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COMMUNITY NOTES

JUST AS the Easter Octave was ending for us on Saturday 29 April, the Orthodox churches were beginning their celebration of the Pasch. Sr Mary Angela of Jesus and the Divine Face died at Fairacres late in the evening and it was good to imagine her slipping into a jubilant choir, her first words being, 'Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death; and to those in the tombs, he has given life'. Sister had been in Romania for Orthodox Easter in 1978, and prayer for the unity of the church was a high priority in her life. It involved her in a great many personal friendships across denominational boundaries, links which she thoroughly enjoyed and maintained energetically and faithfully. I know that we had her particular prayers at the Permanent International Ecumenical Consultation for Religious which I was attending at Mirfield that week. By the time I returned to Fairacres, it was too late to tell her how well it had gone.

Sr Mary Angela joined the Community in 1945 and, with Sr Josephine, celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her Profession at Michaelmas last year. Much of her Community life has been spent in the smaller houses and she was a member of the household at Boxmoor, where she is much missed, until just a month before her death. At Chapter last year she gamely volunteered to go to St Isaac's, but, as it turned out, there was a different challenge awaiting her, for soon afterwards she suffered a series of small strokes and other health problems.

Even after her stroke, when speech and writing had become difficult, Sister kept up her ecumenical correspondence, and, as she carefully recorded, wrote letters to various Carmels and Benedictine friends in the UK, to Avila, Toledo, Bruges, the Monastère Saint Elie (Saint-Rémy), and to friends in Germany, France, Spain and Romania. Her address book witnesses to a wider correspondence still, reaching to Peru, Japan, Poland and Mexico. In the 1970s Sister studied by correspondence for a degree in Spanish and learnt Romanian; she kept up her reading in both these languages, partly through periodicals and newspapers. She also had a life-long

interest in liturgy and plainchant and worked with great devotion to help those less musically gifted than herself to contribute to the singing of the Office in choir. Sr Eileen Mary, who died a year ago, was her first cousin so they had in common, and both greatly admired, the redoubtable ‘Aunt A’ who had lived to be 103. A difficult act to follow! But they each in their own ways were indomitable too and a credit to the family.

Eastertide ended in a very special way too for on the Feast of Pentecost (11 June) Sr Judith of the Mercy of God made her Profession in Life Vows. Our Visitor, Bishop Richard Harries, was able to be with us for the occasion as well as Sr Judith’s family and friends. And on the Feast of St Mary Magdalene we welcomed Sr Eve of the Promise of God into Profession in First Vows. On 15 May, Hilary Bartlett was admitted as a Postulant and we are glad to have her with us again. We have welcomed also two Postulant Oblates, Katrina Boyce on 31 May and Vera Silberberg on 25 July.

The admission of a postulant, the death of a Sister after so long in Profession, the celebration of a Life Profession—all highlight risk in our life. Or, put another way, they raise some unanswerable questions. Frankly, as Sr Eve put it at the beginning of her retreat before Profession, ‘It is a bit scary.’

It *is* scary, because there is a real risk involved, as there is bound to be if you jump into the sea, or even if you take your toe off the bottom in the swimming pool. We have, by the mercy of God and the generosity of good people, a Convent and other comfortable and safe places in which to live; we have food and clothing and all that we need materially; we have the security of the Community (the sheer fact of its existence) and even, in the church these days, recognition and respect, a social niche. But we may be wrong. A Convent full of nuns does not prove that God is God. The name ‘Sisters of the Love of God’ does not produce, or necessarily convey, the reality to which it points.

Last week I was lucky enough to get on the bus from Hemel Hempstead to Oxford with a retired micro-marine biologist who wanted to talk. So we did, animatedly, for a couple of hours. He explained that he and his wife were not religious people at all, they

were both scientists and had long since left behind the Jewish and Buddhist religious traditions of their respective families. So, recently, when a Jungian friend had been discussing morality with them they had been at a loss to understand what he was talking about. They could conceive of morality as a code of laws to which a given society agreed to subscribe, but then they could point to instances of moral behaviour in one culture which in another place or time would count as immorality. Even in the abstract (not a word we used at all) he found it hard to conceive of morality *per se*.

Despite different presuppositions, we did find things to talk about and values we held in common, not least the value of asking questions, and acknowledging when you do not know or do not understand. Most striking to me was the way my travelling companion spoke of his research, and the delight afforded him by the changing contents of his test tubes. He described how sometimes he kept going back to look at them for the sheer pleasure of it; and how he wanted to share that delight with others. Yes, he admitted he wanted people to appreciate his achievement (a bit of showing off?), but that mattered less than that others should discover the same delight as he. Especially when the unexpected happened. Or when something previously unremarked appeared before his eyes, and he could *see* it! And when he could have the satisfaction of repeating the experiment with the same result, thereby demonstrating its truth. So he did research because he enjoyed it, for essentially 'selfish' motives, rather than because of its usefulness, (though he hoped some of it might be useful all the same). I could make the same confession about the life of a contemplative nun, and confess as well that it seems all wrong to apologise for doing something enjoyable because you enjoy it.

I don't know that he would have appreciated being called a contemplative, but I believe that that's the word for such quality of attention and marvelling delight in what is there. But 'prayer' needed a bit of clarifying. He definitely did not approve of repeating words over and over again in order to numb the mind and become stupid. He was most courteous, but he couldn't avoid letting on that he thought religious people believe some extraordinarily silly

things. (He gave a few examples, and I felt the same way about them.) He did volunteer the idea that some of the repetition of ancient words, which he had witnessed himself in various temples and places of worship, might blot out extraneous and distracting thoughts. In that way they just might, as a technique, contribute to a more concentrated attention.

Then I tried to explain a bit about the Jesus Prayer, that the discipline and delight of it is that each utterance of the prayer can and should be a real and fresh encounter with the One who is present in his Name. *‘Really?!’* He said, ‘Do you mean to say you come to prayer open to the possibility that something quite *new* is going to happen?’ He sounded as genuinely interested as when he had been describing his own experiments ... Maybe he thought of them too for he soon enquired, ‘All the same, isn’t that a bit selfish? After all, what use is that to me?’

The idea that we do not come to God alone, but as part of a whole, part of creation, part of humanity, and in relation to others, was a difficult one to put across. Even though, then and there, we were side by side on a crowded bus! And even though he knew about ecology and the role of algae in the oceans. I did not attempt to explain about coming to God ‘in Christ’, as a branch of the vine and in union with the whole church. Though I could not help saying something about the communion of saints. When I spoke of stilling the mind and of silence, he said he did not understand at all and he was quite dismissive of ‘feelings’.

All the same we talked a little about love and music, and he admitted to writing poems, just for fun, and enjoying a recent performance of Verdi’s Mass. But, ‘so what?’ You can see how the conversation went, how we tried out seeing things through each other’s eyes, but using our own particular methods and habits of observation. At one point, lightly and laughingly, just for a moment, we touched on loneliness, each feeling (sic) that the other deserved some sympathy, as well as respect. That was when we came closest to acknowledging the risks involved in our distinctive commitments. Just as I have beliefs, so had he—in the form of scientific premises. He stood on the shoulders of others as I do, and he hoped

that his work would play a small part in future scientific understanding—indeed it already had.

Since I began these notes, we have heard with sadness of the death of Robert Runcie. Many tributes have already been paid to the former archbishop and there will doubtless be more to come. Someone who knew him very well has written as follows:

Jeremy Taylor once said, ‘Lord, give us affable souls,’ but I think Robert’s unfailing affability has concealed from too many the rocklike attendance to God and duty that was his daily bread throughout his time.

For all who, in whatever age or culture, embark on the experiment of lifelong response to God as their ‘daily bread’, there are no predictable results. At Profession, as at the moment of death, there is a large element of uncertainty about the future. That is what makes it either scary, or interesting, or exciting, depending on your viewpoint at any particular moment. Each life given to God is his new creation, not a repetition of anything that has gone before, and unrepeatable. But if what we believe is true, each will bear the Maker’s authenticating hallmark, some manifest likeness to himself in faith, hope and love. When we undertake ‘to live in the light of God by faith and repentance’, as our new leaflet puts it, it is in order to bring these out and let them show.

Our patronal festivals of the Transfiguration and the Holy Name remind us of this, for they direct our contemplative attention to Christ the True Image of the unseen God. In our post-Easter faith he shows as brightness, so let us try borrowing the Orthodox word for the days of the week after Easter and apply them to all the days of our life: Bright Monday, Bright Tuesday, Bright Wednesday, Bright Thursday ...

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

DEEPEST OF MEMORIES

Sermon Preached at Ty Mawr Convent on Easter Day 2000

A. M. ALLCHIN

ON MAUNDY THURSDAY I quoted two lines from an early Welsh poem which spoke about Jesus as ‘gentle, and consoling of speech’. I want this morning to look a little further at that poem and to see some of the things it can tell us about Easter itself.

There may perhaps seem something odd, almost perverse on this day of days, the greatest of the Church’s festivals, in turning back to a text composed some eight hundred years ago, in the last years of the twelfth century. It is an almost unknown text which so far as I am aware, has not attracted much attention or commentary on the part of scholars, either in Welsh or in English.

There is, I freely admit, something odd about this procedure, but for me the oddness, the strangeness of it, grows from the way in which a text so outwardly obscure can sometimes take hold of one as if the author himself had something he wanted to share with us now. This sense of a meaning or a message which longs to be expressed comes from time to time to those who study old documents. It is something which itself at times involves ‘a little resurrection’ as what has been past becomes present and living.

The poet whose work I am quoting was one of a family of poets. His two brothers, Meilyr and Einion were both well known masters of the art. His grandfather Meilyr Brydydd had been court poet to Gruffudd ap Cynan, Prince of Gwynedd. His father, Gwalchmai ap Meilyr, had been court poet to his successors. Our poet, Elidir Sais, had been born and bred to the art of poetry, knowing it in his bones as a gift, a gift which he had received from his father and mother in the very gift of life. But also knowing it at the same time, as a task, a skill, a laborious exercise which had to be learnt and mastered. For the poetry of this school of poets, the poetry which was bread and butter to this family, was not something simple or simply overflowing. It was something intricate, carefully wrought, embellished and adorned like one of the finest pieces of Celtic jewellery, like the Ardaghly Chalice or the Derrynaflan

Chalice for instance. These were the ‘poets of the Princes’, and they wanted to make of their craft a royal as well as a priestly offering.

At the heart of the poetry of this school was praise, and the central act of praise was not the praise of the prince or the warrior, however vital that might be, but the praise of God himself; the essential act of praise of God as creator and life-giver from which all other acts of praise in the end derive. Meilyr the grandfather, Gwalchmai his son, and his three sons Meilyr, Einion and Elidir Sais, all sing poems of praise to God, and all show themselves deeply aware of the nature of poetry as both gift and task, a sacred gift and a sacred task. This is a gift they believe they have received from God in order to render it back to God with all the skill, with all the loving attention of which they are capable, a gift of praise which they are to offer on behalf of all God’s people, indeed of all creation.

Elidir Sais’ poem begins on Shrove Tuesday and passes rapidly through Lent until it comes to Holy Week; then again it passes rapidly through the first days of Holy Week until it comes to the heart of the matter in Holy Saturday and Easter Day, that is to the Paschal Mystery itself, the destruction of death by death. As the poet approaches this central mystery he reminds us that the work of our redemption, the cross, the tomb and the resurrection on the third day, though it was the work, the action, the passion of the Word made flesh, Our Lord Jesus Christ, yet it was also the work of the whole Holy Trinity. He knows, as Julian of Norwich knew, that all three persons of the Trinity work together not only in the creation but also in the redemption and the recreation of the structure of our world. Hence he speaks on Wednesday of Judas’ intention ‘to betray our Spirit’. It is not the betrayal of Jesus that he speaks of, that is something altogether evident. It is a deeper, more intimate act of betrayal to which he points, the betrayal of *our* Spirit; yes he may have in mind the betrayal of our own human spirit at its deepest and most intimate point, but he also most surely has in mind the betrayal of Our Lord the Spirit, whom he calls so simply and directly Our Spirit.

Why, when we say so confidently Our Father and speak so freely of Our Lord Jesus, do we not also feel free to speak as he does of the third person of the Trinity as Our Spirit?

When he comes to Good Friday, Elidir speaks of it simply as ‘a cruel day, a day of blood’. It is the day of our total oppression, the day of ‘the cross of Our Father’. In the cross of his Son the Father is also mysteriously but fully involved. We may think perhaps of some of the medieval representations of the Trinity in which the Father is shown seated in majesty, holding in his hands the cross of his Son, and the Spirit descending as a dove upon the Son.

All this is covered in two substantial eight line verses. But now we have come to the centre of the work, to the moment of the resurrection itself. To our surprise, perhaps, the poet speaks first of Easter Morning and then of Holy Saturday and the descent into hell. It is as if we had first to receive the ‘great message’ of the resurrection before we could begin to explore the meaning of its height and depth in the liberation of all those who lay imprisoned in the darkness of death and Hades.

Without knowing it, in these lines the poet has reproduced the order of the little three line verse which the Eastern Orthodox Church repeats over and over again in the celebration of Easter night. ‘Christ is risen from the dead, by death he has trampled down death, to those in the tombs giving life.’

I want this morning to look at just two points which come in the first of these verses of Elidir Sais, the verse which speaks of that early dawn on the first day of the week, the day of the new creation. He speaks of the Sunday on which the true sun arose, and then says simply, abruptly, in a way which is particular to the poetry of this school, ‘Deepest of Memories’.

What a multitude of meanings there are here! Is this the deepest most buried memory at the heart of each one of us, at the heart of every human being? Is this a memory, not only as many have thought, of an original moment of creation, an Edenic vision of a transfigured world, Traherne’s vision and Wordsworth’s vision and Edwin Muir’s? No, it is perhaps a deeper and more mysterious memory still, another memory, another thought which dwells within

us, the presence of which we are often so little aware. This implies that the gift and vision of Eden itself is given us through an immense and loving act of sacrifice; the Book of Revelation points to this when it speaks of ‘the lamb slain from the foundation of the world’. At the foundation of the world there is the act of sacrificial love, which reveals itself in its fullness in the resurrection on the third day.

But then we need also to look at the perhaps more obvious, more public meaning of this phrase ‘the deepest of memories’. We need to see it in relation to the whole of the Church’s life of prayer and worship; to the corporate liturgical prayer of the Church, gathered together in the power of the Spirit, on the one side, and on the other side to the hidden silent prayer of the Church made in the depths of the heart of each one, when the Holy and life-giving Spirit becomes the very life of our life, the breath of our breath, and speaks in us with sighs which are too deep for words.

Certainly, this expression ‘deepest of memories’ points us to the heart of the Church’s *anamnesis* which reaches its deepest, intensest, most powerful, most creative point in the proclamation of Easter Night.

Then to the second point: after speaking of Christ *rising* from death, the poet turns and takes up the language of *awakening*, waking from sleep. ‘This great message awakens us and will awaken us.’ The gift of risen life is ours already now, this is a direct expression of a realised Johannine eschatology, which is characteristic of much of the faith of the early Christian centuries both in Wales and in Ireland. Resurrection is ours even now, already in this world. But the *already* is always accompanied by the *not yet*. Here we have only begun to awaken to reality and to life. The fullness of awakening is something which will come later, beyond the limitations of this world of space and time. ‘This great message awakens and will awake us.’

And this great message is nothing less than ‘Christ the Lord’s awakening’ which is made ours. The heart of the gospel is not news about the risen Saviour. It is the risen Saviour who is himself the news, the message which we receive, and this message touches us at

every level of our lives, in every fibre of our being. The poet goes on ‘this great message awakens us and will awaken us, Christ the Lord’s awakening, the awakening of our poetic art’.

Suddenly we are back where we started in our consideration of this poem, with the art of the poet. Do we feel disappointed, disillusioned about that? The writer has brought us back again to his own particular intensity of interest in the art which he practises, the art of making a shape out of words. Is he simply limited to this one point of concern?

I do not think we need to be disappointed, still less disillusioned. For the word which is translated ‘poetic art’ has in the original many other and more varied meanings. It speaks of any kind of art or skill or technique or effort or achievement, it speaks of many kinds of work in many different fields. There is the skill which you need to make a car engine, or a computer, or a garden, or a dress, or a birthday party, or a functioning team, whether of managers or football players, all these skills, however diverse, are, the poet tells us, awakened, freed enlivened in the awakening of Christ the Lord. All these skills, in their almost infinite variety of ways, demand of the one who exercises them, a selfless dedication, a dying to self so that the new and unexpected reality which has been waiting to be born may come into the world, so that men and women may come to learn to be creators with their Creator, caught up into his work of redemption and transfiguration.

The poet knows that the art he exercises is something which he has received. It is given to him in his inheritance of life, something which God has given him through his family, and through the life and expectation of the society to which he belongs; for this is a society which expects poets, at moments of disaster and at moments of rejoicing, to express the deepest and most truthful convictions about the nature of things by which that society lives.

But the poet knows that this gift is also a task which is laid upon him, a task which means that he must live his life to the full, exercising to the utmost of the gifts which he has received. It was a gift and a task, but the task itself had become gift as he learnt through the selflessness of his dedication to offer his praise to God

as a worshipper, a priest, a celebrant, enabled by God's grace to speak not only for himself, but for his people and his Church; and not only for them but on behalf of all the world which God has made, which is now revealed to us in its true depth and splendour, in its true and amazing potential shown in the light of the resurrection morning.

In such a context the work of the poet, the work of the priest, and the work of the man or woman of prayer, are all very closely interrelated. Some indeed have thought that at the end of his life our poet, Elidir Sais, may have become a monk. Certainly it seems to me that his poetry reflects that close and intimate relationship of monastic and lay vocation which was one of the features of the early centuries of Christian life in the Churches of the Celtic lands. Still at the end of the twelfth century that interaction of lay and monastic can be seen at work, not least in this text which has perhaps brought to us, on this Easter Morning, something of the power and joy which it aroused when it was first recited or sung in the presence of an expectant gathering of God's people, eight hundred years ago.

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THE SANCTIFICATION OF TIME

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

TOWARDS the end of that missionary classic *Christianity Rediscovered: an Epistle from the Masai* by Vincent Donovan, there is a passage I should like to quote as a starting point for some reflections on time.

The herders were bringing their cattle back to the village enclosure for the night. You could almost set your clock by it. You didn't even need a clock or a watch. The herders didn't have any, but they were never late. All they had to do was to look up at the heavens to know the time. The African equatorial sky seen from those plains below was like a perfect dome that served as a gigantic time-piece. The dome was dark for twelve hours and light for twelve, equally divided between sunlight and starlight. In the daylight, it took just twelve hours for the sun to move across that dome from the eastern rim to the western, and anyone could look up and know what time it was by seeing where the sun stood in the sky. When it was a quarter of the way across it was three o'clock, African and biblical time. It was strange how the two times seemed to merge for me when I used the sky clock. The hottest part of the day was when the sun was moving between half-way across and three-quarters of the way across, from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, the hours when Jesus died.

I looked out from beneath my umbrella tree with just one hour of sunlight left. It was the eleventh hour, not the most propitious hour of the day, the hour when the labourers were scolded for standing around idle, for not working in the vineyard: the hour when there was so little daylight left for work.

The further one is from the equator the more unequal the natural divisions of time become. The hours of daylight are longer in summer, shorter in winter, and there is marked seasonal variation in weather, so that there is a natural rhythm to the year as well as to the day. Moreover, as even the makers of Stonehenge knew quite well, the natural cycles by which we measure time are not exact multiples of each other: there is not an exact number of days to the lunar month or to the solar year. It would, on the face of it, be more

convenient if there were, except that it would put the stationers who supply calendars out of business, for every year would be exactly the same. In fact, as we all know, there are roughly three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter days to the year, and twenty-eight and a quarter to the month, which calls for regular and complicated adjustment to keep everything in step. Stephen Jay Gould has remarked that either God is a poor mathematician or else he has a sense of humour. In fact, I suspect it is all to the good that there is a slight irregularity built into the system: it means that although the same pattern almost recurs at intervals it is never exactly repeated, which in turn means there is precisely that balance of dependability and unpredictability which makes life possible, but also interesting.

The Romans seem to have coped adequately with dividing day and night into twelve hours even in regions where day and night vary in length, so that in winter a day hour would be a lot shorter than a night hour and in summer the situation would be reversed. As soon as you need, for whatever reason, to tell the time more exactly than to the nearest hour, then hours of varying length become intolerable. No piece of clockwork could possibly cope with that. Wells, as we all know, has one of the earliest mechanical clocks still in existence and in working order, but the ubiquity of clocks and watches and the standardisation of time is a modern phenomenon. The needs of navigators led to the improved accuracy of timepieces, since to check your position on the globe you need to know with precision both local time and the time of your starting-place. Until the advent of railways in the nineteenth century everyone could keep to local time without creating any problems, but even in a small country like England the discrepancy between London time and Bristol time begins to matter once you can travel from one to the other at a mile a minute or even faster. Consequently, the time by which we set our clocks and watches and catch trains and buses is an artificial creation, which differs significantly from real time, and never more so that when we indulge in the somewhat illogical practice of 'daylight saving'. People will only get up and go to work an hour earlier in summer, sensible as that is, if the government pretends that seven o'clock has become eight o'clock overnight.

Consequently our experience of time and our attitude to it is entirely different from that of earlier ages. Furthermore, our ability to turn night into day with artificial lighting still further removes us from the natural rhythms by which people used to live.

Time as experienced is a natural phenomenon; time as measured an artificial construct. The solar system, which provides our natural rhythms, is an example of quasi-periodicity, in which two or more periodic motions have no common measure, so that they almost repeat, but not quite. Clocks and watches, however, are deliberately made so as to behave deterministically. Technology creates systems to which the classical paradigm of Newtonian dynamics applies, whereas according to Ian Stewart in *Does God Play Dice?* the way to model nature is through differential equations. We think of real time as the inexorable progress from second to second, steady, unalterable, irreversible: but this is in fact an abstraction from real time, something of which we would not be aware but for the ubiquity of increasingly accurate timepieces. My college in Cambridge has placed a large and carefully-designed sundial on the street façade of its new building, and you see people looking at it and then looking at their watches to see if it is right. In earlier times, people would have used the sundial to set their watches by.

T.S. Eliot speaks of London as ‘the time-kept city’ and our modern lives are dominated by time as never before: not time as experienced but time as precisely measured. It is true that a much earlier poet than Eliot spoke of ‘time’s winged chariot hurrying near’ but he was thinking of the transience of life, the shortness of our mortal span, and man has always been conscious of that kind of urgency: ‘Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, “I have no pleasure in them”’. For all that, there was less sense of hurry, less of the desperate struggle to keep up that our obsession with time has generated, and a greater adaptation to natural rhythms. Earlier the preacher whom I have just quoted tells us, ‘To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.’

We tend to speak of people without religion as pagans, but that is highly inaccurate. Pagans, like Fr Donovan's Masai tribesmen or the people of Greece and Rome and pre-Israelite Canaan, were highly religious: religion and life were far more closely intertwined than they are for us. Naturally, therefore, times and seasons took on a religious significance. We have in Britain two sets of quarter-days: the English set marks the solstices and the equinoxes, and has been christianised as Christmas, Lady Day, St John the Baptist and Michaelmas. The Scottish set marked the approximate beginnings of spring, summer, autumn and winter, round about the start of February, May, August and November: these too have been taken into the church calendar as Candlemas, St Philip and St James, (or more recently St Joseph the Worker), Lammas and All Hallows. The Puritan attempt to abolish the observance of the Christian year meant that in Scotland until recently Christmas and Easter were largely ignored, but the really pagan festivals survived. The Church was far wiser when, as Gregory the Great advised St Augustine, it took over whatever it could of whatever people already held sacred.

There is, as we have seen, a natural rhythm to the year and to the day, which lends itself to a spiritual interpretation. Sister Eileen Mary, in a study of the Spanish Carmelite mystics *Pilgrimage and Possession* speaks of 'the mysterious inter-relation of the rhythms of the spiritual and material worlds'. She illustrates this by three successive circular diagrams, the first based on the Chinese traditional teaching of the *I-Ching*, which charts the daily progress of the sun from east to west between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., and its nightly return from west to east during the hours of darkness, and the annual progress from early morning spring through mid-day summer to evening autumn and then to the depths of midnight winter. On this she imposes the second diagram, charting the hours of the monastic office at the first, third, sixth and ninth hours of the day, with Vespers, Compline and the Night Office completing the pattern; or the major festivals of the Christian year, with Christmas at midnight, Easter springtime at the dawning of the day, Pentecost in early summer at the third hour and so on. The shape of the liturgy follows the same pattern:

So the Church as a whole sanctifies natural times and seasons by pouring out the Word of God upon them through the Psalter, the Scriptures and its whole liturgical life. All this is taken for granted in St Teresa's writings and it is assumed that the individual's prayer is based on this rich heritage.

(Pilgrimage and Possession, p. 22)

This is just where for us the real problem arises. For Sister Eileen Mary in a contemplative community, the old nexus between natural and liturgical rhythm is unbroken, and she can go on to produce a third diagram, applying the same circular pattern to individual spiritual growth. But we have mostly lost that organic relationship between the rhythms of daily life and the pattern of corporate and liturgical prayer. The calendar year for us is relatively arbitrary, and we have secular holidays cut loose from whatever religious significance they may once have had. Easter still wanders about the year and Christmas about the week, but instead of Easter Monday we now have a Spring Bank Holiday. Whitsun has vanished from the secular calendar altogether, and the newly-introduced May holiday is held normally not on May Day but on the nearest Monday, so that the working week may be disrupted as little as possible. We change our clocks on Saturday night, because Sunday morning doesn't matter.

I personally believe that we would be healthier, both physically and spiritually, if we paid more attention to the natural rhythms that govern life on this planet, and from which technology has tried to emancipate us, fairly successfully but at considerable cost. It would be much better for us to work longer hours in summer and shorter in winter, and take more rest when the days are dark and the nights are long; and our spiritual lives would be healthier if the hours of the day and the days of the year were perceived as providing a constant reminder of the active presence of God in his creation and the eternal significance of every moment. Unsurprisingly, to my mind, Thomas Merton, writing about the spread of the Cistercian order to which he belonged, remarks that it had proved very difficult to observe the traditional pattern of feasts and fasts and the daily hours of prayer in the southern hemisphere, because it meant that you

were fasting at a time of abundance and doing heavy manual work in the fields, getting in the harvest, just when the liturgy called for very long services in Holy Week. Antarctic explorers find it impossible to celebrate Christmas properly in the middle of the summer sledging season and so make a major feast of midwinter's day at our midsummer. It might have made sense if when the church first penetrated south of the equator it had adapted the liturgical year to fit the altered natural rhythm. After all, Christmas was chosen for Christ's birthday solely because it corresponds roughly with the winter solstice, the day of the Unconquered Sun when light begins to return:

'The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not'.

Easter is the unalterably fixed point: which may sound odd, since it can occur anywhere between late March and late April; but it is fixed in relation to the Passover, which is determined by the moon: the first full moon after the spring equinox. The principle is straightforward, the calculation so complicated that most of us rely on our diaries. Back in Saxon times a discrepancy in calculating the date of Easter led to fierce controversy, finally settled when at the Synod of Whitby those who followed the by then obsolete and inaccurate Celtic method agreed to come into line with the Roman computation—rather as, in centuries later, Protestants reluctantly accepted the Roman reform of the calendar which lost us eleven days. That particular change many Orthodox have still not made, which is why Russia had its October Revolution in November. Sister Benedicta, in her book *High King of Heaven* speaks of this deep sense of the centrality of Easter:

On it hung the whole of the Christian year, with Lent beforehand, Pentecost afterwards and all the Sundays of the year linked into it. Nor was the date of the death and resurrection of Jesus arbitrary: it was a historical fact in time, and because of it all time was changed into a new configuration. Tradition had linked the date into the ebb and flow of the universe, of all creation.

(*High King of Heaven*, Mowbray 1999 p.43)

Those who tried to abolish the Christian year in the seventeenth century had this much justification: as Dom Gregory Dix points out, in *The Shape of the Liturgy*, the original liturgical cycle was ‘a weekly proclamation and manifestation of redemption on Sunday, and two annual Sunday festivals which emphasised the ordinary Sunday message quite as much as they commemorated particular historical events.’ This eschatological understanding of liturgy had more to do with the transcending of time than its sanctification. However, by the fourth century the Church was fully committed to the sanctification of time. As Dix describes it

Sanctifying human life within time by consecrating the chief natural points of every day—the quiet of the night, dawn, the beginning of work, the approach of the day’s heat, noon, the return to the afternoon’s work, sunset, rest—with appropriate Christian prayers, publicly offered on behalf of the whole community. So in the same way the liturgical cycle, when its main outline had been completed, sanctified the annual round of the seasons, and set out to imprint on the rhythm of nature and its reflection in social life the stamp of distinctly Christian ideas.

It was relatively easy for the Church in earlier ages to take over an already religious understanding of time; it is far more difficult for us, either as individuals or as a Christian community, to continue to observe what for most people has ceased to be meaningful at all. The process of secularisation has gone so far that there is something quaintly archaic, a hint of self-conscious revival, about, say, blessing the crops on Rogation days, and to keep Sunday special seems almost a lost cause. I remember being amused as a curate by a church which kept Ascension day on a Wednesday, because that was the day of their mid-week communion; now the Roman Catholic Church, no less, allows its observance on a Sunday. We should remember that early Christians met for worship on a Sunday even though it was an ordinary working day because for them it was the day of Resurrection, whether it meant anything to their contemporaries or not. Maybe we need to cultivate the same deviant persistence in keeping Sundays and holy days, and try also to mark the hours of the day. To live within the sound of the angelus is a

blessing, recalling one at mid-day to the realisation that we live in a sacramental world, a world that has been redeemed, a world in which, as Peter was reminded, we are to call nothing that God has made common or unclean. After all, the point of our observance of times and seasons is not to fence off a sacred area so that the rest of our time is secular, ours to do what we like with, but rather as a constant reminder that all time is God's time

Canon Michael Paternoster was Rector of St James's Church, Aberdeen until his recent retirement to Wells, where he gave this talk.

THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

SISTER STEPHANIE THÉRÈSE SLG

ON the Feast of Pentecost this year, the Sisters of the Love of God adopted the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) for use on Sundays and the Festivals for which it provides. In introducing this new book to any of our readers who have not yet experienced it, I will begin by apologising for the numerous abbreviations I have had to use to describe how it has evolved, and how we have come to adopt it.

First published in 1992, the RCL is an international, ecumenical lectionary based on the 1969 Roman Lectionary. It has a three-year lectionary cycle with three readings for each Sunday and Festival, usually an Old Testament lesson, a Psalm linked to the OT lesson, a New Testament lesson, and the Gospel. Each year of the three-year cycle features one of the Synoptic Gospels read in a semi-continuous fashion throughout the year. The tradition of reading St John's Gospel during Eastertide has been retained. Unlike the ASB lectionary, the RCL lectionary is seasonal and not thematic. It was felt that the thematic approach used in the ASB lectionary proved too limited and wore thin with sustained repetition, so it was abandoned. Departure from the overt thematic approach leaves the various themes inherent in the scripture readings to emerge naturally in their context.

Some churches have adopted the RCL in its original form, while others have adopted it with some modifications. The Church of England is one of the churches which has chosen to modify the RCL at some points. The Church of England alterations to the RCL are found in the weeks of Epiphany and in the weeks before Advent, these changes being made to enrich the seasonal flavour of those times. According to the C of E Liturgical Commission, the changes in Epiphany-tide aim towards ‘a gradual unfolding of the mystery of the Incarnation and the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ’; while before Advent they ‘bring together a cluster of themes that November provides: All Saints, the Departed, Remembrance, and the Kingship of Christ.’ As not all the Sundays in these periods have alternative readings, the differences between the RCL and the C of E version are not as great as implied. The RCL provides two ways of reading the Old Testament in the first lesson during Ordinary Time. Track 1 provides a semi-continuous approach in which one book of the OT is read through in a series of lessons over a number of weeks. These semi-continuous readings have no predetermined link to the epistle and Gospel for the Sunday. Track 2, on the other hand, does provide a set of readings where the OT lesson is related to the Gospel reading. In that Track, the readings will jump around among the books of the OT. Once a Track is chosen for the year, the congregation is expected to stick to the selected Track and not move between the two. SLG is using Track 2 which correlates most closely to the RC Missal that we have been using.

The Gradual Psalms, said between the two readings, are much longer than in the previous RC Missal. The translation used in the RCL published for the C of E is from the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church of the USA, with adaptations by the Society of St Francis (UK) for British word usage and inclusive language. The Sisters use the ECUSA psalm translation (without the SSF changes) in their Daily Office, so there is now a welcome continuity of translation throughout the Office and the Eucharist on Sundays. The RCL printed for the C of E also includes the Festivals, Collects and Post Communion Prayers authorised in 1997 and included in the forthcoming *Common Worship*. During the Seasons

the naming of Sundays will be a little different than before, again to emphasise the spirit of the season.

So, for example, it will be ‘the Second Sunday of Easter’ rather than ‘the First Sunday *after* Easter’, a small but significant change since ‘after’ seems to imply that Easter is over when liturgically it lasts for the Great 50 Days. This ‘Sundays of’ nomenclature is used for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter. In the non-seasonal, Ordinary Time following Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, the naming will be ‘Sundays after Trinity’, as found in the BCP calendar. The C of E variations to the RCL also provide for ‘Sundays before Advent’ and ‘Sundays before Lent’. It is in these ‘Sundays before’ sections that the changes to the original RCL lectionary, mentioned before, are usually found. The Sisters have been using the RC Missal since the mid-70s. There was then little choice of missals, but in the intervening years all the churches have made considerable advances in liturgical practice, A wealth of liturgical material is available today, and the RCL is a testimony to how much has been done on an ecumenical basis.

It was stark necessity that made our Community adopt the RC Missal in the 70s. We needed not only a reference lectionary but a book with the lessons printed out. And now that the C of E has published such a lectionary, the Sisters are happy to be in step with our Church, and rejoice that the C of E has moved so far towards an ecumenical lectionary. Unfortunately, the Sisters are unable to embrace completely the C of E variations to the RCL, and will be using the RCL as it was originally published in 1992. As the Community’s Liturgical Committee reported to Chapter in 1975: ‘In proposing a new missal [for the Community’s use], it would be essential to see that the relationship between Mass and Office is preserved.’ This is as true today as it was in 1975. Because the Sunday Gospel is linked with the Canticle Antiphons at Lauds and both Vespers of Sunday, and because we still use at Fairacres the traditional plainchant based on the RC Lectionary, it would have been discordant with our Sunday worship to use the C of E variations, because the Office antiphons and the Sunday Gospel

would vary. This was one of the reasons we could not adopt the ASB lectionary when it came out.

From its beginnings SLG has felt called to pray for Christian unity. Part of our prayer for unity can now be found in the lectionary we use, which links us with other congregations and other denominations throughout the world—an outward sign of an inward desire and prayer. While the essence of Christian unity does not lie in doing things the same way, but in Christ, an outward sign of unity can be a strong witness to the unity of the Body of Christ. In our separate places and traditions, we worship God together in a perceptible way.

In ending, I will return to a beginning and quote the first paragraph of the Introduction to the RCL, because it captures, I believe, the spirit and hope of this ecumenical endeavour:

The orderly reading of scripture is at the heart of Christian worship. A lectionary clothes the cycle of the Christian year with the stories that tell the story of divine activity and human response to it and makes it possible for Christians to celebrate the mystery of faith the more effectively. When they use a common lectionary, and read the scriptures in step, they are also enabled to celebrate their essential unity in Christ.

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A LENTEN JOURNEY
OBLATE SISTER JEAN IRENE, SLG

ON Ash Wednesday last year the preacher at the church to which I belong reminded us that 'Lent is a time for us to be changed'. I found myself in Germany for two weeks during the middle of Lent this year and have increasingly come to realise what an important journey that was for me.

It began, though, back in October 1999. The Librarian of the Hochschule, Anhalt (in the former GDR) visited the library where I work and as part of his programme came to talk to me. I am in charge of the Inter-Library Loans Section and have always assumed that the way we organise this in the United Kingdom is the best way, and that we couldn't possibly learn from other people's way of doing things! During my encounter with our visitor, however, I discovered that there might be quite a lot to learn. The German way of arranging inter-library loans is indeed very different to ours, but there are features which seemed to be in advance of what I am used to. I took the first step on my way.

The next step came when all the staff in Bristol were told of the invitation extended to one of us to make a return visit to the Hochschule Bibliothek in Anhalt. I have never learnt German and the idea of spending a fortnight in a country whose language I cannot understand seemed to me to be reckless. However, I expressed an interest. In December 1999, I was told that I had been chosen to make the return visit. And here I would like to thank the British Council for their support, for this was part of their regular programme of exchange visits. The Library Association paid my air fare and without the backing of these organisations, my trip would not have been possible. I am very grateful to both for their support.

So in March this year I set out. The Hochschule has three sites—one each in Köthen, Dessau and Bernburg. I was based in their guest accommodation in Köthen. After all that has happened in East Germany in the last ten years I was glad of the opportunity to see that part of the country for myself and not only to rely on the

reports of other people. By now I had acquired a little ‘tourist’ German but it still felt very risky ...

I arrived on a Saturday and the next morning, a lovely spring day, I took courage and went out to see if could find a church. Bells were ringing and, drawn by them, I managed to find the Roman Catholic Marienkirche, in time for the service at 10.00 a.m. It was very much like a Mass in England, and even though I could understand only the occasional familiar phrase, I was able to follow the service. When at the end the priest read a letter from CAFOD, and I gathered that it had to do with an appeal for the flood victims in Mozambique, I was aware of being part of something much bigger than I usually realise. Sometimes it is easy to forget that we are not the only people who care about such things, but here I met the concern of another group and knew that we all belong to something universal, which transcends our own boundaries and encompasses us all. So I was aware at the same time of my church at home, of SLG and of Christians throughout the world, all uniting with me and the other members of this congregation in one offering of worship. I already knew this as an intellectual truth, but I now experienced it in a new way at a deeper level.

The next day I started work in the library. My lack of German was a bit of a problem as only about five of the thirteen staff based in Köthen spoke English and with varying degrees of fluency too. I found them all immensely friendly and welcoming and somehow the difficulties which we had in understanding each other brought us together. It is a cliché that there is more to communication than words, but I discovered its truth. I think I had to experience the different ways we use to communicate with each other to realise how important they are and how easy it is to overlook them. By the time I came to leave, I had made very good friends and was sorry to be saying goodbye.

I felt that I was lucky to be staying in the guest flat as I had to get all my own food, which meant shopping! That made it easier to get a feel of what ordinary life is like and to reflect on the experience than if I had been staying in a hotel. On my first Sunday I looked around at my fellow worshippers in the Marienkirche and

saw them as people who have suffered greatly throughout the twentieth century. Since the outbreak of the First World War they have been caught up in momentous events which have left their mark on everyday life. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was the latest in a sequence of such happenings. People had such high hopes when the Communist regime came to an end and looked for the beginning of freedom and prosperity. Freedom is certainly real now; the freedom to travel, to express ideas, to read and have access to information. When I visited the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig, I was told that it had received copies of everything published in West Germany throughout the GDR time, but only those with special permission could read Western publications. But prosperity has not come yet. I was told of a factory in Köthen which employed five thousand workers before 1989, but now only employed five hundred. In all the libraries I visited I was told that staff had heavy workloads and found it difficult to cope, but there was no money to pay for additional staff. There was money to pay for new buildings or refurbish existing ones and to buy books. I sensed that now a different kind of materialism prevailed.

As I spent more time in Köthen, I focused more and more on the meaning of reconciliation. I visited the Leipzig Book Fair with one of the staff and we were able to do some sightseeing. We visited the Nikolaikirche, where from 1982 the services of prayer for peace were held which inspired the final demonstrations leading to the fall of the Wall. It made me ponder the way in which we resist evil and how far the end justifies the means. As a result, I went on the Saturday to Dresden. I wondered how people might react to a phrase I had to use a lot—‘*Ich bin Engländerin*’ to explain why I didn't understand!—but I met with nothing but friendliness and help. At the *Schloss*, one of the attendants went out of his way to make sure I saw everything. I felt I could understand the destructive power that makes people want revenge as well as the suffering of all those caught up in the bombing, I wondered whether my response of ‘there are no easy answers’ was just an excuse for failing to try to find any. Perhaps reconciliation has to do with holding all sides to God and believing that, in his mercy, He will guide us to a new way

of being, a costly way which will challenge us to leave our own certainties behind. And we will also expose ourselves to the hostility of those who think that we are just sitting on the fence. At the same time that I was in Germany, Pope John Paul was visiting the Holy Land and this too played a part in my reflections.

The next day brought another opportunity to reflect. In Köthen, I shared the accommodation with someone else, a Russian girl who had been teaching Russian in the Hochschule for six months. She spoke fluent English as well and we went to Berlin together. I think that is one of the things I shall always be grateful for, that a Russian girl and an English woman could travel together to Berlin.

My last night was another piece of recklessness! I went back to Leipzig to hear the choir of the Thomaskirche singing Bach. It proved to be a Lutheran service which included another sermon I didn't understand and J.S. Bach's motet '*Jesu, meine Freude*'. I was worried about my train back to Köthen—whether the service would end in time for me to catch it, whether I could find my way back to the Hauptbahnhof in the dark, whether the train would indeed stop at Köthen. Would I ever be able to get my packing done? Then I realised that all this anxiety and fretfulness was coming between me and the music, so I made a conscious act of will to put it on one side and to enjoy the present moment. Another opportunity to trust God! And I found my way back, the train was fine, and I did my packing in time to be ready for my lift to the airport at Leipzig the next morning.

Since I first met our German visitor, I had felt that I was engaged in something which asked me to leave behind my own preconceptions and to be open to what was being offered. What I have called recklessness was really an invitation to greater trust. Coming home in time for Passiontide and Holy Week only gave me more to ponder and again I realised how reluctant I am to unite myself with Our Lord's handing over of himself to the Father. I gained immensely from my journey, especially in the friendships I made. This seems to me to be a sign of hope and the power of love in our broken and divided world.

THE CROWN OF THE YEAR

A Homily Preached on the Feast of Corpus Christi

ERIC SIMMONDS CR

Christians don't measure the passing of time in the same way that other people do. For us, right now, we are about mid-way through the year—the Church's year, that is. The first half has run its course: in it we commemorated and celebrated in fast and feast the mystery of the world's redemption disclosed to us in the things concerning Jesus in the days of his flesh. From Advent into Christmastide, on to Lent, Holy Week, the Triduum and Eastertide, culminating with the day of Pentecost, and concluding with the vision of the consummation of all times and seasons in the worship of the Holy Trinity.

From prophecy to fulfilment: from the voice in the wilderness and the call of the watchman in the night, to the song of the redeemed and the ingathering of the nations, we have recalled and rehearsed God's saving purposes for his creation.

And now we stand at the beginning of the second half of the Calendar—post-Pentecost, after Trinity, Ordinary Time—the green season, for green is nature's colour, life's colour, the colour of growth, of reaching out towards the light. And, as in the natural world, so it is for us. This is the season for our maturing and ripening into the fullness of life, the abundance of life, which he came to bring to us.

We are those, surely, of whom Saint Augustine speaks: those in whom

the glory of love (is) alive ... but yet frost-bound. The root is alive, but the branches are almost dry. There is a heart alive within, and within are leaves and fruits, but they are waiting for a summer.

'They are waiting for a summer'. Indeed and indeed. And with the poet we cry out, 'Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain.'

And today's Feast, standing as it does on the meridian of the Church's Calendar, providing the hinge on which the year turns, draws together all that has been commemorated and celebrated in

the observance of the Lord's incarnate life in the first half of the year, and at the same time gives us our marching orders and sends us on our way into the second half.

For on the one hand the Eucharistic mystery celebrates and sets forth the whole span of Our Lord's life in the flesh: it is all here; Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem—all that he was, all that he did, and all that befell him—it is all here, available to us, given to us, as we remember him in bread and wine. This is how he fulfils his promise to be with us always, to the close of the age (Mt.28:20). This is how he keeps company with us and goes with us—not only *alongside* us (as an external presence), not only *for* us (as an encouraging presence), but as one who *comes to us and makes his home with us*, sharing with us all that he himself has received from the Father. He in us: we in him.

And on the other hand, today's Feast, coming as it always does at the beginning of the green season, reminds us that the Eucharist is always for us, at all times and in every season, our summer. Here is the light, the warmth by which our shrivelled souls recover greenness and ripen to their fullness. Here is the dew, the rain, by which we quicken into the rich fruitfulness of Christ who makes glad our wilderness. He in us: we in him.

So God in Christ crowns the year with his goodness. He visits the earth—the earth of which we are made, our frail mortality—He visits the earth and blesses it with his real presence; He makes it very fruitful. We in him: and he in us.

As the rain and snow come down from above,
and return not again but water the earth
Bringing forth life and giving growth,
seed for sowing and bread to eat
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth:
it will not return to me fruitless,
But it will accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the task that I gave it.

(Is.55:9-11)

‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift’.

PRAYER AT EIGHTY-SEVEN

VERA HODGES

I SAID a little about this at one of the group discussions at the Servants of Christ the King conference and was asked to write about it. I am growing old. I am increasingly deaf. My left eye is useless but my right eye, with a magnifying glass, can still manage New Testament Greek. My real problems are angina and a loss of balance which makes walking rather perilous, stairs difficult, buses and tubes out of the question. I have had to learn to adapt my life to these limitations. I have had to stop exploring markets, going to meetings, shopping, or going to church on my own. God spoke to me silently but clearly, saying that I had been given the gift of extra time to spend at home and alone; and this extra time should be given to him.

Derek Mottershead, the clergyman who has helped me with my prayers for the last ten years, underlined this. ‘You are quite different from most of my old people’, he told me. ‘They usually tell me about all the jobs which they used to do for the church but can’t do any longer, but you never tell me about what you used to do. You want to move forward in a “Mary” kind of direction. He meant that I see my present job is to learn to know God better, to learn to love him more deeply, and to pray for the church.

It seemed to me that God wanted more from me than he was getting. I must tidy up my rule of prayer. I needed discipline. I already said a morning office regularly but wondered if perhaps I should say an afternoon office as well. I wanted to feel I was praying with the church and for the church. Perhaps that was one of the chief jobs I should be doing. But to begin with I found the Evening Service much more difficult than the Morning Service. I was often tired and forgot it altogether or read it without concentration. It came to me, suddenly, that it might be easier for me if I belonged to some organisation of people who were all committed to saying the offices, and who supported each other in their prayers.

I wrote to the Sisters of the Love of God, at Fairacres in Oxford, and told them my problem. I was sent a leaflet about the Fellowship of the Love of God whose members support the Sisters and are supported by them. The leaflet told me:

The purpose of the FLG ... has been to set up and encourage, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in conjunction with the Community, an ever deepening life of contemplative and intercessory prayer ... The offering of the Eucharist and the Divine Offices (whether the Monastic Office or Morning and Evening Prayer) will have their rightful place, and will be nourished by the spirit of prayer built up in the silent waiting upon God which will find increasing importance in the life of every FLG member.

This seemed to me just what I wanted. Years ago, when I was distressed about a priest who had taken his own life, Mother Mary Clare of Fairacres gave me counsel about intercession and contemplation. I felt I was asking help from the right place, somewhere I already belonged. Derek said, 'That is obviously right for you. Get on with it!'

SCK helped too. Alison Norman said, 'In your present position I think that is just right for you. Would you like me to drive you to Oxford to see Mother Rosemary who will admit you?' At the first meal at the SCK Conference I sat next to Veronica Maxwell-Stephens and asked her whether, when she lived in Oxford, she had had contacts with the Sisters of the Love of God. 'Yes,' she said, 'I am a member of the Fellowship of the Love of God.' I was delighted. We talked about our problems in finding the right form of Office. I had been using the Franciscan *Celebrating Common Prayer* while Veronica felt drawn towards the fuller forms of the Roman Catholic breviary.

On the Friday after the Conference Alison drove me over to Fairacres to be admitted to the Fellowship. Mother Rosemary was tall and stately but totally welcoming and encouraging. She asked me questions about my contact with Gilbert Shaw, at one time Warden of their Community, and about my experience of prayer, and the steps which had led me towards the FLG. She said that it

did not matter at all which form of Office I used. She stressed that I am old and I must accept that and not push myself when I am tired. One psalm, or part of a psalm, may sometimes be all I can manage.

I asked if I might buy a copy of the Office book which the Sisters use. She said it was not for sale but she would give me a copy. This is a beautiful volume with rubrics and capitals printed in red and five markers of different colours. It is a translation of the Day Hours of the Benedictine Breviary with additional devotions—mostly collects—‘for its use in accordance with *The Book of Common Prayer*’. I have been using the Offices of Lauds and Vespers and finding them beautiful and the Psalms, in the BCP version, more familiar for me than the modern version of CCP.

God gives us many things: I thank him for my family and friends; for my books, my radio, my T.V and my computer; our cats, our comfortable house and beautiful garden. Somerset Ward, a great teacher of prayer, said that we can give God only two things in return: our love (or desire for love), and our time. Reciting psalms is certainly a way of giving time. Of course we are all different and not many old people may be drawn to the formal patterns of the traditional services. I discussed this with an SCK Shadow, Betty Beale, house-bound in a nursing home. She told me that she used to be a Benedictine Oblate and went to Communion every day. Now, she didn’t often want to use words in her prayers. I understand that very well. There is a prayer by Nicholas Grou in the *Oxford Book of Prayer* which I often use:

Teach us, O God, that silent language which says all things ...
Teach us to remain quiet under thine action and produce in our souls that deep and simple prayer which says nothing and expresses everything, which specifies nothing and includes everything.

This simple kind of prayer is specially valuable for old people. I find it just as important as prayer-book prayers. Here one learns to express one's love for God and accept his love for us.

I used to know two prayerful old ladies who had their own methods of giving time to God. Both were blind and one, my Grandmother, had learnt Moon, an older, simpler system than

Braille. I can picture her sitting up in bed reading her huge prayer book with her finger tips. The other lady had a sharp memory stored with hymns, both English and Welsh, which she used to murmur over and over. Sometimes, she said, she would try to translate them into French or German.

One question which Mother Rosemary asked me was whether I used the Jesus Prayer—that is a repetition of ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.’ I said that I used it sometimes but my husband had used it a great deal during his long last illness. She said that some of the Sisters used it in intercession. I remembered Derek saying that any religious exercise—a service or an Ignatian meditation—could be offered to God on behalf of someone for whom one wished to intercede.

After I got home, I tried using the Jesus Prayer in this way. I was surprised at what happened. Instead of the prayer being said by me it turned into something that was being done to me. Many of you will recognise a kind of passive prayer which may be quite rough. I felt this was like being hammered into shape in a blacksmith’s forge where the Spirit worked in me with wind and fire.

I remembered Mother Mary Clare saying to me that Christ is the true Intercessor, on the Cross and at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25). We must keep him always in sight and hold the suffering and needy before him. This may be a costly exercise in which we share something of Christ’s compassion and the stress of those for whom we pray.

Christians often have special causes they feel called to pray for: a friend of mine, a vet, prays regularly for over-worked donkeys all over the world. I have felt the need to pray for over-worked clergy with problems and temptations, ‘That is your attrait,’ said Gonville French-Beytagh, (SCK Warden 1972-1984).

I have an old letter from Gonville in which he encouraged me to write something about prayer ‘directed to older people with time to think about it, and, hopefully, towards the house-bound, bed-ridden etc whose prayers (especially intercessions) it seems to me make a particular impact.’ I remember him saying in a sermon that old

people in their intercessions, serving the Kingdom at their eleventh hour, often make their most valuable contributions to the Church.

I might have said something about the value of the BBC Daily Service (Long Wave 9.45 am); or the ASB Litany as a framework for intercessions; or reflections on the Eucharistic readings for the day in the magazine *Bible Alive*; but enough is enough.

Finally, I want to commend a prayer from CCP Compline which comes to my mind many times a day:

May God bless us,
that in us may be found love and humility,
obedience and thanksgiving,
discipline, gentleness and peace.

(This article is printed by kind permission of The Servants of Christ the King)

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We apologise for the mistake we made in the Spring Chronicle where the Secretary's address was incorrectly given, and are sorry for any inconvenience this has caused.

AN ORDINATION HOMILY

*Preached at S. John the Evangelist, Palmers Green, N. London on
Sunday 2 July for the Edmonton Area of London Diocese*

JOHN SCOTT

THERE is a remarkable passage * in a work by the sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite friar, St John of the Cross. He is speaking of the many occasions recorded in the Old Testament when prophets, priests and kings questioned God in many ways about many different matters; and were right to do so. God in turn answered in a variety of ways. But now, says the saint, all is changed: 'In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other) he spoke everything to us at once in this sole word—and he has no more to say.' St John imagines us asking God for something further; God's reply is: 'If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this?' The saint concludes: 'God has become as it were mute', but only because he has 'given us the All, who is his Son'.

Now the Holy Spirit has, in his usual variety of ways, brought you all here both to witness Bishop Peter acting in the name of God, and also to assure him that he acts in the name of the Church. What will you expect from your new priests? They will preach, if you are there or if you are not; they will pray, sometimes with you, but always with you in their hearts; they will preside at God's altar and build up Christ's body in the ordinariness of weekdays, the community of Sundays and the great events of Christian story and history that we call feasts; and they will learn how to care for you, to be pastors.

A different and much earlier St John, writing the book that we call the Revelation, has messages for seven churches, and he repeats over again: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' All those duties and expectations that I have listed, they will be poor things indeed if your priests do not have ears. I said that they will learn to care for you. Some of you will be voluble, some very quiet; some of you will carefully conceal what

you might really like or fear to say. Your new priests will take time to know how to hear you; they will mishear you; and just when they may be getting the hang of hearing you, Bishop Peter will move them on. Fear not; others will benefit, and you will still have your parish priests with their sharp hearing.

However, before your new priests turn an ear to you, they must have spent and be spending their time with an ear to God. Now, says St John of the Cross, God has said everything ‘all at once in his Son’. To hear someone’s life story in one go will leave us exhausted; for God to declare himself in one go, even in the thirty-three years of the life of Jesus Christ, is an infinitely greater matter. Please do not begrudge your priests having an ear to God. They have a very great deal to hear, to listen to; and the prayer for them is that, as they continue to be attuned to God’s Word, that is, to Jesus Christ, they will be the more able to hear you, to understand you; and to find God in you and with you.

There is no need, says our saint, for requests to, enquiries of, revelations from God; but then he goes on to say that God does not want us to rely wholly on our own understanding and intuition. From Moses through to St Paul, God’s people seek human confirmation of what they believe God to be asking of them. As the Lord says in the gospel: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’—that is, says St John, ‘clarifying and confirming truths in their hearts’. Your priests, then, are not one-way channels. They have urgent need of you as they learn to have an ear to God. If you do not trouble much to speak to them, if you do not trouble them in every sense of the word, make demands on them, cause them some disquiet, too, then they will lack that interaction which the saint describes as the necessity if any of us are to learn to hear God speaking in his all-at-once way.

God will speak to them through you sometimes; or you may find God wholly mute sometimes; or you may find that other ways, other beliefs are leading and supporting you sometimes. Let your priests hear this, too, for they, with you, must struggle hard to attune their ears to God in this age and in this land, and here in North London.

And so, take to heart the warning of St John of the Cross: our hearing is not easy, neither for priests: nor people. But God has chosen these two who are before you to give their lives in a particular way, to have ears to hear what the Spirit of Christ says. Especially God now asks them to repeat the words and deeds of Christ, to renew them for you. Your sins are forgiven; This is my body, my blood given for you; The kingdom of God is very near to you.

I have spoken largely to you all this evening, rather than to them as they await God's action in the Church. The last words, though, are for both of you who come to be ordained priests, and they are God's words imagined by St John of the Cross.

If you desire me to answer with a word of comfort, behold my Son subject to me and to others out of love for me: fix your eyes on him and you will discern hidden in him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom and the wonders of God. Behold him well.

* *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Book 2 Chapter 22

BOOK REVIEW

IT CAN BE DONE, The Real Heroes of the Inner City by Fred Catherwood. Lutterworth Press, 2000. £9.99.

The Evangelical Alliance represents 3,000 churches, with about a million members, from every kind of Protestant denomination. In 1992, Sir Fred Catherwood, whose career spans business and politics, was elected as their President. His brief was to have 'hands-on involvement', and this book is a witness to the variety of social welfare projects undertaken by committed volunteers. Separate chapters focus on specific areas of need, in relation to the problems of family break-up, disaffected young people, homelessness and unemployment.

The projects are characteristically small-scale and local. In most cases, the vision and enthusiasm of a particular individual has been instrumental in launching the project. Annual funding typically ranges from £75,000 (for example, the Friary Drop-In Centre, Nottingham) to £1 million (PECAN, the employment task force in Peckham, London), and is a combination of public finance and

charitable donations. The introduction opens with the manifesto that: 'This book is a story of a fight for the soul of our country'. We are offered a mix of detailed project descriptions, broadbrush statements about the decline in moral standards and the disintegration of the nuclear family, economic commentary about the devastating effect of monetarist policies on employment and industry, and robust statements urging a church and state partnership to recover the traditional moral and economic order. Within the space of about a hundred pages, Sir Fred introduces us to thirty or more projects and networks. He sprinkles his account with anecdotal material and thumb-nail sketches of clients and volunteers, and their responses. The effect is lively but rather 'breathless'—as though we are being conducted on a nation-wide whistle-stop tour of clubs, refuges, schools and centres and committees! On the plus side, the case studies could be both a morale-booster for those who are already volunteers, and give encouragement to newcomers to the scene.

The author draws on his own experience with the Overseas Trade Board, and as a Cambridge MEP, as well as with the EA-supported projects. There is scope for widening the frame of reference. Potential allies in the field could include the Church Urban Fund; the work of dedicated priests and activists such as Ken Leech in London's East End and Bob Holman in Glasgow; Liberation Theology with its 'option for the poor'. Somewhat surprisingly, Sir Fred feels the need to argue the case for Christian social action; and he vigorously berates the failure of what he refers to as 'secular humanism'. However, major public policy measures *are* happening and on a far larger scale than anything the churches can provide. One has only to think of the social exclusion unit, the single regeneration budget, the working families tax credit and the 'New Deal' employment training scheme (which does get a somewhat grudging mention as a 'move in the right direction' (p.72).

Sir Fred saw an opportunity to encourage the churches to develop area networks of projects. There are now seventeen networks, in cities and London boroughs, and more are planned. There is a strong sense of local identity. In Sheffield the Network set up a work-

creation project, supported by an investment fund. The Hackney Network has representatives from Anglican, Pentecostal, Baptist and Black churches on its steering group. A task for each of the Networks, is to publish a directory of projects for their area.

The book sets out to be practical and to help the voluntary sector 'to learn from each other as fast as possible how they can use limited resources to maximum effect ... by showing how some of the front-runners have done it' (p.8). To this end, it would be helpful to have more overall consistency in the way that the projects are described. (In preparing this review, I drew up a spread-sheet to present the project details under standard headings). There is no index and internal cross-references lack page numbers. Readers are left to draw their own conclusions as to 'what works'. One key factor appears to be the existence of clear communication and supportive relationships at every level—between the various 'service providers' (such as City Council, churches, charitable trusts) as well as between the individual clients and volunteers. Workers at the M13 Youth Project in Manchester have found that 'inappropriate behaviour can be more easily addressed and changed within a committed relationship between the worker and the young person' (p.39). Home Office research on young offenders tells a similar story. The projects endorsed in this book can be fitted into the wider context of prevailing thought and action.

In her article, 'Fifty Years Of Debate On Welfare' (*Fairacres Chronicle*, Summer 1999), Dorothy Howell-Thomas, one-time secretary to Archbishop William Temple, asks whether we can re-interpret, in a contemporary context, the challenge put by Temple in 1943 for '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'. The evidence of this book, in line with trends prevailing nationally, is that what is emerging is a fragmentary patchwork of local grass-roots initiatives and partnerships between the public and private and voluntary sectors, linked together in loose networks. Maybe this is what is meant by those elusive New Labour terms 'the Third Way' and 'joined-up thinking'?

SISTER DIANA NOVICE SLG

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