FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

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COMMUNITY NOTES

ON ALL SOUL'S DAY I received a telephone call from a radio interviewer in connection with some recent research into prayer. He told me that prayer could be *good* for you; what, he wondered, did I think about that? I would have liked to have come up with some cheery or challenging sound-bites for him, but the news that some hospital patients who engaged in prayer got better more quickly than those who did not, drew from me only a rather long silence. He explained that prayer brought their stress levels down. I wondered if that would be the case when their prayer went unanswered. And, privately, whether aromatherapy or a hot bath might not do as well. Not that stress reduction was the purpose of prayer, he pressed me, but as a side effect ...

We did not pursue the subject long and I was let off the interview, but I thought afterwards that I had been rather churlish. Of course prayer is good for you! How could it be otherwise when God is good? Indeed trying to be good (in a moral sense) without God, without prayer, might well rocket the stress levels. But I would not want to seem to justify prayer on any grounds other than love, and God being God. Kierkegaard maintained that prayer for the dead in particular is a work of purest love, since it looks for no result we can perceive. Prayer hangs upon transcendence. How can one speak of it outside the context of faith?

I hope the caller found some contemporary St Teresa to speak roundly and convincingly of the relationship with God which is prayer—entered into gaily, with reckless abandon and great hope, but no illusions about the way in which God is liable to treat his friends. On occasion, indeed, St Teresa cautioned particular Sisters not to over-do prayer as with some temperaments it could lead to mental strain. Engaging in some manual work or acts of charity would be the better course. She might have recommended that all serious prayer should come with a health warning.

I think we can say very simply that the point of prayer is *more love*. And that is the point of our Community. Fr Cary, who as Father Director from 1915 to 1950 contributed so substantially to the continuing foundation of the Sisters of the Love of God, rightly described the enterprise as an adventure, and a response—surrender—to a vision. The Feast of the Holy Name, that little Christmas celebrated in the summer which is our patronal festival, was especially a time when he would focus the vision for us. At Christmas, and this Christmas in particular, it is right to reflect upon what Jesus is for us, and words such as these, to our Chapter in 1929, can be a kind of charter for our prayer and life:

> Whenever, wherever, that Most Holy Name is breathed, that which is of this world, natural, is irradiated by the supernatural, divine. In its power all things are gathered under its invocation into the heavenly order. And that is precisely what your life, both in its wholeness and in its details, means, if it is not mere foolishness and a dream. It is, and must be in all its aspects supernatural, heavenly-minded, heavenly ordered, heavenward seeking, in and through the Life, the Passion, the Victory, and the Glory of JESUS the Divine Saviour King.

St Teresa in *The Way of Perfection,* writing for her Sisters in her own newly founded Convent of St Joseph's about perfect love, finds herself compelled to bear witness similarly to 'the heavenly order' and the effect of her own clear knowledge of that reality.

> Now it seems to me that those whom God brings to a certain clear knowledge love very differently than do those who have not reached it. This clear knowledge is about the nature of the world, that there is another world, about the difference between the one and the other, that the one is eternal and the other a dream; or about the nature of loving the Creator and loving the creature (and this seen through experience, which is entirely different from merely thinking about it or believing it); or this knowledge comes from seeing and feeling what is gained by the one love and lost by the other, and what the

> Creator is and what the creature is, and from many other things that the Lord teaches to anyone who wants to be taught by Him in prayer, or whom His Majesty desires to teach. (ch. 6,3)

She longs for all the Sisters to have this clear knowledge: 'You will say everybody already knows these things I have mentioned. May it please the Lord that this be so, that you know them in such a way that they be important to you and impressed deep within your being.' With it comes discernment, clarity about what love is like and what it is not, freedom, healing, likeness to Christ.

In the turmoil of the sixteenth century, St Teresa felt driven to found St Joseph's and issued an urgent call to prayer because the church was beleaguered and 'the world is in flames!' Her heart went out to souls being lost. Many of us know that acute ache today (though words for it may come less readily to us), especially when we hear and see the world news.

I am writing these Notes from Bede House glad, as always at this time of the year, to be in the country and see the unadorned shapeliness of the trees and the land. When the sun comes out the grass is brilliant emerald, and blue tits on the apple tree outside the window shine like jewels too. A wagtail has been sheltering high up on the oast in the lee of the cowl, and the rounded end wall of chapel reminds me, comfortingly, of a honey pot. But I am not comforted. There is too much challenge, too much insecurity, too much of a riddle, in all this beauty. It may take a millennium, but I would like, if possible, to come to some clear knowledge about sparrows: *Are not five sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God* (Lk.12:6). Or, as Matthew has it, *not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will* (Matt. 10:29)—nor, presumably, one wagtail, one ammonite, or dinosaur either.

Really? Can it be true? If God has by nature a sort of infinite DIY information technology at his disposal I am impressed, but, honestly, not very interested. What Jesus tells us about God's knowing, though, is that it is the same as his love: direct, personal and inexhaustible. What hard knowledge that is to take

in, ‘in such a way that it is important to us, is impressed deep inside us’. Were we to know about sparrows, and about ourselves, let alone about God, in that way, would not that be enough, by itself, to turn innumerable swords into ploughshares? In prayer, and by celebrating Christmas, we lay ourselves open to be known and to know in that way.

* * * * * *

On 2 September Sr Teresa of God died in St Luke’s Hospital, Oxford, where she had been cared for for nearly four years since suffering a severe stroke. Prior to that, Sister lived for many years as a solitary on the Lleyn peninsula, so it was good to have friends from there attending her funeral, as well as her niece and Sisters from the Society of the Sacred Cross, the community in which Sister made her Profession. She was consecrated as a solitary in 1982, but her dedication to God was life-long, and included years as a missionary in India. We give thanks for her, and for all the warmth, goodness and love, both manifest and hidden, in her life.

Someone else who has meant a great deal to us over the years, Oblate Sister Peggy of the Divine Thirst, died on 13 August in Bournemouth. Her membership of the Community as an Oblate Sister dated from 1961 and she was on the Oblates Council from its inception. Faith and devotion to the church undergirded her whole life, both as Co-Principal of Queensmount School in Bournemouth, and as a Reader and member of St Alban’s church there. She could be formidable! But wisdom and love always shone through, and she was wonderfully generous. Christmas after Christmas she and her friend Margot would wrap up individual named gifts for each of us, and unwrapping them together was a source of wonder and delight. Some of us even may still have a bright red woollen vest as a source of secret cheer and a reminder of her!

On St Teresa’s day Oblate Sister Julie of the Heart of Jesus made Life Promises. Her husband, Jim, was able to be with us from Oklahoma and a great many Oblate Sisters were there since the Oblates Chapter had been held the preceding day. As Julie

said, one could not imagine a better way of celebrating her birthday, which happens to be 15 October. We have just gladly admitted Carol Simmons as a Novice Oblate on 18 November, and Liz Koole as a Postulant Oblate on 20 November. We look forward to admitting two new Postulant Oblates before Christmas.

For the first time this year there are at present no resident Postulants as Sr Teresa Irene was Clothed as a Novice on 5 August, at First Vespers of the Transfiguration, and Sr Helen of the Mercy and Truth of God on 1 October, the Feast of St Thérèse. We rejoice with our two new Sisters, both from USA. At the end of October Catherine Hamilton left the novitiate and we hold her in our hearts and wish her well as her spiritual journey continues in new settings.

May the season of Christmas be a time of blessing for us all, a time of clearer knowledge and greater love.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

QUAILS IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS

An address given at the Fellowship Retreat, in October

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

MANY years ago now, one of our Companions who does lovely wood carvings, gave us this life-size model of a quail. When I asked her once why this bird had attracted her attention, she reminded me that quails figure as one of the foods of the Israelites during their wilderness years. For her, at least, the quail represented a sign both of God's loving faithfulness, and of resurrection. It may be that this bird is a symbol of resurrection; I have not yet found it described specifically as such, though implicitly it can carry that meaning. It seems to be a two-faced symbol with both a dark and light side, and indeed, in witchcraft is known as the Devil's bird and is a sign of diabolical powers and sorcery. But in most traditions it is a sign of hope, the sign of returning life after winter, and of courage. Within the Hebrew tradition both sides of the symbolism are present. It is miraculous nourishment in the desert but at the cost, as we shall see, of God's wrath and the people's lust.

I had forgotten this conversation when in the winter I spotted in a discount bookstore *The Atlas of Quails*. This unlikely title caught my eye in the first instance because of the lovely drawings, which immediately kindled my imagination for embroidery designs. I then remembered the conversation with Sue and wondered if the book could act as a visual aid and source of inspiration for this retreat. Indeed it has proved so.

When I began to read the book closely I discovered that as well as the beautiful illustrations and descriptions of the varieties of quail world-wide, it is a manual for quail enthusiasts, with minutely detailed instructions for raising and breeding the birds. Nothing is too small a detail for consideration, and the love of David Alderton, the author, for these tiny birds is manifest in page after page of the manual. When you learn that the newly hatched chicks of some species are no larger than bumblebees and require round-the-clock attention, you begin to understand

the nature of wholehearted commitment to a cause or person.

As well as having my knowledge of aviculture unexpectedly extended I was left with a sense of having made the acquaintance of a delicate and nervous bird, very prone to disease and stress. Alderton is someone who raises them for love, not the table, though he gives a nod to the huge industry Japan has developed for this purpose, and to those who in this country raise them for gourmet dining. Indeed there are probably some amongst us here who have eaten roast quail or quails' eggs.

It is when one meets people like this, so absorbed in their hobby or work that no detail is too small to ignore, that one glimpses something of the creative and creating love of God. Some would say that no one should keep these birds or any wild animal in captivity. But one can only note the regular reporting of declining figures of wildlife, including quails, and be glad that some people are prepared to devote time and the best care they can afford to giving us an insight into the fecundity of God's imagination. David Alderton, speaking of declining quail populations, tells us:

> The growth of quail farming can be related to some extent to the decline in these birds in parts of their range where they were formerly hunted. When the famous cookery writer, Mrs Beeton, was considering the European Migratory Quail at the end of the 1850s for example, she noted that these birds had declined in numbers in Britain. There was still a resident quail population at this stage however, with these birds being known to move to the coast in search of food at certain times of the year.

A later writer, Sir Herbert Maxwell, described how there was still a reasonable influx of quails here in 1893, but also noted the popularity of these birds with gourmets right across Europe, where hundreds of thousands were being eaten regularly. Today, in comparison, quails have become definitely scarce in Britain; their breeding area is now confined to only approximately eight counties in the south of the country, and several localities in southern Ireland. These quails also invariably migrate in winter,

leaving to fly south about September, only returning again in the following May, with no resident populations still surviving.

Changes in agricultural practices during recent years have almost certainly speeded the decline of the species here. Remarkably, between 1954 and 1966, quails were known to have bred in every English county except Middlesex and as far north as Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides off the coast of Scotland, but this pattern shows no signs of repeating itself today.

The numbers of quails taken from the wild in many areas in the past have been staggering, and were quite beyond what their populations could be expected to sustain. Egypt alone was exporting more than two million for food each year, with this trade reaching a peak of over three million birds annually during the 1920s. By the end of that decade, the huge flocks which had regularly migrated in this area for countless thousands of years were no longer to be seen, and since then their numbers have never reached the same level again.

But this is a by way, interesting though it would be to pursue. Let us return to the quails of the Old Testament. The first mention of them is in Exodus 16.

> They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'
>
> Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.'
>
> And Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, "Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your murmurings"'. And as Aaron spoke to the whole

> congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God."'
> In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground.

The people are restive. Life in Egypt seems not so bad after all. Whatever the oppression and 'ethnic cleansing' they endured, they at least had enough to eat. So the Lord promises Moses and Aaron that this hunger will be satisfied. In fulfilment of the promise, 'In the evening quails came up and covered the camp and in the morning dew lay round about the camp'. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the phenomenon of the manna, 'the fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground'. Out of the detailed instructions on gathering and eating, the Israelites are given a clear lesson in trusting God to provide enough for everyone's needs *and* enough for the Sabbath, so that they can rest as God has commanded. The quails are given no further consideration. It is the manna which sustains the Israelites in their wanderings for forty years. But let us not too easily dismiss the quails as a bonus or a seasonal extra to their diet. When we turn to Numbers 11 there is a full consideration of their part in sustaining the Israelites in the desert.

Two years into their Wilderness Journey the Israelites are again complaining of the bad deal they've had by following Moses. By now their hunger has become a 'craving'. Rather than the more general description of 'fleshpots' we are given specific items which they are missing:

> Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving; and the people of Israel also wept again, and said, 'O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.'

Though no one is very sure what natural phenomenon produced manna, it seems to have been a completely nutritious food and adequate to their needs. But it does seem as well to have been rather boring eaten day after day, however cunningly the cooks tried to disguise it:

> Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, and ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, and boiled it in pots, and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil.

It is worth pausing at this point to note that two different words are used to describe the complaints of the Hebrews. In Exodus *raab* is used for 'hunger', which can mean as well 'famine' or 'starvation'. Early in their wanderings they are unused to the foraging required in the desert and need food to prevent death. The word translated as 'craving' in the RSV, and 'lusted after' in the King James bible, is *avah*, which falls within the meaning of 'desire' or 'inclining towards with affection', even of lust. It is a strong word, as the context proves, and gives a glimmer of explanation as to God's action at the end of the chapter.

The narrative of the quails is intertwined with the account of the appointing of the seventy elders. Moses is by now at a complete loss as to how to deal with the complaints, as well as being fed up with God and the people. He knows he cannot go on by himself as sole leader and tells the Lord so, as well as demanding that something be done about the food question. The Lord assures him that his cry and the criesof the people have been heard and orders him to appoint seventy men to assist him, as well as promising that there will be enough meat for a month for everyone. And, lo!:

> there went forth a wind from the Lord, and it brought quails from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and about two cubits above the face of the earth. And the people rose all that day, and all night, and

> all the next day, and gathered the quails; he who gathered least gathered ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

We know that the quail of both these passages is the indigenous European Migratory Quail mentioned by David Alderton. It is one of few of the species which does migrate, and its range is huge. It breeds across Europe (including 'approximately eight counties in the South of England') and well into China. It winters in Africa and the Far East, and from writers of antiquity we know that during migration, in early May and late September, the birds which breed in Europe follow the wind in vast flocks across the Mediterranean at its narrowest points, entering Africa across the Sinai Peninsula. Pliny noted 'that these birds could be a hazard to small boats sailing in coastal areas, because as they approached land vast numbers of quails would settle on the masts and sails causing the craft to sink under their weight' (Alderton, p. 4). At night, or if the wind changes, they alight exhausted on the ground, and are then easily gathered by hand. The migration continues for about a month, so the promise of meat for as long as that is true. When one has logical scientific proof of biblical phenomena it is difficult to classify things as miraculous. Perhaps the miracle comes from the fact that the birds arrived at the moment of necessity and in the right place in such a vast area of desert.

It is likely that the Israelites had eaten quails in Egypt. We know from Herodotus that the Egyptians ate them and cured the flesh: 'As for birds' he writes in his *Histories* (ii, 77), 'they eat quail, duck and raw salted young birds. In general, however, they first bake or boil any species of bird or fish their country provides … before eating them.' The Israelites seem to have practised a primitive form of sun drying, for 'they spread [the quails] out for themselves all around the camp.'

Thus far we have read the chapter as something of a fairy tale. Just for the asking the great Lord has fulfilled all the needs of both Moses and his people. He hears their grumbles and dissatisfaction and gives them what they want and think they

need. Then comes judgement, for ‘while the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague’. What are we to make of this?

Let us look again at the beginning of the chapter. God in his mercy, and with full knowledge of the all-consuming desire of the people for things they think they need, fulfils these desires far beyond their expectations and in a totally unexpected way. Perhaps the ‘plague’ which afflicted them was a form of food poisoning, or just the incapacity of their bodies to absorb so much meat so quickly. The things they craved, melons, cucumbers, leeks, garlic and onions, the cooling foods to slake desert thirst and the flavoursome ones to take the taste of sand from their mouths, distracted them from carrying out God’s will and putting their trust in the covenant made with Abraham and renewed with Moses.

We have in one short chapter confronted the mystery of God’s providence. Here is a deity who gives bountifully, more generously than we imagine or even desire, and who also inflicts suffering in as great a measure. There is no hint in this passage that this is a God who allows suffering; rather it seems that pain and death are within God’s power to inflict, and come direct from his creative will. Greater minds than mine have struggled to provide a satisfactory explanation of these light and dark aspects of creation and of a loving Creator, and found it difficult or impossible. I do not have one either, but if we are to make some sense of the inexplicable suffering that comes upon us we must from time to time try to reconcile the two aspects

It is perhaps true to say that many, if not all those with a vocation to contemplative prayer have at some point confronted evil and suffering in the raw. By this, I do not mean the effects of suffering or of sin; I mean some instinctive perception that behind the effects, whether those of war, natural disaster, poverty, the sins we deliberately commit against each other, there is a root cause that can only be addressed by prayer. Professor John McManners, the Chaplain of All Souls College in Oxford,

goes some way towards expressing this in a sermon he preached there in 1996:

> People tell academics to look at what the real world is like. By this they mean dictating letters in the office, selling and buying shares, instituting manufacturing processes, mastering legal briefs, tapping information into computers. They are mistaken. Behind their world is the real world, the battlefield, and only soldiers, terrorists and their victims know it. Here is the ultimate reason for the social order written in letters of lead and shards of steel. In face of this, you cannot believe in God, the God of the deists. But you can, almost with despair, turn to the God who suffers with his creation, accepting the burden of sin that arises from human freedom, and taking it on himself.

The traditional story of Adam and Eve and the Fall is a metaphor which I for one still find helpful, for it goes some way towards explaining why the free will which is bestowed upon each one of us at conception has the malicious quirk within it which we call evil. It is when one addresses the unanswerable question of why God created us with free will in the first instance, and whether evil is a created or uncreated power that one is confronted with human finitude and the mystery of God's nature and personhood. I believe evil is created, but whether we give it existence by following the paths down which the malicious quirk leads us, or whether it is within the completeness of the nature of God I do not know. To say that by overcoming death Christ has broken the power of evil whose ultimate power was death, does not answer the question entirely, unless one believes that love is uncreated and infinite, and that it is manifested in the resurrection of Christ. And that by our own personal choice we appropriate that love for ourselves and the world.

However one explains evil, the one sure fact, and our hope, is that Christ suffered, both at the hands of evil men and of those who thought they were doing the best for their people. I think it is important to remember these last. Motives are so mixed, always. It is the suffering of Christ, and the perception that prayer is both a union with the suffering Christ, and a

participation in bringing humanity back to God—with the malicious quirk at least redirected, if not straightened out—that gives us the courage to continue praying in the face of the most horrendous suffering and wickedness. As our Rule puts it:

> There is in true contemplation an urgency to love God for himself and also a desire that all humankind should be drawn to respond to his mercy, to acknowledge and accept the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ.

And as Fr Gilbert Shaw puts it in the Introduction to *The Face of Love*:

> Suffering without purpose is just the evil that it is. Suffering offered to God 'in much patience' and 'purity of intention' releases 'the power of God' (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1–12), so that, bearing about the dying of Jesus through our incorporation in his life, we manifest 'the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh' (2 Cor. 4:11).

We will not be far along the road of contemplative prayer before we are brought up against the suffering we ourselves have experienced and which we are capable of inflicting on others. It is easy to disregard the harshness of our own desert, the cravings, the lusts, the genuine hunger—which can take many forms—that shape us and prevent us responding to God's mercy. It is difficult to regard ourselves as a component of 'all humankind'! When self-knowledge begins to come we usually have to learn to accept it in love and be thankful for the transforming power of God's love for us.

We may, too, not be far along this road before intercession, which for many has formed the basis of our prayer for many years, seems to go dead or have little point. The lists which we have so diligently and lovingly cultivated no longer mean anything, and become a burden. The time for intercession either drags or one finds oneself at a place of stillness and 'just being' into which a list of names rudely intrudes. There is nothing wrong; don't panic! As contemplative prayer takes hold there is less and less need for words or use of the imagination. God is turning the mind and imagination gradually towards the working out of the divine will in the world, toward the 'naked intent'

spoken of in the *Cloud of Unknowing*. To quote our Rule again:

> Intercession is the uniting of the human will to be one energy with the will of God. Contemplation gives both strength and purpose to this, for by waiting upon God to be taught of God, both of the wonder of himself and of his will for the world, the intercessor will see that world in the light of God and, with compassion, will hold its suffering and lack of purpose to his love for healing and restoration.

This sounds very grand, and attainable only by the very pious or by those living the religious life. But in actual fact it is a description of what happens to most people who pray regularly, and like most natural changes in life is neither difficult nor fearful, coming upon us gently and without fanfare.

The Israelites asked, demanded, complained about their lacks and needs. God provided all that they wanted and more. Providence and mercy never fail. Let us have no hesitation in asking for the same mercy and providence to be sent our way. We shall be surprised and delighted at its abundance.

Readers of *The Letters of Saint Antony the Great* translated by Derwas J. Chitty, SLG PRESS,1975) will be familiar with this picture taken from a fragment of *Scenes from the Lives of the Hermits,* in Christ Church, Oxford. An association may be found between these scenes and a passage in the *Life of Paul of Thebes*, generally held to have been written by St Jerome (c.345-420).

WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAINTS:

Antony the Great's vision of Paul of Thebes and the Angels

> He saw Paul among the host of angels, among the choirs of prophets and apostles, shining with a dazzling whiteness and ascending on high.

The Life of Paul, whether an imaginative romance or a piece of hagiography, was a popular book in late medieval and early renaissance Italy. It had been included in an abridged version in the widely read *legenda aurea* of the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (c.1230-98) and was to be found in many Italian monastic libraries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In it, the aged Antony is described as receiving a revelation concerning Paul of Thebes and then visiting him. Guided by a hippocentaur and a she-wolf, and fed with dates by a satyr, Antony sought Paul's cell in response to this revelation. Knowing that Antony was approaching and wondering about his intentions, Paul bolted the door of his cell. His visitor, declaring that he would rather die in front of the door than go away—thereby proving that his intentions were not treacherous—was admitted and the two men embraced each other. The two hermits shared a meal of bread provided by a blackbird and water, supplied from a nearby spring, and, having talked together, spent the night in prayer. In the morning Paul begged Antony to bring him the cloak which Athanasius (c.296-373) had given Antony in order that his body might be wrapped in it. (Jerome explains that the hermit, in sending Antony back to his own home, spared him the grief which he knew would be caused by his death).

> Weeping in silence, [Antony] kissed Paul's eyes and hands and returned to the monastery ... His steps could not keep up with his will, but although his body was emaciated as a result of fasting and broken by old age, yet his will overcame his age.

Antony returned to his cell, ‘exhausted and breathless.’ There, Amathas and Makarios, two disciples who looked after their aged abba, anxiously ran out to meet him and asked where he had

been. In answer to their question, Antony replied,

> Alas for me, sinner that I am. It is dishonest of me to call myself a monk. I have seen Elijah, I have seen John in the desert and now I have seen Paul in Paradise.

Antony went into his cell to fetch his cloak. When he emerged, the two disciples begged him to explain what he had meant by his earlier reply. This time, however, Antony's explanation was even more cryptic. He said to them, 'There is a time for silence and a time for speech.' These words are, I think, the key to understanding the essential meaning of the painting of Antony, Paul and the angels. Let us, therefore, look a little more closely at this fragment.

Antony in the wilderness

I have mentioned that the fragment illustrates three episodes from Antony's life. These three illustrations are separated from each other by rocks and hills. There are a few plants and trees scattered over the fragment but with rather more growth in the distant background than in the foreground, intensifying the atmosphere of isolation and ruggedness around the two hermits. In the centre of the painting Antony is depicted sitting just outside the doorway to his 'little cell' a plain, stone structure, typical of the dwellings of some desert fathers as depicted on fourteenth and fifteenth-century thebaids, with one small rounded window and a pitched roof. Antony is shown with his bearded head resting on his right hand. He is dressed in long, dark robes and his head is encircled with a halo. His eyes are closed. In his left hand Antony holds a closed book (a bible?), the early renaissance counterpart of the scroll which usually accompanied the saint in medieval illustrations.

In the middle chapters of Jerome's account of Paul's life, the author writes:

> When Paul had now been leading his heavenly life on earth for one hundred and thirteen years, while the ninety-year-old Antony was living in another part of the desert, it occurred to Antony (as he himself used to relate) that there was no monk in the wilderness more perfect than himself. But during the

> night while he was asleep it was revealed to him that there was someone else further into the desert interior who was far better than him and whom he ought to go and visit.

This is abbreviated in Jacobus' account to:

> Saint Antony thought that he was the first monk to live the eremitic life, but it was made known to him in a dream that there was another such hermit, holier than he.

Significantly, both Jerome and Jacobus begin their narratives by drawing our attention to the revelation that, despite Antony's great age, there was, in fact, someone who was ‘far better’ and ‘holier’ than Antony. Both writers refer to Antony living in the desert but it is only Jerome who emphasizes Antony's pride. For, according to Jerome, not only did it not occur to Antony that there could be another monk ‘more perfect than himself’ living in the wilderness, but, as the writer adds, Antony boasted of his ignorance to others. It is clear, too, that both writers also associate Paul's precedence with his greater holiness. The narratives then describe how Antony responded to the divine call to visit this other hermit.

It is tempting to consider that this first illustration shows Antony living in the wilderness of the desert before his first visit to Paul. Certainly it is not a depiction of Paul's home, which, according to Jerome, was a small cave, a disused mine, whose only cover was provided by an old palm tree, nor is it meant to show Antony after his first visit to Paul for, again according to Jerome, Antony wasted little time in fetching his cloak from his cell before setting out on his return journey to Paul. Could it be that Antony is seen meditating, perhaps on the words he has just been reading, or is there a hidden meaning in showing the book closed rather than open?

A host of angels ascending on high

In the top left hand corner of the fragment, above the first illustration, is the second illustration. Four angels are seen, all in a similar attitude, ascending in a procession up a flight of steps to Heaven. Both the top and bottom of this unsupported flight are

hidden.

Jerome's account continues with a description of Antony's vision of this heavenly ascent:

> Then Antony went out and returned the way he had come without taking even a small amount of food, for he longed for Paul, desiring to see him and to contemplate him with his eyes and with his whole heart. He feared the very thing that had in fact happened, namely that in his absence Paul would have given up the spirit he owed to Christ. When the next day dawned and there was still a three-hour journey left, he saw Paul among the hosts of angels, among the choirs of prophets and apostles, shining with a dazzling whiteness and ascending on high. Immediately Antony fell to the ground and threw sand over his head. Weeping and wailing he said, 'Why do you send me away, Paul? Why are you going away without saying goodbye? Are you leaving so soon, when I have only just got to know you?'

Jacobus alters the setting of Antony's vision and simply writes:

> As Antony was on his way back to his own cell, he saw angels bearing the soul of Saint Paul heavenwards.

Unfortunately, the painting of the angels is damaged and has been restored.

At the moment of this divine revelation Antony threw himself down on the ground, in an act of abasement, and threw sand over his head, in an action of contrition. He had lost the object of his longing, recognized the sin of his pride and realized the pain of human isolation. Yet, through God's mercy, it is enough that Antony had all too briefly known Paul, for in doing so he had known the deeper holiness and the greater humility, and had taken the first step on the spiritual ladder.

Paul's heavenly ascent is, of course, derived principally from the dream of Jacob in which a ladder reaches from the ground to Heaven with angels going up and coming down it (Gen. 28:12) and is later associated with Jesus himself (Jn 1:51). In addition to its important place in mysticism, both eastern and western, the celestial ladder is repeatedly found in the literature of dreams and visions.

The burial of Paul

We look down across a river and over a rocky hill to the third and final illustration showing the burial of Paul. In front of a stone well. Antony, wearing the same clothes as shown in the centre of the fragment, is seen kneeling as he buries the dead body of Paul of Thebes in sandy ground. The corpse is wrapped in a shroud. The heads of both bearded saints are haloed. On either side of Paul's body are two lions (often found accompanying depictions of Antony and Paul besides being present, too, at the burial of other desert dwellers including Mary of Egypt), one standing, the other lying.

Having described the sight which met Antony's eyes as he arrived at Paul's cell for the second time, Jerome ends his *Life of Paul of Thebes* with an account of Paul's burial:

> Antony therefore wrapped Paul's body up and brought it outside, singing hymns and psalms according to Christian tradition, but he was upset that he did not have a spade with which to dig the earth. His thoughts were in turmoil as he considered a number of alternatives ... As he was pondering these things, behold, two lions came running from the inner desert, their manes flowing over their necks. At first Antony was terrified at the sight of them but when he focused his mind on God he was able to stand still without fear as if he saw a pair of doves. They came straight towards the corpse of the blessed old man and stopped there; wagging their tails in devotion they lay down at his feet, roaring loudly as if to show that in their own way they were lamenting as best they could. They then began to dig the ground near by with their paws: vying with each other to remove the sand, they dug out a space large enough for one man.

Here, Jerome's account and the depiction of Paul's burial slightly differ from each other. In the *Life of Paul of Thebes* it is recorded that Antony ordered the lions to depart once they had dug the grave, and as soon as they had done so Antony buried Paul's corpse.

Again, Jacobus provides a résumé:

> [Antony] had no means of burying the body, but two lions came up, dug a grave, and, when the saint was buried, went

back to the forest.

The scene from the fragment is closer to Jacobus' account here.

It is important that the lions are included in the scene for their presence reminds us what can happen when the mind is focused not on oneself but on God. Jerome describes the turmoil of Antony's thoughts at the realization that he had no spade with which to dig the earth for Paul's corpse and the fear caused by the sight of the lions. As he turned his thoughts to God, Antony's fear was removed and he was assisted in preparing the ground for Paul's burial by the most unlikely means.

Closing comments

I have drawn attention to two phrases whose significance now becomes clearer. In referring to Antony's revelation to seek Paul, Jerome notes that the younger monk used to relate that there was no monk in the wilderness 'more perfect than himself'. Later, before he set out for the second time, Antony called himself a sinner and berated himself for his dishonesty in describing himself as a monk. The 'word' he gives to his disciples when they beg him to explain what is happening—'There is a time for silence and a time for speech'—is taken from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes (3:7); which begins, 'For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time: a time to be born and a time to die ...', and includes the words, 'In dealing with human beings it is God's purpose to test them and to see what they truly are' (3:18).

The fragment is a lesson in humility. Antony became aware of the consequences of the sin of pride which cut him off from communion with God. Instead of regarding his own importance, Antony responded to the revelations and his sights were set higher than himself. There was, in fact, someone 'more perfect,' 'far better' and 'more holy' than Antony and, old and weak though he was, Antony sought him out. Antony's two journeys led not only to Paul but also to greater humility which is the work of all the saints. In telling this tale Jerome, too, was led to greater humility for he concludes his *Life of Paul of Thebes* by writing that, should God grant him his wish, he would prefer to

follow the *via Pauli* rather than the way of kings. By seeking out Paul, Antony had already begun to walk in the older hermit's footsteps, the way of faithful obedience.

ASSOCIATES

PRIEST ASSOCIATE

Revd James Wheatley, 132 Hangingwater Road, Nether Green Sheffield S11 7ES

COMPANIONS

Mrs Enid Powell, St Martha's Lodge, Park Road, Tring, Herts
Mrs Verity Harvey, 58 Field Road, Oxhey, Watford, Herts WD1 4DR
Mrs R A Bannock, Trees, 185 Hadlow Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4LP

FLG

Martha Giltinan, 3 Crabtree Lane, Shirley, MA 01464, USA
Gail Fox, Loretto College, 70 St Mary's St. Toronto, Ontario,MSS 1J3, Canada
Susan Hudspith, 171 Hart Lane, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 0JH
Keith Straughan, Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge CB2 3HU

R I P

Mary Averill

HOMILY AT THE CLOTHING OF SISTER HELEN OF THE MERCY AND TRUTH OF GOD AS A NOVICE SLG

Feast of St Thérèse of. Lisieux 1 October 1999

SISTER BARBARA JUNE SLG

YOU speak in my heart and say 'Seek my face. Your face, Lord, will I seek',—a verse from Psalm 27, which if we did not know it so well might appropriately be ascribed to the Saint and Doctor of the Church whose feast we are celebrating. Thérèse can teach us much about the life of prayer we are on quest for together, in terms of listening to what is spoken in the heart and seeking the face of the Lord.

First of all, then, prayer is about the voice in the heart—about heart language. It is not clear from the various translations of this verse from Psalm 27 whether the voice speaking in the heart belongs to the Lord or to the psalmist or to the heart itself, and the ambiguity is itself significant and meaningful. Thérèse profoundly understood that prayer is spoken in heart language. Paradoxically behind what can superficially appear the easy outpourings of her own prayers, poems and writings, there lies a silence hard as rock and a testing and preparing of the heart we too know. So she can encourage us, when we are conscious mainly of our own stony-heartedness, to wait for his mercy and hope for good things. Learning to attend to the voice speaking in the heart can ask of us the kind of foolish, patient, bold confidence manifested by Annie Dillard's cranky neighbour, who was rumoured to be teaching a stone to talk.

Let me quote her briefly: she tells how her neighbour keeps the stone on a shelf, covered by a square of chamois leather, like a canary in a cage, and he removes the cover for its lessons. She says:

> No one knows what goes on at these sessions, least of all myself … I assume that like any other meaningful effort the ritual involves sacrifice, the suppression of self-consciousness, and a certain precise tilt of the will, so that the will becomes a

channel for the work ...
I do not think he expects the stone to speak as we do and describe for us its long life and many, or few, sensations. I think instead that he is trying to teach it to say a single word, such as 'cup' or 'uncle'. (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*.)

'Sacrifice, the suppression of self-consciousness, and a certain precise tilt of the will'—those are phrases which also describe prayer in terms that Thérèse would understand and assent to, I believe.

'My heart has spoken of you: Seek my face'. We can even better learn from Thérèse something about the way of prayer as seeking a face we love and recognise. Indeed she defines prayer as a cry of recognition and love. *'C'est un cri de reconnaissance et d'amour'.*

We recognise a voice: we better recognise a face. Think for instance of the experience of coming round from unconsciousness, or being wakened from a deep sleep, when we struggle to bring into focus and recognise the face or faces around us. Where are we to seek the recognisable face of Christ? Part of the mercy and truth of the Incarnation is that we may glimpse it in every face; as Gerard Manley Hopkins says:

~ Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father in the features of men's faces.

And in the mystery of human faces, as in every true mystery, what is revealed shines through what is properly concealed. This was illuminated for me by a beautiful and remarkable book we were given recently, containing no text, but only an astonishing series of portrait photographs taken by Steve McCurry—not studio set pieces, but random shots captured in all kinds of countries and situations world wide. Each face on each page is unique; each possessing its own beauty and its own due place; whether it be the tightly swaddled Tibetan baby in Lhasa, gazing out at the world with an infinity of wisdom behind wide, dark, new born eyes; or the Chicago streetwise show-off swanky kid, in heavily studded black leather jacket and wearing a large, live,

white rat on his head!

The photographs we have of Thérèse herself are compellingly iconic. And this face is surprisingly consistent, whether in the photographs of her childhood or in those we have from the Lisieux Carmel.

When we receive the habit as a sign of the life in Christ which we are to lead, as you, Helen, are about to do, we keep bare our faces and our hands. No masks are supplied, no gauntlets—no kid gloves either. Outwardly we may present a more or less uniform brownness, but faces and hands and feet are a give-away of our mattering differences. Yesterday I discovered a surprisingly apt description of this community which you, Helen, have asked to enter, and perhaps it also fits the other communities which it is a special joy to have with us here today. It was on the lid of a chocolate box—just two words in embossed gold capitals—TRADITIONAL ASSORTMENT! That description could also have fitted the Carmelite community that Thérèse so resolutely determined to enter.

But for her, as you so well know, seeking the Divine Face was seeking the suffering face of the Christ of the Passion—the Face of Love, as Father Gilbert called it. And the mystery of this face was its hiddenness—*un visage caché*—a hidden face to be sought in hiddenness. This was the face imprinted on Veronica's veil; the eyes almost closed, downcast. Not for Thérèse the compelling splendour of the Pantocrator, nor the countenance shining with the glory of Transfiguration, but the darkened, disfigured face of the Cross-bearer, the King of the Friday. Recognition of that hidden face comes in darkness, in the 'being with'. Not for Thérèse, most of the while, the intimacy of eye-contact, so to say; but nonetheless a seeing and a being seen which could awaken a cry of love and recognition. Being in the cell she once compared to being behind a blank brick wall that shut out the stars. No rose garden image that, and yet that is the setting we have put her in.

And yet, yes, it's true that there is love, joy and peace to be found in this way of life, as well as always the mercy and truth of

God to which you, Helen, are dedicating yourself. Welcome! and may you rejoice in the patronage of St Thérèse, and may we all take to ourselves the verse from Psalm 27 which I'll end with in the plain words of the ICEL translation,

Deep within me a voice says: *Look for the Face of God*

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BOOKS

HIGH KING OF HEAVEN. by Benedicta Ward SLG. Mowbray, 1999. £12.99.
CHRIST WITHIN ME. edited by Benedicta Ward SLG. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999. £3.50.

For some time now Celtic spirituality has been in fashion. The trouble is that, like Humpty Dumpty, people use both 'Celtic' and 'spirituality' to mean whatever they choose to mean. Sister Benedicta has done us all a great service by clarifying her terms and dispelling the myths. For her, spirituality is a portmanteau word for the manner in which people receive and live the gospel, and in these two books she sets out to explore the earliest manifestations of a specifically English piety. As for those who like to think of a 'Celtic Church' different from (and in some sense opposed to) a 'Roman Church', she points out that Christianity reached Britain by two routes but from the same source: from Rome via Gaul and from Rome via Ireland. The evangelising of the English was a work undertaken jointly by missionaries from Ireland and those sent from Rome by Gregory the Great; the British Christians in Wales took no part in it. The major divergence between the two missions was over the calculation of the date of Easter, seen by everyone as a matter of crucial importance, since Easter was the pivot of the liturgical year and the annual remembrance of the turning-point of all history. This difference was amicably resolved at Whitby.

Sister Benedicta emphasises ‘I have not written about Celtic, Roman or Anglo-Saxon but about the mingling of these which produced English piety, stressing the mixture rather than the ingredients.’

Here, the two books are complementary. *Christ Within Me*, the latest in the ‘Enfolded in Love’ series, provides sixty short passages for daily reading from English writers of the seventh and eighth centuries. *High King of Heaven* sets these readings in their historical context. The first two chapters describe the two major influences on Anglo-Saxon piety, Roman and Irish. There is a sympathetic portrait of Gregory the Great, who left a permanent mark through his book on pastoral care, which both Bede and King Alfred valued highly and commended to the close attention of their contemporaries

In an earlier generation Helen Waddell, from a background of Ulster Protestantism, showed a remarkable ability to enter with sympathy and imagination into the medieval outlook; but Sister Benedicta has the advantage of living the life in community that nurtured the saints and scholars whose work she translates and interprets. Outside the monastery, the closest modern parallel that occurs to me is the Polar expeditions of the heroic age, in which a small group with a common aim lived outside ordinary society, sometimes in close proximity, often in complete isolation. In her chapters on prayer in community, on the sense of unity with the unseen world of the angels and the saints, and on prayer alone, she brings out the centrality of the psalter. For Alcuin,

> The psalter was ... a summary of the revelation and prophecy contained in the rest of Scripture: it was the whole Bible compressed into one text, a pantechnicon for the Christian for the whole journey of life.

What of the prayer-life of the ordinary laymen? Here too the psalter played its part. Bede made a selection of single verses from each psalm which could easily be learnt by heart, even by the illiterate; he also provided in English more than one paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘With the psalter in their

memories as the content of living prayer, the Anglo-Saxons also had a framework for prayer and this was provided by the Our Father.'

A final chapter relates prayer and the Cross, with special reference to the sufferings inflicted on the young church in England by the Vikings, a sharing in the Passion of which the high crosses and *The Dream of The Rood* show a profound understanding.

Sister Benedicta quotes with approval Edmund Bishop's judgement: 'I seem to discern as the specifically "English" quality of this earliest devotional literature, strong feeling controlled and also penetrated by good sense'. These two books together confirm the truth of Bishop's judgement, and are clearly the work of someone who shares both the strong feeling and the good sense of those she admires and has made so accessible to us.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

HOPE AGAINST HOPE, *Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context,* Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart. Trinity and Truth Series, edited by Stephen Sykes, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999. £11.95.

This is a timely book—or timeous, as they say in Scotland: the authors are both from St Andrew's University.

At the start of this century, hope filled the air. In Britain at any rate, the spirit of progress gave content to the word. The progress was the result of human intelligence and endeavour. That spirit has slowly declined during the course of this century. Today, as the century and the millennium draw to a close, the confidence has all but gone. It is now fashionable to speak more darkly.

The authors of this book start by teasing out just how and why this should be so. Those human, secular things in which we placed our trust have let us down or turned to haunt us—science, economics, politics. This century human beings have killed

hundreds of millions of their own kind. The very things to which we once looked for salvation have proved to be more problematical than we supposed. In some ways our use of them is threatening our very existence.

At the same time, as chapter two explores, the story or 'meta-narrative' which gave sense both to our society and to individual lives in it by having an ending or goal to which we could direct our lives, has been replaced, in our post-modern time, by a multitude of stories, each of which is equally acceptable within current society. In this context the authors ask if the Christian meta-narrative can be made to have arresting significance again.

The third chapter discusses tragedy. I'm not sure the authors do justice to those who have accepted 'the tragic sense of life', nor (for example) to Benjamin Britten's bitter irony in the *War Requiem;* but as Christians they want to direct our attention to 'the wager for transcendence' (one of several fine aphorisms taken from George Steiner), a source of hope outside history.

Then follows an interesting chapter on what the 'ending' of this transcendent story might be. The Bible says God will do something new. The authors examine what this might mean, and distinguish imagination from fantasy. Here, I feel, the authors' struggle really beings, and ours with theirs. For there is clearly a tension between saying *God* will make all things *new* and supposing that limited human minds can talk about it. We can, however, say that even if we do not know *what* the future will hold, we know *who* is coming to us; and we can say that what God *will* do will be consistent with what we believe God *has* done. For believers, the past is *not* a foreign country, they argue. So there is point in trying to extrapolate from the tradition, and the authors go on to do this. They discuss images of hope found in our tradition: the *parousia*, resurrection, new creation, the millennium, the last judgement, the garden of God and the city of God, sabbath rest and marriage feast, and the kingdom of God.

The final chapter returns to the opening, and explores ways in which, in the light of all this, 'a shipwrecked race might a port of refuge gain,' and hope afresh. For these writers, the church is

to be a sign. By *imagining* the future—God's future, that is—and by living in a present shaped by it, we experience it, they say, if only in part. 'The goals of hope in our own lives … fuse with God's promises for a new creation of all things'. (p.199)

So, yes, this is a timeous book, and one which I was glad to read. The authors are well read, and provide good bibliographical notes. Of course, like all writers, they select their sources. (Colin Wilson, for example, in *The Outsider*, provides a very different selection when he considers hope and hopelessness.) Certainly their ambition is a worthy one: if our generation is to hope again, it needs help. But I sense this book is more likely to help believers deepen, than non-believers discover, hope. Even as a believer I was worried by a number of things. Just a couple of examples: if everyone is to be bodily raised (as they suggest), there will certainly be biological difficulties, since the stuff of which our bodies are made has been recycled through an endless number of people. Or again, the early sense of Jesus of Nazareth being the key to everything and everyone has got to be handled very sensitively now we are aware of the human race, the planet—indeed, the universe—as a whole.

But the book argues its case well and I was helped by it. I happened to be reading it on holiday in Ávila. Perhaps that influenced me to be glad of the contemplative communities. Many have spent recent years navel gazing, but for the rest of us, by their stability, holding fast, and going on trusting, they are a powerful bulwark against this world's meta-narratives. And when the authors quote Isaiah (pp.195f) it was as if to show that that contemplative too knew *that* God would act, if not *what* he would do. While I was reading this book a friend gave me *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving. Readers of this Chronicle might enjoy it too. Its hero discovers the same truth: *that,* not *what.*

But by stability something of the what *is* is revealed. Surely it is learned in 'prayer and righteous action' (the pairing is Bonhoeffer's). As one fine Christian woman once said, 'Prayer rescues hope from the future and brings it into the present'. And

I think she would agree, the same can be said of Bonhoeffer's 'righteous action'. In each we find ourselves close to God who cannot be proved, only known. By love, not by thought. So, a wider *perspective* on things. New indeed. Hope indeed.

JOHN ARMSON

CONSCIENCE AND ITS PROBLEMS, *An Introduction to Casuistry by Kenneth Kirk. James Clarke, 1999. £.....*

Conscience and its Problems was first published in 1927 when Kenneth Kirk was teaching moral theology in Oxford. It was his third major book of moral theology, the other two being *Some Principles of Moral Theology and their Application* and *Ignorance, Faith and Conformity.* A year later he delivered his famous Bampton Lectures, which were published subsequently as *The Vision of God.*

Bishop Eric Kemp in his biography of Kirk written forty years ago captures well the reaction of a reader coming to these texts for the first time. He suggests that, superficially, they can appear to be irretrievably dated. Kemp quotes from Kirk's introduction:

> But about the main principles of Christian conduct, as applicable to a civilisation like our own, there is little controversy. Difficulties only begin with the discussion of the subordinate precepts dependent upon these main principles; and such subordinate precepts can only be reached with any degree of assurance and unanimity if the rules of procedure adopted are both wise and commonly accepted. Here, therefore, at the point where controversy presses, a prior study of casuistry is all-essential.

We live today in an age where Christian principles do not necessarily frame the conduct of the state and where rival interpretations of the content and consequences of faith sit uneasily together. This can be shown by two examples—although Christians may disagree over the permissibility of abortion in certain circumstances, there is a consensus that the

current legal situation does not promote a Christian understanding of love and procreation. By contrast, the debate about homosexual relationships rests on differing understandings of what is normative for Christians. Are adult Christians called either to celibacy or to heterosexual partnerships? Or is there a moral evaluation that looks first to the quality and stability of relationship be it heterosexual or homosexual? At stake are two different visions of the end of which human beings are called.

In the seventy years since *Conscience and its Problems* was written we have become aware that the church may need to challenge the state in order to be the faithful people of God. In different ways philosophers and moral theologians such as Donald MacKinnon or Stanley Hauerwas have made us alert to the subtle and not so subtle distortions that arise when the church sees its prime task to be the voice of conscience for the nation. For there is another obedience that requires a continual wrestling with the strangeness of scripture, and a more radical critique of the forces at work in civil society. Indeed, an overarching concern in the parochial teaching of the church must be to help congregations realise and express the tension that may exist between membership of the eucharistic community, and the values of the work and lifestyle that they embrace from Monday to Friday.

If we make allowance for the change in context, Kirk's work does indicate the need for a substantive Anglican moral theology. His published work brings together many of the ingredients essential to the task—ascetic theology, ecclesiology, moral psychology, and attention to particular cases. *Conscience and its Problems* shows familiarity with both the tradition of casuistry of the church and with the philosophy of his day. It is closely argued, and offers a consistent vision of moral character, and the demands of Christian discipleship. The second part of the book applies, with subtlety and insight, an informed conscience to particular moral dilemmas ranging from birth control to general strikes.

Throughout Kirk offers a confident and disciplined statement

of a catholic Anglican ecclesiology. He argues that the Anglican Church's specific balance of liberty of thought and tolerance, authority and freedom, can make a valuable contribution to Western Christendom as a whole as it grapples with the autonomy of the modern age.

Our answers to some of the problems that Kirk discusses may have changed. We may be less secure than Kirk that an Anglicanism that is no longer imperial, but plural and global, can offer a unified moral vision. But Kirk knew that the rebuilding of moral casuistry could not be done in one generation. He saw his work as a very fragmentary and tentative contribution to a long-term project. His achievement and stature is such that any Anglican concerned about the church's moral teaching must engage with the rigor and breadth of his work. The reader of this book will have his moral perception sharpened and enlarged, even if he can no longer accept without question the premises on which Kirk's argument rests.

JOHN CLARKE

SILENT WAITING, The Biblical Roots of Contemplative Spirituality, by Alexander Ryrie. Canterbury Press, 1999. £8.99.

Nowadays, there will be few children, if any, who, like Helen Waddell at eight years of age are able to repeat the first thirteen chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews by heart; and perhaps even fewer grown-ups of the stamp of Alice Field, great-grandmother of 'Elia's' Dream Children who 'knew the whole of the Psaltery by heart, ay, and a great portion of the Testament besides'. One effect of this fine book is to make the reader wistful for that knowledge 'by heart' of at least some of the biblical words and phrases which have slipped by default from our memory.

Alexander Ryrie, who is a priest associate of our Community and the author of a widely-read Fairacres Publication*, Prayer of the Heart*, sets out to show that a disposition which is both spiritual and

contemplative is characteristic of the Old Testament as a whole. His aim is to help us to use the resources for acquiring such a disposition (in other words, such a habitual frame of mind, inclination of heart, direction of will) which his spade-work will uncover. There are times when almost all words can sound in our ears and on our lips insipid and stale, but that does not make them any less pregnant with meaning in themselves. This is supremely true of the words of Scripture, and in the light in which Sandy Ryrie examines some of them, they shine indeed.

He begins with a close scrutiny of the four Hebrew words for *meditation, night, silence* and *stand* and the contexts in which these occur in the Old Testament. In the following chapter, 'Waiting for God in the Psalms', he searches out the ways in which each of his four words relates to that impassioned theme of *'waiting for the Lord'* to which the psalmist returns over and over again. Dwelling on the language in which the Chosen People, through their prophets, law-givers, and kings, were accustomed both to speak to God, and to hear his voice, Ryrie handles each word with reverence and care, turning it this way and that, like a well-wrought tool, to discover its properties. He does this in the knowledge that prayer, at its deepest is non-verbal and that silence, moreover, is many-layered. The level of silence at which the heart itself rests in the presence of God is not reached by short-cuts.

The waiting, which is sometimes is all that prayer may consist of, is 'an activity of silence' for which other things than words are needed, but which themselves need words to describe them. In his fine analysis of Psalm 27 as the psalm of communion with God, Ryrie shows, for instance, that waiting for God can be waiting for Him to act, to 'do something' as we would say, but also waiting for what is desirable above all else—some hint at least of God's presence and his very self. And he goes on to show how this disposition of waiting for God is no less a defining characteristic of trust, of penitence, and most importantly of intercession. In this sense, 'to stand in God's presence on behalf of others' tells us something of what 'waiting for God' meant for the prophets. The search for God will always

be a personal one, but the same language of longing for his presence and his face, is used to express urgent pleading for the deliverance of the nation, for its forgiveness and restoration to the Promised Land and for justice for the poor and powerless.

Alexander Ryrie shows what it meant for Israel to know themselves unequivocally to be the Chosen People, whose unique relationship with God was rooted in *his* faithfulness to the covenant, to his providence, and loving-kindness; and at the same time to face the bitter consequences of their own recurrent betrayal of that covenant and wilful neglect of God's word. The process of becoming the people of God in reality, of beginning to reflect as a nation the character of the God they worship, unfolds through many centuries, and is, indeed completed only in one Man, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

As a novice I was taught that the history of the Chosen People is in fact also the story of each individual soul in its journey through life to its destined fulfilment in the kingdom of the Triune God—a journey in which God himself is guide, companion and goal. This book was for me a compelling reminder of that truth and of the perennial need of Christians for the Bible in its entirety.

In the second part Ryrie moves from the Old Testament roots of contemplation into a brief consideration of the tradition of the desert, where the solitaries and monks of the early Christian era gathered all their energies to water these same roots with the rain of unceasing prayer. Here he takes up again the four words with which he began his search, and shows that just as giants such as Cassian, Macarius and Ephrem found *meditation, night, silence* and *standing* to be inseparable from the 'prayer of the heart', the same has been true for the multitudes of praying people, who have followed them, even to the end of this millennium. With this phrase 'prayer of the heart' we come to what is both the core and climax of the book, for which all that precedes it has been a preparation. The chapter on 'Presence, Absence and Longing', indicates with a sensitivity and sureness of touch that need no further comment, regions on the map of the spirit which any

contemplative will recognise.

I had the good fortune to read *Silent Waiting* in surroundings of inspiring beauty and grandeur and that may be why I came to the last page with the sense of having prayed the book rather than read it. That, at any rate, signalled for me its value. A bewildering choice of books on every kind of 'spirituality' is available today but for anyone who wants to start out again from where our 'elder brothers' started, this is the one to go for.

SISTER ISABEL MARY SLG

BERNADETTE OF LOURDES, by René Laurentin, trans. J. Drury. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989. £8.95

We have here a life of St Bernadette (1844-1879), whose visions at Lourdes are the source of the remarkable pilgrimage that continues to flourish. Whilst Lourdes itself is the focus of the first part of the book, it is as an unnoticed poverty-stricken village; and we are there only until Bernadette herself leaves, aged 22, to become a Sister of Charity at Nevers. Bernadette, ten years later, seeing some photos of what had become the shrine said: 'Oh my poor grotto! I would not recognize it any more'.

The value of this account is its constant drawing on original testimony. Laurentin has published a number of detailed works on Bernadette and the process for her canonisation, and is well acquainted with the circumstances in which she grew up as well as the particular atmosphere of the Community at Nevers where she was to live out her religious life (almost wholly in the infirmary, either working or as a patient) and die. As with St Thérèse of Lisieux, we have photos too, but those of Bernadette are of a different sort—a few taken before she joined the Sisters of Charity, and some group photos with her sisters, yet all of them from when she had started to become known. When at Nevers, Bernadette was amused to hear that the price of photos of herself had been reduced.

A review can only notice a few salient points; and first

among them is poverty. There was the grinding poverty which led to the repeated failure of her father as a miller; to the family being put in the one-room ex-gaol to save them being on the street; to Bernadette's being loaned out to relatives and others, both to work and to save expense; to the death of several siblings in infancy and to Bernadette's own chronic asthma and ill-health which frequently took her to the edge of death. (After three months as a novice, she was hurriedly professed in the night, as expected to die. She could only manage 'Amen' to the profession formula, but then recovered and informed those awaiting a pious end, 'I will not die tonight'.) Nonetheless, poverty stood her in good stead. It taught her to reject from the beginning more or less disinterested offers of money and assistance; it probably also taught her the plain simplicity of response which saw her through often hectoring interrogations both secular and religious. All the testimony records her as constantly shunning any fame. Bernadette said, just before leaving Lourdes in 1866, 'How foolish people are! If they want objects touched, let them go to the grotto and leave me in peace. You parade me like a prize ox'. And on another occasion, 'I love the poor a great deal, I love to take care of sick people'. Poverty led her to Nevers; for the Community had given her a home in Lourdes at their hospice school after the visions.

Yet this could not be the sum of her vocation. Laurentin shows how Bernadette's religion was rooted in a deep family love. Bernadette sent a message to her family , when she heard of the pilgrimage trade: 'Tell them right out not to get rich', and no less in a large ignorance of basic doctrine. Quite without schooling, she found catechism impossible to memorise and certainly could have provided no account of the Trinity at the time of the visions. However, hours on her own seem to have formed a contemplative spirit in her by her early teens. To be sure, she said the rosary, but in French, a language that she knew about as well as many catholics knew Latin in the pre-Vatican II liturgy. When the Blessed Virgin (whom Bernadette had only termed 'aquerò', 'that thing') appeared and spoke, it had to be in

the local *patois*, which differed even from valley to valley (causing misunderstandings when officials from further away came to investigate). Only after the visions did Bernadette start, falteringly, to speak 'standard' French.

Laurentin suggests that Bernadette was learning how to enter fully into the hiddenness and poverty of the Mother of God. Her Community, to a degree, understood this. They kept her at the Mother House where a degree of protection from curious visitors (but not, alas, bishops) could be afforded. In a bizarre scene when all the novices were given assignments, she was left till last and assigned 'Nowhere!', and then told that she would be kept on to help in infirmary, as an act of charity. This, apparently, was contrived to prevent others thinking that Bernadette was being singled out for special treatment. However, the bishop presiding then spoke truly when he continued: 'I give you the job of prayer'. She herself remarked: 'Oh dear! I don't know how to meditate', but another sister adds: 'She buckled down to it in the long run'—difficult to feel that she was not happier in the quiet fields around Lourdes.

However, the hardships of her peasant upbringing which may have given such insight into the mystery of Mary were also the foundations of the pride and stubbornness in her nature. At Nevers Bernadette conformed as much as was necessary to the prevailing spirituality which emphasised humility and docility; but perhaps her true trial lay in having to give up any work and simply be constantly painfully ill. After a sister had stayed watching at night, Bernadette said: 'I don't want that sister to attend me during the night any more … I want sisters who go to sleep'. All this led in turn to a true Dark Night and emptying before God, which took her into death. Her last confessor noted: 'It is more that she was worked over than that she herself did the work'.

The late Fr Michael Hollings, a lifelong pilgrim to Lourdes, notes in his introduction: 'Bernadette has disappeared [at Lourdes]. You and I, the pilgrims, take her place in looking towards the niche in the rock … . We are taken up with the

beautiful lady who is now for us Our Lady. But … if we forget Bernadette we are liable to miss the meaning of Lourdes and much deep meaning in the gospel story'. The visions of the Blessed Virgin were given to one person, for all; and no less was Bernadette's unique vocation to be a gift for all.

JOHN SCOTT

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press

Raymond Chapman, *Stations of the Nativity, Meditations on the Incarnation of Christ,* £5.99.

John Davies, *Be Born in Us Today, The Message of the Incarnation.* With paintings by Gillian Bell-Richards and foreword by Rowan Williams, £7.99.

From Darton, Longman & Todd

A Carthusian, *From Advent to Pentecost, Carthusian Novice Conferences,* £9.95

Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions, Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church,* £10.95

Alastair Redfern, *Ministry and Priesthood*, £7.95

From Hodder & Stoughton

Alister McGrath, *The Journey, A Pilgrim in the Lands of the Spirit,* £9.99

New Fairacres Publication

THE HIDDEN WAY OF LOVE

Jean-Pierre de Caussade's Spirituality of Abandonment

BARRY CONAWAY

'Yes, if one could only leave the hand of God to do its work, one would reach the most eminent perfection. All souls would reach it, for it is open to all.'

Thus Jean-Pierre de Caussade expresses the hope of all who surrender themselves to God in child-like trust. In his meditative study of this spirituality of abandonment, Barry Conaway allows de Caussade's own words to reveal the hidden way of love which is the royal road to paradise.