yet behind them stood many, with or without family, who honoured their memory and sought their prayers, whilst not able wholly to follow their example.

Now these martyr acts, taken from a period of, at the most, one hundred and fifty years, and from Tunisia around the Eastern

Mediterranean to Greece, show us Christians witnessing in varied situations. The authorities may wish to deal with them swiftly; or they may be curious to know more of this incomprehensible faith; or they may be very averse to sentencing to death. Similarly, the martyrs may suffer lengthy imprisonment and torture; or be sentenced on the basis of their witness in the inspiration of a moment. Their families may support them; or the martyrs' children may be so young that they can express no opinion; or husbands, wives and children may plead, creating acute dilemmas, or raising no question at all in the martyrs' minds. Inevitably our own days are different, but Christians continue to have to witness to their faith even to death in various parts of the world, and it would be strange if these stories from the beginning of the Church's life could not still illuminate and inspire that particular identification with Jesus Christ, which is fulfilled in death 'freely accepted', and which wrestles with the gospel saying: *Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me.* (St Matthew 10.37)

Note: Quotations are taken from *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, translated by H. Musurillo, Oxford 1972. Some caution is appropriate in reading these translations.

John Scott is Chaplain at Bede House

HOMILY AT THE CONFERENCE OF BRITISH CONTEMPLATIVES AT YORK

24 June 1999

JACK NICHOLLS

'WHAT did I tell you about this window? Always keep it open.' So ends the film *Hook*, a rather inferior sequel to J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan.*

Peter Pan, having left Never Never Land, marries and raises his own family. He begins to grow older and he forgets Never Never Land, or at least relegates it to the realms of childish imagination. He is seduced by busyness and wealth and when his own children are tempted to throw open their bedroom window—the door to Never Never Land at the beginning of the film—they are told angrily by Peter, 'What did I tell you about this window? Always keep it shut'.

The film is the story of how, through the loss and rediscovery of his children, Peter Pan himself is changed. He remembers that which he had forgotten and so the film ends when, in mock anger, he jokes with his children, 'What did I tell you about this window? Always keep it open'.

As I watched that film I thought of today. For you are locked in a battle between these two demands. Satan says to the World, 'What did I tell you about this window? Always keep it closed.' But we are those who hear another voice, 'What did I tell you about this window? Always keep it open'. And you are those who are called to keep a window open, even, and especially, when the World forgets.

The Millennium is about remembering what the World, at least this part of it we call western civilisation, has forgotten—that is, Jesus. Jesus is our window into God.

He calls us not only to keep the window open, but also to become so changed, so transformed, so transfigured, that we become part of the window, incorporated into the window which is Christ.

The call to keep the window open is the call to holiness and the call to be saints, thin spots in the veil between earth and heaven through whom others see the light of the love of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

To open that window Christ died and 'the great ones have to pay for their gift in blood'—in other words, those who follow Christ are called to martyrdom, be it red or white. This is brought out beautifully and simply by Saint Luke in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. For it is no coincidence that in Luke the words of Jesus from the cross, 'Father forgive' and, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit', are echoed almost precisely in the final words of the first martyr Saint Stephen. The link is made and the cost of discipleship spelt out.

The demand of your calling is uncompromising. There is no hedging of bets. You are to be single-minded and nothing must stand in the way of your standing against the voice which loudly, insistently, demands that we forget and keep the window closed; and the window is the cross. For God's sake do not desert your part, the laying down of your lives for those who are your friends—yes, and your enemies too.

It is not your enclosure we would enter, but your hearts. Carry us in the silence of your hearts to God as you stand before the open window of the cross, and be transfigured for us so that we may see through you to God.

Almighty Father, Son and Holy Ghost, eternal, ever-blessed gracious God,
to me the least of saints, to me allow that I may keep a door in paradise.
That I may keep even the smallest door,
the furthest, darkest, coldest door, the door that is least used, the stiffest door.
If so it be but your house, O God, if so it be that I can see your glory even afar, and hear your voice, O God, and know that I am with you, O God.

Saint Columba of Iona

Jack Nicholls is Bishop of Sheffield

THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH TO A NEW CULTURAL ORDER IN BRITAIN

An Address to the Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
21 February 1999

DR. M MASHUQ IBN ALLY

SOME years back the rock group Queen included the Muslim prayer *bismallah* in one of their most famous hits, while in one of Madonna's recent releases she used Hindu symbolism; the thirteenth century Muslim Sufi Rumi is one of the religious personalities most widely read by Hollywood stars—these are some examples which illustrate the search of popular culture in the West for new motifs beyond their own civilization.

At a more serious level, British television, particularly BBC and Channel Four, regularly launch religious education programmes for schools, which are bound to exert an influence on the young people who watch them. In addition to the study of Christianity, religious education has broadened its perspective to include other faiths, and this is a fundamental change in the way religion is studied in British schools. Since the Rushdie controversy even the arts and literature have become more sensitive to questions of race and religion. Often the most rigorous challenges come from traditions of faith. They engage us with their different world-views, but also startle and inspire us by values held in common. This, I believe, is the starting point in Britain for a new religious and cultural order. Pluralism of religious culture is implicit in a democracy, from which can grow a unity able to sustain a common life in spite of the inevitable strains. The resulting synthesis allows diverse communities of faiths to preserve their individual and group identities through the sacred powers of each tradition, and, at the same time acknowledges the one ultimate reality in whom we trust. Peaceful communal life in Britain involves both theology and skilful negotiation towards the growth of shared commitments. For such unity in diversity to flourish, we need religious freedom, since this

allows free movement of ideas and spiritual growth, thus promoting human rights in general. Wherever human dignity is at stake, the church, the synagogue, the mosque, the *ghudwara*, the temple, must be present and active.

When Christianity was emerging, the importance of religious freedom was recognised by the church father Tertullian who in 212 AD wrote an appeal to the then Roman Proconsul Scapula: 'It is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that all human beings should worship according to their convictions'. The Emperor Constantine eventually accepted this view in the Roman Empire in 313 AD: 'We should therefore give both to Christianity and to all others free facility to follow the religion which they may desire'. Other faiths also promote respect and tolerance of other religions. 'Sikhs must in no way give offence to other faiths', states Rahit Maryada. 'I desire men of all faiths to know each others' beliefs and acquire sound doctrines themselves. By honouring others one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to others. In dishonouring them one injures one's own faith. Concord alone is commendable.' Similarly in Islam, its source book, the *qur'an*, reminds us that 'there is no compulsion in religion'. Despite these good words and statements, religions have been in conflict. In Britain today the relative peace we enjoy is the result of many communities of faith living side by side in a secular context.

The movement towards a new religious and cultural order forms a long and arduous process, because the sources of personal and group identity within communities of faith are different. But members of such communities are not prisoners of their traditions. The social and ethical teachings of religion should not be formulated as eternal truths, but as fallible interpretations of truth, subject to change in the constantly shifting relationship between society and basic religious principles. Without sacrificing their essential beliefs and values, those communities must see themselves as continuously evolving in new contexts. Choice and malleability in religion through new interpretations of the tradition, re-shaping of the boundaries, and re-clothing basic elements empower religions to create a new future for Britain.

Fundamental theological and social questions arise out of this new consensus. Will common life together create out of many gods one God? Will common life together create out of many gods one people? Tensions arise between the power of religion to build bridges and form relationships, to give and preserve a sense of identity.

Religions that are universal in character are rich in strengths to effect a new cultural order, which can transcend ethnic and national boundaries. On a theoretical level, religious faith claims to be open to all and offers a transcendent truth about ultimate reality or the sacred. On the practical level, the spread of faith in more than one cultural setting indicates a transcultural appeal. Even religions such as Sikhism, with an ethnic identity, or Zoroastrianism, which is closed to converts, contain aspects of universalism. However, we should not be confused with the idea of 'universal religion'. No such thing exists or is ever likely to exist: communities of faith emerge out of specific traditions with texts, history, rituals and leaders specific to a group. These are transmitted through language, learning, family, institutions, and so on. As a new religious and cultural synthesis evolves, account must be taken of the power of cultural particularity. For instance, Muslims are creating a British Muslim community made up of many ethnic and racial groups.

This universal perspective within religions offers an opportunity to develop relationships between members of the same religion, and between communities of diverse faiths, as well as with non-religious communities. The ability to transcend the narrow confines of religious boundaries is a resource for diversity in faith, combined with universality in spiritual mission and cultural tradition. This is more noticeable among the post-war second and third generations of all traditions than those of the first generation, who still draw strength from national and ethnic identity.

Britain is an island of ethnic groups reflected in its regional identities. But since the war new ethnic groups have arrived. Ethnicity is intermediate between kinship and national identity, and binds together minority populations, whose members claim a

common background, participate in shared activities, and value a language and culture. The religious groups that arrived in Britain are formed by ethnic identities. However, the second and third generations are less influenced by the ethnic element, and the short-term strategy of stressing ethnic identity, which has been very successful for the first generation, may not be the most effective in the long term. Yet ethnicity has had a profound impact on British culture in areas such as cuisine, fashion, jewellery and furniture. Ethnic tradition can provide a valuable stratum in a new cultural order.

Finally, diversity in a community of faith is a testament to the free movement of ideas and interpretation, which can give rise to dissent and growth. Normally this generates sectarianism—that is, specific traditions and rituals transmitted and authenticated by a hierarchy, or theological schools. Loyalty to a religious leader as a living symbol of spiritual authority enhances institutional development. This institutional strength gives confidence to communities to establish links with others within and beyond the faith and to struggle for mutual interests and common causes.

But these inherent contradictions and tensions contribute to development and growth. The conflicts which I highlight here are common to all faith communities, not least in my own Muslim community where the processes by which change can take place are focused in the family, the primary institution in the Muslim community. But the Muslim family needs to adjust to the fact that it is now a family of and within British society, and must come to terms with its responsibility for forging links with families of the wider society. Similarly, the present leadership of the Mosques has excellently fulfilled its function in preserving the identity of community, but the all-important need to build bridges with others has been less successfully carried through. How many Muslims are here at this meeting? two? three? This is not uncommon up and down the country, and it is unacceptable in a community that has a long history of good intercommunity relationships in other parts of the world. The institutions of the community, particularly the mosques, have been and continue to be the powerhouse of community welfare. But they must retrieve the role for which they

were originally created: to serve humanity, both Muslim and non-Muslim, with concern not only for the spiritual but also the educational and social welfare needs of society.

Further, while few religions are national in origin, we witness national and religious xenophobia. The power of the modern nation states tends to create such national forms of religion—as for example, Islam in Pakistan and Hinduism in India. But national boundaries help sharpen and consolidate identities. For many Muslims two national identities are involved in their development in Britain: the nation of origin–Pakistan, Bangladesh, Yemen; and the nation of residence–Britain. The tension between the two identities is often experienced as a generation gap between the parents and their British children. There is a conflict between the oral tradition of faith acquired by parents in their countries of origin, and their children in Britain who, having acquired the skills of learning can study the sources of the teachings of Islam for themselves. Furthermore, there is conflict in the differing perceptions of life in Britain. For the first generation life in Britain was seen as short-term, whereas for the second and third generations it is long-term: they are now British citizens and they know no different way of life. Thus the first generation came to Britain with very limited skills for life in an industrial society but their children have been educated in preparation for the high-tech society of the twenty-first century, and their aspirations are much higher than those of their parents. They now look towards the negotiating skills which will enable them to retain their Islamic identity while evolving a culture in keeping with life in Britain. But the situation is more complex because elements of both national identities are found in every generation.

What is required from a spiritual point of view is the emergence of a new cultural order which draws on the best of both identities. The suspicion and insecurity arising from recent world events is reinforced by the power of the global technology which makes information instantaneously available. Yet this same technology is a valuable resource in enabling local religious cultures to meet and enrich each other. As such it should be

increasingly harnessed by the leaderships of religious communities.

The challenge to communities of faith, living in contemporary British society is twofold. Strong new leadership is needed, dedicated to dialogue and to the service of the whole of society. Communities have often failed to draw on the gifts and skills of younger members working in non-religious settings, who could be invaluable in building bridges. Leaders must also recognise the potential for their communities' own renewed spiritual development through our new styles and methods of education. Muslims, for example could look forward to the day when a translation and interpretation of the *qur'an* will be undertaken by a contemporary British Muslim.

The religious and cultural future of Britain depends on all faith communities drawing on their inner spiritual strengths and material resources to reach out beyond their narrow boundaries, working with others to evolve towards a society where there is respect for differences in faith and in which we can celebrate a new common cultural heritage.

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CONTEMPLATIVE CHALLENGE 2000.

An Impression of the Conference at York

YORK Minster offered us generous hospitality. The doors were open to us for early morning prayer, when, looking faintly picturesque in our flowing habits, we made our way alongside the grassy moat and medieval city walls into the Minster. Did we appear to be just part of the 'heritage industry'? or could we feel challenged in ourselves and thus *offer* a challenge? The York Conference was organised by the Association of British Contemplatives—a body defined in its statutes as being 'constituted by the women's contemplative communities of England, Scotland and Wales, Roman Catholic and Anglican'. In this context, as an Anglican and a novice, I had the experience of being part of a minority group as well as a newcomer to the scene: but maybe this in itself could be experienced as a freedom from any past constraints? We had come together in York in order to look towards the *future* and get in touch with *the heart of the matter*. Later in the week, at the celebratory service, Bishop Jack Nicholls would plead with us to 'keep the window between earth and heaven *open'*.

The theme of the talks given at the conference was 'mysticism'. They were given by Dom Bernardo Olivera ocso, the head of the Cistercian order, who had come from Rome to join us. His presentation of the subject was broad and traditional. He sought to 'de-mystify' the area of mystical experience, and re-establish it as a normal and intrinsic part of being human. Moreover, every baptised Christian has already entered into the Christian mystery—albeit with varying degrees of conscious awareness. I remembered the men and boys whom I used to see fishing along the banks of the canal, on my way to church on a Sunday morning; they sat there for hours, motionless, in all weathers, silent, doing 'nothing'—contemplating …?

One of the questions put to us for group discussion was as follows: *'The experience of desire is basic to contemplative life, and our mystics speak of it in terms of great intensity. Am I at ease in this tradition, or do I prefer to keep it at a safe distance*?' This

was the fifth question from a total of nine, all equally huge and mostly even more complex! 'What do you desire?' is a familiar question in SLG, and 'desire' is undoubtedly at the 'heart of the matter' in our community tradition. Hopefully, in daring to talk about mysticism in public, unashamedly and simply, the conference would be helping to make available the intimate heart of Christian experience, and thus to draw and attract those who are seeking, but who do not get behind the facades of our religious institutions.

Throughout the five days at York the thought kept running through my head: 'What can I tell the Sisters when I get back to Bede House?' The climax of the Conference was the service in York Minster on 24th June, 'a celebration of 2000 years of monastic and contemplative life'. The focus of this celebration was 'the living flame'. I had come to York as part of the liturgical dance group (or 'meditated movement group', as the service sheet designated us), and our 'Flame Dance' was one way of giving life and energy and expression to our desire to 'fan the flame'. For contemplatives, committed to the prayer of intercession, 'a heart attentive to the needs of the world', as one of our sisters put it, is a vital constituent of that desire. It so happened, that the meeting of the G8 countries in Cologne had taken place the previous weekend, when the petition for cancellation of Third World debt, an issue very close to our hearts, was presented. The basic movement motif of the dance was the reaching up of the dancers through the Cross to the Glory. We were indebted for the choreography to Joan Johnson, Oblate Sister from Turvey Abbey, (and we had rehearsed in those hospitable and spacious surroundings). Wearing orange veils and waving orange scarves abandonedly, we danced to an African rhythm of drum-beats, with sounds of birdsong and animal life. Creation was waking up. The Church is growing at its fastest there on the African continent. I felt energised and light-hearted; I want to continue the dance, and for the dance to continue and draw us on.

SISTER DIANA, Novice SLG

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BOOKS

ASCENT TO THE DEPTHS OF THE HEART. The Spiritual Diary of Swami Abhishiktananda (1948-1973). Edited by Raimon Pannikar. Translated by David Fleming and James Stuart. ISPCK 1998. £17.99 (Hard Cover).

On 16 August 1948 a French monk from the Abbey of Ste-Anne de Kergonan in Brittany arrived in Trichinopoly, South India. It was the fulfilment of a dream that had begun some fourteen years earlier. Henri Le Saux was thirty eight, a priest, and a churchman of promise, both in terms of his strong personality and his intellect. Quite how the call of India had come to that remote part of France is unexplained and there had certainly been many obstacles to gaining permission for this journey. The purpose was the founding of an Indian Benedictine Ashram, along with a secular priest, Father Monchanin, with whom le Saux had for long been in correspondence. As part of his initiation into India, he was taken by Monchanin to visit Arunachala, the holy mountain of Shiva, where Sri Ramana Maharshi, one of the great Advaitin saints of the century, had an ashram. It was a life-changing encounter. The diary records nothing sensational, save that (significantly) Le Saux fell ill. But from then on, Ramana and Arunachala became the touchstones of his life, turning Le Saux the western priest into Abhishiktananda the wandering *sannyasi,* more surely than anything else.

These diaries, which have been lovingly edited by Pannikar, a lifelong friend and admirer, record the journey, sometimes deeply painful, of an interfaith pilgrim. Through Ramana he saw into the heart of Hinduism, the realised ideal of the Vedic tradition. Once touched by it, he could not let it go. He sought nothing less for himself, though he was too well-grounded to deny his heritage as a Christian. It is easy, at this point in time, to underestimate the task that Le Saux found himself confronting in those post-war, post-partition years. The Church in India was almost wholly western in outlook. Hinduism was little understood, and for the most part seen as superstitious and polytheistic. More problematic still, there

was no theological thinking to guide anyone through the maze of conflicting ideas thrown up by the dialogue of faiths. Le Saux, with his training in Thomist theology was in some senses well equipped, but by the same token deeply vulnerable. There were times when the gulf between his training and background, and the experiences into which he was drawn by his inner life, brought him to the verge of insanity. In the caves of Arunachala he discovered the nakedness of the Hindu monk, but 'the monk's cowl and the priest's chasuble' pursued him 'like a rejected lover'. The early years covered by the diaries make unremittingly painful reading.

There were other conflicts too. The Ashram project at Shantivanam went ahead, requiring energy and attention. Monchanin was not the easiest of companions, and together they cannot have made a comfortable community. Besides, on the evidence of these diaries, Abhishiktananda was rarely there. Whenever he could he escaped to Arunachala, or to Madras, or later, to the Himalayas. A few postulants came and went but it was not until Bede Griffiths took charge in 1968 that the place took on its true significance. But as the years pass, the contradictions begin to lessen, and slowly a synthesis begins to emerge. By the mid-sixties there is more conviction that he can have a single fidelity to two visions. He can piece together his theology again, with greater confidence speak of Guru Jesus, and move more easily between the Upanishads and the Gospels. This is of course the time of the Second Vatican Council, and its effect on Abhishiktananda was clearly considerable. He read the theologians advisory to the Council and drew much hope from its documents, while these in turn underlined the importance of the project that he had undertaken. Increasingly the solitary *sannyasi* was needed as a lecturer and leader of retreats. His appeal for the Indianisation of the Church during the National Seminar in 1969 (itself a response to Vatican II) marked him out as the man of the moment, and, with his beard and saffron robes, it was easy, and right, to cast him in the role of a prophet.

The publication of these diaries in English (they have been available in French for some years) does much to establish for us

the stature of this complex man and his immense contribution to our spirituality, and more than anything will turn us back to his writings. His greatness lies in the fact that, as the title implies, he sought to unite in himself so many conflicting strands. He stood between one faith which developed a particular history, and maintains a strong view on historical particularity, and another that distrusted the outward forms, and constantly loses itself in mystery. He longed to be the naked solitary, yet never lost the mind and attitude of the western intellectual that he was. Despite the wanderings, the flow of articles, books, talks and reading (Tillich, Robinson, Küng) continued. The s*wami* of the Swarg Ashram in Rishikesh (always a doughty defender of the tradition) was appalled at the number of books in the hermitage at Uttarkashi, and the number of relationships and engagements he maintained. 'What will *that* profit you?' he demanded. 'Simply overwhelming visit,' the journal records. But how could the swami have known the strong call to the wider Church that never left this man alone?

And in the end these conflicts are reconciled. Nowhere does the journal record anything of the intimate detail of the inner journey, but it is clear the awakening begun at Arunachala found its completion in the end. In a powerful poem (he was a gifted writer) written in 1970 there is a repeated line:

> You have seen the lightning, keep your secret

And later

> I have come to know that Mighty Person, Golden like the Sun, beyond all darkness.

In the last years the lonely guru found, perhaps was given, a spiritual child. Marc Chaduc had become a fervent disciple in 1969. At Rishikesh in 1972, Marc, with Abhishiktananda beside him, had a powerful experience of awakening. 'A disciple who has awakened. It is enough.' In June of the next year Abhishiktananda, with Swami Chidananda, gentle head of the Shivananda Ashram beside him, initiated Marc as a *sannyasi*. 'It was too beautiful—too powerful.' The diary of these last years was edited by Marc, and, sadly, much of the more personal material was thrown into the Ganges. But what is left is profound and moving. The words

are charged with the authenticity of experience. The old themes are there, but drawn together now into the person of Jesus, and above all, the life and being of the Trinity, which became as the years went by more and more the ground of his believing.

Four days before his Great Departure, in one of his last letters he wrote: 'The holy-heavenly Jerusalem does not lie in an always mythical dream of the future. It is *kai nun* (even now). We only have to open our eyes! That is the only thing I would like to make understood from now on if I stay alive. And it is so simple that no one can grasp it …'

This book has much to offer the modern pilgrim, dissatisfied with the narrowness of religious tradition and attracted by the teachings of the east. And there are the other writings, *The Secret of Arunachala* and *The Further Shore*. But perhaps the Church too, burdened as it is with ancient forms of expression that fit so badly in a modern age, can be taught by this stern, wonderful man, and begin to understand what it is to let go, unlearn, and, under God, be reshaped and reformed. 'It is *kai nun* … so simple that no one can grasp it.' As he knew only too well, the question hovers: But what if we don't?

DAVID BARTON

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CALLED TO BE ANGELS, An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Spirituality, by Douglas Dales. Canterbury Press, 1998. £5.99.

This is a clear and down to earth introduction to Anglo-Saxon spirituality, in which each chapter ends with a short section of prayers and questions arising out of the text, to be used both for reflection and discussion, suitable either for the individual reader or for group use. Each of the six chapters takes a saint, so we begin with Gregory the Great and end with Dunstan. Douglas Dales calls his book a pilgrimage of discovery, with the aim of making the spirituality of these five hundred years available and relevant to us all. Here, he feels, is something that will help the

Church in its need to recover and strengthen its inherent unity, to evangelise, and to reinforce the foundations of its most vital values and traditions.

This is good, sound teaching. Perhaps that is why he warms to Bede whom he summarises thus: 'Bede is a great teacher: if you read his *History* today, and it is available in several good translations, it is like reading the Bible. It leaves an abiding impression of a good, intelligent and sensitive person, seeing in the history of his Church and its growth the working out of God's purpose of love … He reminds us that the search for Truth is life-long and very demanding; in some ways theology is more like science than anything else …' Like all the best teaching, this book points beyond itself, and one its most attractive features is the author's choice of quotations from the original texts. Gregory the Great, the saint who laid the foundation of Anglo-Saxon spirituality, was a man who knew only too well the tension between the contemplative and the active life: 'By an amazing divine grace he who seeks contemplation sincerely can be occupied in serving others, so that his more perfect spirit may profit those who are weaker than he is'. There is a most lovely prayer for true compunction from Dunstan: 'Most loving God, You brought forth from the rock a spring of living water for Your thirsty people: bring forth from the hardness of our hearts sincere tears of repentance, that we may be able to weep for our sins and obtain by Your mercy their forgiveness.' The *Nunnaminster Codex*, a ninth century prayer book, (perhaps adapted for use by an abbess of a royal nunnery), opens:

> O God the maker and re-maker of human nature, the creator uncreated:
> You spread the heavens and founded the earth:
> You planted Paradise and formed man from the dust …

We are made aware of the place of women. We meet Hilda of Whitby of course, but there is also Eadburga, abbess of Thanet, who sent Boniface spiritual books, and Leoba with whom he had a most important friendship and who was buried next to him at Fulda. There is a tantalising glimpse of a royal lady and ascetic called Aethelfleda who nurtured Dunstan in the contemplative life.

Douglas Dales helps us to recognise many of the threads which make Anglo-Saxon spirituality so attractive and so important. The centrality of the Cross, the role of poetry, the interweaving of friendship and learning, the way in which learning should underpin theology and theology should exist for the spiritual welfare of the Church.

For many for whom Anglo-Saxon piety has hitherto been rather hazy, centring around vague memories of *The Dream of the Rood*, this clarification of the way in which the Cross penetrated so deeply into Anglo-Saxon spirituality, art, and liturgical life will be revealing. Here was the point of conflict, the place of victory, the focus of judgement, the ultimate reference point for all human history.

This short introduction, less than a hundred pages, ends with a very useful concise bibliography for those who will undoubtedly have been stimulated to read further. The list does not include the more recently published study *High King of Heaven*, by Sister Benedicta Ward SLG. Clearly Anglo-Saxon spirituality is receiving the recognition it so rightly deserves.

ESTHER DE WAAL

Esther de Waal is well-known as a writer and lecturer, especially on themes of Celtic tradition and Benedictine spirituality.

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS, *Daily readings for the calendar of the Church of England*, compiled and introduced by Robert Atwell, Canterbury Press, 1998. £18.99 (Hard cover).

In his introduction to this imaginatively chosen anthology, Robert Atwell makes the point that the communion of saints, at its broadest, encompasses the whole people of God. But within that company the Church has recognised and designated as 'saints' particular individuals 'through whom God's purposes of love, mercy peace and justice have been specially revealed'.

Tracing the historical development of the doctrine of the communion of saints and its shaping influence on the memory and liturgy of the Church, Atwell notes that the primitive Church had a particular awareness 'of the mutual and reciprocal nature of prayer between the living and the departed', its yearly commemorations of the martyrs generating 'a powerful sense of solidarity (and) a belonging in Christ which transcended death'. He suggests that in the present day the need to recover this sense of oneness in Christ is leading to a fresh perception of the shared prayer of the whole Church, living and departed, in the communion of the saints.

Remarking that the new Calendar is more inclusive and ecumenical than any of its predecessors, and that we often learn more through stories than concepts, Atwell expresses the hope that this book could be of value both as a resource for teachers of religious and social education, particularly in multi-cultural areas, and for deepening ecumenical understanding. As he reminds us, the stories of great Christian people from other communions, including those who died for their convictions, can 'challenge us to a fresh examination of our perceptions of the past', and invite our prayer and penitence. The reading (by Mark Santer) given for the English saints and martyrs of the Reformation era explores more fully the 'connection between our self-identification as members of particular communities and the stories we tell about our past'.

The readings for each day are preceded by a short biography (or in the case of major feast days, an exposition of the origins and significance of the feast). These are definitely biographies rather

than hagiographies—sympathetic but even-handed, and not neglectful of contrary judgements and shortcomings where these are relevant. It was disappointing however to find in the biography of St Mark the Evangelist the unsupported suggestion that the Gospel which bears his name 'was probably based as much on Peter's preaching of the good news as on Mark's own memory.'

The readings are drawn from a wide range of literature. For major feast days there is a choice of readings intended to reflect the spectrum of patristic, medieval and, occasionally, contemporary spirituality. Alternative readings are also given for some saints, often of a more personal nature, giving a sense of both public and private voice.

This collection offers countless opportunities for the deepening of knowledge and the enlargement of sympathies. As I read, I found myself repeatedly grateful to be introduced to many who might otherwise have remained no more than names to me. Pandita Ramabai's meagre designation in the Calendar as 'Translator of the Scriptures' tells me nothing of her pioneering work as a social reformer and educationalist in India at the turn of the century, nor of how she retained her cultural identity as a Hindu after her conversion and welcomed ministers of all Christian denominations to the church she built for widows and orphans. There is much here to challenge and inspire. Caroline Chisholm's avowal to 'know neither country nor creed, but to serve all impartially' was made after her efforts to seek help for her work with immigrant women in Australia met with rejection because she was a Roman Catholic. The early missionaries Henry Venn and Mary Slessor ministered to indigenous peoples without imposing western values and culture upon them. Martyrs—Stephen, John Fisher, Bonhoeffer, Janani Luwum—speak as profoundly in their deaths as in their lives.

Austin Farrer once said that a characteristic of the saints is to be 'massively real', and this book does much to bring that reality to life, including the self doubt and the failings. Perhaps we can identify with Basil's lament on his removal to solitude that 'I carry my own problems with me wherever I go', or with Boniface's admission: 'I would be only too glad to give up the task of guiding

the Church which I had accepted, if I could have found some warrant for such a course of action in either the example of the Fathers or in Holy Scripture'; and this in its turn may help us better understand the reciprocal nature of the prayer that unites us in Christ.

In a letter to Donatus (part of which is the reading for his day), Cyprian writes: 'When speaking of God, our master, the absolute sincerity of what we say will communicate to others not by our eloquence but by the substance of our lives'. This book, in reflecting both the diversity of the saints and their unity and common witness in Christ, can be gratefully received for making 'the substance of their lives' one with the substance of our own.

SISTER NICOLA SLG

MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS by Robert Llewelyn, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998. £12.95.

After spending World War II in India, Robert Llewelyn returned to Westminster School for a year as chaplain, and there he met Donald Allchin, a young man in his final year at school. Canon Allchin has claimed many times since that it was Father Robert who during that year first showed him that theology could be exciting. It is typical of Father Robert that he discounts his own influence, convinced he is no theologian. But this autobiography convinces us otherwise. He is a born teacher, both of the mathematics which as a schoolmaster he spent much of his life imparting to children, and of the things of the spirit which, drawing on many sources, he has come to cherish and to understand. If a theologian is one who prays, we are here in the presence of a true God-talker.

The sources of Father Robert's spirituality and theology lie mainly in western Christianity, in devotion to Our Lady, in l'Abbé de Caussade, in Francis de Sales, and especially in Julian of Norwich. The fruits of his pondering on their writings have been widely disseminated through the *Enfolded in Love* series, first published to promote the teaching of Dame Julian after he became Warden of the Julian shrine in Norwich. This series still proves so

popular that DLT have recently added another title to mark his ninetieth birthday, *Christ Within Me, Daily Readings from the Anglo-Saxon Tradition*, edited by Sr Benedicta Ward. But he has explored too the ashram practices of Hinduism and Buddhist practices of Zen.

Although this book is autobiographical, descriptive of a full and interesting life observed with great humour, there are long reflective passages in each chapter giving teaching on different aspects of spirituality. At first these irritated me, distracting me from the story of the author's life. However, I gradually found myself slowing down to ponder further the matter they contained, thus responding to the aim of a good teacher. Indeed, when the book was first put out for retreatants in Fellowship House, it was by far the most popular of the current publications on display, drawing appreciative comments from many readers.

Since 1975 when Father Robert experienced the recital of the rosary as a contemplative act, he has promoted its use within Anglicanism. In the course of so doing he discovered two of the best-known shrines of Our Lady, Lourdes and Medjugorje. His descriptions of his visits to them are full of interest, and one cannot doubt the sincerity of his conviction that they are holy places, singled out by Mary, whatever reservations one might have about their significance.

The two penultimate chapters of *Memories and Reflections* consider the teaching of Julian, whom Father Robert undoubtedly numbers among his friends. Here his understanding of the wrath of God and the love of God, set within the *Revelations of Divine Love,* are carefully and fully expounded. The *Revelations* become attractive and accessible under his guidance, leading us to a deeper apprehension of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Arthur James
Edward P. Echlin, *Earth Spirituality, Jesus at the Centre*, £5.99.

From Canterbury Press
Angela Ashwin, *Woven Into prayer, A flexible pattern of daily prayer through the Christian year*, £12.99 (hard cover).
Robert Atwell (Compiler), *Celebrating the Seasons, Daily spiritual readings for the Christian year*, £18.99 (hard cover).

From Church in the Market Place Publications
Gordon S. Wakefield, *Medicines for the Heart*, £4.95.

From Darton, Longman & Todd
Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope, Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context,* £11.95.
Robert Llewelyn, *Love Bade Me Welcome* (new edition), £7.95.
Korneel Vermeiren OCSO *Praying with Benedict, Prayer in the Rule of St Benedict,* £7.95.

From Hodder & Stoughton
Diana Leatham, *They Built on Rock, Stories of the Celtic Saints,* £9.99, (hard cover).
Ray Simpson, *Soul Friends, Celtic Insights into Spiritual Mentoring,* £7.99.
Carol Wilkinson *The Hallowing of Time, A daily prayer resource, vol III,* £17.99 (hard cover).

From ISPCK
M.K. Kuriakose, *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*

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[1] Hansard, Lords, 315-320, 25 February 1943.

[2] Archbishop William Temple Papers, Lambeth Palace Library, vol.5

[3] For background to the Poor Laws, see for example, *London, a Social History* by Roy Porter (Hamish Hamilton, 1994).

[4] *Crucible.* The quarterly journal of the Board for Social Responsibility, January-March 1999

[5] Ibid. 'The "New Politics" and the "Old Religion": Conflict, Cooperation or … ?' by Kenneth Leech.