

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

COMMUNITY NOTES

INSTALLATION SERMON

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THE WARDEN SLG

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COMMUNITY NOTES

GREAT AUNT MAUD, in 1943, did not give my parents a wedding present, on the grounds that the world was coming to an end. They laughed at her, and did not think much of it as an excuse, but on 11 September this year, their wedding anniversary, I did just wonder whether she might not have been on to something, in a mixed up sort of way. Years on, her words seemed to have found some sort of mark, and she was at least trying to place public and private life within the same frame of reference.

More significantly, an aside Fr Gilbert made in an address to the Community in the mid-1960s reads today as a prophetic utterance and a word ready to come home. Reflecting then on events in the Middle East, with the text of Romans 8 before him, he said:

First, let us call to mind the prayer that the whole Church should be making at this time of tension in the world, of which that of the Middle East—*which might well result in conflict between the Mohammedan world and our so-called Western Christianity*—is but a part.

He urged us to use the particular opportunities of our way of life (enclosure, silence, prayer) to see the world in the light of God and stressed that ‘it is the Holy Spirit who is interceding for the world crisis today as we give ourselves in Christ to be more completely the children of God’. He seems to have foreseen religious conflict between western Christianity and Islam, and he boldly pointed out that world crisis is a challenge to our integrity in prayer and life-style. How, today, can we apply this insight?

We can begin by admitting how hard it is to hold together our knowledge of the tragedy of what is happening in the world and all that continues as normal in our daily lives. Despite the headlines, the columns of newsprint, we know so little, and the little we do know is too much—much too much—in terms of human suffering. We carry on doing the usual things, but there is an undertow of weight and burden. But we can at least recognise this, take time to feel it, and realise how soon we meet our pain threshold. That is the moment at which to plunge our small capacity and consciousness into Christ’s, in penitence and faith.

St Paul, in that chapter of Romans, speaks of the whole creation groaning in travail and pain. If we were a little less grown up, if we knew more of what it is to be children of God, wouldn't our faces be stained day and night with tears? In prayer, or in moments when we are caught off guard, in sleep even, we may become a place where those so necessary tears can be shed. Or it can happen in the sort of way that one of us once described to us. Sister Ellinor, whose needs are now such that she is having to be cared for in a nursing home, at one time had a daily chore in the kitchen at Fairacres. The Community, hurrying from high tea to Vespers, would abandon unwashed dishes, sinks of dirty water and wet tea towels so that afterwards, day after day, Sr Ellinor was faced with a great mess to clear up. She would groan, sometimes literally and loudly, and was tempted to go on strike—until she saw that the mess was the world. Then she rolled up her sleeves and got on with the job. Seeing and engaging with what is right in front of us with some kind of clarity and compassion gives us a starting place from which to see the world in the light of God, and harness our willingness to his purposes. Fr Gilbert continued:

In the day of tension in St Teresa's time, it was God's will for her to found a little community to live as perfectly as they could for God. That also is our answer. God can do a great deal through lives lived as perfectly as possible for him, so our intention should be to give ourselves to be more completely in his joy that he may bring good out of evil. The way of salvation is to hold the evil and the confusion into God, as Christ holds all in his Passion.

At All Saints' tide, eight Ordo Pacis Sisters, including the Leading Sister, Erika Fischer, visited us for a few days. As well as the pleasure of welcoming and meeting these 'dispersion' Sisters who had not been to Fairacres before, I was glad of the chance to read again treasured notes of a talk Sr Jane gave to Ordo Pacis when she stayed in the Cella. Her subject was the Spiritual Conflict, and her notes included the following:

Christ *is* Victor—once for all. He overcame powers of darkness by His Love. Those called to a life of prayer may share in the

overcoming by experiencing something of the forces of evil as they batter against Him and His Body.

Always remember that:

- 1) HE HAS OVERCOME.
- 2) We can bear all things IN HIM.
- 3) We can do NOTHING without HIM.

Any form of divisiveness is of the Devil—therefore, in the most mundane situations beware of anything that makes for separation rather than unity: even ‘principles’ can be divisive if they are maintained intolerantly. What makes for mistiness & confusion—not seeing clearly. Meet these positively by PUTTING IN LOVE.

If we are not to be overcome, what we do with our minds is vitally important. And thanksgiving is an obvious and significant way of countering any ‘negative spin’. These Notes give me the opportunity to recall with thanksgiving some very positive events in our recent SLG experience, including the visit of the Ordo Pacis Sisters from Germany. I think too of my three-week sabbatical in the summer, giving me the opportunity to share in the life of the ecumenical monastic community of Bose. *Chronicle* readers will recall Fr Donald’s article about this Community last year.

In May, as the guest of UISG (the general superiors of women’s apostolic congregations) I attended in Rome a conference entitled ‘Many Cultures One Heart, Women Religious: sent to be a living presence of the tenderness and compassion of God in our wounded world’. It was an astonishing privilege to be there, and to hear in the reports the cries of poor and suffering people from all over the world. There were some 800 participants, of whom I was the only non-Roman Catholic and the only person from a women’s contemplative order, yet it was the most natural thing in the world to address them all as ‘Sisters’, and I sat at their feet as women of prayer, wisdom, determination and compassion. Despite the harrowing stories we heard, I came away with renewed hope and energy. The final blessing from the Conference must still be sending its reverberations round the world: ‘May you always know how to give love, may your love be received, and may the Lord be glorified in and by the communion that flows from this love.’

This has been an eventful summer for the Community. On the Feast of St John the Baptist, our Visitor, Bishop Richard Harries, installed me as Reverend Mother for a further term of office. At the end of Chapter in August we said good bye to Fr Richard Buck and wished him well in his retirement; on All Saints Day, Bishop Richard commissioned and blessed Fr David Barton as our new Warden. Fr David has written below to introduce himself. Now we look forward to the Profession in First Vows of Sr Elizabeth of the Word of God Incarnate on the Feast of St John of the Cross. Joanne Whittering, having discerned that her vocation does not lie with SLG, has left the novitiate; we give thanks for her and for her time with us.

Oblate Sister Mary Elizabeth of the Visitation died at Nightingale Cottage, her home in East Hanney, on 10 August. She had always had a strong sense of vocation and this was expressed in faithful service and hard work for the church and in education, especially at the Manor School where she was the headmistress. But, as Fr Tony Hogg her vicar and friend said in his address at her funeral, her vocation found its fulfilment in her life as an SLG Oblate Sister. There was much in her to respect and to enjoy, not least her menagerie: wonderful basset hounds who occasionally honoured us with a visit, equally pedigree hens and ducks, and the donkey, or donkeys, who did their bit for the Fairacres economy by consuming basketfuls of small or wrinkled apples.

Katrina Boyce received the habit as a Novice Oblate on 20 July, Vera Silberberg on the Feast of St Luke, and Gill Russell on All Saints' Day. Dot Martin became an Oblate Postulant on 3 September; Oblate Sister Carolyn was admitted to Life Oblature on St Luke's Day and Sally Ann made her First Promises as an Oblate Sister on the second Sunday of Advent. We are grateful for your prayers for each of them, for all of us and for the Community as a whole.

'May you always know how to give love, may your love be received, and may the Lord be glorified in and by the communion that flows from this love.'

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

SERMON AT THE INSTALLATION OF SISTER ROSEMARY
AS REVEREND MOTHER ON 24 JUNE 2001

RICHARD HARRIES, BISHOP OF OXFORD

THE WORDS I associate with John the Baptist, whose feast we celebrate, are not so much those in the Collect set for today but those in the Collect set for the third Sunday of Advent:

O Lord Jesus Christ who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way ...

The theme of preparing and making ready the way does of course echo our first lesson from Isaiah 40.

The Sisters of the Love of God are in a special way ministers and stewards of the divine mystery, and this vocation is focussed in the responsibilities of a newly elected mother. This task is not easy in today's church. Although, thank God, the Diocese of Oxford remains a predominantly happy one, I believe that there are more signs of strain now than there were five years ago. There are fewer stipendiary clergy and those we have are very stretched. The pensions bill, which we now have to find in addition to clergy stipends, has recently seen a dramatic increase. We are all living longer: clergy live two or three years longer than average and judging by the little notes I sometimes receive from religious communities indicating the passing of a sister, the religious life is conducive to longevity. Then, of course, there is so little resonance of Christian things in the wider culture in which we are set. These pressures will inevitably make themselves felt one way or another on religious communities who, in addition, will have their own challenges.

At a time like this it is perhaps above all the vocation of SLG to prepare and make ready the way. In ancient Israel there were great prophetic movements in the eighth century BC and then in the sixth century BC. But when the people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon in 520, they concentrated on consolidating their life under

God. Empires rose and fell whilst the people of Israel sought to be faithful to the discipline of their religious life. It was not a time for prophecy, and for writers at the time of the beginnings of the Christian period, there had been no prophecy for many centuries. Then came John the Baptist. But he too spent a long time personally preparing and making ready the way. As the Gospel recorded, ‘He was in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.’

It seems that for many, perhaps the majority in our culture, traditional Christian themes, images and language have gone dead. But some decades ago now Dietrich Bonhoeffer was conscious of the same phenomenon. When he was in prison, he wrote a letter to the child of a friend of his who was being baptised. In this he wrote,

Our church, which has fought in the last years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of bearing the redeeming and saving word for men and for the world. Therefore our earlier words must become powerless and silent, and our Christian existence will be confined to only two things: praying and acting justly among men ... the day will come—when men will once again be called to utter the word of God with such power that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new speech, perhaps wholly unreligious, but freeing and redeeming like the speech of Jesus, which will shock men and yet overcome them by its power ... until then the Christian cause will be silent and a hidden affair, but there will be those who pray and do justly and wait for God’s own time.

Today too there will be those who pray and do justly and wait for God’s own time. In St Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai, above the sixth-century mosaic of the Transfiguration are two roundels, in one of which is the Virgin Mary and in the other is John the Baptist. It is the earliest known example of a *deesis*, which later came to be the standard iconography for either side of the royal door in the iconostasis. John and Mary hold out their hands to Christ: for *deesis* means prayer, or beseeching or entreating. Now is a time in which the church, and religious communities in particular, like John the Baptist pray and beseech and entreat until once again the word of God will be uttered with new power.

SLG has a special vocation and Mother Rosemary a special responsibility in keeping the community focussed, confident and joyful in this vocation: with the church, and on behalf of the church, praying and making ready the way, praying and doing justly and waiting for God's good time.

In Rosemary's editorial in the latest edition of the Fairacres Chronicle she talks about 'graced moments'. There are graced moments, even though, as T.S.Eliot said, the rest is 'Prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action'. Today is a graced moment. We give thanks and pray for Rosemary in her continuing responsibilities.

A NOTE FROM FR DAVID BARTON

I was ordained in 1965 and served in parish ministry in the Diocese of Oxford. Later I trained as a teacher and worked in London Schools, serving at the same time as a non-stipendiary priest. My parish work was diverse: from the council estates of White City to St James, Piccadilly. My teaching brought me finally to Soho and the headship of its Primary School, a wonderful multi-cultural community, where I spent eleven happy years. Since then I have been an Education Adviser for both the Church and for Oxfordshire LEA. I am married to Susan, who is a teacher here in Oxford, where we have lived since 1992. Our two children are at university.

It was something of a surprise to be asked to become Warden of the Community. I find myself awed by the task, but also deeply grateful for the privilege, and for the opportunities it affords me to deepen my own pilgrimage into God. When I was blessed into office on All Saints Day, the Bishop spoke of the 'new seriousness' that has overtaken the world since 11 September. We are suddenly acutely aware of being less secure than we had dared to hope. But at least it has reminded us of the prime task before each one of us, to continue steadfast in prayer for the peace which God alone can give.

SORELLA MARIA: FRIENDSHIP IN GOD

A.M.ALLCHIN

I

IN A PREVIOUS article I gave a brief introduction to the history of the small Franciscan community of Sisters founded by Sorella Maria in the nineteen-twenties and of the part played in it by Amy Turton, an English woman who had long lived in Italy and who introduced Sorella Maria and her companions to an international network of friends and supporters, amongst them Evelyn Underhill and Lucy Menzies.

This second article chronicles a first visit made in April 2001 to Campello, the old fourteenth century Franciscan hermitage to which Maria and her community moved in 1926, and where the community still exists, though now greatly reduced in numbers. In a remarkable way, although there are now only three full members of the community at Campello, not only the spirit but the actual pattern and rhythm of daily life as it evolved in the time of Sorella Maria, the alternations of silence and speech, prayer and work, of solitude and sharing, is maintained with joy as well as with devotion. I visited Campello in company with an old friend, Father Christopher Armstrong, former vicar of Aberdaron.

The Eremo itself is in a most beautiful and inspiring position, high up on the hillside above the Wells of Clitumnus, with huge views across the Vale of Spoleto, to the mountain peaks on the far side. I speak with the more emphasis about the beauty of the place because the days when we were there were not particularly attractive in any conventional way. It was the end of April, but there was a strong, cold, north wind which brought snow to the neighbouring mountain tops, and when the wind fell the clouds gathered and we had days of light but persistent rain. How beautiful the place would have seemed had we had sunshine and springtime, I find it difficult to imagine.

The community itself occupies a building from the fourteenth century, a Franciscan hermitage, dedicated to St Anthony of Egypt,

a strikingly simple and picturesque group of conventual buildings. The site is reputed to have been a place where hermits from Egypt and Syria had come in the earliest centuries of the Church's life, and where Benedictine monks had later found a place of retreat. It is a place deeply imbued with the spirit of prayer and silence, and it was part of the gift of Sorella Maria to renew this ancient monastic place in a new and creative way. The situation of the buildings so high up on the hillside has in the past made it difficult of access, and when Sorella Maria and her companions first came there in 1926 there was still a great deal to be done to restore and improve the buildings themselves. Now they are kept with great care, and repair work after the recent earthquake is going ahead steadily. But neither running water nor electricity extend to large parts of the complex. Simplicity of life remains a characteristic of the place now as it was seventy years ago.

In the brief time that I spent at the hermitage I was given most generous access to large parts of the community archive. There was much more than I could cope with in the time available, especially since much the greater part of the material was in Italian, a language of which my knowledge is very limited, so that often I have the impression of looking through a pane of glass which is constantly blurring over!

So in this article as in the previous one you have at most an interim report. But it seems appropriate to make it now, partly since there is some advantage in getting down first impressions of a new world at once, and partly, and more importantly, because it is evident that in the person and teaching of Sorella Maria we have a figure of no small significance in the development of twentieth century Christianity. She was a person far ahead of her own time; one who can speak in a surprising way to ours.

There is no question but that it is Sorella Maria who is the outstanding figure in the foundation and growth of the community at Campello, but the contribution of Amy Turton remains a substantial one, in particular in relation to the international and ecumenical outreach of the place. When Maria and Amy first met in 1921, both already had a vision of what they wanted to do. Maria's

vision was that of a free community of sisters who would renew, in the twentieth century, the original Franciscan vision of a life of poverty, simplicity, openness and hospitality to all. Amy for her part had long had in mind the formation of an association to pray and work for Christian unity, an association which she already called in her mind 'The Spiritual Entente' (*L'Intesa Spirituale*), the name by which it has since been always known. In the first part of this article we shall look a little at what the two friends contributed to their common work.

II

The two women, Maria and Amy Turton, who met in 1921, had very different backgrounds and very different temperaments. Perhaps their greatest difference was that, as Amy herself put it later, whereas, 'Maria lived her vision, I dreamed mine'. Perhaps in summing up the situation in this way Amy Turton was being less than fair to herself, but it is clear that the idea of an association of people of different Christian traditions, dedicated to pray for the increase of love, understanding and unity between those traditions had been with her for a very long time, at least since 1887, and she had hesitated long over how to realise it. She speaks of 'a waking dream', or a vision, and the final text in which she describes it is called 'A Modern Parable'. The account is quite a lengthy and detailed one; at its heart it is simple however. There is a great mountain on which there are many ways up and where a variety of people are travelling. The different ways are separated from one another by walls which at the lower stages are high and very solid, but which become lower and less divisive nearer the top, so that at the end all the climbers are united together in their common approach to the summit. The way up, however, is not without its complications and difficulties. One of the interesting features of the vision is that the function of the dividing walls is not only negative. At least at the early stages of the ascent, they provide guidance and direction. Only as the ascent proceeds do the climbers begin to feel that the walls are narrowing and hindrances.

And then there are places where the walls are broken down and allow movement from one way of ascent to another. But these places too are a cause both of difficulty and encouragement. Sometimes those who passed from one way to another are themselves perplexed about the path, sometimes those who are following them are disturbed and troubled at their change. A voice declares, 'Change of road is not God's will for those who know him, since every road alike leads up to him. Each soul has to proceed forward from where God placed him in order to reach the altitude where divisions cease and truth is known as one and omnipresent.'

The woman whose vision this was in 1887 was already almost thirty years old; here, as in many other places, she reveals herself as a wholehearted and largely unselfconscious Anglican. Her whole experience of daily life, of the people that she meets, tells her that the love of Christ is to be found active and at work in people of very different denominations, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Waldensian, to mention only those whom she was constantly meeting in her life in Italy. By this time Amy Turton was, it seems, living in Italy, involved in the training and education of nurses. In this pioneering work she had been much encouraged by Florence Nightingale whom she met in 1896, and whose life and work she was trying to make better known in Italy.

From the beginning of the twentieth century she seems to have been settled in Siena, where she acquired a great devotion for St Catherine. Through her friendship with an older English resident in Florence, Francesca Alexander, a collector of Italian folk tales and Italian folk songs, she came to know something of the popular faith and piety of the countryside. Amy herself became a lover of these songs, 'which dear Francesca Alexander first taught ... in her little top-floor studio where she received mostly her poor friends, but where Ruskin also must often have talked with her and heard her sing.'

This is the woman who Maria meets in 1921, a woman in her sixties, long familiar with life in Italy, with the professional problems confronting those involved in the training of nurses, but

also aware of the traditional life of the countryside, its songs and stories. She is a woman deeply rooted in Anglo-Catholic faith and prayer, but with a largeness of vision which speaks as much of Florence Nightingale as of the more conventional Anglican models of the time. She and Maria met, saw that they had different visions, but saw too that they could help and complement one another. Maria had the decisiveness, the daring and the courage to put her vision into action. Amy had long meditated hers, but still hesitated as to how to realise it.

On one thing they were in total agreement. 'Before knowing each other,' Amy writes, 'she and I had held the same belief about hospitality making no distinction of class, nationality or form of faith, or even those without any acknowledged faith.' It is interesting to see how this simple determination to treat all men and women as equals carried them very far and had far-reaching implications, both in their meetings with people of other faiths like Gandhi and his associates, and in Maria's determination that in the Franciscan family she was founding there should be complete equality amongst the sisters, something not at all to be taken for granted in religious congregations of that time. From the very beginning women of social standing with professional qualifications were to live side by side with women from the neighbouring villages, some of whom at the beginning were illiterate, sharing in a common life of prayer and work inspired by ideals of Franciscan simplicity and poverty.

Amy Turton had hesitated long in the formulation of her dream for an international and interdenominational association of prayer, 'The Spiritual Entente'. There was discussion and correspondence about it in 1919, and it seems as if it was at that time that Evelyn Underhill and Lucy Menzies first heard about the plan and were greatly attracted by what they heard. But, according to Amy herself, it was only in 1923 that the idea took its final form, and then the wholehearted support of Evelyn Underhill was of decisive importance for her. Now she felt she had to act. Thus in 1923 the basic texts which set out the aims and purpose of the association

were agreed and printed, and they are included in an appendix to this article.

There has been some confusion about the founding of the Entente or *Intesa*. At times, in a spirit of modesty and self-effacement, Amy tried to make it seem that the idea of the Entente, like that of the community of sisters, had originally come from Maria. But in the end it is made clear by both Amy and Maria that it was Amy who was its originator. 'The Confraternity of the Spiritual Entente, to give it its full name,' she writes in 1927, 'remains distinct from Maria's mission as I remain distinct from her group, being neither Roman Catholic nor renouncing all possessions. My ability to possess has enabled me to secure an old Franciscan convent through the co-operation of friends of St Francis of various confessions. Maria's help in bringing the CSE into being has almost equalled that of the friend who first discussed it with a priest and patiently modified it as he advised. But it was the Counsellor of my vision [i.e. Evelyn Underhill], who really, so to say, brought it to birth in the spring of 1923.'

The formulations of the CSE, its aims and methods, as we read them now, seem in many ways strangely dated. They reflect a time when Christians of different churches had hardly begun to meet one another, let alone to trust and understand one another. They speak to us of the situation of the nineteenth century rather than the twentieth, let alone the twenty-first. But as we can see from references in her letters, the association was of real and liberating significance to Evelyn Underhill during these years. Insistence on respect for the convictions of other people, on restraint in the statement of our own views and on the importance of listening to those from whom we differ, remains as necessary today as it ever was, particularly at a time when the most sharply felt differences between Christians are often those which divide members of the same Christian family.

In 1933, when she was in her seventh-fifth year, Amy entered the novitiate of the community and so in 1942 became the first full member of the Eremo to die. She has an honoured place at the top of the community graveyard, 'The Daughter of Peace', in Maria's

naming of her. She was, however, not the first Anglican to become a full member of the community. That honour goes to an American Episcopalian who visited Campello first in 1928, and then became a member of the community. From then until the Second World War Miriam Shaw spent several months each year at Campello, returning regularly to her home near Boston, where, together with a Catholic friend Mary, she followed a similar style of life to that in the Eremo.

During the war years, it was of course not possible for her to visit Italy, but after the war she took up again the practice of extended visits each year until 1970, when illness and infirmity made the journey impossible for her. She was recognised throughout her life as a full member of the community, and was encouraged to gather around her a little group of fellow Christians who sought to live by the teachings of Sorella Maria. In 1978 she celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of her profession and being no longer able to travel to Europe, the community of Campello sent a Sister to the United States to affirm their communion with her and with those she had gathered round her. She was a person who had close links with the Retreat Centre of Adelynrood, north of Boston; like Amy Turton, she quietly lived out her life as a pioneering Anglican member of a predominantly Roman Catholic community, and her life too surely deserves to be better known

III

The morning after we had arrived at Campello, the first thing that Sister Brigitte, the Sister who now fulfils the service of responsibility in the community, suggested to us, knowing that we were interested in the community's origins, that we should visit the community's cemetery. Before we set out, she explained to us that Sorella Maria had originally wished that the cemetery should be near the convent buildings, but for reasons of civil law this had not proved possible. She therefore decided on a site directly above the convent, high up on the hillside, another two or three hundred feet higher up. So we set out in silence and in line, ahead Sister Brigitte leading us and stopping from time to time to explain or point out some element of the journey we were making. To go to the

cemetery was always, she said, to go on a journey of meeting, meeting with the departed who were still so closely with us and meeting with the Lord in whom we and they were united.

So we went up the path, sometimes taking a zig-zag way, sometimes straight ahead. On the way we observed that some trees had small wooden plaques with inscriptions on them, bearing words from the scriptures, from tradition or from the wisdom of the ages. From time to time Sister Brigitte would call one or other of them to our attention. After a while we passed through the wooden door of the solid enclosure wall around the conventual buildings and came out onto the open hillside. Up we went again, pausing from time to time to look back over the growing vista of the Valley of Spoleto, that valley so much beloved by St Francis. The sky was cloudy but there were hints of blue here and there and moving patches of sunlight illumined the scene before us.

Eventually we came to the graveyard itself and were again confronted with a locked gate, a further requirement of civil law. As we went in we passed a large plaque commemorating the members *non-conviventi* who had died and been buried elsewhere.

Coming to the graves themselves, we found each grave is marked by a low light enclosure of split branches taking the form of an oblong or oval. The graves are cultivated but only slightly, all is very close to nature, and the shape given to each burial place is understood as perhaps suggesting a ship, a ship which takes us from this world to the next, or perhaps a cradle, the cradle of our definitive birth into eternal life. At the top we found a tall plain cross, with a steep wooden gable, such as one would find in the mountain valleys of the north, the region from which Maria had originally come. Here too we found her own grave, together with that of some of her first and closest associates: Sister Jacopa 'L'Unanime', a remarkable woman, the intellectual, the scholar of the community's early years, herself born blind, using a particular form of braille which she herself had devised; and then Sister Amata (Amy Turton), the beloved granny, who had also been known as Granny Hope, and is here named simply Daughter of

Peace. Each grave is marked by a cross, with the name of the person buried and sometimes a very few facts about them.

Our whole expedition, both up and back, was made in an atmosphere of stillness, broken from time to time by Sister Brigitte's words of explanation or commentary, or by our questions about this or that aspect of the place. The entire journey was marked by an atmosphere of quiet joy, as of an encounter with the mystery of life triumphant over death, which we were celebrating that Easter week. Speaking together afterwards, Christopher and I found ourselves at one in our sense of the way in which the places on the hillside which we had traversed and the whole arrangement of the burial place itself seemed to bring out simply but vividly the sacramental character of the natural world. The trees, the low bushes, the paths which ascended sometimes abruptly, sometimes more obliquely, all seemed to speak of an understanding and experience of the natural world which respects and discerns its quality of potentially infinite depth. In our visit to the community cemetery we found that we had been taking part in a small domestic ritual, which was altogether without stiffness or artificiality. This same combination of the holy and the homely, of the sacred and the secular, of the serious and the less serious, met us constantly, day by day, in our stay at the hermitage.

It was therefore not a surprise to discover afterwards amongst the sayings of the foundress words such as these.

How much I believe in the communion of saints. For me it is a certainty which I have from experience not only from faith. I also believe in a mysterious possibility of communion with all creatures. For example those I love: a star, a bird, a flower, a butterfly; they enrich my life and make me gentle like the saints who are my friends.

In a most natural and quite unassuming way, Sorella Maria had discovered and lived the mystery that 'everything that lives is holy', as St Thomas Aquinas puts it.

When we enter into communion with that life, our own life is enlarged and deepened. In our friendship with all the creatures,

and particularly with those who share the sacred gift of life, our friendship with God is enriched and made new.’

In the days which we passed at Campello we constantly felt that the spirit of the Sorella was not far away from us. So it was no surprise again to find in her writings reflections such as these.

‘I believe in relics because through experience it seems to me that things which we use become impregnated by us ... Thus if a fragment of something that a Saint has used comes to us, we must have faith. So, if we keep respectfully something that has belonged to a dear friend, we feel a deeper closeness to them. I have and will always have veneration for these material relics, but one should not stop at the material sense of things; that which remains of the thought of the Saint is undoubtedly more precious and more efficacious than any material remains.’

Maria is always at war with anything which narrows and restricts our faith our life and our vision.

‘Humans always have a tendency to restrict themselves. Christians think that Jesus has redeemed them alone. No, no; all, through the same sufferings, through their faith, even if unconscious, are redeemed by him. We must not limit ourselves to one place; yes, we belong with veneration to the Church of Rome, but we must keep ourselves open to be at one with all.’

The desire to include everyone, this confidence in God’s all-encompassing grace and mercy, has very specific application to problems of Christian disunity. ‘When we read in the *Sacramentario*, that someone who marries a non-Catholic risks losing their faith’, she exclaimed,

what a fallacious idea that is! Do we Catholics alone have faith? Poor Jesus, he allowed himself to admire the faith of a pagan. (Matt. 8:10) ... If I think about dogmas, my little lamp goes out, since I wish to keep it alight I don’t think about them! ... How is it possible for people to feel the need for these blinkers!

As for myself, you know one of my innermost wishes is to have in our little community Sisters of different religious confessions, so as to realize amongst ourselves the *Irenikon*, that is union in peace.’

Later she comments,

Don't call our dear brothers who belong to different Churches from ours Protestants, that name belongs to those in all churches who stop at the letter and don't go on to the Spirit.

Sorella Maria speaks and writes as a poet, an intuitive, not as a systematic or analytical thinker. Her words constantly strike us with the clarity and fire to be found in the words of the Fathers and Mothers of the desert in Egypt and in the life and sayings of the first Brothers and Sisters of St Francis. This renewal, in the twentieth century, of the original gift of Christian monasticism, is celebrated in the brief but remarkable tribute paid to Sorella Maria at the time of her burial on 6 September 1961 by Father Giovanni Vanucci, one of the few clerics amongst her contemporaries who truly understood her. Let his tribute sum up for us something of the life and the message of this woman whose voice surely needs to be much more widely heard and recognised.

There rises in us, those present and those far away, a spontaneous word of gratitude to you Sorella Maria, for the love wherewith you have loved us and for the love that you have awoken in us, now as we are accompanying your little body to the place of its rest. The light which you have given to the creatures of the hermitage, near and far, to the Church of Rome and to all the Churches, will never be extinguished. From you we have learnt to love the truth of all creatures and to recognise one sole reality in all. We have learnt from you a love for what is humble and quiet and thus for what is beautiful and hidden, a love for all that suffers and waits, a love for friends and enemies, for those near and for those far away, for those shut out, and those shut in. You have taught us to see in every human being the suffering and hope of the Son of Man. Thank you, for having guided us to love pure simplicity, silence, the respect for things and for creatures, gratitude for all being, the Cross and our suffering and that of all.

Thank you, for having shown us that in simple and absolute faithfulness to the Lord Jesus, the faith of East and West, the Church of Rome and all the Churches can meet in the unity of love. Thank you for having given life once more to the essential words of Christianity, that due to the usury of time had become

faded, *agape*, *koinonia*, *sacrum facere*, peace, brotherhood, mother earth ...

Thank you for bringing back to the old hermitage the life of the first monks, a life renewed by you with faithfulness to the Spirit and with newness of forms. None of us think of you as dead, and as we are accompanying you to the grave we are certain that you are in the place of light and communion without end.

The creatures that you have loved and blessed will carry you in their heart always as a gift of peace and faithfulness.

There is clearly much more to be discovered and explored in the life and the teaching of Sorella Maria. But perhaps the greatest of her gifts of vision was her clear understanding that in creation and redemption alike, both in grace and in nature, it is the one work and wisdom of the one Lord of All which is to be found. It is here that Evelyn Underhill at once perceived the identity of her vision with that of her 'old man', Friedrich von Hügel. This is a theme which I hope to examine briefly in a further and concluding article.

APPENDIX

I

Confraternity of the Spiritual Entente

A brotherhood without vows, rule or special habit, with members of every nationality, class and form of Christian faith.

No names are published. Each Brother or Sister is free to enrol others by giving them the card to sign and keep. Each member is free to leave at any moment if he finds that he is no longer in the spirit of the Confraternity. In this case he will destroy the card, and notify the Brother or Sister who enlisted him.

Object

To Hasten the Coming of the Kingdom of God by Promoting Spiritual Union Between all Believers in Christ.

Means

1. Prayer. ‘Prayer is the only solid link in spiritual things.’ Members must be capable of real prayer; striving to be ‘true personal servants of our Lord’.
2. Work. Shall be according to the gifts received from God, and undertaken for his Glory. ‘The love of God cannot be lazy.’ The Spiritual Entente should grow invisibly, from one to another, working like leaven.

II

Promise of the Spiritual Entente

I will seek, with the aid of Our Lord, to meet every Christian as a brother. I will strive, by opening my own soul to God’s grace, to find him in the soul of every Christian, and to treat with reverence his form of worship.

I will by God’s grace, when with Christian brethren of different confessions from my own, refrain from criticism or expressions of disbelief in any doctrine that is true to them; and I will seek to diffuse this spirit around me.

To my brother who doubts the form of faith in which he was born, I will suggest the seeking of counsel from persons who are really spiritual and illuminated; for God has shown me that he is in every soul which verily loves him, believes in him and serves him; and that his flock is being led by different roads to the one fold where there is ‘One only flock, one only shepherd—Jesus Christ’.

**Prayer of the Confraternity
That of St Catherine of Siena**

Come Holy Spirit into my heart; draw it to Thee by Thine ineffable love, and bestow on me charity with fear. Keep me, O Christ, from every evil thought. Warm me and illuminate me by Thy most sweet love, that every pain may seem light to me. My Heavenly Father, my sweet Lord, I pray Thee help me in my every service in all Creation.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Sorella Brigitte of Campello for her assistance with this article, and also to my friend John Stuart Allitt for his generous help in translating the texts in Italian. The quotations from Sorella Maria and from Giovanni Vanucci are taken from booklets privately printed by the Community at Campello. I have also made use of the most recent study, Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Maria dell'Eremo di Campello. Un'avventura spirituale nell'Italia del Novecento*, Guerini e Associati, 2000, in many ways an excellent first presentation of the life of Sorella Maria.

THE HOPE OF SALVATION : *Sermon for the 2nd Sunday before
Advent*

JEREMY SHEEHY

Malachi 4:1-2a; 2 Thess. 3:6-13; Lk. 21:5-19.

THERE can be few areas of our Christian faith about which we hear less today than what scholars call the ‘apocalyptic’ or the ‘eschatological’. So often the apocalyptic writings of the Bible and of the Jewish and Christian traditions seem luxuriant in their imagery, unhelpful in their emphases, and, if we are honest, downright unbelievable in much of what they affirm. There is much associated with these matters which is difficult to make a great deal of sense of—the trumpets and the angels and the question of how anything can be seen throughout a global world—and most of us know that an undue interest in, and too much fascination with ‘the last things’ has almost always been a sign of disease in Christian believing. Paul seems to have thought this the case with the Christians at Thessalonica, and I don’t think things have changed.

But, apart from the wealth of apocalyptic literature elsewhere in the great tradition, each of the synoptic gospels presents us with the narrative of the Passion immediately preceded by a lengthy and uninterrupted discourse of Jesus on the ultimate events of the world’s history, and what is to accompany them. It forms the last piece of extended teaching, and indeed in Mark’s gospel this lengthy and articulated discourse is unique. For a number of reasons—for instance, its departure from the usual structure of short episodes or sayings, what the scholars call ‘pericopes’, its inclusion by each of the synoptic writers, and the unease and slight embarrassment it apparently caused to the early church—I think there are good reasons to believe such a piece of extended teaching before the Passion comes to us from the original layer in the tradition. What are we to say about such things?

Well, we may do well to remember that to many at the time of Jesus and in the days of the early church it would have been taken for granted that life was essentially cyclical. Time was not purposive, but was cyclical. Time was not a linear progression, but a

recurrent process. And there have always been those who liked the idea of the circle, the cycle. It seems to be what happens in nature, and so it seems appropriate that the same pattern should be repeated on the grander scale. There are philosophical and religious views that use this framework. Some of them had a great influence on certain of the early Christian writers. Some of those interested in subjects like reincarnation use such a framework, and it has a place in much 'New Age' thinking. Perhaps a well-developed and not altogether reprehensible wish not to be rude about the convictions of others stops us from pointing out, as we might, what a deeply pessimistic world-view this is. For the cyclical view of time is ultimately desperately despairing. All things happen, simply to happen again. We are not on the way, we are trapped within the wheel, like performing mice in some cosmic cage. It is nihilistic, for nothing can have permanent value within the cyclical view. The world, and we ourselves, are not purposive. Ultimately it is all futile.

The Jewish, and subsequently the Christian, way of thinking, were radically at odds with this. They could not lastingly exist side by side with it. Such a view of time could not be baptised into Christian believing. The Jews, and following them the Christians, had much too high a doctrine of history, of what is indeed salvation history, for that to happen. And so eschatology and apocalyptic, underneath all the exciting and sometimes scary imagery, is the assertion of the linear view of time, a consequence of believing in the creation and the incarnation and the resurrection, an outworking of the assertion of the mighty acts of salvation. That, I think, underneath the difficult language in which it comes to us, is what is important in our eschatological texts, in our books of apocalyptic, and that is why they assert that what they say is important; and that is why modern lectionaries that leave them out in the hope of making things easier and presenting us with a sanitised tradition are running a risk. How could the people who kept Passover, how could the community that celebrated the Easter Vigil, accept a cyclical view of time?

And this is not just about maintaining a coherent picture of things, important though that is for the task of apologetics. Faith, hope, and love are the three things which abide, says St Paul, and they have been classified by later Christian thinkers as the three theological virtues. The neglected member of this triad is surely the virtue of hope. Indeed, I remember one of my students saying to me that they could not see why hope was listed as a virtue, and I suspect their puzzlement is not unusual. I think I would want to suggest to you that in asserting the linear view of time the great apocalyptic passages and the eschatological texts proclaim the virtue of hope. Jürgen Moltman, in what was his first major theological book, *Theology of Hope*, wrote that ‘the sin of unbelief is manifestly grounded in hopelessness’. He went on to say that ‘Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving’. Paul’s words give us an account of the hope that is in us, because they tell us that the final judgment and salvation of God is on its way. The Heidelberg Catechism of historic German Calvinism puts this splendidly, I think. We find the question, ‘What comfort has thou by the coming again of Christ?’ And the answer is ‘That in all my miseries and persecutions I look with my head erect for the very same ... who took all malediction from me’. Yes, indeed. The final judgement and salvation of God is on its way.

REFLECTIONS FROM ST ISAAC’S

SISTER CLARE SLG

IT ISN’T easy to put into words something which has meant a great deal to you. I will try and pick out some things about being at St Isaac’s which have made a particular impression on me.

Coming from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern was very exciting, but after being here for a while I began to realise that the really incredible thing is that St Isaac’s is in this particular bit of New Zealand, the Hokianga. Clem must have been inspired by the Spirit in her choice of this particular property. Its location sets the

scene, so to speak, for the life of prayer which it invites. The hills around are both awe-inspiring and sheltering. I recently went around the track and over the back fence to a point from which it is possible to see St Isaac's, Tamaka, St Luke's and Pakanae Marae. Seen from that vantage point St Isaac's nestles in the bush, dwarfed by the surrounding hills. From one point of view it is insignificant, almost vulnerable to being crushed, yet from another it is held in the palm of a gigantic hand, protected by the hills. It is like our relationship with God who is totally other, beyond anything we can know, yet nurtures us and protects us with a Father's care. The words of the psalm come to mind: 'I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help.' I came expecting beauty, but not prepared for the impact the place would have on me, yet I suppose it is not surprising: Christianity is about the Incarnation, and God is the creator of the world, so our surroundings matter, a kind of sacrament of his presence, his gift to us.

The simplicity and rhythm of daily life here has also been a gift and has challenged me to look at things and at ways of doing things which I had thought of as necessities and to see whether they really are necessities or not. I think that is a gift to Community—it is much easier to explore and experiment in a small group and new(er) situation than in a large group and a long established situation.

The isolated position deepens the solitude and silence which is part of the gift of the place but is balanced by the links with the wider community which again is part of the gift of St Isaac's. I am particularly thinking of Joseph and Catherine's regular visits, and of our being part of the local church, going out to church each Sunday and welcoming local people to our regular Wednesday Eucharist. I've found myself more aware of being part of the local church community (thinking ecumenically not just denominationally) than is often possible for us in Community.

The words which keep coming back to me are rootedness and silence. St Isaac's is really quite new, but rooted in a centuries old tradition of the Christian life with prayer, worship, solitude, and communion all playing their part. The Christian history of this country is relatively short, only a couple of hundred years or so

since the first missionaries came—and that gives me pause for thought when I compare it with the centuries of European Christian history—but we are part of that and part of the building up of Christian life that is really God’s doing. I am also aware that this place has its roots in the history of the local people going back centuries before the coming of the missionaries and who have a great deal to teach us about land and family. The New Zealand Prayer Book uses the phrase *E te whana e te Kariti*, and the idea of *whanau*, family of Christ, which we all are, is something which has come alive for me with new meaning, thanks to coming into contact with the local people.

And silence—well, it’s a very ‘noisy’ silence sometimes, with wind, water in the creek, rain falling on the chapel roof and cicadas, but the deep silence is there and it invites us to silence and listening even though it is always up to us whether or not we accept the invitation. Places of literal silence are becoming more rare—even at Bede House we can hear traffic noise—so again the location of St Isaac’s is a gift, but there is also the silence of listening to God which we seek and which those who come to stay are also seeking. That experience of silence is one of the gifts and memories which I will take away with me.

So to conclude, I’m very grateful for my time here: to Clem and the Trustees for their welcome and for their vision for this place, and to the Community for having sent me.

A NOCTURNALL UPON S. LUCIES DAY, *BEING THE
SHORTEST DAY.*

TIS the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
 The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
 Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes ;
 The worlds whole sap is sunke :
The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunk,
Dead and enterr'd ; yet all these seeme to laugh,
Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring :
 For I am every dead thing,
 In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
 For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse :
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death ; things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have ;
 I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
 Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
 Have wee two wept, and so
Drownd the whole world, us two ; oft did we grow
To be two Chaosses, when we did show
Care to ought else ; and often absences
Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown ;
 Were I a man, that I were one,
 I needs must know ; I should preferre,

If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means ; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love ; All, all some properties invest ;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light, and body must be here.

But I am None ; nor will my Sunne renew.
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
At this time to the Goat is runne
To fetch new lust, and give it you,
Enjoy your summer all ;
Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

John Donne (1571/2-1631)

THE YEAR'S MIDNIGHT

Reflections on John Donne's 'A Nocturnall Upon S Lucies Day'

KENNETH MASON

I FIRST came upon this poem about fifty years ago, and it became then, and has remained, an important part of my perception of mid-winter. I was attracted to Donne by his curious double reputation. He made himself a name as the licentious Jack Donne, author of erotic elegies like 'To his Mistris going to Bed', but then achieved another as the learned Doctor Donne, celebrated preacher and composer of 'Holy Sonnets'. It was a change he had himself remarked, saying to God,

... but as in my idolatrie
I said to all my profane mistresses,
... so I say to thee ...

(Holy Sonnets, XIII)

This, and other such poems, tell of the redirection of *eros* rather than of its eradication, but may still leave us uncertain how Donne

came to accept and live with the change. One of the properties of the 'Nocturnall' is that, though it appears among the early 'Songs and Sonets', it points towards the 'Divine Poems', and may even show something of how the change happened.

For this is an erotic poem in which the idea of sexual love has been disciplined to a seriousness that makes it able to stand alongside the most challenging aspects of life and death. Donne's understanding of love's philosophy had always made play with fantasies about the exchange that lovers make with one another, of hearts or selves; but here, with (what were probably) some anticipations in the 'Valedictions' and 'The Extasie', he speaks of a single shared identity. Man and woman have become one soul, one self, through love.

That is a comprehension of love that points to life-long marriage as the one relationship in which such eroticism could find its true fulfilment, and it encourages us to read the 'Nocturnall' as the declaration of a bereaved husband. In it Donne shows what happens when such a belief in love has been accepted, practised and tested, and then one of the lovers has died. What is the state of the other? It is not so much what modern attachment theory points to—a sense of raw exposure from having been torn apart—as a discovery that one is no longer there at all, dispossessed of one's true self and substance.

If any occasion provoked Donne to write it, it could only be the death of his wife Anne More, for whose sake he had put his freedom and livelihood in jeopardy, and whom he loved with a singular devotion. There are other poems which mention this bereavement, and scrutinise it, but the 'Nocturnall' shows a bitter immediacy that sets it apart. Whenever it may have been written, it describes that state of numb emptiness when the bereaved person knows that feelings are in order but cannot feel them. As Anne died in August 1617, and the poem is nominally dated to 13 December, we have to assume that Donne gave himself time to explain himself to himself in verse, and that the conjunction of grief with St Lucy's Day is a conceit that found him during the process. It is a very powerful and

fertile conjunction, even though for Donne it stands above all as an image of sterility.

St Lucy's Day, at the time Donne wrote, was the winter solstice, the shortest and darkest of days, 'the year's midnight'. For Christians, the solstice has meant several different things, depending on the current calendar. Originally a time of pagan festival, it was chosen, or perhaps merely discovered, to be the Feast of Christ's Nativity, and so observed from the fourth century. By Donne's time, thirteen hundred years later, the inexactitude of the Julian Calendar had moved it from 25 to 13 December, St Lucy's Day. Lucy is an early virgin martyr who is mentioned in the traditional Roman Canon, though she is perhaps best known now as an annual visitor to Swedish households on her feast day, rousing them early with coffee, crowned herself with burning candles. When the Gregorian reform of the calendar took effect, the solstice moved to 21 December, which at that time was universally kept as the Feast of St Thomas. Here too we have a variation on the theme of light dawning on darkness, for St Thomas' Day is, or was, a little Easter before Christmas, a reminder that it is only through the resurrection that we come to recognise the incarnate divinity of Christ, our Lord and our God. More recently—though a few hold on to the old date—St Thomas has been carried off to July, and the day's liturgical significance is focussed on its Magnificat Anthiphon.

O Dayspring, Brightness of Light Everlasting,
and Sun of Righteousness :
Come and enlighten them that sitteth in darkness
and the shadow of death.

It is not difficult to imagine that behind all these changes there is an unseen poet, spelling out in one way or another, that the year's midnight is also the year's dawn, that it is when dark is at its deepest that light first shows its strength.

All the same, much of this feels foreign to our experience. It is true that the darkness of winter has a profoundly depressive effect on some of us, and most of us are heartened by signs of spring and brighter evenings when eventually they come. But the city lights on the shortest day have quite a different message. They insist that the

present opportunity is cheerful but brief, and they tell us, perhaps more than anything, that Christmas goodwill is promised to those who spend. If we raise our eyes above the illuminations and rooftops we may catch sight of a genuine December sunset, pale orange and turquoise on the margin of darkness, and think nostalgically of other and older winters, but we are unlikely to find in any of this a promise that the face of the earth is at the point of renewal. Unless we are alive to the word of Christ at this season of his birth, the time can turn out to be much more demanding than promising, and even nature's promise has been suppressed.

Donne is clearly aware of promise (of some kind) as he addresses those

who shall lovers bee

At the next world, that is, at the next Spring :

but for him it is hollow and without meaning. He seems concerned, as we read him, to head off any hopeful associations that might lay claim to his allegiance, even Christian ones. He makes no reference to Christmas, or to Christ, and even Lucy herself is presented only as a symbol of the sun's short duration. The day takes its meaning from the almanac alone, and even conventional mythic overtones are held in check. Only the final verse nods in acknowledgement that Capricorn, the zodiacal goat, may bring new lust, to emphasise yet more forcibly Donne's own sense of exclusion from the world of nature and of life.

If we follow Donne's plain directions we are led to a reading which finds the centre of the poem in those nine blunt words,

But I am None ; nor will my Sunne renew.

The season speaks of loss, and he has lost himself. If it has anything further to say, he is not able to receive it. And everything around this central negation—the vast claims, huge comparisons, technical allusions—is simply so much poetical superfluity and metaphysical paradox.

But another reading is possible, besides this wholly negative one. John Carey* has described Donne's mood—more exactly, the poem's mood—as bitter and suicidal. Bitterness is certainly there,

* John Carey, *John Donne, Life, Mind and Art*, Faber, London, 1990, pp.78 and 158.

but it is hard to find a will to die (as can be found in the closely related poem, 'The Dissolution') among all the protestations that he is dead already. But Carey's insight into these protestations is valuable. Did ever nothing so protest! Donne is trying to affirm himself by the very vehemence with which he obliterates himself, to make himself the uniquely quintessential nothing. These things may be said in a tone of despairing resignation, but they also betray an eager desire to be noticed, a quality of boasting.

And yet, none of this will be new to those who have tried to satisfy themselves that they really understand the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Here too we come upon the need to distinguish 'ordinary' nothings from the radical nothingness, the absolute non-existence of which the doctrine speaks. God does not create by imposing order on chaos, or form on hitherto formless matter, but simply by calling things, the world, us, into being. 'Nothing', it is said, 'is not a special sort of something out of which God makes things. Rather, there is nothing—nothing at all—from which he creates.'

The clearest scriptural testimony to this way of seeing the matter is found in two sayings of St Paul, who in neither case is expounding the doctrine of creation but assuming and using it to make a more existential point. At Romans 4:17, explaining the faith which justifies, he describes God as he

who quickeneth the dead
and calleth those things that be not
as though they were.

And at I Corinthians 1:28, reminding his disciples that they have nothing of their own to brag of, he says that God has chosen

things which are not
to bring to nought things which are.

Donne's crescendo of negations, culminating in 'things which are not', sounds like an echo of these passages, and it is hard to believe that he did not know this and intend it.

The belief that he did intend it is strengthened when we see how he builds up to this climax. Love, he says, has wrought nothingness upon him, has ruined him, and he goes on,

I am re-begot

Of absence, darknesse, death ; things which are not.

Certainly 'rebegot of nothing' here will bear the explanation, 'reconstituted as nothing', but it could also mean 'brought again to being and life out of nothing'. And 're-begot', too, is an echo of scripture, with just this meaning. I Peter 1:3 blesses God who

hath begotten us again unto a lively hope
by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The major paradox of the poem, then, is that Donne, in speaking of his nothingness, his death, uses the very same words that Christians have used to testify to their faith in God as creator out of nothing and quickener of the dead. Admittedly, there is no sentence in the poem in which Donne says that he shares that faith, still less that he anticipates that quickening for himself. If God is to be thought of as present to the poem at all, it is as one who overhears and recognises the appeal to himself contained in the profession of despair. How often do people tell someone—anyone—that their case is hopeless, hoping that they will be contradicted?

Once the possibility of such a reading is admitted, the beginning and ending of the poem may be found to strengthen it. Even if St Lucy is dismissed in the second line as 'scarce seaven houres', she still presides over the whole from the title, and not entirely in her own right. If 'Lucia' is a version of Lucina, who was the Roman goddess of childbirth, then she points forward to the Feast of the Nativity. Or if we connect her name with the Latin *lux-lucis* (light-of light), she is a reminder that the light of Christ continues to shine, not least on those who sit up till midnight writing a nocturnal.

Donne is very insistent on it being both the year's midnight and the day's. It is not immediately clear which midnight, pertaining to which day, he has in mind, for the stroke of midnight belongs to no day, being the instant of transition between two. It may be best to think in terms of the Jewish and ancient Christian understanding of

days beginning at sundown, so that St Lucy's midnight would fall at twelve o'clock on the eve, as the time of vigil, looking ahead to the Feast. And the words of the poem agree with that.

Since shee enjoys her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

'Shee' here is evidently Donne's dead love, but she is being conformed to the image of St Lucy, whose day, if any, is a 'long night's festival', and Donne is able to stir himself in spite of his despondency to think of using the hour of vigil as, what it is meant to be, a time of preparation. If this tentative hope does not appear, as emphatically it does not, under the sign of Capricorn, we are left to make our own judgment what promise has conveyed it.

It seems, then, that if we want to read this poem as a Christian statement, an exploration of faith, we may do so provided we overthrow its syntactical system. Bald statements are to be taken as hints, and mere hints as statements. This is not unreasonable if Donne is—as we might imagine it—describing what is on his mind to a possibly sympathetic listener. In such a case it is really the hints that count. Direct statement of vulnerable feelings is impossible, too much exposed to refutation or rebuke.

We may do this then, but not as though we were entitled to declare that Donne has written a Christian poem which—in the paradoxical way typical of the gospel—need make no mention of Christ, and proclaims a hope which proves itself in the very jaws of despair. Proof of that kind lies outside the boundary of the poem. At the most we can say that he has juxtaposed the theme of 'absence, darkness, death' with reticent hints of promise from various sources, natural, pagan and Christian. And if the Christian promise is rejected less vigorously than the others, that is largely because reticence at that point has taken such an oblique approach as to fall, almost, into silence.

There are many people every Christmas, people to whom the gospel message could be a real consolation, who will nevertheless appreciate this kind of reticence. These are the people who have

been so shattered by loss that any overt reference to Christmas cheer, even if it is underwritten by God's love, will seem offensive—about as sensitive as a hearty slap on the back. Donne can be seen as staking a claim on behalf of such people, not to be left alone but to be treated with the utmost consideration. Above all they are not to be challenged in their sense of emptiness. Donne's eloquence betrays the need for an audience, for what we now call empathy. It also warns us off any response that begins with that fatal phrase, 'Yes but ...'.

By setting his grief within the context of midwinter, what for us is the Christmas season, Donne makes this appeal for sensitivity especially challenging. Of all the times when people want to see other people cheerful, Christmas is the most difficult. Especially in our own time, when we are encouraged to invest so much in having a 'good Christmas', the thought of 'absence, darknesse, death' is most threatening and hardest to cope with when it forces itself upon us. There is a feeling abroad that we must all co-operate to create an atmosphere of peace and goodwill, and we do not want this to be disturbed by accidents, family quarrels, inconvenient visitors, strikes, power-cuts, floods or deaths. Such things would shatter the great illusion to which we have devoted so much of ourselves in creating. 'And at Christmas of all times!' we say in helpless indignation before the reality of darkness.

Christians sometimes try to repudiate this grand conspiracy to insist on good cheer and ignore the darkness, branding it as merely pagan or commercially inspired. But it is really too late, and misinformed, to do that. The Church has been bold and confident enough in the past to claim this season for Christ, trusting that his are all times, all seasons, and that all natural and social powers are subject to him. It would be a mistake, though, to think that the Fathers of the Church claimed the winter solstice as the Feast of Christ's Nativity, only in order to have a share in the season's reputation for merriment. There has always been an acute awareness of the dark side of the season as well. It is virtually the ground bass against which the melody of Christ's coming is played. 'The light shines in the dark, and the dark neither understands nor overcomes

it ... That was the true light ... coming into the world.’ (John 1:5 and 9.)

But if we are going to address that darkness at this season and, above all, address those who are most oppressed and exhausted by it, we cannot do it by insisting that the merriment all around is justified by Christ’s coming and it is only lack of faith that keeps people from joining in. Donne’s strategy of reticent juxtaposition may be read as a way of making a new start, and in the work of consolation the chief need is to find a starting point. One of the truths that Christmas especially declares is that God is content to make a small beginning. Christmas is not the final glory. It is rather darkness and the first healing rays of dawn. It is despair, and the first intimation of grace and peace coming to meet us in our despair. People whose sense of loss keeps them from joining in, or allows them only to go through the motions tentatively, know this, perhaps, better than anybody.

MEETING SAINT BENEDICT IN SUBIACO

SISTER ISABEL MARY SLG

IT WAS certainly in a ‘divine landscape’ that the thirteenth CIIR congress was held in September this year, at the Monastery of St Scholastica which stands high above the little town of Subiaco in the Alban Hills. To the natural beauty of this mountainous region is added something more—a tranquillity and holiness which can surely be ascribed to the divine providence which drew the young boy Benedict away from the pitfalls of sixth-century Rome, to learn directly from God and in complete solitude how he was to spend his life.

The theme chosen for this Congress was the place of prayer for unity within the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical and Anglican traditions of Christendom, illustrated in the teaching of their spiritual masters. Four papers were given, each on a specific subject of the speaker’s choice, which was then discussed and developed in various groups. The official language of the Congress

was of course Italian, but the linguistic skill of some of the participants was generously placed at its service both in written translations of the papers into French, German and English and in enabling much dialogue throughout the day.

What emerged from our corporate listening to these voices, from the fifth, twelfth, seventeenth and twentieth centuries, was perhaps not so much an increase of sympathetic understanding of our differences, as a recognition that at the level of contemplative prayer where ‘heart speaks to heart’, unity has always subsisted, and that it is from there that the numerous strands of mystical theology and Christian practice can be woven together. Moreover, recognition of this unity and the action which it requires happen within the dispensation of grace and not of ecclesiastical ordinances. It is worth remembering that the original inspiration of Father Martin de Zabala, to inaugurate these biennial congresses, was wholly ecumenical. Nearly thirty years ago Father Martin perceived that the vocation of religious to simplicity of life, prayer and a great measure of silence gave them a head start in surmounting the barriers to Christian unity.

At least two of the subjects chosen—St John Chrysostom and William of St Thierry—can hardly be regarded as ‘belonging’ exclusively to East or West. Gerhard Tersteegen, despite the wide provenance of his wonderful hymns may perhaps be slightly less familiar, and Gilbert Shaw, our elder contemporary, is not widely known outside Britain. What is common to all four is a consuming love of God, familiarity with the things of God, and a desire for His kingdom to be established in the hearts of all his children. This is crucial for us who continue to hear and read them, because without some share in the same longings as our masters, study of spirituality and traditions however eagerly pursued is little more than idle talk.

To have been made attentive to these things in precisely this place could not have been more auspicious. On the first day of the congress we scrambled about two kilometres up the mountainside to Sacro Speco, the monastery built over the site of St Benedict’s cave. It happened to be a Sunday, so we certainly did not have the place to ourselves in which to reflect quietly and deeply on the beauty of

early medieval frescoes preserved within its walls or to catch glimpses of monks watering scarlet geraniums in little arcaded gardens. Better than that, we were carried along in the flow of other pilgrims, mostly parish people on a Sunday outing to the shrine of their beloved saint. Among them there were many sick people, blind, crippled and variously disabled. They had come for the consoling presence and healing power of St Benedict.

Very different was our visit to Monte Cassino a day or two later. If Sacro Speco and St Scholastica were potent reminders of the purity of intention of the young boy whose unsuspected genius as a monastic legislator and leader would begin to unfold in that remote colony of hermits, Monte Cassino, an undefended fortress on the plateau of its great mountain, was a revelation of the genius of Benedict the Civilizer. Rebuilt from the rubble of its fourth and latest destruction in 1943, and surrounded by the graves of the soldiers who fell in the battle for the mountain itself, the present monastery says nothing of the moderation or the simplicity of the Benedictine spirit. It is however an astounding witness to the resolve of an exhausted and defeated nation to restore the immense palace which, in the course of many reconstructions St Benedict's foundation had become, to the peak of its renaissance and baroque magnificence.

Without any doubt, it was the sheer impact of St Benedict, not only his achievement extending through fifteen centuries, and culminating in his being proclaimed Patron of Europe by Pope Paul VI, but the more delicate sense of his holiness and fullness of personality, that suffused each hour of this conference and turned it into a corporate encounter (for some of us also an individual one) with the Father of Monks. Since the days included many meetings with friends old and new, it was all the more disappointing to meet so few of the living sons and daughters of St Benedict on their own soil and to observe that not a single Benedictine (Roman Catholic or Anglican) from these islands was present, while those of France, Belgium, Germany and Sweden were represented. This rather prevalent sense of disappointment was made sharper in the context of the Eucharistic celebrations. It seemed extraordinary that sixty

men and women, all confessing the same creed, all living under monastic vows, and brought together for a purely ecumenical purpose, were yet not able to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation at the same altar, as members of the body of Christ. Is this resistance, I wondered, a sign of patience and humility; or is it a paralysis of the will which is the very negation of obedience; or is it the last shred of the tattered garment of prejudice to which we obdurately cling for covering? Whatever the answer—and it may be none of those suggested—the experience aroused in me at any rate a sense not only of sorrow but of shame.

Four days after my return came the terrorist attack on New York and Washington, and for a time, there was much hostile talk directed at religion *per se* for all the harm and cruelty it has inflicted on the world. Many Christians profess themselves ready to shoulder their vast share of blame for this, as far as the strength of their own fissured body allows them. Peace marches and inter-faith meetings in East Oxford in the wake of the attacks have encouraged us who live here to believe that it may be so. May blessed Benedict, the wise son of a distraught civilization, pray for us and for the world of the third millenium.

BOOKS

TRAFFIC IN TRUTH: Exchanges Between Science and Theology, by John Polkinghorne, The Society of the Sacred Cross, Tymawr, 2000. £4.99.

To inaugurate its new series of titles, *Borderlands*, The Society of the Sacred Cross has chosen this splendid book by John Polkinghorne, physicist and priest. They could not have made a better choice. Not only is Polkinghorne one of the most significant thinkers writing today on matters of theology and science, but he also has an acute sense of the meaning of borderlands, those places where exploration may result in conflict, exchange or new understandings that lead to transformation.

As a physicist, Polkinghorne is aware of the importance to theory-building of hard data and careful, informed investigation; as

a man of faith, he understands that meaning and the eternal values of goodness, beauty and truth are what give purpose to creation and to our lives. In his writing he interweaves the strands of his thought, based on the fundamental principles of science and theology and demonstrating that both fields are not only complementary but indeed necessary to each other. He has written numerous books to date, including the recent *Faith, Science and Understanding*, yet even in this one slim volume of 56 pages he manages to discuss basic elements of his thinking clearly and compellingly, without giving the reader a sense that he has oversimplified his thesis in the interest of brevity.

The book begins by pointing out that one of the essential differences between science and theology is that scientists have ‘set themselves a limited range of tasks to accomplish. They are concerned with asking the question How things happen, by what processes things come about. Their discoveries have taught us many important things about the structure and history of the universe in which we live. Yet there are also many other questions that are meaningful and necessary for us to ask—for example, the Why questions of whether there is meaning and purpose in what has been going on in cosmic history. He illustrates with the example of music: ‘We should not condemn ourselves to thinking that we have said all we can say about music when science has enabled us to note that it is vibrations in the air. We need to also recognise music’s mysterious power to use a pattern of sound in time to speak to our hearts of an everlasting beauty. That acknowledgment may well point us in the direction of the Eternal, whose joy in creation is, I believe, the ground of our creaturely aesthetic experience.’ He offers the reader a view of the underpinning of his own position when he says, ‘Those who seek to serve the God of truth in this way should welcome truth from whatever quarter it may come. Some of the truth about the rich, many-layered world in which we live comes to us from science. I am a passionate believer in the unity of knowledge, and that belief is underwritten by my belief in the unity of the Creator, who is the ground of all that is. Theology, properly understood, proclaims the border we are discussing to be a free-

trade area for the ready exchange of intellectual goods.’ Polkinghorne dismisses scientific reductionists and religious fundamentalists, accusing both groups of misunderstanding and misrepresenting reality and discrediting both science and theology.

The middle chapters of the book entitled ‘Insights from Science’ and ‘Insights from Theology’, outline evolution, with its balance between chance and necessity, the Anthropic Principle, quantum theory, chaos theory, the importance of beauty in mathematics and physics, and the significance of religious experience. Each section includes theological comments and scientific illustrations; some statements, such as ‘Every atom of carbon in our bodies was once inside a star’, directly invite the reader into theological reflection.

To illustrate chaos theory, Polkinghorne employs the concept of the ‘butterfly effect’ with eloquent simplicity: ‘In certain circumstances, the earth’s weather systems are so sensitive that a butterfly in the African jungle, stirring the air with its wings today, could produce consequences that grow and grow until they produce a storm thousands of miles away over our heads in about three weeks’ time.’ He then moves to Aquinas’ suggestion that the human soul is the “‘form” (that is, the almost infinitely complex pattern) of the body ... [This makes] sense of the Christian hope of a resurrected human destiny beyond death. It can be pictured as being the result of God’s remembering the individual patterns that we are and reconstituting them again in the life of the world to come.’ To the imagination, the implications of such statements and linkages are vast and deep!

Early on in his chapter ‘Insights from Theology’ Polkinghorne asks, ‘Why is science possible at all? Why can we understand the universe so profoundly?’ In his customary practical way, he answers, ‘We must have a rough and ready understanding of everyday occurrences in order to be able to survive.’ But he then goes on to discuss the relationship between beauty and validity in theoretical physics, culminating in the statement that ‘science is possible, and mathematics is so remarkably effective, because the world is a creation and we are creatures made in the image of the

Creator. Fundamental physics reveals a universe shot through with signs of mind and it is an attractive understanding that it is indeed the Mind of God that lies behind that wonderful cosmic order.’ It is not within the scope of this short book to discuss this point in greater detail, but this statement clearly sets forth the fruit of Polkinghorne’s investigations, and in the Chapter ‘Common Cause’ he points out that ‘one further important cousinly connection between the two groups of people is that both are led to belief in unseen realities,’ and that for both ‘dwellers in science-land and dwellers in theology-land ... the question of truth is the paramount question.’

Polkinghorne’s faith enables him to know that scientific exploration does not—and is not an attempt to—solve the mysteries of God but instead enables us to increase our appreciation and awe at the wonders of God’s creation while, conversely, the regressive theology of the God of the gaps, where ‘God’ is used as an excuse for all we do not yet know, only cheapens and denigrates the true depth and glory of all that is before us. He knows the limitlessness of God’s universe and is not afraid to use his intellectual gifts to explore it fully and to invite others to join him. This is a timely and useful book, good as a brief yet substantial and articulate introduction to the thought of one of the leading contemporary writers in the field of the interface between science and theology. The awarding of this year’s Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion to Arthur Peacocke and the increase in membership of the Oxford-based group of scientist-theologians are indicators of the current interest in this field of inquiry, and the Society of the Sacred Cross is to be commended for bringing us a valuable and accessible contribution from this borderland exploration.

SISTER HELEN NOVICE SLG

THE CIRCLING YEAR, Perspectives from a Country Parish by Ronald Blythe, with etchings by Robin Tanner. Canterbury Press, 2001. hb. £16.99

This is a delightful book. It is the kind of book to keep at hand for dipping into from time to time, and also for leaving on the bedside table in the guest-room for the benefit of one's visitors.

It is an almanac of sermons marking the changing seasons of the year, both natural and liturgical, preached (though the author says that he read them) at Mattins and Evensong in the churches of the three country parishes on the banks of the river Stour between Essex and Suffolk where the author-preacher serves as a Reader. And although they were originally conceived to be heard in church within a liturgical setting, these pieces transfer readily to the printed page, where of course they can be savoured and mulled over.

In these sermons there are occasional references to walking, including those famous walks around Galilee, or to the village named Emmaus. And perhaps the reader might feel that the preacher is taking us on a gentle stroll around his beloved local countryside. He pauses from time to time to point out a favourite view or to make a remark about the weather, or about the flowers and trees. And we move from the dark of winter into the exuberance of spring, through the fullness of summer into the ripeness of autumn.

Readers of Ronald Blythe, whether of his weekly pieces in the Church Times, or of his larger books, will know that he has the observant and loving eye of the born countryman. And by the same token it can be said that his is also the eye of the poet. His observations both of people and places, and times and seasons, are expressed succinctly and felicitously. His style is as lucid and as refreshing as spring water.

His delight in the things and creatures and people of the countryside is evident on practically every page. And so it is not surprising that we find ourselves in the company of such figures as George Herbert, Thomas Traherne, John Clare and William Cowper, and others who, in our English tradition, loved and

celebrated the beauty of the English landscape. And along with the poets there are the hymnodists, ranging from Prudentius to Mrs Alexander and C.A. Alington.

And in the best Anglican tradition these sermons are soaked in Scripture and in the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer. There are thumbnail sketches of a variety of figures from the Bible. Among them we meet Stephen the Deacon and first martyr, the Apostles Peter and Paul, Martha of Bethany (for whom the preacher clearly has a soft spot), Jeremiah the Prophet, and the admirable lady in the Book of Proverbs whose price is above rubies. And various saints put in an appearance too, particularly those who belong to England—St Alban, St Swithin and the Lady Julian of Norwich.

Here is a preacher who respects his hearers and engages with them. He is not in the least patronising, he does not talk down to his congregation, and he is not censorious or given to denunciation. His exposition of Scripture is done with a light touch and with imagination, and he makes connections with everyday life, with such things as a notorious novel, a speaker on ‘Thought for the Day’, instruction manuals, as well as some of the various occasions which go to make up parish life in the countryside.

Although he has very little to say about the horrors which have overtaken so much of rural life in recent times—the closure of village schools and shops, the industrialisation of agriculture, the effect of Brussels bureaucracy on the countryside—he is not unaware of the tragedy of so much of what goes on in our world, and of the cruelty and barbarism of human history, not least in our own times. But his tone is always one of compassion rather than of condemnation. Perhaps his saddest comment, and a very enlightening one for those of us who live in urban settings, is that somehow the countryside has lost heart, and now that agriculture is mechanised it is no longer a communal enterprise and undertaking; for better or for worse, the days are gone when the whole village would turn out to help the local farmers with the harvest.

The book is handsomely produced, and is enhanced by the delightful etchings of the late Robin Tanner. The tone of it is caught

perfectly by the reproduction on the dust-jacket of Samuel Palmer's 'Coming from Evening Church', one of the loveliest celebrations of faith in the English countryside.

ERIC SIMMONS CR

REVOLUTION, RELIGION, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY. Imperial Anglicanism in British North America, 1745-1795 by Peter M. Doll, Associated University Presses, 2000. £38.00.

Peter Doll introduces this study of the complex relationship between the Church of England, the British Government and the North American colonies in the years leading up to and following the War of Independence with the claim that it is '... an attempt to understand ... religious policy on its own terms'. By this is simply meant that it may be helpful, first, to investigate the possibility that a substantial number of eighteenth century Churchmen continued to understand their civil polity in Richard Hooker's terms of a unity embracing both the civil and religious aspects of establishment, and, secondly, to understand the long campaign for the establishment of a colonial episcopate in terms not of political manoeuvring, but of sincere theological conviction. This work can therefore be seen as a further, and very effective, contribution to the recent scholarly effort to reconstruct our understanding of the Church of England during the 'long' eighteenth century.

This is a book of major importance, which calls into serious doubt the casually accepted orthodoxies of writers such as Carl Bridenbaugh (*Mitre & Sceptre*, 1962) and Judith Fingard (*The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova-Scotia*, 1972). Doll makes effective use of an abundance of archival sources, in Britain, France, Canada and the United States, and produces much fresh material: information from the Inglis family papers at Hope Bowdler Hall in Shropshire is especially interesting. With his well-established understanding of the character of pre-Tractarian High Churchmanship, Doll is well placed to set this study in the wider context of a theological tradition stretching from Hammond, Bramhall, Ussher and Fell to Wake, Potter, Gibson and Secker, and

to show how continuing concern for the welfare of the episcopal clergy in the North American colonies was nurtured by the Church of England's sustained attempt to find a pattern for its own identity in the practices of the primitive church during the earliest centuries of the Christian era, above all by insisting on episcopal oversight, apostolic ministry and doctrinal orthodoxy. Such teaching was, of course, anathema not only to presbyterians, congregationalists and other sectarians in North America, but also to English dissenters, who retained a curiously powerful influence on British policy, despite their doctrinal heterodoxy and growing numerical weakness.

Circumstances for the Church in Canada were, of course, different from those in the North American colonies, and Doll provides a thorough review of both aspects of the subject. In Canada, he shows how the haphazard and voluntary nature of the Anglican missionary tradition placed Britain at a disadvantage in relation to the French, whose government had from the outset seen missionary work as a vital instrument of colonial consolidation, with such good effect that during the Seven Years' War Governor-General Duquesne calculated that the Sulpician Abbé Francois Picquet was 'worth more than ten regiments'. Such disadvantages, already experienced in Acadia before the taking of Quebec, were suddenly compounded after 1759. However, the British ecclesiastical response (based on a very interesting precedent set at Minorca in 1720) was as sensible and imaginative as political constraints would permit, and Doll argues persuasively that the intention of those who eventually framed the Quebec Act was not, in fact, to offer toleration to an alien religious system in a spirit of liberal indifference, but, rather, to seek, deliberately and by degrees, to assimilate a 'Gallican' church within the Anglican Establishment. The earlier experience of Archbishop William Wake and the French canon Pierre le Courayer indicated that such hopes were not necessarily ill-founded: few could have predicted the emergence of a revived Ultramontanism in response to events after 1789

In the North American colonies, concern to provide resident bishops to counteract the democratic, republican and separatist teachings of the New England dissenters had originated with

Archbishop Laud. Doll's description of events over the next century and a half reveals a familiar story of frustration, but in new detail and with fresh emphases. The efforts of Samuel Johnson and Myles Cooper, the first two presidents of King's College, New York, are placed within a tradition of campaigning, both by earlier colonial governors, such as John Hart of Maryland in 1714, and by the extremely influential Yale seceders of 1722, whose episcopalian convictions are shown to have derived in large measure from study of the Fathers. Even more interestingly, Doll casts new light on the campaign for a colonial episcopate that was sustained at the highest level within the Church of England, not only by recognised High Church bishops such as Edmund Gibson, Thomas Sherlock and Thomas Secker, but also by others, such as Archbishop Thomas Herring. Equally remarkably, he also shows that government ministers, such as the 2nd Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary for the Colonies in 1774, could sometimes give active encouragement to the Church's cause, only (as usual) to be overtaken by events.

Eventually it was only after British rule in the North American colonies had come to an end in 1783 that the long-standing wishes of both American and English churchmen on both sides of the Atlantic for the creation of a 'purely spiritual' and 'primitive' episcopate could be fulfilled. Progress was then rapid, with the consecration (in response to American demands) of Samuel Seabury in Scotland in 1784 and of William White and Samuel Provoost in England in 1787 being quickly followed by the establishment of the first British colonial bishopric in Nova Scotia, and the consecration of Charles Inglis in August 1787. Had this been accomplished any sooner—for example, at the time when George Berkeley was attempting to set up his College at Newport, Rhode Island in 1728-31—it is tempting to speculate just how different everything else might have been.

RICHARD SHARP

CHRIST THE GOLDEN-BLOSSOM: A Treasury of Anglo-Saxon Prayer by Douglas Dales, Canterbury Press, 2001. £9.99.

As citizens of the western world we hardly need reminding that ours is an almost entirely secularised environment. And yet, living within it, we find ourselves surrounded at every turn by signs and vestiges of a different view of the world, which must once have been important; a view in which it came naturally to their founders to give to churches, institutions, even cities, the names of men and women whose reputed friendship with God made their patronage and protection desirable, or whose miraculous deeds deserved to be remembered in perpetuity. These men and women are almost all members of the communion of saints, and many of them were natives of Britain. In particular, the kingdoms established by the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the sixth and seventh centuries and brought into the western fold of Christendom by the missionary endeavours of St Augustine and his successors, came to be distinguished by a whole galaxy of saints.

It would be hard to find a more alluring way into that vanished world than this book. Much more than an anthology, it is in fact a *vademecum*, certain to delight those for whom some commerce with the past enhances their sense of kinship with companions in the faith outside the divisions of time. It will also be an eye-opener to any who are inclined to dismiss the Anglo-Saxon centuries as barbaric or dull. With the skill of one long familiar with his sources, both Latin and Anglo-Saxon, Douglas Dales has compiled a sequence of texts and images from the liturgy, poetry, hagiography and religious art of that age which is both scholarly and thoroughly reader-friendly.

Ending his straightforward, informative Introduction with a section on 'How to use this book', Douglas Dales says of the many beautiful prayers he has included: 'They are intended ... to enlarge our vision of the Church and the reality of heaven.' It could be added that this intention is fulfilled in the book as a whole. A rough, island society, inured to isolation and aggression, is shown here in

the security of its knowledge that on earth it is part of the commonwealth of faith, and that its citizenship is in heaven. The intensity of Anglo-Saxon devotion to Christ and his Saints is expressed in the beauty of pictorial art, in artefacts of exquisite workmanship, and in the sometimes inspired achievements of a young vernacular literature.

The publishers are to be congratulated on applying to its presentation the skill and care which this book so fully deserves.

SISTER ISABEL MARY SLG

AMONG THE COPTS, by John H. Watson, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2000, illustrated. hb. £30.00.

John Watson points out in *Among the Copts* that ‘the largest and most influential of the ancient churches is the Coptic Orthodox Church’. Coptic Church tradition holds that the Church in Egypt was founded by St Mark the Apostle its blessedness having been already anticipated by the long sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt; dozens of sites where they stayed are holy places today in Egypt. The Copts, after more than thirteen hundred years of ‘deadly, daily discrimination’, make up about ten per cent of Egypt’s population. ‘It is believed’, Watson reports, ‘that an average of one hundred Copts per annum have been martyred in the last decade’, a fact grossly under-reported in the Western press and scandalously disregarded by the West in general.

Among the Copts is the best English language introduction to the Copts and their Church known to me. This is because Watson, an Anglican priest, both knows the Copts well (during four decades) and is not afraid to speak his mind. His blunter assessments (‘Spiritually the liturgy is too often weakened by the fact that ambitious men become monks solely because it is the only route to the episcopate’) raise the ticklish question of what right a Westerner and non-Copt has to make judgements about the Coptic Church, but I found him knowledgeable, sympathetic, insightful, and honest. His book is impressionistic rather than systematic, spiritual rather than scholarly. Instead of overwhelming the reader with masses of

(Arabic) names, dates, and details, in each of the book's nine chapters he chooses two or three subjects that illumine key aspects about the Copts and their Church. As a student and friend of the Copts, I found him especially enlightening on the struggle over the Coptic papacy, the Coptic Church in Africa, and the surprising influence of conservative Protestant thought on modern Coptic theology.

TIM VIVIAN

The Revd Tim Vivian is an Episcopalian priest in California and an independent scholar specialising in early Christian monasticism.

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press

Myra Poole SND, *Prayer, Protest Power: The Spirituality of Julie Billiart Today*. £11.99.

Raymond Chapman, *Following the Gospel through the Year*. £12.99.

From Darton, Longman, & Todd

Margaret Silf, *Wayfaring*. £9.95.

James Alison, *Faith beyond Resentment*. £10.95

From Continuum

Ed. Selina O'Grady and John Wilkins, *Spiritual Stars of the Millennium*. £9.99.

From SPCK

Mark Pryce, *Literary Companion to the Lectionary*. £9.99 (pb.).

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NOTICE—2002

**We regret that Bede House will be closed to visitors in June
and July, 2002 for renovations to Chapel and Library.**

NEW IN 2001 FROM SLG PRESS

ETERNITY AND TIME by Dumitru Staniloae. £2.00

PILGRIMAGE OF THE HEART by Benedicta Ward. £2.25

MIXED LIFE by Walter Hilton, translated into modern English by
Rosemary Dorward. £3.00

*IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD: The Teachings of Abba Isaiah
of Scetis* by Pachomios Penkett and John Chryssavgis. £2.00