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COMMUNITY NOTES

THE STORY goes that when our Community was first founded and lived in the Cowley Road, the policeman on the beat used regularly to stop beneath the Sisters' windows to hear the Night Office being sung at two o'clock in the morning. So we know that to pray at that time of night has been characteristic of the Sisters of the Love of God from the beginning. For some Sisters it has been the decisive factor in their being drawn to this Community; and over the years many people have been comforted to know that night after night we would be praying at that time. It is, then, only with great reluctance and heart-searching that we have decided, for reasons of practical necessity, to discontinue having the Office at 2 a.m. We are now experimenting, for three years, with Matins at 5.30 a.m. instead. Guests at Fairacres and Boxmoor will already have encountered this practice; the Sisters at Bede House have yet to adopt it. And St Isaac's nicely reminds us that all time is relative by turning 'night' into 'day' on the other side of the world! (Ironically and happily, the Sisters there are now finding they *can* be up regularly for a short 2 a.m. Office and they are being encouraged to continue this.)

As the Night Office has been such a significant aspect of our life, we asked Sr Judith Robertson of the Vocation Sisters to facilitate our discussions on the subject in preparation for this year's Chapter when the decision had to be taken. She asked us each to draw a symbol of what the Night Office meant to us, and then to talk about it. The moon and the stars came to mind, and the dark sky; a river or great gushing waterfall of prayer irrigating the life of the plains; not surprisingly an alarm clock featured often, and one Sister ruefully tracked two sets of footprints to and from bed, signifying going to bed and getting up again twice. We were given glimpses of 'serried ranks' of Sisters in choir, and of attendance eroded by the necessities of age or the claims and pressures of life during the day. Sunrise and sunset were depicted too, and these pictures enabled a Sister to say how the experience of Dawn Office, as we were calling it then, was like a sunrise, bearing new life and light and hope. As well as natural symbols and the life of the world

in which we are set, we spoke of the prayer of the night in relation to Christ: his prayer at night, his entering into darkness, his coming in clouds and like a thief in the night, for the sake of which the Church keeps watch and yearns.

Sr Judith Robertson helped us to see how much more there is to 'Night Office' than clocking on at 2 a.m. She teased us gently for being idealists and romantics—and even mystics; but she urged us to keep in touch with that 'more'. She pointed out that we could and should endeavour to continue to do something which would hold the meaning Night Office carries for us. In practice now there are still Sisters who pray in the night, some regularly, some when a particular need or call comes to them; and Sisters who have been awake from two to three each night for years are not easily weaned from the habit. As a Community we continue to keep all-night vigils at particular times during the year; so far, we have continued to have Night Office of the Dead at 2 a.m. before the burial of a Sister; and of course there is Christmas night, and the Easter Vigil. And 'night prayer' in the metaphorical sense continues: the prayer of sheer faith, persevering in darkness, and the 'hidden joy' and folly of being there, everything in suspense, for no other reason than that God (unfelt, unseen) is God. It is too soon to tell what effect letting go of Night Office will have upon the Community's prayer in general. Will we find that we have lost a necessary and supportive asceticism? Did Night Office give us the sort of experience and spiritual staying power which can stand one in good stead in other kinds of dark night?

It may be important to recognize that Night Office at 2 a.m. has been a genuine 'charism' of our Community, and therefore a gift to us from God, an expression of his love, and something we in turn have been able to give to the Church and the world. But it would be wrong to take it for granted as 'our thing', or something we have a right to keep for ever. God has sovereign freedom to do as he wills with his gifts! Perhaps he has something new to give to us and through us. In the past when people asked us 'What do you *do* in your Community?' we could always say, and habitually did with some pride, 'We say Night Office'. It is a relief not to say that any

more, to have been relieved of that particular form of justification by works. We have been made blessedly empty-handed.

Another gain is that we have been reminded, and can keep reminding ourselves, that we are not the whole body of Christ. A Sister has just returned from staying with the Reformed Cistercians on Caldey Island where the monks have Vigils at 3.30 a.m.; she experienced their prayer as having the same feel as Night Office, and rejoiced in their faithfulness to it. And earlier in the year a Priest Associate wrote to me of his form of night office, said between two and three in the morning and partly inspired by Fairacres: 'part of Psalm 63, a form of remembering that all creation silently worships during the night, a prayer for those who are prevented from sleep by various troubles, and a plea to God to deliver us all from the evil powers of darkness.' He continued, 'I am wondering whether I should try to find out whether there are individuals here and there who would similarly engage in prayer during the night along these lines, if not every night at least frequently.' And, 'If prayer in the night still goes on in secret and informal ways [at Fairacres] … then perhaps this fact could be recognized in a general way and we could feel ourselves to be part of a hidden network or fellowship of night-pray-ers, even if there is no formal Night Office. Perhaps this happens anyway, without anything being said about it. But prayer during the night seems to me to be so important that any form of mutual help or support which those of us who attempt it can give to one another is I think to be welcomed.' I was much heartened by this letter and am grateful for permission to quote it here. Anyone wishing to follow it up may write direct to Revd Sandy Ryrie, Boisils, Bowden, Melrose TD6 0ST.

Some readers may remember a similar very informal and hidden fellowship of pray-ers which Mother Mary Clare helped to initiate. The marks of their companionship are still valid, especially for those who pray at night, and worth quoting:

> To stand within the redemptive and re-creative energies of God; to stand with Christ at the place where Divine Love and evil meet … To draw strength from the hidden companionship of all others who hold themselves by faith in Jesus Christ at the heart of

human suffering and redemption, and to invite others to take their life-stand there.

In this dark time of the year (this side of the world at least), we recall the Advent Office hymn which, with its plainsong melody, is most evocative of the night sky, and yearning prayer:

> Creator of the stars of night,
> Thy people's everlasting light,
> Jesu, Redeemer, save us all,
> And hear thy servants when they call.

Our prayer goes with Hilary Bartlet, who left the novitiate on 21 October, to explore a like, but different, vocation which began to open up for her while she was with us. We give thanks for Oblate Sister Sheila Margaret of Christ the Servant who made her First Promises on St Luke's day; Oblate Sister Carol of the Mercy of God made her First Promises on Sunday 26 November, the Feast of Christ the King, and Gill Russell who was admitted as an Oblate Postulant on All Saints' day. On Saturday 9 December Novice Oblate Sally Ann of the Indwelling Christ received the habit.

And we will be remembering all our friends and associates as with the whole Church we celebrate the Child born at midnight and the Light which no darkness can overcome.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

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THE TRANSCENDENCE OF TIME

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

TIME is one of the dimensions of existence. It is ubiquitous, inescapable and irreversible. Time in our experience flows in only one direction, from the past into the future, and it flows inexorably. We cannot go back in time, nor can we leap ahead of where we are, except in imagination. According to A.J. Ayer, the notion of time-travel contradicts itself:

> To say that an event is precognised is to imply not that it is happening, but that it will, just as to say that an event is remembered is to imply not that it is happening, but that it has. There is no more justification for saying that future events are really present because they are precognised than there is for saying that past events are really present because they are remembered. We travel in space by being at different places at different times: but to be at different times at different times is not even a logical possibility.[1]

Or, as a character in an unfinished story by C.S. Lewis puts it, you don't have to be a great scientist to discover that it takes a year to get from 1938 to 1939. What makes people play with the possibility of escaping from their own time into the past or into the future is the sense that we are trapped in time, that time is running away with us, and that everything we do is marked by transitoriness and impermanence. You do not, however, escape from time simply by moving to another point in time, even supposing that were possible. Time-travel, were it ever to occur, would be travel within the bounds of space and time; it would not really be transcending time.

Why should anyone want to transcend time? Animals, as far as we can tell, for the most part live in the present with no very vivid memory of the past and no premonition of the future; but human beings are both immanent in the world of nature and transcendent

[1] A. J. Ayer. 'The Ghosts of Versailles and Others' in *The Listener,* 23 May 1957.

over it. Our minds are not limited to the present moment. This gives us immense practical advantages which have helped to secure our position as the dominant species on this planet: we can store up past experiences and learn from them, and we can consciously plan future developments, taking steps now to achieve some relatively distant goal. With the development first of oral and then of written tradition, we can even profit from and build on the experience of generations long since dead, and we can pass on our own experience to a remote posterity. Our sense of time is essential to survival: an individual or a community that forgets its past has jeopardised its future.

Our awareness, however, extends to knowing perfectly well that we are mortal: that after a relatively brief span of life we are all doomed to die. It has been said that man is the only animal who knows he is going to die and does not believe it. Even Neanderthal man, our cousin rather than our ancestor, buried the dead with some decree of ritual and ceremony, which implies at least a faint hope that life does not end with death. The earliest work of literature to have survived, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, written before Archbishop Ussher thought the world had begun, shows a hero haunted by the fear of death and desperately seeking immortality.

What we are looking for, it seems, what we have always been looking for, is some way of escaping from the limitations of time. We know that for each of us one day time will come to an end: but is there anything afterwards? Or is 'afterwards' quite the right term to apply to something that lies outside our experience of time? We tend to think of eternity as endless time—more and more time, going on for ever and ever. No wonder people find the prospect of heaven boring in that case; but eternity is not time prolonged *ad infinitum* but time transcended altogether.

Before we pursue that thought further we ought perhaps to look more closely at the relationship between past, present and future. It is often said that the present alone is real: the future does not yet exist, and the past has ceased to be. One can live neither in the past nor in the future. Toynbee has pointed out the dangers to society of archaism and futurism. Yet 'the present' is an elusive, perhaps even

an illusory concept: the thin and ever-moving dividing line between past and future. Moment by moment, all our lives, our future is vanishing into the limbo of the past, gone beyond recall. Goethe's Faust may have wagered with Mephistopheles that he would never feel like saying to the fleeting hour, 'Remain, so sweet thou art, remain!' but most of us quite frequently want time to stop, or at least slow down a bit, before all our life has disappeared down the drain of temporal succession. The past has gone for good, however hard we try to recall it. I cannot show you the flat where we began our married life, for it has been demolished; the things I never asked my parents I cannot ask them now, for they are dead. What we were yesterday we are no longer. Only the future is open; the past is a closed book.

Interestingly, Viktor Frankl, that most perceptive of psychotherapists, stands this thought on its head. For him the future is unreal, because it has not happened yet, and the past is real, solid and permanent: 'everything is fleeing from the emptiness of the future into the safety of the past ... The present is the borderline between the unreality of the future and the eternal reality of the past.' Life, undoubtedly, is transitory: from moment to moment we are confronted with possibilities, possibilities that become real only by being actualised, and once actualised are no longer transitory: they are, so to speak, permanently present in the past.

> Nothing can change them, nothing can undo them. Once a possibility has been made into a reality, this has been done 'once for all' for all eternity.[2]

Think of a book or a building, a painting or a piece of music: it exists now—permanent, unalterable, and it is difficult to imagine it any different from what it is. Yet for its creator it was once a nebulous possibility, and the solid form it has taken is the one he has chosen for it out of almost infinite alternatives. That one alone is real: all the others might have become real but for some reason failed to do so.

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[2] Viktor Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning,* Hodder & Stoughton, 1979. p.111.

On this view the present moment is certainly highly significant. It is, in Frankl's words, 'the moment when we choose what we want to admit into eternity.' He goes so far as to say, 'man does not become a reality at his birth but rather at his death .... death awakens us to the true reality of our selves.' Paradoxically, man's own past is his future. What we take into eternity at our deaths is the totality of what we have become. Moment by moment we are shaping what will only be a whole when it is completed. Clearly, for Frankl, death puts an end to any further development: we are for ever what we have become at that moment. Here, believing in purgatory as I do, I would disagree with him. The process of 'becoming what we are' will, I believe, continue until we are indeed what God intends us to be, and most of us are only too well aware that in the course of our lifetime we have made all too little progress towards an almost unattainable goal. But purgatory, to be experienced as further development, must still be in time. Once we do irrevocably enter into eternity, time as such will cease.

Time-bound as we are, it is difficult to imagine timeless existence, which is why perhaps people have thought of eternity as endless time. According to F.D. Maurice, 'Eternity has nothing to do with time or duration.' Eternal life, as defined in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, is 'not only a life of endless duration but the fullness of life of which the believer becomes possessed here and now through participation in God's eternal being.' Long before Maurice, Boethius defined eternity as 'the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life.' This is surely how God experiences his own reality and that of the universe: for infinite mind everything is simultaneously present—'Before Abraham was, I AM.' The present tense is the only one applicable to God: he just IS. Dr. Ruth Page, in her book *God and the Web of Creation,* picks up Bergson's comment that time is what hinders everything from being given at once, and sees time therefore not as absolute, not even as flow, but as retardation. To her, 'creation is retardation in the midst of the immediacy of infinity so that

possibility can arise and things can happen.'[3] Development requires space and time. Eternity, on the other hand, simply *is*. This fits in with Frankl's view, already quoted, that sees the passage of time as the process of turning possibility into reality. The purpose, then, of individual lives and of history as a whole, is to turn what is potential into what is actual, and what has been actualised in the course of time is stored permanently in eternity.

I doubt, however, if we could even begin to speculate about eternity if we never experienced, here and now, something of what it means to transcend time. T.S. Eliot speaks of history as 'a pattern of timeless moments', records in his poetry experiencing 'a moment in time and out of time' and tells us that

> to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint.

Arvo Pärt, whose slow-moving, almost static music is clearly intended to evoke an image of eternity, remarks, 'this instant and eternity are struggling within us.' Certainly, if eternity lies outside time altogether, every moment is equidistant from eternity, and there is no need to wait till the end of time to be aware of eternity. At any moment, if we are perceptive, it can break through and transfigure our mundane existence.

I want to suggest two ways in which we can transcend time: the sacramental and the mystical. We have seen how the church as it developed the liturgical cycle set about the sanctifying of time. It was, however, simultaneously also transcending time. Gregory Dix maintained that the primary emphasis of the eucharist in the early church was eschatological: it was a foretaste of the end of time, a foretaste made possible by the breaking in of eternity into ordinary history in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In baptism the Christian died with Christ, was buried with him, and rose with him to new life: and every eucharist repeated and reinforced this experience. It was not simply a remembrance of the Last Supper, a commemoration of a past event; it was a genuine re-calling and re-

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[3] Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation,* SCM Press, 1996, p.52.

presentation of that event and all it signified and a sharing here and now in the messianic banquet. When the Negro spiritual asks us, ‘Were you there when they crucified my Lord?’ common sense answers ‘No: it happened long before I was born;’ but faith answers ‘Yes, for I have been present time and again at the re-presentation in time of a timeless event.’ It hardly matters that we go to communion frequently without the slightest awareness of the extra dimension that brings not merely the past into the present but the present moment in touch with eternity. The reality is there even if we fail to perceive it.

> ’Tis ye, ’tis your estrangèd faces
> That miss the many-splendoured thing.

Sacramental communion with eternity is possible only because we live in a sacramental universe: there is more to experience than can be confined to four dimensions—three of space and one of time. God’s presence can be felt at particular times and in particular places not because he is otherwise absent but because he is always and everywhere present. He is both immanent and transcendent. If he were not present in and to the universe it would not exist: but if he had never called it into being, he would still be there, eternally himself.

That we encounter eternity in the sacraments is a matter of faith not always supported by experience. Receiving the body and blood of Christ may bring us to, or keep us in, eternal life, but we are not as vividly aware of this as perhaps we should be. There is another class of experiences which usually come unbidden but which carry a conviction which is unshakeable, and that is the mystical. I am aware that this is an extremely slippery concept. Humpty Dumpty, you remember, used words to mean exactly what he wanted them to mean, and the mystical is definitely a Humpty-Dumpty word. Surrounded as we are nowadays by devotees of the New Age looking for spiritual experience, it is important to stress that mystical experience is not something one can acquire for oneself by the mastery of particular techniques or the use of drugs or ritual to induce altered states of consciousness, or anything of the kind. In a remarkable book *To the Unknown God*, the Romanian novelist

Petru Dumitriu expresses exactly what I am getting at: he speaks of 'moments of grace' which have occurred two or three times in his life and which make him feel he has not lived in vain—'instants of pure joy which at the same time were always moments of pure gratitude.' These moments occur unexpectedly in the course of everyday life: he does not levitate, he is not transported, he is not outside himself, he is not consciously aware of God, and yet it is upon such moments that he bases his conviction of the reality of God. I do not know how common such experiences are: I know that I have had them, and that they have always taken me by surprise. C.S. Lewis' phrase 'surprised by joy' seems aptly to describe such moments. It is difficult to say what triggers them, or whether there is anything one can do to put oneself in the way of experiencing them. Perhaps it is best to think of them as pure gift, and not strive for them at all. As Dumitriu says:

> Grace, as I am acquainted with it—in a small way, I know, but with certitude, comes and goes as it pleases. I could not call it up or manipulate it ... It is always unexpected, always unhoped-for, for I should dare neither to look for it nor to hope for it, unless in some very humble way, on the verge of total renunciation.[4]

To have experienced even once in a lifetime a timeless moment and to have taken it seriously is to shatter once for all any conviction that the world of space and time and sense-experience is all there is. In the old-fashioned pantomime there was always a transformation scene. At first all the light was in front of a scene painted on a transparent cloth; when the lights came on behind it, the front scene vanished and a totally different scene sprang into view. Moments in time and out of time, moments of grace, moments of pure joy, are like the transformation scene. They show us beyond the scene on which our eyes usually rest the splendours of eternity, there all the time but usually invisible.

(The above is the second of the two talks on the nature of Time the first of which was printed in the Summer Chronicle.)

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[4] Petru Dumitriu, *To the Unknown God*, Collins, 1982, p. 78.

AN UNOFFICIAL SAINT

Homily at the Eucharist on the 250th Anniversary of the Death of J. S. Bach, 30 July 2000.

JOHN BARTON

LAST week contained a kind of unofficial saint's day which I'm sure I'm not the only person here to have observed. Friday was the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of Johann Sebastian Bach. It will remain an unofficial day, since there are no known mechanisms for canonizing Lutherans, but for many of us it will have meant more than many of the official kind. I have just made a little Bach pilgrimage, visiting some of the towns in Saxony where he worked—which until ten years ago were in East Germany, and so not so easily accessible to tourists, but now, of course, entirely simple to get to. Two Sundays ago I was in St Thomas's in Leipzig, where Bach worked for the last twenty-five years of his life as cantor, teaching in the school and directing music both in the town's two main churches and in the concert halls and coffee houses. I was at a Lutheran mass. If what you know about Lutherans is basically that they are Protestants, you may imagine that their services are a bit like an English Free Church service, or even like an evangelical Anglican service, but this is seriously misleading. Lutheran liturgy, which is lengthy (this mass lasted around two hours) is ceremonially simple—and the clergy wear cassocks and surplices—but it is liturgically rich. Everything but the sermon is sung, not excluding the words of institution, and the atmosphere is both solemn and formal yet also joyful and peaceful. There is plenty of time to listen to the music, and what the organ plays is regarded as part of the liturgy, not a cover for taking the collection or for congregational coming and going. In Bach's day the sermon, which lasted an hour, was framed by the two halves of a cantata, producing a service that lasted three hours in all. And Bach, as many people will know, composed a fresh cantata for each Sunday of the liturgical year for five years running—adding up, with saints' days

as well, to nearly three hundred cantatas, many sadly lost. It verges on the incredible, but there is no doubt of the fact.

Now I am not qualified, as a non-musician, to speak of the quality and character of Bach's sacred music, but in any case I do not need to. I can say that I think it is a major reason why, in my teens, I remained a Christian when many of my friends did not: I could not see how such music could rest on an intellectual mistake about the way things really are, and I still can't. But my case for the sanctity of Bach, despite the fact that we really know so little of his character, rests more on how he worked to the glory of God in composing than on what he produced, wonderful as it is. Bach came of course from an enormous dynasty of musicians, and fathered another. As someone remarked last week in the Sunday paper, if you were a Bach you became a musician, much as if you are a Sainsbury you become a grocer. He simply got up each Monday morning to begin writing a cantata, starting with the choral bits so that that his helpers would have time to copy the parts, finishing it on Wednesday or Thursday, getting the choir and band to play it through on Saturday, performing it on Sunday at the mass in one church in Leipzig and at Vespers in the other, and then going to bed on Sunday ready to get up on Monday and start the process again. He composed sublimely to God's glory but did not, to use a particularly inappropriate metaphor, make a song and dance about it. His music, like much German Protestant theology produced in words rather than in music, seems to have involved some consumption of wine, brandy, and tobacco, but that it also involved prayer can hardly be doubted. But he carried it out as a task, as the practitioner of a God-given skill who simply happened to be rather good at it rather than as some kind of tortured genius. Right up until his death he was still taking his turn, one week a month, with the other teachers at the school in patrolling the dormitories and making sure that the meals were not too boozy. He quarrelled with the town council, but he still wrote them the music they needed for mayor-makings and the like. While Handel swanned around the courts of Europe he stuck to his last in the smallish area of Saxony in which all his life was lived—a model of the virtue of stability—loved his

two wives and all his many children, and did not think the banalities of ordinary life above him, though if anyone could have been forgiven for doing so, then perhaps he could.

Bach above all worked with the material he had been given: the motley collection of town pipers and fiddlers, the choir boys of the Thomasschule; the themes of the liturgical year and its lectionary; the need for keyboard players to have good models to imitate. He was famous far and wide for his ability to improvise, most famously doing so under almost examination conditions on a theme given him on the spot by the Prussian emperor and thereby producing the so-called Musical Offering. But in a sense his whole career was a vast piece of improvisation, coping with the demands of the day and the week and producing his masterpieces not in spite of the givenness of the situation but because of it. He did not think that he could produce something great if only he were free to choose his own materials, but got on with a virtuoso performance on the basis of what lay before him. This is perhaps a good model for the Christian life, which does not consist of saying that we could serve God if only our conditions were different, but of seeking to do so precisely in the circumstances that are given to us. Not that we should not try to improve what can be improved: I'm not suggesting a kind of quietistic passivity, but I am proposing that Christians always have to begin where they are, not, as Austin Farrer memorably put it, 'wriggling on the nails of our easy crucifixion'. What beginning where one is can lead to, Bach's music can remind us.

We celebrate this sacrament in commemoration and celebration of the greatest improviser of all, the one who took up what life in first-century Galilee threw at him and turned it into the salvation of the world. All his life he improvised with the materials at hand: as in our Gospel, where he takes the little bit of food that someone offers him and builds it into his purpose of feeding the multitude, rather than producing the food from thin air as he might have done. (Though I have to confess that the twelve hampers worry me; where did the disciples suddenly produce them from? Surely they did not carry them around just in case a miraculous feeding might occur.) At the end of his days on earth, God improvised on the most

spectacular scale, bringing life out of death and hope out of despair, and turning sorrow, in the words of J.R. Tolkien, which Bach would surely have understood at once, into ‘joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.’

DISCOVERING SORELLA MARIA

A.M. ALLCHIN

ARRIVING one Saturday afternoon in September at the Community of Bose in North Italy, an ecumenical monastic community of which we shall say more, I was surprised to find myself talking in a rapid, insistent way about Evelyn Underhill to the monk who was welcoming me. My host was obviously puzzled since, though he spoke excellent English, he had clearly never heard of Evelyn Underhill and was anxious to explain all kinds of practical things like the layout of the community buildings, and to show me where I would be staying. I pulled myself up short, saying, ‘We can talk about Evelyn Underhill some other time’, and began to listen to what the brother had to tell me.

He was giving me a very short introduction to a remarkable community, now about sixty-five strong—thirty-five brothers, thirty sisters—the vast majority being under the age of fifty. It is basically an Italian and Catholic community, but it has some members of other nationalities and some who belong to the Churches of the Reformation. It is set in a broad valley in Northern Italy with a wonderful view up to the Italian Alps, some seven thousand feet high. In the last ten or more years it has made a special effort not only to maintain but also to develop contacts with the Orthodox churches, and in particular with Orthodox monasteries. Indeed it has become a centre of spiritual encounter and exchange between Eastern and Western monasticism, of a kind unparalleled in Western Christendom.

Settling into the room which was to be mine and having some time before the evening office, I was amused at my vehement desire to enquire about Evelyn Underhill. I knew of course why I wanted

to speak about her; it was because I felt there must be someone here who could help me to find out who the Sorella Maria was, the Franciscan sister whom Evelyn had met in the hills near Assisi in 1925; it was evident that she had impressed Evelyn in a way that very few people had. I had never been able to find anything published about her in English, either in Britain or the United States, apart from the one article which Evelyn Underhill wrote for *The Spectator* in 1929, and the references to her in published letters. But in face of the remarkable and unexpected developments of the community's life at Bose, in relation both to Orthodoxy and the Reformation in the third millennium, my vehement concern about Evelyn's visit to the hermitage in Umbria seventy years ago seemed on reflection to be pretty marginal.

A couple of hours later, after Vespers and the evening meal, I found myself sitting with another of the brothers, the only member of the community whom I had met before when he was in Oxford in 1998. He was explaining to me the pattern of the community's worship during the coming week: the biblical readings which were set, and the commemorations which would be occurring. Monday the fourth September would be the feast of the prophet Moses: an Old Testament feast which points to the strong emphasis on the Bible to be found throughout the community's life and worship, and which also points to the influence of the Eastern Christian tradition where the great saints of the Old Testament are regularly commemorated. 'Monday', he explained, 'is a feast when the regular readings of the morning, mid-day and evening offices may be replaced by special readings for the day. Tuesday, on the other hand, is a commemoration, and in a commemoration there is no change of the readings in the morning and evening, but at the mid-day office either a passage from the person commemorated may be read or a passage about her or him.' And he continued, 'Tuesday the fifth is the commemoration of Sorella Maria di Campello.' 'So is that', I said, 'the Sister whom Evelyn Underhill met in 1925?' 'Yes,' he replied, in a matter of fact way, 'she is quite an important figure for us, representing a strand in Italian Catholicism to which

we feel great affinity. Her teaching and her vision are part of our heritage.'

Sorella Maria and her Companions

Riccardo began to explain to me something about this woman who in the 1920's had founded a little free community of sisters in a Franciscan hermitage at Campello. She was a person misunderstood and under ecclesiastical suspicion for the greater part of her life on account of the wideness, the simplicity, and the daring of her views both of religious life and of ecumenical encounter. For about twenty-five years the sisters were not allowed to have Mass at the hermitage, nor to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved there; only from 1950 onwards could Mass be said regularly in their little church. Sorella Maria, however, lived on into the next decade, dying in her eighties in 1961. She saw the coming of Pope John and of the second Vatican Council. One of the first things which the new Pope had done was to send his blessing and his approval to Sorella Maria and her companions. She died knowing that the things she had lived and struggled for were not rejected by the Church to which she belonged, and which she served with such devotion.

This is not the place to give any detailed account of Sorella Maria's life and work, or of the nature of her vision, though I plan later to give a couple of texts which show something of how the community at Bose today makes use of her insights. But I soon discovered by penetrating into the community's library that a good deal has been written about Maria in Italian in the last twenty years, and that material on her in German is not altogether lacking. This is largely on account of her friendship and correspondence with the eminent high church Lutheran theologian Friedrich Heiler. I found, for instance, a reference to an article of Heiler's published in 1963, entitled *A Franciscan Pioneer of the Una Sancta, Sorella Maria*. But I could find no reference to anything published in Britain or America apart from Evelyn Underhill's article in *The Spectator*.

Among more recent Italian works was a careful, thesis-like study of the relationship between the hermitage and the ecclesiastical authorities in the years from the 1920's to 1950, entitled *Sorella Maria and her Hermitage, Opposition and Hostility*.

This book contains a good deal of official and personal correspondence, not least a long letter of Maria's to Pius XII written in 1942, and another letter written to John XXIII in February 1959. Here I found also a brief account of those characteristics of the community Maria had founded which most troubled the ecclesiastical authorities of her time. First, there was her resolute determination to open the hospitality of the hermitage to all who might wish to come, whatever their religious, social or political convictions might be. Universality of welcome was for Sorella Maria one of the distinctive marks of the Franciscan calling which she believed was hers. Secondly, there was her equally firm resolve not to allow the community to be enclosed 'in an institution with fixed rules and ecclesiastical approbation'. It was not that the life of the sisters would be lax or irregular; it was to be an intense life of common prayer and shared work, of silence and contemplation, of faith working by love. But it was not to be burdened with the prescriptions of canon law.

Both these things troubled the authorities. But there was worse to come. First and most serious was her personal friendship with the most notorious Catholic Modernist of the time, Ernesto Buonaiuti, (1881-1946), who was not only excommunicated in 1921, but was declared *vitandus* in 1926, one whose company was to be avoided by the faithful. The second was her constant reliance on the support and friendship of an English resident in Siena, Amy Turton. This is the Miss Turton to whom Underhill refers in her letters about her visit to the hermitage. Miss Turton was an Anglican.

It was through Amy Turton that Evelyn Underhill was first brought in touch with Maria as early as 1919 or 1920. All three were intimately involved in those years in the formation of an almost 'secret' network of friends called the 'Spiritual Entente', a group joined together in prayer for unity, 'with no meetings, no rules'; its members were to be seekers after the presence of God, people capable of prayer and loyal to their own Church. Here is another part of the picture which needs to be filled in and which in time can perhaps be given in more detail. For Evelyn Underhill it was an extremely important contact at a decisive point in her life.

In the story of Sorella Maria, Amy Turton plays a quiet supporting role. But the more one looks at the outline of things, the more substantial that supporting role becomes. In the first place Amy Turton was older, almost twenty years older than Maria and her companions. Maria, like Evelyn Underhill, was born in 1875; Amy Turton was born in 1858. At the time when the community was beginning she was already in her sixties, hence her two nicknames: first and more often *Nonna Amata*, Beloved Granny, or sometimes *Nonna Speranza*, Granny Hope.

Amy Turton was an experienced woman and evidently a person of some substance, wealthy enough to be able to give considerable help to the community in acquisition of the property where they lived, and in the repair of the buildings of the hermitage. She was both a friend and a benefactor. It is equally evident that she was a devout and thoughtful Anglo-Catholic, who had lived long in Italy and for some time had worked with and among Italian Catholics. While remaining firm in her Anglican conviction, she was fully ecumenical in her activities. Maria was evidently completely happy with this position and there never seems to have been a question about it between them.

International and Ecumenical Friendships

But if Amy Turton was a devout and practising Anglo-Catholic, she was certainly in no sense a rigid or narrow-minded one. From her first meeting with Maria in 1919 she saw in the younger woman a spiritual vision and a power of leadership which impressed her greatly. She became herself an admirer and follower of Maria, attracted by the radical newness of her vision of Franciscan life. But she was not only a follower, she was also prepared at times to take the lead. It was through Amy Turton that the community acquired many contacts in the English-speaking world. It was through her that Evelyn Underhill was first put in touch with Maria. She also had friends in India. Already in 1922 Amy had translated the larger part of a small book on Sadhu Sundar Singh into Italian. Maria was captivated, and suddenly ‘she felt she loved him as a brother’. They

began to correspond with him and in time translated B.H. Streeter's larger and more serious study of the Sadhu.

This was in 1922, and at the same time Amy Turton and Maria decided between them that Amy was to keep her apartment in Siena; she had commitments there which she could not abandon. It was planned that she should spend half the year at Siena and half the year at the hermitage with the community, thus retaining a measure of independence whilst still being clearly identified with the community itself.

The contact with Sadhu Sundar Singh was of course passing. It may be seen as the prologue to a longer and more substantial Indian friendship and correspondence, that with M.K. Gandhi. Here again the intervention of Amy Turton was of vital significance. She already had contacts with the circle around Gandhi through her friendship with Verrier Elwyn, and it was through her that Maria first wrote to Gandhi on 24 August 1928. 'Brother Gandhi, here is a little sister for you from now on. I belong to Christ and I am an Italian.' Maria goes on to speak of herself and her sisters, of their life of prayer and silence and poverty, of their longing for peace and reconciliation, and of their love and admiration for him and his work. Gandhi's reply came less than a month later. It is a brief letter of thanks and greeting saying that he has sent her letter on to C.F. Andrews.

Already this was becoming not just a correspondence between Gandhi and Maria. On Maria's side her sisters, and in particular Nonna Amata, were involved; on Gandhi's side some of his most immediate associates were also concerned—Mahadev Desai and Mirabehn and his two closest Anglican friends, C.F. Andrews and Verrier Elwyn. The high point of this relationship came on 13 December 1931, when Gandhi was in Rome; he, Mirabehn and Shamrao met Maria, Amata and Sorella Immacolatella in the Villa Morris. It was for both parties a meeting which was not to be forgotten. Henceforth 13 December was kept as a day of commemoration in the hermitage. A relationship of love and prayer was built up; for a time, when Gandhi was in prison, both groups agreed to sing together 'Lead Kindly Light' (in Gujarati and Italian)

at sunset on Fridays in order to be linked at a specific time in prayer.

The correspondence between Maria and Gandhi is one of the aspects of her life which has attracted some attention in Italy in recent years. Her letters give many indications of how deeply her prayer and thought and love were drawn towards him. In a letter of 14 September 1935 she writes, ‘Yesterday, Friday, thinking of you, of dear India and singing with the sisters ‘Lead kindly Light’, I asked myself, “Am I faithful to my friendship with Bapu? I don't write to him: I do nothing for him.” And my heart replied, “Yes, you are faithful, because you simply live, suffer, work, rejoice and love for clarity and for clarification, for non-violence and mature gentleness, for the humble but passionate search for truth.” So, my great friend, I offer you my faithful offering of love, veneration and gratitude.’ It is a passage which tells us much about the way in which Maria lived her life as a prayer with and for others, with and for the whole creation.

Often Maria would write to Gandhi simply with news of the community’s life. Thus, in April 1933, she told him, ‘Amata (Miss Turton) who been united to us for so many years by the sacred bond of friendship, was received on 25 March as a novice in our community. The religious sincerity of the seventy-five year old novice is indeed moving!’ Again in 1935, she writes recalling the time when the three of them had met Gandhi and his companions in Rome in 1931, and again she speaks of Amata. ‘Her presence with us is a continual blessing. How she prays; how she is “less”, how she loves you!’

By this time Amy Turton was in her eighties, and it is clear that when the war came she decided to stay in Italy with her Italian friends and sisters of so many years. Maria not only wrote about her to Gandhi, she also mentioned her in the long letter to Pope Pius XII, written in June 1942. It is a moving letter which ends with a plea that the community might have permission for Mass to be celebrated at the hermitage, and that the disapproval of the diocesan authorities and of the Archbishop of Spoleto should be withdrawn. It is written with respect, but also with great simplicity and

frankness. In it Maria sets before the Pope her own situation and that of the community. She writes about Nonna Amata; one feels that anyone less open than Maria would simply have passed over in silence the existence of the old lady, but being Maria she is determined to be honest. She describes her as a *Donna Santa di nobile famiglia* (perhaps that was a slight concession to the Pope's known fondness for the aristocracy; a 'good family' would perhaps have been more accurate!) 'She is Anglican by birth and she has the most Catholic spirit that I know. By now failing in powers, she still supports us by the example of her unconquered faith and her angelic recollection.' Maria goes on to say that some priests had hoped for her conversion, and had encouraged her to think the matter over. 'She has always replied, "I venerate the Roman Church, and so I am united with all Catholics and with all sincere Christians. But I desire to remain faithful to the Church of my birth and my family."'

Here, in the middle of World War II, an unknown Italian woman, herself in her late sixties, writes to the Pope about a long-standing friendship, a long-standing spiritual relationship, between herself and an Anglican companion. What could be more fragile in terms of this world's understanding of things than the relationship between these two elderly women? Yet surely, looking back now and seeing both figures, the Catholic and the Anglican, in the context of those they knew and loved, we have one of the great ecumenical friendships of the twentieth century. Much has been written about Lord Halifax and the Abbé Portal, something at least has been written about Evelyn Underhill and Friedrich von Hügel; here in Amy Turton and Sorella Maria, is another sign of the power of divine grace to break through the barriers created by human fear and ignorance and violence.

Present Recognition

Equally striking is the fact that both Sorella Maria and Evelyn Underhill, whom Amy Turton brought together, should now be publicly recognised and commemorated in the worship of the Church; Maria in the calendar of Bose, Underhill in the calendars of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church of America.

Neither Evelyn nor Maria had been given any official position in the Church in their own lifetimes; both have been recognised since their death as figures of prophetic power and significance.

Certainly at the human level, there is much that separates Evelyn Underhill from Sorella Maria. Evelyn with her comfortable Kensington home, with her almost compulsive activity as a writer, with her pioneering ministry as a retreat conductor and a spiritual director in the last fifteen years of her life; Maria, with her small, precarious community of sisters, inhabiting an historic place of Benedictine and Franciscan prayer, a place of intense natural beauty but with no regular drinking water and no electric light, living without the Eucharistic for many years and under the disapproval of the local church. There was indeed much that separated them; yet they had met and immediately seen in one another the reality of their commitment to the one Christ and the gift of the one Spirit. They had a profound sense of the unity of all Christians in Christ as something already given to them. It seems to be the starting point from which they began. From there they looked out into the whole of humanity. Both were deeply attracted towards India; Evelyn in the years of her collaboration with Rabindranath Tagore, Maria in her long and faithful correspondence with Gandhi. Both in different ways were deeply affected by the message and the person of St Francis, above all in their sense of the sacramental quality of all human relationships and the whole of creation. For those who have long known and valued the vision and teaching of Evelyn Underhill, to discover something more of the life of her Italian friend is to find Underhill's own position again and to see it in a new light.

Charles Williams in his edition of the letters, and Margaret Cropper in the first biography of Evelyn Underhill, both underline the importance of this friendship. Although Evelyn and Maria only met once in the autumn of 1925, as Margaret Cropper writes, 'Like the single meeting between George Herbert and Nicholas Ferrar, this meeting led to a spiritual intimacy. Years afterwards I remember Evelyn telling me how she could write about her spiritual troubles to Maria and how the short and telling replies comforted and sustained her.' The quality of those replies can be guessed at

from the word which Maria gave to Evelyn on the occasion of their one meeting. Having spoken about Maria's delicate courtesy, her serene and widespreading love, Evelyn Underhill goes on to mention her profound sense of the pain and need of the world, and her passionate desire to help it. 'As we sat in the woods I asked her to tell me something of her conception of the spiritual life. She replied, in words startlingly at variance with the peaceful surroundings, "*In tormento e travaglio servire i fratello*" (in torment and travail to serve the brethren).'

In Dana Greene's study of Evelyn Underhill's unpublished, private notebooks, *Fragments From An Inner Life*, the one work which gives us a direct insight into Underhill's own inner development, we can see how closely Maria was associated with Evelyn in prayer at decisive moments in her life, as for instance in the early 1920's when her public ministry of retreat conducting and lecturing was just beginning. Indeed, in this book Dana Greene suggests that Evelyn's decision to return to active membership of the Church of England in 1920 may have been directly connected with her joining the little prayer fellowship called the *Spiritual Entente* in that same year. Five years before they met, it seems clear that the two women were already intimately united in their prayer for one another and for the unity of all humanity and all creation in God.

An Ecumenical Inheritance

As the days passed at Bose and as I had time to penetrate further into the writings about Maria, particularly the collection of letters and memories put together by Amy Turton in 1929, I began to see that my original thoughts about Evelyn Underhill and her relationship to Sorella Maria had not been so irrelevant to my stay with the community as at first I had suspected. Clearly the vision of Sorella Maria has entered deeply into the life and prayer of the Community of Bose and has flowered in ways she would hardly have foreseen. Through Bose that vision which in her own lifetime was hidden in the hills of Umbria has become the possession of many people who perhaps have not heard her name. Certainly in the community she is a quiet, humble presence, not only through the

annual commemoration of her memory every 5th September, but in the use of her words and thoughts in the regular prayer of the community.

One example of this is particularly striking. At Bose, Compline is said together by the community only on Sunday evening. It is a service which has a particularly homely feel to it. For the other offices the brothers and sisters put on white monastic albs; for this office they come in their ordinary everyday clothes. The office begins with a six verse hymn, sung to a haunting Italian folk tune. The words are written by Sorella Maria and they have their origin in the practice at the hermitage in the summer months of the whole community and their guests gathering for an hour before sun-set under the trees to keep a time of silence together, to pray, to sing and to read passages from Scripture and from other religious writings. 'It is', Maria wrote to Gandhi, 'a time of great gentleness and peace, in which we feel in communion with all our dear ones far away and with all creation.' It was at this time that on Fridays they would sing 'Lead Kindly Light' as a special act of communion with their Indian friends. Something of the quality of this time is expressed in Maria's hymn with its Franciscan joy in the beauty of nature, and in the thrice repeated refrain 'Peace, peace, peace' in which we surely hear an echo of the Indian invocation 'Shantih, shantih, shantih'.

> We come to greet the dying day
> And to ask forgiveness of the Creator
>
> And peace, peace, peace we leave to you,
> All health and peace to you we love so much.
>
> And peace, peace, peace to those who are distressed
> To the poor, the wanderers and the sick.
>
> And peace to mother earth and peace to the sea
> And peace to those who must travel far away.
>
> And peace, peace, peace to our departed,
> May heaven grant them salvation and light.
>
> And now we stay with our thoughts fixed
> In God, who in his mystery makes us his own.

I would conclude with another text, this time one which is Bose's own but which reflects and at times incorporates the words and thoughts of the Sorella. It is used at Vespers on Saturday evening.

> O Lord we seek for you and long for the vision of your face
> Grant that one day, all veils removed, that vision shall be ours.
>
> We seek you in the Scriptures, which speak to us of you,
> And under the veil of the wisdom which is the fruit of the
> searching of the nations.
>
> We seek you in the shining faces of our brothers and sisters,
> And in the imprint of your passion on the bodies of the suffering.
>
> Every creature is marked with your imprint
> Every object reveals a ray of your invisible beauty.
>
> You are made plain to us in the service of brother to brother,
> You are manifested in the faithful love which does not grow less.
>
> Not the eyes but the heart has sight of you,
> With simplicity and in truth we seek to speak with you.

References*:*

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Frammenti di un'amicizia senza confini. Gandhi e Sorella Maria, Eremo di Campello sul Clitunno 1991.

The most recent publication on Sorella Maria is Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Maria dell'Eremo di Campello. Un 'avventura spirituale nell'Italia del Novecento,* Guerini e Associati, 2000. (This I have not seen.)

THE LOWEST PLACE

Homily for the Feast of All Saints

JOHN SCLATER

NEXT Saturday , the Vigil of All Saints' Sunday, I shall be doing a sponsored reading in one of the churches I look after—St Nicholas' Church, Hedsor, a small medieval church overlooking the Thames valley, once a monastic church belonging to Hedsor Priory. In order to raise some money for the restoration of our beautiful nineteenth century banner of St Nicholas, which really is a lovely work of art, I have agreed to read for ten hours from Butler's famous *Lives of the Saints*. For, alas, the bills from Watts and Co. in Westminster are not small, even if the restoration has been beautifully executed with great skill. Well—such are the antics we get up to in parish life! I shall begin each hour reading the life of St Nicholas and then read through as many other saints as I can in ten hours.

All Saints' Day and Butler's *Lives of the Saints* raise for us the questions: who is a saint? what makes a saint? Now, doubtless, before you entered the Community you thought a saint must surely be like a Sister of the Love of God; but when we actually belong to a Community we do tend to revise our ideas somewhat! It is, of course, almost impossible to answer those questions, because nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose the saints can be fitted into some kind of formula, according to a production-line pattern of spirituality. The secret of the saints, the hidden mystery of their lives, is that in opening their lives to the redemptive grace of God they became most fully themselves, each in his or her own unique and individual way.

No human life is ever repeated; however many millions of years life on earth continues there will never be another me or another you, and so to try to copy a saint is probably the worst way to follow their example. We can be inspired by their lives, and such is the reason for a book like Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, but the inspiration should serve the purpose of drawing us to open *our* lives to God in all their uniqueness, and to follow God in our own unique way.

By God's goodness it has been my privilege to meet a few people in my life whom I would call saints, and I think in meeting a genuinely saintly person something is communicated which lights us and lightens us and which makes us feel: 'Well I never, it really *is* possible to be *me* in the presence of God!' If, however, there is one characteristic which we could single out as being common to all the saints I would like to suggest it is that of which Jesus speaks in St Luke's Gospel (14:10-12):

> When you receive an invitation go and sit down in the lowest place, … for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

These words remind us of Thomas à Becket's sermon for Christmas morning in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral:*

> So thus as on earth the Church mourns and rejoices at once in a fashion the world cannot understand; so in Heaven the saints are most high having made themselves most low, and are seen not as we see them but in the light of the Godhead from which they draw their being.

The teaching of Jesus about taking the lowest place has, of course, nothing to do with the psychological temptation to despise ourselves, or with feelings of being insignificant or of no value; the invitation is addressed to us in all the dignity we have as human beings, in all the freedom offered to us—the invitation is there *to choose the lowest place.*

The characteristic of the lowest place, it seems to me, is that it is a position from which we can *look down on no one*. The opposite of humility is pride and we speak of a proud person as being 'haughty'—high. From their high places the proud look down on others. You remember the devil took Jesus in his temptations to high places. So it is that the saints are the least judgmental of people because from the lowest place they look down on no one.

A story from the life of W.H. Auden related by Humphrey Carpenter in his biography of the poet illustrates this point; it impressed me the first time I read it and I have never forgotten it. It tells of Auden's meeting with the writer and novelist Charles Williams. Now as a young man Auden was known as a rather

promiscuous homosexual—the sort of person many people might have looked down on with disapproval. Auden was in his early thirties when he first met Charles Williams, and he recalled: 'For the first time in my life I felt myself in the presence of personal sanctity.' He went on, 'I have met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my short-comings but in the presence of this man—we never discussed anything but literary business—I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving.' Auden was not the only one to be moved by Williams's sanctity. T. S. Eliot also asserted, 'Williams seemed to me to approximate, more nearly than any man I have ever known familiarly, to a saint.'

It seems to me that in the presence of Williams, Auden did not feel ashamed because he was in the presence of someone who was not looking down on him. Williams seems to have had that secret of choosing the lowest place. And that is the difference, isn't it, between goodness and sanctity. So often in our goodness we can't help feeling that we are—not, of course, haughty and proud, but perhaps just a few rungs up the ladder!—surely we can be justified in looking down on some people? Very few people choose the lowest place, for, as Jesus tells us, 'the way that leads to life is narrow and few there be that find it'.

The saints are those who in the secret depth of their hearts, the dwelling-place of the Most High, have freely chosen the lowest place. They have chosen to be near Jesus at the place of his cross, of his shame and humiliation, where the devil is defeated; and from that lowest place of the humility of God they have discovered the eternal source of love and compassion.

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BROTHER ANSELM SSJE

28 September 1914 - 2 September 2000

ALAN BEAN SSJE

THERE are those who are entirely practical and active like Martha and there are others, like Mary, whose whole inclination is towards contemplation and prayer. The best religious is a mixture of the two. Our Brother Anselm thought he was unpractical, yet here he managed the sacristy for thirty or forty years. It was no small job: it meant getting up in time to open the church before Mass at six a.m.; on weekdays there were two or three masses at each altar and on Sundays, after two or three early masses, there was a Sung Mass at nine-thirty, and the High Mass at eleven—all of which kept the sacristan on the go until one o'clock. The church then had to be ready for the Catechism at two-fifteen. There were many demands upon the patience and judgment of a sacristan. No wonder Brother got to know people, clerical and lay, sometimes when they were at their most particular and demanding.

I think that living in our community had already prepared him for this, as one of his first jobs in the novitiate was looking after the sick and infirm. It was then that he learnt the true meaning of love. When I arrived at Marston Street in 1940 Brother had already been there a year. He said to me, ‘You will like Father Bignold; he’s over eighty and stone deaf. He says Mass every other day in the infirmary chapel; on the other days he has his breakfast in bed. Next to him is Father Trenholme—quite different. He is a dear too. He collects insects and has them all over his room in little cardboard boxes. Then there is Father Cary, he lives in two or three rooms downstairs. He’s got diabetes. He looks after the SLG convent. He’s full of stories about his travels to convents abroad—when you are servitor at Sunday supper you’ll get a chance to hear him. Make sure he gets his special fruit.’ In this way our brother learnt the way of Martha, while his heart was in the way of Mary.

He was able to follow both ways in the Community’s worship—our daily Sung Evensong and High Masses every Sunday and feast day. Father Rose at the organ and Father Hemming at the

Cantor's desk were in charge of our music. Soon Brother became the second Cantor. Then, in Father Dalby's time, he began to go out to teach and form sisters in the art of choral plainsong. Father Dalby somehow discerned that Brother Anselm could teach, and indeed he taught sisters as no one else ever did: he teased them; he made them laugh; he conveyed to them the majesty and beauty of the chant through his bubbling enthusiasm. He went to Clewer, to SLG, to Malvern Link and the Sisters of Charity at Bristol, to name only a few. And when Father Rose died and Father Hemming had gone to Canada, he became responsible for our choir too, and carried on until our last Evensong in this church twenty-one years ago.

He did not take up this work without preparation. He had acquired a real grasp of the chant from its source in the Benedictine tradition**.** We had already been in contact with the monastery at Solesmes for some years; it began when Father O'Brien was Superior through the patristic conferences organised by Dr Cross. Two monks of Solesmes were coming to the Conference and it was suggested they should stay at the house in St Giles. 'Oh no,' said the monks, (one of whom was Dom Gribomont) 'we are going to stay with the Cowley Fathers!' This was before the war in the early days of the ecumenical movement, but religious had helped to bring it about. Then we discovered a closer affinity in life and interest. At these conferences Bible and liturgy brought us together without controversy. Although Brother had no use for all the talk that went on at conferences he saw the point of them, and even served the masses of the Solesmes monks in our Lady Chapel. So one thing led to another. Brother was already familiar with the Benedictine spirit, however; in his youth as a member of St Alban's, Holborn he had learnt Benedictine ways of worship and he was an oblate of Malling before coming to our Society.

As sacristan, Brother was in contact with many people connected with our church and he endeared himself to them all. There was the lady, easy to laugh at, with her little torch-bearers; Gertie Arnold at the clubs in St John's Hall; the Verger Deeley's encounters with the streams of penitents for Father Adams. There were plenty of stories ... He was never blinded by mere enthusiasm

in the parish workers; he saw clearly this was often a cloak for self-importance. He laughed at them—and then quite often carried out their wishes, as with the very 'progressive' people who wanted Mass at a dining-room table and scorned a chalice and paten. He just told them his latest joke or rudest rhyme, but he rarely failed in kindness and understanding. He knew how to cut down to size someone who was merely silly.

I worked closely with him in the guest house where we often had parish groups visiting for the weekend. And he was touched to see how some of the mothers appreciated simply being waited on at meals. He was usually a sound judge of the authenticity of people who wrote asking to stay: he would occasionally say, 'Not this one' and he was nearly always right. He never jibbed at hard work even though he always had other jobs to think of, like the sacristy. I will not speak of the help he has been to me in running the Priory in Iffley Road since some of us moved there twenty years ago.

I shall miss him greatly. He was a good man, a good fellow-religious and a good friend. Now he has gone, by God's mercy very quickly and quietly, through death to life, we can think of him, his fine singing voice restored, preparing to sing in the heavenly choir, and once more amongst his brethren—Father Trenholme, Father Bignold, Father Chard—and many others whom he served at the altar during his life.

Perhaps, after the first blinding vision at death of the One he had tried faithfully to serve in our little life, death means the long deep sleep of peace until Resurrection Day. I hope this is so. Church tradition supports the view. May he rest in that sleep and rise to everlasting glory.

We are grateful to Father Bean for allowing us to include in the Chronicle *part of his tribute to Brother Anselm, given at the Requiem Mass in the Church of St John the Evangelist, Oxford, on Friday 15 September*

SOME SLG MEMORIES

A FEW weeks ago we began to collect into a huge carton our old Antiphoners and Mass Graduales, not only because these have been superseded over years of liturgical revision and renewal, but also because—despite our lingering affection for books we had once had to sew and bind with our own hands, whether capable of doing it or not—they had disintegrated beyond hope of repair. Among the Graduales, there cannot have been one whose pages were not peppered with comments and directives dating from forty years ago and more during which Brother Anselm drilled us in the Solesmes tradition of plainchant. The weekly choir practices were hard work, for Brother's passionate love and thorough knowledge of the chant meant that he brought energy and total dedication to his task. This love and knowledge were nourished for many years by his annual visits to monasteries and convents in Belgium and France, from which he would return more animated than ever by the beauty of the singing he had heard at Clervaux, Maradret, Maredsous, Solesmes and others, and by the friendships he had formed on his travels.

But it was above all his own God-given temperament that made Brother's enthusiasm so infectious and his practices so much fun. We were only one of a number of Anglican communities he taught, and we were left in no doubt most of the time that they rendered the Office better than we did, while of course the continental monasteries were in a different category altogether! If one or more of our voices soared inadvertently above the top note, or if a 'neum' was unduly 'swelled', or an interval 'scooped', a sharp reference to Galli-curci or Clara Butt was enough to bring us back into line, while any half-heartedness would earn a comparison with Minnie Mouse. Nevertheless, while he never flattered, and praised only sparingly, he always left us feeling encouraged and refreshed.

Brother Anselm knew each sister by name. Anyone returning from another house was immediately spotted, and greeted with some impromptu quip, because outstanding among Brother's characteristics were his humour, his gifts for poker-faced repartee and impersonation, his irreverence—never hurtful and always to the point. If the portress had to answer the door during practice it was

always 'the Kleen-ezee man'. A typical interjection during Choir Practice might go as follows:

The Reverend Mother of Woking
Said, 'My sisters are very provoking.
A third, you see,
Have gone out to tea,
And the rest are all drinking and smoking.'

His conversation was so extensively laced with lines from *The Importance of Being Earnest* that he must have known it by heart. While he was indeed having tea with Mother Jane and another sister or two after the practice, it was a joy to hear the peals of laughter coming from behind the door. If, as the Book of Proverbs says, laughter is the best medicine, then Brother Anselm was undoubtedly a restorer of health. A Cowley Father once remarked that if Brother happened to be out of spirits, the whole Community was struck with dismay—exaggerated perhaps, but significant.

Other tales could be told of deeper and graver aspects of his character. Most apparent was the love of music which he extended above all to Mozart. Small attentions and signs of appreciation also touched him visibly. But it is probably the buoyancy of spirit, which both hid and reflected the stability in which his vocation was lived out, by which we and his friends will best remember him.

TO ALL OUR READERS,

The changes you will have noticed in the subscription form require some explanation. From January 2001 we shall be publishing the *Chronicle* only twice a year, in Spring and Winter. Hence the reduction in the charge for an annual subscription.

We find that our Community life no longer allows us, during the summer months, to devote the time and care necessary to produce a *Chronicle* and at the same time to meet our continuing publishing commitments. While regretfully giving up the summer issue, we shall, with two *Chronicles* a year, do our utmost to maintain our links with you as strongly as ever. Thank you for all the help and encouragement you give us to do so.

SENSUOUS GLORY; The poetic vision of D. Gwenallt Jones, Donald Allchin, D. Densil Morgan and Patrick Thomas, Canterbury Press, 1999. £7.99

This title presents two contrasting studies of the work of a 'direct and deliberately propagandist Christian poet', (R. Gerallt Jones, *Poetry of Wales 1930-1970,* Gomer Press 1974, p.93) followed by translations into English of thirty-five of his poems.

They are introduced by a preface in which Rowan Williams skilfully summarises both the differences between the two writers and the paradoxes within Gwenallt's own work. In the third section, Patrick Thomas conveys faithfully to non Welsh-speaking readers the content and something of the imagery of Gwenallt's verse, though the rhythm and music of the originals are, of course, lost in the process of translation.

It is through the two essays, however, that readers are made to feel some of the impact of this striking poet's work. Both are intensely personal and, though scholarly, the style is informal. Each writer refers to his own encounter with the poet, and Gwenallt's place in his spiritual development, with the aim of imparting to the reader his own enthusiasm and enabling him to see beyond the sometimes negative and short-sighted criticism that has become fashionable since Gwenallt's death. For Donald Allchin, this poetry is a part of his delighted discovery of a culture of which he confesses having known nothing until his thirties: for Densil Morgan, who grew up with the same religious, social and linguistic background as the poet, it was the slow revelation of a deeper dimension to a common inheritance that brought Gwenallt's verse into his own spiritual struggle and led to his desire to share his insight with others.

Donald Allchin in the first chapter deals with the specifically Welsh topics in the poems; the rural community that nurtured the poet's grandparents, the industrial society in which he grew up, and the interaction between the two. Several paragraphs of the chapter are devoted to the vital importance to the Welsh language and

literature of William Morgan's translation of the Bible, and, after a brief denial of any inconsistency in Gwenallt's affirmation of both Christianity and Communism, it ends with an appreciation of the power of his imagery and language. The second chapter takes a wider view. It deals with Gwenallt's theology, and the influences not only of earlier Welsh poets from the medieval period onwards, but also of Barth, Kierkegaard, Baudelaire (with his profound sense of sin); of Clement of Alexandria, the Orthodox East and the Latin West. Allchin, however, never loses sight of the fact that for Gwenallt 'that which is altogether particular, of one time and one place, becomes altogether catholic, of all time and all places.' (p.23) The third chapter is concerned with time and eternity. In it Allchin perceptively draws parallels with T.S. Eliot and gives some space to a comparison of the latter with Lossky. Both figure in his last chapter, which concludes with 'the mystery of God's presence with us in the midst of pain and loss.'

Densil Morgan follows a similar pattern, but uses a different method, and naturally examines the poetic technique in greater detail. He traces Gwenallt's spiritual development through his successive publications, using specific poems to summarise each phase. He starts off from the sense of sin, symbolised by the wild boar (Twrch Trwyth) or the polecat (Y Ffwlbart). These and the chapter heading, 'Howling for the Blood of Redemption' (taken from the poem 'Sin' and described by Rowan Williams in his Foreword as 'one of Gwenallt's most outrageous and unforgettable images') vividly convey his deliberate intention to shock those who accepted unquestioningly the optimistic liberal theology of his day. The writer shows how Gwenallt's own way of howling for the blood of Redemption led him through his translations of Villon and Goliardi and through Baudelaire to an Anglo-Catholicism expressed in poems like 'The Church' (Yr Eglwys) and sonnets to Ireland, 'The Nuns' and to Saunders Lewis (a Roman Catholic and a pioneering Welsh Nationalist). The second chapter records a certain mellowing, which in no way softens the images in which his indignation is sometimes unleashed. But the writer discerns 'an integration of sorts'. Morgan then goes on to examine and answer

the accusations of some of the poet's harshest critics, in particular on the grounds that he was inconsistent. In his third chapter, headed 'The Prophet of Europe's Ruins', the theme is rather the unsentimental and often ambivalent use of animals as symbols. The Cross leads us into the fourth chapter. Here we are shown how the rational approach of writers like Darwin, Huxley, and Fraser, which had led to Gwenallt's rejection of Christianity, failed to provide any answer to the problems of suffering and sin. The last chapter heading, 'The Catholicity of the Word', speaks for itself and brings us back to the Welsh valleys and to the final answer to the once prevalent negative attitude to man's sinfulness; the Cross.

We are left with the impression of a journey; a journey through time and space, theology and culture; Gwenallt's from a traditional Welsh Nonconformist background in a working-class family, through Marxism, to the Anglican Church and finally back to a greatly enriched understanding of his Nonconformist roots; Donald Allchin's from public school and Oxford through Professor Hodges' translations of Welsh hymns to a widening appreciation of the culture and religion of this people; Densil Morgan's from a background identical in most respects to Gwenallt's, which he felt he had taken perhaps too much for granted, to a fuller comprehension of its limitations and contradictions, and to the hint of a resolution of its inherent paradoxes. In these journeys we are invited to join them, and to ignore the invitation would be, I think, our loss.

OBLATE SISTER MARY SLG

THIS IS MY FAITH, A personal guide to Confirmation, by Douglas Dales. Canterbury Press, 2000. £5.99

There cannot be many tasks for a priest or minister which are as important and urgent as the formation of new Christians and the strengthening of faith in those who feel 'at sea' amidst the startling array of choices on offer in our post-modern world. This short book is an important new addition to the small number of effective resources available in this area. It is intended for young people preparing for confirmation—an area in which the author has much

experience, being a public school chaplain—but it does assume an above average reading age. In a parish situation it is likely to appeal to adults who like things presented simply and clearly. It is a well-presented book, arranged in three sections: ‘Becoming a Christian’, ‘Belonging to God’ and ‘Belonging to the Church’; and the text is interspersed with pauses for reflection and with prayer material. It covers all the most important Christian themes: scripture, ethics, doctrine, prayer, and introduces the reader to participation in the liturgy. The outstanding sections are those interpreting the Ten Commandments; practical advice on spiritual growth; and straightforward answers to some of the most commonly-voiced criticisms of the Christian faith. There is some mixing of quotations from the ASB and the Common Worship Baptism service which could be confusing.

The book is well suited to those who like their faith rationally presented; reading it, one gains the impression that the life of a Christian is a serious and attractive alternative to the many life-styles on offer in our society. It avoids jargon, and where it uses special terms they are generally well and simply explained, the only exception being the unexplained use of the word ‘supplication’. As a preacher I spotted several good and truthful illustrations of difficult concepts. However, some serious questions about Christian formation still remain: can we any longer assume that formation means transferring a certain body of knowledge from where it is to where it wasn’t before? The emphasis in our society is on ‘experiencing’ and ‘feeling’; answers need to be our own answers rather than ‘cribbed’ ones. While this book will help many to take a certain step along the way, no book—no video, no CD-ROM and no website for that matter—will replace the personal encounter and friendship needed for us to be formed and informed in our faith.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

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PURSUING THE MYSTERY by George Guiver CR. SPCK 1996. £9.99.

BOTH ALIKE TO THEE; *the Retrieval of the Mystical Way* by Melvyn Matthews. S.P.C.K., 2000. £9.99.

More than forty years ago, Bishop Moorman told his diocesan conference,

> We must show men that the work of the church is not primarily to interest people in religion, nor to provide pious entertainment for those who care for that sort of thing, nor to teach the young to be good citizens, nor to stop people drinking and smoking, nor to balance our parochial and diocesan budgets, nor to do many of the things which absorb so much of our time and energy. The primary duty of the Church is to be the body on earth of the risen and ascended Christ.

His exhortation has not, alas, been heeded. Canon Matthews deplores the contemporary Church's emphasis on 'mission, management and marketing' and the disastrous consequences of overworked clergy who have ceased to be a contemplative presence but are, like everyone else, driven by the need to be successful and to set achievable goals. He says, 'The Church still remains very preoccupied with matters of liturgical and ecclesiastical re-ordering, a preoccupation which even after many years shows little sign of disappearing. Without "a mystical life" all such re-ordering risks losing a theological direction.' Fr. Guiver sees the Church's problem rather in a polarisation of attitudes. Long ago, George Macleod complained that people had dismembered the cross; some carrying the vertical beam of prayer and adoration, to the exclusion of the service of humanity, others carrying the horizontal beam, ignoring God in their concern with the world and its problems. Fr. Guiver calls these two attitudes 'eternalism' and '*humanitas*'. He believes with Charles Simeon that the truth is not at one extreme or the other, but at both extremes; he attempts to hold them together in terms of the theology of mystery which Dom Odo Casel found in the Fathers and reintroduced to the contemporary Church. According to this theology, God's mysterious purpose in the saving events of Christ's life, death and resurrection is objectively present in the Christian mysteries and in the daily life of Christian people. It is both a wider

understanding of Christ's presence in the eucharist than the somewhat arid late medieval and Reformation debates about 'real presence', and a wider understanding of the sacraments which does not limit them to two or even seven. God is, for instance, equally present in the Word proclaimed in the liturgy and meditated upon in the daily office as in the eucharistic elements. (I am reminded of how in the chapel of the Mission de France in the fifties a light burned before the reserved sacrament and before the missal open at the gospel for the day.)

Fr. Guiver is only too well aware that there are enormous difficulties in making this theology credible to the average churchgoer, let alone the outsider. He quotes a German theologian who found that Dom Casel's theology was virtually meaningless to secondary school pupils of Catholic upbringing. To them, it belonged to an odd and obsolete world-view. His answer is that the patristic understanding of the liturgy and of the Christian life cannot be directly taught, it can only be lived.

Rather similarly, Canon Matthews found, when he was a university chaplain, almost insuperable difficulties in introducing students to the Christian mystical tradition, particularly in its apophatic form. He was up against a culture of instant access and with it the assumption that a Christian ought to be aware of the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit all the time and find in prayer a direct line to God. To this way of thinking, any experience of the absence of God cannot possibly have positive value, despite the witness to the contrary of scripture and tradition. He believes it is vital to the Church's health to recover the mystical life, not as the preserve of an elite, but as a possibility for all Christians. Just as Guiver tries to reconcile eternalism and *humanitas* in a deeper appreciation of mystery, so Matthews sees the affirmative way and the negative way not as opposites but as complementary approaches to the overwhelming reality of God. Either our attempts to speak of God break down altogether, or we cannot stop talking about him, piling image upon image and metaphor upon metaphor because none is adequate.

Both authors realise that there is a risk of opting for ‘a God who is no bigger than we can cope with’. As Guiver puts it, ‘we need to be prepared for the fact that God can be mind-boggling.’ Matthews quotes with approval Aquinas’ dictum, ‘We do not know what kind of being God is.’ Paradoxically, the estrangement of our society from the institutional church has led to a strategy of offering a simplified gospel of pre-packed ‘truths’ whereas what people are looking for is precisely the sense of mystery lacking in our increasingly prosaic liturgies.

If Guiver relies heavily, though not uncritically, on Casel and other German Catholic theologians, Matthews turns to a group of radical orthodox theologians in English universities who are striving to come to terms with post-modernism. I am not as convinced that the current flight from the attitudes of the Enlightenment is necessarily good news for the Christian apologist: one needs always to be aware that he who weds the spirit of the age is soon a widower.

Guiver sees the religious community as a place where eternalism and *humanitas* are reconciled in a common life centred on God but open to the world. Matthews is equally positive about the monastic tradition, but asserts that ‘the parish is the monastery now’: ‘If you look for a place where the school of the Lord’s service will be, it is within the parish where you are called to live with the brothers and sisters that God has given you.’

Of the two, Fr, Guiver’s book, though longer, is easier to read; but Canon Matthews has important things to say and it is worth persevering even though his style is more difficult and his apparently random choice of male and female pronouns for God is irritating. At times I felt that Fr. Guiver’s summary of the apostolic preaching was alarmingly like the five-point plan of salvation in fundamentalist tracts, rather too sure that we know what God is up to. Again, Canon Matthews is less than just to Evelyn Underhill, who was more von Hugel’s disciple than William James’ and who in her life and in her later writings certainly achieved a balance of eternalism and *humanitas*—hers, in the end, was a very down-to-earth mysticism. But these are minor criticisms of books which have much to say to the contemporary Church. One only hopes they will be heeded.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

THE HEROIC FACE OF INNOCENCE by Georges Bernanos. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1999. Paperback, £12.95.

Bernanos was a French lay Catholic author who died shortly after the Second World War. The book contains three short works by him, contrasting in style but united in the conviction that redemption for the world can only come about through a child-like submission to the gospel word. If he focuses again and again on the image of the child, then, that there is no age limit to this vital childhood is demonstrated by the subjects of these works who are respectively, St Joan of Arc, St Thésèse of Lisieux, and a fictionalised 18th century Carmelite novice.

In 'Joan, Heretic and Saint' Bernanos gives us a meditative essay, which is interspersed with extracts from the authentic accounts of her trial. Here the theme is proposed that Joan's intellectually respectable and religiously distinguished judges suffered above all from spiritual old age—'all these old men, many of them under thirty, look enviously at this little France who is so fresh, so mischievous, who is awfully afraid of being burnt, but still more afraid of telling a lie.' This is not a discussion of the politics so much as insight into the collision of two worlds, the old horrified by the claims and bearing of the new. As Bernanos says, all was done in due order and with proper respect for the Church's teaching; yet, he suggests, the moment comes when Joan's judges find themselves suddenly overwhelmed by the weight of the evidence that they have accumulated: 'The unending dispute, no longer over texts, but carried on in front of the fresh young body destined for the flames, must end by seeming suspect to the best of them …' Only such an understanding can enable us to comprehend in turn the solemn plea of the court in which her judges beg Joan to recant and to submit, to deny her innocence and vision. In Bernanos' understanding it is indeed a powerful plea, but one in which the judges unwittingly beg Joan for their own salvation. Her persistence, to martyrdom, is thus to become a perpetual source of life for the Church; she vanquishes its old age, which, indeed, is the

victory which all the saints have to offer to us now; for our response 'the saints have only to wait.'

The 'Sermon of an Agnostic on the Feast of St Thérèse' provides even less comfort for a church much occupied with ordering its internal affairs. Bernanos wrote this as part of a larger work published at the time of the Spanish Civil War. His agnostic ascends the pulpit (in place of 'one of those intolerable praters') and asks what hope and vision the congregation can offer him. The question is put by one not actually hostile, but originally interested, and then disappointed by what he finds—'we don't want to know whether God entrusted Himself to you; we want to know what you are doing with Him!' The agnostic does not delude himself as to the state of world: it is 'obsessed by suicide … hurriedly piling up all the necessary adjuncts to this gigantic enterprise'; the world has 'lost its flavour, [but] whom is it I should blame?… You are the salt of the earth.' The preacher detects an excess of Christian charity, in just the wrong direction: 'You see unbelievers as they are, and Christians as they should be—an unfortunate misapprehension.' The agnostic hears talk of states of grace, of sharing in the divine nature; but where is the evidence? He hears applause of the saints; but where is the following of them? So St Thérèse is invoked: as a child pointing to the strength of childhood, of becoming wholehearted as children are. It is 'Your last chance—and ours. Are you capable of rejuvenating our world or not?'

The 'Dialogues of the Carmelites' is a film script based on an earlier novella by Gertrud von le Fort describing the events leading up to the martyrdom of the Carmelites of Compiègne during the French Revolution. Whilst some historical characters appear in it, the characterisation is wholly from Bernanos' spiritual vision. As events develop, so contrasts are set up and played out: between those of aristocratic and peasant background in the Community; between obedience and conscience; between a Prioress who finds poverty best expressed in pragmatism and a senior sister who envisages martyrdom. As the Prioress notes: 'Prayer is a duty, martyrdom a reward.' But principally Bernanos is concerned with the novice Blanche de la Force, who takes as her dedication the

Agony of Christ. Coming to Carmel in the knowledge of her weakness, her increasing fear is examined as the Community faces successive onslaughts. Deprived by civil decree of the opportunity to take vows, Blanche is later able to join her sisters in making a vow of martyrdom. Terror then causes her to flee, but news of the sisters being condemned brings her back, finally, to share death with them. A happy ending? Blanche's innocence, with the concomitant willingness to enter into the depths of her fear, becomes a commentary on St Paul's teaching about God's weakness and human strength.

Bernanos does not write in sentimental ignorance of the potential of childhood and innocence both for good and for evil. His vision of their power for sanctity may sound a strange note to much current thinking; nonetheless, it is rooted in the experience, which is also ours, of a world deeply mired in despair. Perhaps Bernanos will make us think about what the Church really wants when it so constantly bemoans the absence of the young from its life.

JOHN SCOTT

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE CREATIVE SPIRIT, Harmonious Living with Hildegard of Bingen, by June Boyce-Tilman. Canterbury Press, 2000, £7.99

INK AND SPIRIT, *Literature and Spirituality*, introduced and edited by Stephen Platten. Canterbury Press, 2000. £8.99.

COLONIES OF HEAVEN, Celtic Models for Today's Church by Ian Bradley. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000, £9.95.

HOW TO FORGIVE, A Step-by Step Guide, by John Monbourquette. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000, £9.95.