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COMMUNITY NOTES

ON THE FEAST of the Presentation (Candlemas) Sr Christine celebrated 25 years in Life Profession, and the final day of her term of office as Prioress at Fairacres. It would be understandable, in view of the demanding role of the Prioress, if Sr Christine did *celebrate* the latter in some respects at least! Be that as it may, we are very grateful for all that she has done and been for us in the difficult task of keeping things going and looking after everyone at Fairacres for three years. I am aware of how much costly behind-the-scenes work that entails. Sr Christine flew out to St Isaac's in Easter week, and Sr Shirley Clare returned from there after a six-month stay. Sr Margaret Theresa was installed and blessed as Prioress on Sunday 3 February and has smoothly taken over that responsibility, manifesting the grace of office, as well as her own welcome gifts and skills.

Sr Diana made her Profession in First Vows on 24 February, which meant that she began the 10-day retreat beforehand on Ash Wednesday. The context of a desert journey, where meanings shift and the presence of an awesome void is palpable, is not unfitting as a preparation for following Christ bound by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. But if Profession can feel like a leap into the void, it is also a leap into life, and the joy and simplicity of that was unmistakable on 24 February. It was recognisable again on 14 April (the third Sunday of Easter) when Sr Eilidh of the Light of God made her Profession in First Vows, with many friends of all ages in attendance. Sr Helen of the Mercy and Truth of God will make her Profession in First Vows on Whitsunday and we look forward with her to that. How blessed we are! For the Revd Mother, accompanying Sisters in their preparation for Profession is one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of her office.

This year we renewed our friendship with the American congregation of the Society of St John the Evangelist when two of the brothers made personal retreats at Fairacres during Lent, and Sr Helen stayed with them at the Monastery in Cambridge for Holy

Week and Easter. We rejoice in this continuing friendship and value it very much.

Please pray for our newly professed Sisters, and also for Sister Noel of the True Vine, now Rosemary Noel Lee, whom the Chapter released from her membership of this Community at the beginning of February. This was at her own request, made after much heart-searching and a number of years' experience of living away from the common life in community. For Noel and for us such a grave decision is hard and involves a sense of loss on both sides, but we rejoice with her that the way forward came peacefully clear to all of us. We are thankful too for her nineteen years in SLG – and for her stay at Boxmoor for Lent and Easter, to help the household there, as soon as she became a lay person again! That is a lovely witness to our continuing fellowship in the body of Christ. Now, as I write, we are preparing to say good bye to Sr Teresa Irene of the Heart of God (Irene Perkins) as she leaves our novitiate to continue her religious life in the USA. We pray that she too will find lines of continuity between what she has experienced in SLG during her time with us, and the life she is embarking on.

We had the Oblates Chapter day at Fairacres on 5 March and the majority of Sisters were able to attend, either for that day alone or as part of a longer stay. As we have at present a number of relatively new Oblates, this was a welcome opportunity for old hands and new ones to share in some intimacy and depth about the Oblates Sisters' vocation. On 22 February Oblate Sister Liz had made her First Promises, and on 28 February (Revd)Louise Lancaster was admitted as a postulant Oblate.

Chronicle readers are accustomed to read in these Notes about comings and goings and events in the lives of Sisters. But it is becoming evident that, these days, Community Notes are incomplete without some mention of the staff on whom we now depend for our daily life in many respects. In one way this is not new. Even when the Community observed a strict enclosure we were necessarily dependent upon the services of those around us, and we needed help in the garden at Fairacres, witness a story which goes back to the time when 'help in the garden' included looking

after the cow. The Sisters were making enquiries as to the suitability of a lad called George and asked his mother if he had any relevant experience. She assured them—and she turned out to be right—that having kept a parrot he would be just right for the job! George stayed for many years and became a friend who, after his retirement, came back to see us each year on the Feast of the Dedication. Ron the gardener at Burwash, and his family who lived in the Lodge, were similarly part of the life of the Community for many years.

From the beginning, when Fr Hollings SSJE was instrumental in founding the Community, the role of the priests who serve us has been recognised and extremely significant. The Chaplain General, (later this title was changed to 'the Warden'), was seen as a vital link with the wider church, all the more important when Sisters' contact with anyone outside was severely limited. Today Fr David Barton, our present Warden, who introduced himself in the last *Chronicle*, is closely involved in the life of the Community, as is Fr John Scott, the chaplain at Bede House. Fr John has been at Bede House longer than any of the Sisters now resident there and his ministry and presence is a vital part of the place.

Now at Fairacres we are fortunate to have Mark as our gardener of eighteen years standing; his enthusiasm for gardening is matched by his expertise and hard work. Fewer and fewer Sisters are able to help him in the garden, but we all appreciate its beauty – apple-blossom time this year promises to crown an exceptionally beautiful spring. We also, of course, all enjoy the abundance and variety of its produce, from parsley to pumpkins, from fritillaries to french beans; and, always, apples in all their variety and varieties. Des helps part-time in the garden at Bede House, and Neil at Boxmoor, but Mark is our only full time employee.

Towards the end of last year we decided it was time to invite all our Fairacres staff to meet the Community and each other, and it was impressive that there could have been thirteen staff there in all, including those who come to us through an agency. I am not going to enumerate them all, but Annie, Secretary to the SLG Charitable Trust and our administrator/bursar, deserves a special mention for

the vital and untiring professional work done on our behalf. We and she have been very happy to have Elaine working as Annie's assistant this last year; Elaine and her husband Robert, who has been our occasional handyman, are now in the throes of moving to Illfracombe. We will miss them and hope they will be happy in their new home, and as Robert begins his ministry. Julia continues to help us part-time in the bursary, joined now by Rachel the new member of the team.

St Raphael's wing, where our senior Sisters live, is another area in which we are dependent upon lay staff. It is a relatively new departure for us to have our own nurse, Leonora, who comes in twice a week; Sally and other agency workers also come to help with care as required, and that is a service we have long been grateful to call on. Helen makes our habits and sews for us; Denise and Lynn are 'cleaning operatives' (!) Since Easter we have said good bye to Dawn who made the difficult choice between working for SLG, which she loved, (true to her name she arrived at 5 a.m. and worked like a Trojan until 2.00) and moving to Blackpool. In the end, Fairacres couldn't compete with the lure of the lights, but Dawn won a place in our hearts and is already something of a legend. We wouldn't be at all surprised if she doesn't somehow get us all up to Blackpool too eventually.

It is hardly news that we have builders on the premises again, this time doing essential work in 44 and 46 Fairacres Road. The property at Fairacres is much like the Forth Bridge in the attention it needs, and looking after maintenance has been a large part of Sr Margaret Theresa's responsibilities in recent years. For this, she and we rely heavily on the care that Paul, our regular builder, and his team gives to us.

Reading all the above, and reading between the lines a bit, will give you an insight into dimensions of the lives of the Sisters of the Love of God which may strike you as surprising. Are we getting a bit worldly? What is the monastic life coming to? Leonora remarked recently that she is used to living, in the context of the NHS, in a highly *regulated* environment. That is true of us too, but the 'regula'

in our case has been a monastic rule, rather than health and safety requirements or employment legislation.

Within the Convent we have expected to be free to order our lives so as to pray them, and to support each other in vowed following of Christ. We have been able to be somewhat counter-cultural, at the same time, it must be said, as benefiting from the society of which we are part. But we have never been self-sufficient. Now as we continue to work on re-stating our way of life and its rationale in a new Rule, the context in which we find ourselves in the 21st century is a constant challenge. If anything, the call to 'go out into the desert and stand before God' seems more urgent than ever. It is there that we can expect to be strengthened in the conviction that the world is God's, and the object of his love.

If we can grasp that, the changing landmarks and boundaries of our life will not dismay us. Or, if they do, dismay itself can take us to the 'Ground of our beseeching'

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

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RIP

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HOMILY AT THE EASTER VIGIL

As the first day of the week was dawning: (Matthew 28:1)

DAVID BARTON

EVERY DAWN is wonderful. I saw not long ago a photograph taken by a camera deep in space. Somehow it had captured the dawn of a new galaxy far away on the very margins of the universe, seconds after the explosion that gave it birth. A vast, beautiful cloud of gas and rock, millions of light years across, simply hanging against the darkness of outer space. In it was everything needed for the creation of planets and life forms of infinite variety. Whole worlds were there—endless possibilities. Beautiful but awesome.

There is something of that in Matthew's account of the resurrection morning. He alone records an earthquake, but each of the gospels has a narrative like this one, where the women (always the women) come to the tomb as the sun begins to rise, and the men linger behind, reluctant almost to be seen in the light. Fear and hesitation and awe are as much part of the narrative as the joy. Why?

At every dawn the darkness lingers. And in these accounts it must reflect the original experience: the sheer despair and hell of the previous days. The possibility that the supreme good in Jesus, the hope that was woken in these his friends, may simply have been overwhelmed in his putting to death. When the darkness is really dark like that, the light brings its own difficulties. And that is a piece of knowledge we all share: how often have we felt ourselves poised between hope and fear, trust and despair, light and darkness. That is the darkness which is the real source of fear in these accounts. Hell is not something with which God threatens me to bring me into line. Hell is a truth about me, consequent on the freedom God has given me. It is the fear that my own private province of the kingdom of the lie, which always threatens, will overwhelm. That fear follows me about like a shadow. The darkness is familiar territory.

But, he was crucified, dead and buried, and *he descended into hell.* And there is that other image of Jesus harrowing hell. To

harrow is to break up land, the hard soil, the lumps that make fertility impossible; it is to work the land until it is ready to be fruitful. The discovery of this Easter morning is that Christ has conquered death and entered our darkness, and even there he has never for one moment lost the love and life and vitality that was God's life in him. Walking through that whole dark territory he has turned it into land that is fruitful. That is the miracle of the Resurrection. Not just that Christ dies and rises again for love of us—though that is miracle enough, but that he makes it possible for us to be alive—truly to live, beyond fear and beyond failure, and to draw on our own darkness as a resource for living. That is the gift of the resurrection, a gift beyond all telling.

And a gift that is totally unexpected. No wonder Matthew speaks of an earthquake—for it is an explosion of meanings and possibilities where we would put no meaning or possibility at all. Whole worlds are here that we have never dreamed of, new chances for life and living. The discovery of this dawning day is that, in the vast space of Creation, all times and all places are God's. The threat of death is empty, as the tomb was empty. The shadows we fear are places of his presence—the place of his silent secret work to bring us to fruitfulness. And the rising sun is not something from which we need hide, but the means of our growth into his glory. Only one thing is asked of us—that we face the light of his rising, and allow our shadow to be behind us. And to say always to ourselves: 'Christ is risen: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!'

REFLECTIONS ON THE DIABOLIC

An Orthodox Perspective

ALEXANDRU POPESCU

In this article we intend to present a Romanian view of the 'problem of evil', based on personal experiences under Communism. Rather than embarking on a theoretical discussion of theodicy,[1] we shall follow Victor Iliescu's endeavour to explain why human beings did allow evil to occur under Communist tyranny and how 'co-operation' with this system has had disastrous consequences for Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the 1989 'Stolen Revolution', he stresses the importance of repentance in our overcoming of evil in all its forms, including the misuse of human freedom.

Introduction

In an earlier article I gave a brief account of the Soviet experiment of re-education through torture and the religious experiences of political prisoners in Romania in the aftermath of World War II.[2] Paradoxically, the attempt to force them to renounce their faith and national identity and to accept the externally-imposed mould of 'Soviet man' had the effect of deepening their awareness of God. The system that sought to eradicate their sense of divine mystery became the arena of a martyrdom in which human beings were transfigured in deification: a condition of mystical union with that love that is God's very being.

Even after the events of 1989, insidious forms of re-education are still in operation, either by default, or on the rebound, or simply because the mind-set of a great number of people ('new men') is still affected by 'the spiritual crimes of Communism'.[3] The

[1] Theodicy is defined as 'an account of reasons why God might allow evil to occur': Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. x.

[2] See Alexandru Popescu, 'Tradition as the Transfigured Cross', *Fairacres Chronicle*, 34:1, Spring 2001, pp. 14-22.

[3] Yuri Karayakin quoted in Philip Boobbyer, 'The Moral Lessons of Soviet History: the Experience of Opposition to Evil', *Religion, State and Society*, 21:3 & 4, 1993, p. 357.

theological aspects of this phenomenon have been little explored by analysts on either side of the Iron Curtain.

Victor Iliescu: A Biographical Note

Professor Victor Iliescu is a significant exception to this absence of reflective inquiry. The son of a Romanian father and a German mother, he was born in 1923 in Cernowitz, the capital of Northern Bucovina which, after the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty of 23 August 1939, was annexed by Stalin in 1940. Iliescu studied in Bucharest where he graduated in philosophy in 1946. Before the final take-over by the Communists, which followed the 'nationalisation' (i. e. Sovietisation) of Romanian industry in 1948, he was able to teach only for one year at the University of Bucharest. Between 1950 and 1983 when he retired, he worked in the Theological Institute in Bucharest as Head Librarian and as a lecturer in German. Between 1969 and 1972 he worked also for the Centre of Documentation of the Romanian Academy. He participated as an interpreter in various meetings of the World Council of Churches.

Iliescu's Writings

Illiescu could publish his writings only after the 'Stolen Revolution' of 1989, at a time when he was already in poor health. Among his books two are of great importance as theological reflections on the experience of totalitarianism. Their significance extends beyond the borders of Romania, for Iliescu thinks and writes as a European whose analysis can contribute to the understanding of the human condition at the turn of the millennium.

First in order of publication is *The Phenomenology of the Diabolic,*[4] in which he sets out to identify the root evil of Romanian society and 'to wake up my contemporaries'. The second book, entitled *The Three Excuses and Our Post-Totalitarian Human Condition*,[5] is a self-critical analysis and confession of the evils of

[4] *Fenomenologia Diabolicului* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1995) (abbr. PD).
[5] *Cele Trei Alibiuri si Conditia Noastra Umana Posttotalitara* (Bucharest: Vitruviu, 1999).

'post-Communist' Romanian society. Iliescu's approach is original in that, unlike fundamentalist theologians from former Soviet countries, he acknowledges that evil is within ourselves and refuses to regard Eastern European peoples simply as victims of neglect and lack of interest on the part of the West.

Iliescu combines a Hegelian approach to the historical and individual development of the human spirit with a theological view of the world, centred on the Eucharist. He suggests that we cannot be saved, as persons or as nations, unless we look critically at ourselves, from a position of repentance, confession, and desire to change. His books address those people in Eastern Europe who have the courage to engage in self-examination and to assess their situation after the Communist era with dignity, wisdom, and hope for the future. Iliescu's books are no less relevant to those who live under more subtle forms of totalitarianism such as the dominance of mass-media and the crushing imposition of global culture.

Phenomenology of the Diabolic

1 *Spiritual power versus diabolical force*

In Iliescu's vision, the divine can afford to be weak—even extremely weak—as an implicit expression of its power:

> In this resides the significance of Christ's death on the Cross. His death is the expression of an infinite power of the Spirit whereby, in dying, not only does He not perish, but He is raised from the dead. The power of the Spirit is the mark of an immeasurable difference between the diabolic and the divine.[6]

The diabolic does not depend merely on its force, for its force is not that of creation: all it can do is undermine, alter, relativise, and destroy. The diabolic employs brute force to counteract the power of the Spirit. This force is equivalent to total lack of spiritual power. According to Iliescu, the diabolic has an impetus to mimic the power of the Spirit and to move 'in parallel with God'. Occasionally, this parallel movement takes a certain direction, which somehow diverges from God.

[6] PD, p. 38.

> But the diabolic has no effective way of opposing God, precisely because of its fundamental parallelism with God. The diabolic is invariably harmful and is always bent on destruction. But in no way can the diabolic set up a creation in direct opposition to God's creation. The diabolic is nothing more than *para-theosis*—that which withstands the divine. Therefore, the diabolic can neither harm God, nor can it make itself quite like God. Dependent on this parallelism, as a *para-theotic* reality, the diabolic finally becomes a sort of caricature of God.[7]

For Iliescu, the diabolic is not, properly speaking, the opposite of God. It tries by every means to duplicate God, 'like His shadow'. This duplication gets the diabolic into a position from which it can somehow move in parallel with God, in order to appropriate his absolute power or at least to overshadow it.

2 *Caricature of God*

The parallelism between the diabolic and the divine is intended to lead, at some point, to a convergence by distorting the divine Absolute. Invariably,

> this imitation fails. Although resumed again and again (*perseverare diabolicum est*), it is in no way relevant. The diabolic represents only a caricature of God, which requires it to adopt a certain mask, to avoid vanishing into the primordial nothingness preceding God's creation.
>
> By means of this caricature, the category of *distortion* enters the world. The immediate correlative of distortion is *corruption*. As an inseparable mixture of good and evil, distortion represents a denial of evil. Evil has no other way of standing face to face with the uneclipsed and unassailable integrity of the good. The law of opposites no longer functions here; or more precisely, it is irrelevant: it *exists*, but it makes no more difference than if it did not.[8]

Iliescu is speaking with reference to the diabolic, about the category of *as-if-it-did-not-exist.* Understood solely as a remedy for corruption, acting with justice can be confused and lost in the anonymity of a natural gesture. This normal gesture obscures the

[7] PD, pp. 24-25.
[8] PD, p. 202.

reality of justice as an attribute of God, wrongly placing it within the domain of the natural.

> But when you try to add that tiny imponderable which is necessary for justice to become effective, you often fall into excess. And excess, or *lack of measure*, belongs to the diabolic.[9]

In this way the diabolic hides itself and survives as a parasite, beyond its own caricature which is now only a protean mask, one among countless others. As a result, Iliescu writes, life becomes a continuous carnival, with a blurred intermingling of virtues and vices, through which both the denial and the affirmation of the good are reduced to ambiguity. As a category, ambiguity tends to deny and hinder the free activity of the Spirit.

> The good can be opposed to evil. But only the divine can be opposed to the diabolic, only the grace which reduces the diabolic to nothingness, or which shows it up as God's caricature.[10]

By definition, caricature thickens its object grotesquely, using exaggeration to rebuild an identity by deforming it. In the case of the diabolic, however, Iliescu speaks of an extremely refined caricature, which is not over-emphasised. Moreover, it is neither presented nor perceived as a caricature, since it does not have any identity as such.

3 *The diabolic as a roundabout denial of God*

Iliescu insists that the diabolic does not deny God in an obvious, direct or straightforward manner, but by a huge, hidden, and obscure detour, making use of the carnival mentioned above:

> The way round is so huge that the denial of God appears to be lost. Eventually, it no longer has any substance as a denial. It is precisely here that the diabolic comes very close to that affirmative *Fiat lux*, with which God summons His creation into being, as the utterance of His omnipotent and all-loving mystery. The hidden, roundabout way of the diabolic denial of God is a specific caricature of the divine mystery.[11]

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[9] PD, p. 203.
[10] PD, p. 32.
[11] PD, p. 204.

Iliescu stresses that the diabolic is not capable of authentic *imitatio Christi*.[12] If it were, it would cease to be itself. The truth of the paradox *whoever wants to win must lose* (cf. Matt 16:25) is foreign to it. The diabolic does not know how to lose. This is demonstrated in the ever more ferocious attacks which it makes on Christians who are advancing on their way to perfection (*theosis*).

> The diabolic includes both evil and good in a coincidence of opposites. As a result, evil can appear as though it were good, and vice versa.[13]

According to Iliescu, the polarity between good and evil allows them to overlap. Thus a clear front line in its struggle against evil is denied to mankind, for even when it begins as a struggle to overcome evil, there is always the risk of harming the good in the attempt.

> By borrowing the mask of evil, the diabolic runs the risk of being ignored or resisted. This does not matter when the mask is protecting the diabolic. This mask however cannot be permanent. In other words, the mask cannot be con-substantial with the diabolic; if it were, the mask would be without meaning and would lose its very *raison d'être,* which is to unleash the tribulations whose source is in the diabolic. Sooner or later, the diabolic becomes more vulnerable, until it is suddenly exposed.
>
> This is the moment when the diabolic detaches itself from the mask, precisely in order to preserve its meaning, identity and function. In such moments the foundation for a phenomenology of the diabolic is made available to us. We *have* such experiences of the diabolic, but we never possess it as a given object. When we *think* that we have got hold of the diabolic, we have lost our ability to speak as free persons. For it is the Other which then possesses us. This is why gifts offered to us in moments of grace should be shared with others and handed over, again and again, until there comes a given moment, never known in advance, when it is enough to say in truth: 'Only say the word, and my soul shall be healed'. A counter-measure, such as giving away all your

[12] PD, p. 205.
[13] PD, p. 9.

> possessions in order to save your soul, does not work in the case of the diabolic which possesses you.[14]

Iliescu tries to find the true measure of the diabolic, focusing both on its deceptive game under the mask of evil, and on the fundamental distinction between the diabolic and evil. For him the diabolic cannot be understood as a certain *object*, for it is not a datum. It is an object only in the sense of a diffuse entity, which lacks precisely the condition of given existence. The diabolic hides under its very imitation of God.[15] It is an integral part of the denial of God, while trying to be parasitic on the good.

4 *Atheism: true and false*

Atheism tends to be misunderstood as anti-theism. The latter, in Iliescu's view, is no longer under the sign of the diabolic, but under that of badness, stupidity, and brutishness. The fact that anti-theism and atheism are mutually confused, not between themselves but in the popular mind, is eventually to the advantage of the diabolic.
The 'killing of God', proclaimed by Nietzsche's 'Madman',[16] coincides with the death of the diabolic. As long as the diabolic can be unmasked, or leaves suspicious traces, there is also an indication that God is not dead either. According to Iliescu an *atheism* (i.e. non-belief in God) which is really only *anti-theism* (i.e. a frontal attack on God) does not suit the diabolic. Only an authentic atheism (which is bound to acknowledge God but rejects Him) can satisfy the diabolic, by enabling the co-existence of diabolic and divine.

> This co-existence itself forms the ontological foundation of a *true atheism* whose aim is, among other things, to overshadow and blot out the divine power. A certain lack of practical efficiency in atheism invigorates the diabolic.[17]

Because of an alleged 'friendship' between humanity and God, there is a false dependence on God which, according to Iliescu, worms its way into human life taking the form of a surrogate faith

[14] PD, p. 10.
[15] See PD, pp. 14-15.
[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs,* trans. and commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 181.
[17] PD, p. 51.

in God. The diabolic 'enjoys' mankind's 'friendship' with God. For, it is precisely by such a 'friendship' and spurious proximity to God, that atheism is sustained. While God exists in His sovereign and untouchable reality, the diabolic only exists in total dependence on its hatred of God.

5 *Adversary or enemy?*

Because of this dependence, the diabolic always misses the deep mystery of God, that is to say, the most unseen part of God, against which it is powerless. For Iliescu, no material force can undermine or usurp divine authority. However,

> the diabolic has a number of ways of conserving its force. Among these, there is the straightforward attempt to reduce everything to the dilemma: *friend* or *enemy*. But existence of the divine is outside this dilemma. This *outsideness* indicates another order of things and a dimension of divine being which is entirely other than the diabolic.[18]

Iliescu makes a distinction between *enemy* and *adversary*: it is diabolical to try to destroy an adversary, for his role is to show you indirectly where your relative strengths and weaknesses lie. You need to know this in order to thrive in the Spirit and grow in humility and repentance. It is diabolical to treat someone as a deadly enemy, without having first of all confronted him as an adversary:

> Not every adversary is also an enemy … Criticism has no meaning for an enemy, but only for an adversary. But, when criticism is debased to the level of hatred, then it already belongs to the diabolic. The most natural victory is won in the battle against an adversary, which puts you to the test … But the diabolic is not aimed at such competitive victories because, in natural conditions, victory is natural and therefore it also merges with the natural—it vanishes within the natural and no longer exists; it is provisional, overtaken by other equally natural victories.[19]

[18] PD, p. 39.
[19] PD, p. 47.

Conclusion

In the last of his eleven *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx states that 'philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it'. The whole programme of changing the world is based on a fundamental idea, expressed in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, that 'man's consciousness changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence'.[20] According to Engels, 'the natural world is prior to and causally independent of any form of mind or consciousness, and not the reverse'.[21] The stress on the priority of the material over the spiritual world is definitive for dialectical and historical materialism. Matter is defined by Marxist philosophy as a category designating objective reality, which exists independent of consciousness:

> Matter is *uncreated* and *indestructible*, *infinite* both in time and space, and in its features and forms of manifestation.[22]

During the re-education and unmasking process in Romanian political prisons, the blatant wickedness of the torture inflicted made it easy *there* to distinguish between good and evil. Evil had so to speak (or thought it had) a free hand and launched a direct attack on the divine by striving to eradicate the identity of the prisoners, including the image and likeness of God in which they were created. Thus, for a while the system even corrupted the moral consciousness of those whom torture and brain-washing had crushed into compliance with the system, despite their innate ability to distinguish between good and evil.

Once released from prison and dispersed throughout society, such 're-educated' persons behaved, phenomenologically speaking,

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[20] *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 489.

[21] *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.326.

[22] *Dictionar de Filozofie*, ed. by Pavel Apostol et al. (Bucharest: Editura Politica, 1978), p. 448. Italics are mine. They emphasise the fact that matter, in Marxist terms, takes over the attributes of the Christian God, starting with His uncreatedness. The uncreated character of divine energies (which are accessible to created humanity as vision of God's glory in the flesh of Christ) is fundamental to the Orthodox theology of the deification of humanity and transfiguration of the created world, taught by St Gregory Palamas in the 14th century.

as tools of a diabolic system. While they asserted their newly-acquired ideology and acted in its spirit, the distinction for them between virtue and vice had become so blurred that they were incapable of any moral evaluation. The destruction of social order and hierarchy and the replacement of values with non-values are typical of the Marxist-Leninist programme.

When the enemy takes up residence in the house of your soul, it distorts the likeness to God which governs your moral choices. So the invisible combat with evil becomes more difficult. Also it becomes harder to act in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount—to love your enemy—for now you confuse the (human) adversary with the (diabolical) enemy whom you must withstand. It is harder to pin down and penetrate the disguise of the diabolic enemy in circumstances of so-called freedom, than it is to face naked evil inside a political prison.

Within this framework the new martyrs under Communist persecution tirelessly reiterated their belief in the sovereignty of the One Holy God and the power of the spirit over matter. Their testimony should be understood primarily as an exorcism of the diabolic, rather than as ideological tenacity or the self-vindication of political dissidents. The power of the Christian spirit discerns the diabolic nature of atheistic Communism in doctrine and practice beneath its quasi-divine appearance as utopia, and can be seen to denounce it as an instrument of evil still to be reckoned with in the contemporary world.

Without minimising the importance of the Marxist critique of the autonomy of conscience, we have also to recognise that in the New Testament there is deep suspicion of conscience as a safe space where God can speak to humanity: conscience is infinitely corruptible (Tit.1:15). Indisputable is the fact, that it was the experience of their materiality (as people who had been humiliated, whose bodies were tortured) which brought these martyrs to the knowledge of God. Their faith was tested to the uttermost, not by catechetical teaching or theological discourse, but by wounds inflicted on their own flesh by their fellow-men.

Under a tyranny, Iliescu concludes, people experience the diabolical caricature of an omnipotent God. The diabolic often 'warms up', as it were, with a sweeping abolition of a whole scale of dynamic values, which it replaces with the myth of an omnipotent tyrant who can do whatever he likes with his subjects. For Iliescu, apocalypse signifies 'the end of image as a category, and of all that is imaginable'.[23] Apocalyptic imagery enables the truly spiritual person to go behind the letter which kills and to understand the things of God in the Spirit who gives freedom and life (II Cor. 3:6). Iliescu suggests that these images are significant inasmuch as they mediate God's promise of life in his Kingdom, and alert us to our human potential for that positive change which leads to the annihilation of fallen principalities and powers (Col. 2:15), just when their dominion over the earth seems to be complete. Iliescu's 'end of image' is a reminder that the dark delusions of the contemporary world amount to nothing in the light of the Last Judgement. In that eschatalogical light, we shall see face to face and know as we are known (I Cor. 13:12); while, even in this world, faith frees us from the terrifying memories of Gulag and Shoah, and from the illusion of a world empty of God and ruled by a demiurge. The apocalyptic perspective becomes 'a substitute for the Apocalypse, in other words, for the vision of Tabor in which the diabolic is dissolved in the immanence of eternal, uncreated light'.[24] It draws us towards the Eucharistic banquet where repentance and forgiveness have the moral power to overcome apocalyptic evil, in the presence of Christ.

In a final article I shall explore in greater detail the implications[25] of Iliescu's phenomenology of the diabolic against the background of Communist tyranny in Romania.

[23] PD, p. 207.
[24] PD, p. 208. C.f. the words of the Greek Orthodox Rite, inviting the faithful to receive Holy Communion: 'In the fear of God, in faith and love, draw near!'
[25] PD, p. 208.

THE MAKING OF *THE CROSS AND THE BODHI TREE*

ALAN CHANNER

THE MONASTERY of Turtle Hill looks out over the rice fields and the minefields of north-west Cambodia. It was desecrated during 'the Pol Pot time', like nearly every other Buddhist monastery in the country. Today it has been rebuilt, and its ruined *stupas,* which house the ashes of the dead, have been refashioned in concrete.

Shortly after my father and I arrived at Turtle Hill, three nuns led us to the door of one of the new *stupas*. They told us it would be 'safer from thieves'. And so we found ourselves living in a room with a Buddhist shrine—talking by candlelight, taking baths out of an earthenware tub and sleeping on wooden boards above the ashes of the devout of a bygone time.

The next evening, there was a knock on our door. An orange-robed monk led me out into the dusk, down the sandy track that winds its way around Turtle Hill. Kerosene lamps flickered in the windows, and nuns in white robes paced back and forth in meditation, or sat on the steps of their huts chewing betel nut.

When we reached the monastery's crematorium, the monk suggested we meditate. The warm night air was trembling with an incessant chorus of crickets and frogs; popular music from the village was drifting on the breeze, and somewhere in the darkness an old monk was coughing, children were laughing and young students were chanting the Pali scriptures.

It was Christmas Eve. As I sat uncomfortably on the floor, I couldn't help wondering what my Christian friends would make of what I was doing.

Five years later, having directed and produced a documentary film on Christian encounters with Buddhism, my understanding of what was going on at Turtle Hill has deepened. Making the film has been a journey of spiritual growth.

It all started during the summer of 1996. *The Serene Life,* a film on peace-building in Cambodia which my father and I had made, had

just been screened at an MRA international conference in Caux, Switzerland. Shortly after the showing, I found myself drinking tea with an Australian businessman called John Wood.

'That film is a Buddhist film, isn't it?' John asked.

'Well, it's made for a Buddhist country,' I replied.

'So, what about you? Are you Christian?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Look, that's interesting,' he went on. 'I've lived in Asia for many years. I know many Asians who are good people but who are not Christians. However, back in my church in Melbourne, I'm told that all these other religions are on a loser. Now here at this conference, I can see that people of all faiths are welcome—and that's kind of nice. My question is, is it just nice or is it about what Jesus says in the Bible? What do you think?'

I replied that when I had asked a Buddhist monk how he found working alongside Christians, he had smiled and said, 'With the living Christ we have no problem.'

'Do you want to make a film on that?' asked Wood. 'On the Christ-like approach to non-Christians? I think it's important. You'll need money. I'll wire you a couple of grand. Call it burn money. Don't worry if you never succeed. It's worth a try.'

There was a magnitude to the idea and a lack of easy answers that began to fuel my interest.

I could think of only one person to consult on the feasibility of the concept—and so I found myself waiting rather tensely in a small sitting room at the Convent of the Incarnation, in Oxford. After about twenty minutes, Sister Rosemary breezed through the door. I'd expected a nun in a closed order to enter a room with rather less lightness of step.

I plunged in and said I'd come because I was looking for advice about whether to make a film on a Christ-like approach to Buddhism. Sister Rosemary threw her head back, laughed and said, 'Thank heavens I'm not expected to know about the Christ-like approach.' I was taken aback. 'One of the gifts of the contemplative

life is going more deeply into the unknown,' she continued, 'and into being known.'

After about an hour of conversation, she gave me her conclusion: 'I'm sure it would be good for you to look into a Christ-like approach to other religions, but I shouldn't worry whether or not you succeed in making a film.'

I walked out of the convent feeling slightly different about almost everything.

About one month later, Dr Christiania Whitehead, a researcher in her mid-twenties, made an appointment to visit our London studio. She'd been impressed by *The Serene Life* and was wondering if she could work with us on any future inter-faith project. I told her about our idea, and she suggested that a friend of hers, who had just finished his doctorate in theology at Oxford University, might like to help. He was on his way home to Melbourne in Australia. I met him briefly in his study and he gave me an overview of the differing approaches to religious pluralism.

Later that year my father and I were invited to present *The Serene Life* at a national seminar for politicians, soldiers, monks and educators in Cambodia. John Wood told us that he wanted to meet us there, but he never showed up.

We left Cambodia for Thailand disheartened. Then, on the eve of our return to London, a fax came from John asking if I could go to Melbourne to discuss progress on the film.

I paced up and down the Bangkok hotel room, with the air-conditioning on maximum, wondering how to respond. Solid progress on the film had been slight and my health had been poor. But I decided to go. The next day was a blur of travel offices, visa forms, taxi rides, traffic jams and a flight bound for Melbourne.

I met John Wood on the nineteenth floor of a towering office block. He told me about Robert Gribben, a theology professor, whom he was anxious for me to meet, and I told him about Christiania's friend, who lived in Kew. But I didn't have his phone number, which was apparently ex-directory.

'OK,' said John, 'let's just get in the car and go to Kew.'

It was a strange moment when I pressed the intercom buzzer next to a large iron garden gate and then recognised the responding voice. 'Um, hello,' I said. 'This is a bit strange, but we met a couple of months back in Oxford—I'm a friend of Christiania's—and I happen to be in Melbourne now and …' The garden gate opened.

Christiania's friend and his wife welcomed us like familiar acquaintances. It turned out that Robert Gribben was not only a mentor of theirs, but that he had married them!

We all went out to dinner with Robert Gribben in a Melbourne restaurant. Robert spoke warmly of Sister Rosemary's order and emphasised the significance of Christian-Buddhist encounter in south-east Asia. John Wood was impressed. The project was on.

I remember walking on air through a leafy suburb, enjoying the sharp Australian light, the sea breeze, and the songs of unfamiliar birds. 'Your ear shall hear a word behind you saying, "This is the way. Walk ye in it."'

I related this experience of 'Providence' to Christian friends in a fellowship group when I got home (although I avoided sharing the details of Christmas on Turtle Hill). They felt I must be on the right track. And yet the most significant intervention of Providence was still to unfold.

In May 1997, I heard that François Ponchaud, a French Catholic priest who had worked in Cambodia since 1965**,** would be visiting Paris. Realising that I would need an interpreter, I quite quickly realised I would need a particular interpreter, Mary Winstanley—not so much because she had already shown interest in my work as because she'd shown a vague interest in me. As it happened, she had already planned to be in France at that time.

Tea, supper and a four-hour conversation transpired. As he was leaving, Father Ponchaud looked back at us and said to me, with a wink: 'When you next need some interpreting, bring her to Cambodia.'

All the elements for an extraordinary dénouement were in place. Mary and I married and had a daughter, who was christened at the Convent of the Incarnation. Christiania became her godmother. Sister Rosemary was elected Mother Superior of the Sisters of the

Love of God and agreed to be interviewed for the film. Father Ponchaud also agreed to appear, and shortly afterwards was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the President of France for service to Cambodia.

Mary and I have worked together to produce *The Cross and the Bodhi Tree: Two Christian Encounters with Buddhism* for both Anglophone and Francophone audiences.

The film has been acclaimed by critics in New York and by senior figures in inter-faith work in both Paris and London. Perhaps most fulfilling, though, was the response of Monsignor Felix Machado, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Vatican. 'This is a very powerful film,' he said. 'Some of the images are extraordinary. It is a film on Christians encountering Buddhism positively and making sense of it. It is very helpful in our dialogue.'

My own journey with the film was, up to that point, immensely faith-giving. It all seemed so completely in the hands of Providence, that it was never possible to look back and claim, 'I did it.' And yet to leave the story there would be to leave it half-told. For a great giving by Providence was followed by a great stripping away.

An early intimation that work was needed on my ego emerged during the filming of Mother Rosemary. As our interview with her got underway, we began to experience technical problems that might seriously compromise the quality of the result.

Mother Rosemary noticed me getting intensely aggravated and remarked, 'It's not up to you. Let God work through you. You don't need to hold it all. Relax!'

However much Providence had blessed me—or perhaps partly because I had been blessed—there was this strong sense of 'me'.

It reminds me now of a conversation with an American Jesuit brother in a Buddhist temple in Phnom Penh. 'Praying for humility …' he remarked. 'You know what happens? God always answers—something gets at you!'

The sea-change in the fortunes of our film team began when we started to run out of money. John Wood just disappeared; we heard later that he'd lost out in the south-east Asian financial crisis of the

late nineteen-nineties. We worked intensively on funding proposals for charitable trusts, but the results were insufficient. We decided to finish the English version of the film in faith, running the risk of going into debt, in order to enter a prestigious international film festival. Our film wasn't selected.

Then came the French version. Every single English word had to be weighed for accuracy, emotion, idiom and fluency.

Should 'gradually' be '*graduellement*' or '*petit à petit*?' 'Nun' wasn't necessarily '*nonne*'—it could be '*réligieuse*'. And what about 'craving'? Should that be '*cupidité*' or '*avidité*'? Theologians, convents, Buddhists and family in France had to be phoned. French-Pali dictionaries had to be consulted. Meanwhile, a funding proposal for the French version was also rejected.

Deadlines slipped, other initiatives were shelved. Was the film worth all the effort anyway?

In the midst of this, my father became seriously ill. He started to act as if in delirium. 'I've got a rope round my head which we'll need in Hollywood,' he told me.

A few days later he was rushed into hospital unconscious. He spent a month there recovering from a reaction to medication he had been given for post-shingles neuralgia.

The future of our film company itself was now in question, and I found myself feeling a deeper empathy with the content of the film. For while Mother Rosemary in her twenties gave herself to the vocation of prayer, she later experienced that 'prayer went dead'. And ten years after Father Ponchaud had devoted his life to building up the Catholic church in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge reduced every church in the country to rubble. Thirty-eight of his forty students were lost in the killing-fields.

The spiritual journeys of Mother Rosemary and Father Ponchaud have not been about the joy of conversion—the honeymoon with God—but about the long haul through the wilderness into the open spaces beyond.

Two weeks before the public launch of the film in London, I got a call from Mary's father in Paris. Her mother, Annie, who had been in hospital with a bout of severe depression, had just taken her life.

Suddenly there was searing pain and searing love all around us. There was screaming protestation against the hand of fate. And in the night, a long sobbing. Nothing could change what had happened.

'Why should one moment of dark distortion end her life?'

'I have so much more love to give her.'

'Oh God, I can't remember the Bible verses she would have wanted.'

'Which clothes shall we dress her in?'

I'm writing the last words of this article the day before her cremation, surrounded by the most painful circumstances and barely able to concentrate. Although my pain is less than that of my wife and in-laws, I too feel deeply shocked. Why did this have to happen to *me?* Yet as I surrender to the unfolding, I start to know the meaning.

Images blur—smoke billowing from the crematorium at Turtle Hill, the orphaned and widowed nuns whose smiles and hospitality were like Annie's …

Annie was born into a staunchly atheist family in rural Burgundy. She had an immensely painful childhood. She embraced the Catholic faith in adulthood and died with a much-loved Bible by her side. The practice of Buddhist meditation, with its emphasis on awareness, self-understanding and letting go, often gave her freedom from deep mental turmoil. *The Cross and the Bodhi Tree* would be launched with a dedication to Annie.

Suddenly I am reminded of the Buddha's words on loving-kindness:

'Just as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart, should one cherish all living beings—radiating kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths.'

Somehow, I am beginning to sense that all beings eventually return to Love. Working to accept suffering and working to alleviate it are interconnected sides of life.

Trying to make sense of Providence's giving and Providence's taking away on my own journey, I've been reading the poetry of the

Sufi Muslim, Jalal al-Din Rumi. It seems to be referred to in a little story which compares, almost incredibly, the believer with a chick-pea, jumping in the pot as the water boils and crying out, 'Why do you set the fire on me?'

God answers, 'When you were green and fresh, you drank water in the garden; that water-drinking was a preparation for this fire … Do not leap away. I am boiling you so that you may get taste and flavour, so that you may become fit to eat and mingle with the spirit … Your self-surrender is God's eternal purpose.'

The Cross, the Bodhi Tree (under which the Buddha was enlightened) and 'Islam' all seem to point to that life-giving surrender of self—to the pain of growth and to the light of ultimate reality.

The spiritual journeys of Father Ponchaud and Mother Rosemary point there also; indeed it is there that their integrity, courage and joy find their source.

I have learnt from them and from the journey of making the film. I've begun to understand that even Providence's stripping away can be a great gift in this life. In a strange way, the film has worked far more on me that I have on it.

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The Cross and the Bodhi Tree—two Christian Encounters with Buddhism is available from FLT Films, 24 Greencoat Place, London SWIP 1RD, Tel. 7798 6020. email: fltfilms@post.com

GILBERT SHAW: A TEACHER OF PRAYER IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A talk given at the 12th CIIR Congress at Subiaco, September 2001

SISTER ISABEL MARY SLG

ASKED to choose from one's own tradition a master of prayer and to speak about him or her at an international gathering of religious, one would normally fix on a famous name, someone other people have already come across and would like to learn more about. I realise that in a conference of this sort there will be at least some, more probably many, who know little or nothing of the man I mean to speak about, Gilbert Shaw, priest of the Church of England. Who, you may be asking, is this Gilbert Shaw? We have never heard of him. On the other hand, I shall be talking to you—and it is my sole qualification for doing so—about someone I did know, someone whose face and tone of voice I can conjure up without having to exert any historical imagination. And since there are not a great many people left who did know him you will perhaps forgive me if I start with a short biographical outline.

Gilbert Shaw was born in Dublin in 1886, and grew up as an Anglo-Irish boy in London in the last decades of what we now regard as an over-ripe and parasitical civilisation. Hackneyed as the description might sound, it is one he himself used, and it remains true that by the time Gilbert was in his thirties, no fewer than three imperial dynasties had tottered out of existence, the map of Europe had been re-drawn, and the cultural and social heritage left behind could be designated in a title that remains unquestioned even today—the Waste Land.

His father, a distinguished barrister-at-law, envisaged for his only son the same legal profession, with the further prospect of a seat in Parliament and a career in politics. At Trinity College, Cambridge, Gilbert read history, took an active part in Union debates, acquitted himself with credit and, on going down in 1909, seemed all set for the course decided upon. After spending some months in New Zealand, and in Tasmania as aide-de-camp to the

Governor, he was called to the bar in 1913, and in the same year he married his cousin, Sylvia. In the following year a son, the first of three children, was born to them. On the outbreak of war he joined a cavalry regiment and in 1915 was invalided out of the army after a riding accident. Thus he never saw active service in the Great War which claimed the lives of so many of his generation; instead he was responsible for legal work in the Ministry of Food, which included sociological work in the English South Midlands. Well, in wartime many people are diverted into unexpected occupations, and it might be assumed that after the war his career at the bar would resume its predictable course.

But beneath the surface many things had been going on in the life of this well-connected, personable young man. Since his schooldays at Eton he had been active in lay evangelism, becoming increasingly concerned about social issues—slum housing and grinding poverty. In those days public schools and university colleges ran what were known as Missions in some of the poorest London boroughs, and in Camberwell Gilbert came face to face not just with poverty but with stark destitution, and learned what it meant, as a member of the privileged classes, to preach the Gospel to people who could barely keep body and soul together. He kept up this work all the time he was training for the bar—after the War with increasing commitment in the Oxford diocese until 1922—when he had a severe breakdown. This breakdown was not simply the result of over-work. Gilbert, who had an unusual degree of psychic sensitivity, had found himself, as a Christian layman, drawn with one or two others into confrontation with an evil network of occult practices. The details of this experience have no bearing on the theme of the present talk, save that while it made him for a time very ill, it marked the first stage of preparation for a ministry of spiritual healing and deliverance which he would be called upon to exercise in the service of the Church from time to time throughout his life. Towards the end of 1922 Gilbert was sufficiently recovered to spend some months in South Africa, and by the time he came back he had resolved to offer himself for ordination to the priesthood.

Since his undergraduate days, by disciplined prayer and avid reading he had been steadily building his theological house on its baptismal foundation. We cannot pinpoint a decisive moment, though there are hints which suggest a very powerful, even fiery, encounter: *Once Love has beaten on you, you are never the same again.* Somewhere along the line, the ever growing importance of God in his life had eclipsed that of his career, the expectations of his family and friends, whatever had until then been presented to him as worthy of his striving. As a deacon he was for a few years vice-principal of Burgh Theological College in Lincolnshire, taking priest's orders in 1926. The next four years were devoted intensively to the work of promoting and conducting retreats, while his reputation as a spiritual director continued to grow.

Because this talk is concerned with Father Gilbert as a teacher of prayer, it is important to note that the first twenty years of his priestly life, as well as his life as a layman, were as much dedicated to making common cause with the poor and disadvantaged as they were to spiritual direction. Both pursuits were engaging him simultaneously and were in fact two sides of the same coin. I don't know at exactly what point he formulated the intentions which were to govern his whole life as a priest, though they will almost certainly have owed something to the inspiration, joy and support which he drew from his friendship (begun in 1923) with the saintly friar, Father William of Glasshampton (1865-1937), of whom this is not the place or time to speak. One can say only that Father William was perhaps the strongest personal influence in shaping Gilbert's ministry in the 1930s.

His move to Poplar in the East End of London in 1932—a borough at that time rife with poverty and unemployment, exposed alike to Communism and Fascism and impervious, if not actually hostile, to the Church—marked a watershed in his life. There he lived in a single poor room, sharing it sometimes with as many as four others and a heap of old boots to be issued to those who had none. In a disused public-house he founded the 'Sydney', a club for working men, which, by the second World War, had become something of a legend in the East End. There he championed the

rights of its members to fair rents against rapacious landlords, making his legal skills freely available, and all the time living among them as a friend and brother, rather than as a 'parson' or a benevolent 'toff'.

Indeed, the striking authority which emanated from Father Gilbert may well have owed something to this early passion for social justice, to the unglamorous years of toil in the East End and the practical works of mercy which he saw as being in some form an acid test of genuine discipleship—'*Be doers of the Word and not hearers only*'—not least for the earnest souls who sought his personal guidance for their devotional life.

You may be wondering, very naturally, what was happening meanwhile to Father Gilbert's wife and family. He was rarely at home, even at the weekends; he no longer practised at the bar and he was earning practically nothing. I can only say, briefly, that whatever the strains and financial difficulties which Gilbert's vocation placed upon their marriage, both partners proved equal to the ordeal. In Orthodox tradition, marriage, I believe, is understood as a kind of white martyrdom. Gilbert's uncompromising belief that Christian discipleship implied martyrdom had necessarily to be put to the test in his own life, and not only in his marriage.

The War put an end to unemployment and, after being twice bombed out in Poplar, Father Gilbert, now with somewhat impaired health, served the Church in a variety of specialist ways. At no time was he the incumbent of a parish—he had the use of a single room in the parish of a priest friend in Southwark—but spiritual depth, as well as the combination of a keen and well-stored mind with the exceptional psychic sensitivity already referred to, meant that he was able, for example, to exercise in safety a ministry of deliverance for which few priests were qualified; to act as father confessor to convents; and to engage in ecumenical dialogue at a very deep level, a point to which we shall return. A prayer of his, dating from that period in which he was largely ignored by the national Church and knew considerable loneliness and frustration, allows us to glimpse the unchanging direction of his interior compass:

Heart of Jesus be my peace,
Thy wounded side my home,
Thy broken feet my following,
Thy pierced hands my guiding,
Thy crown of thorns my exceeding rich reward,
Thy cross my daily toil,
Thy kiss the consummation of my bliss.

In 1958, a mutual acquaintance introduced Fr Gilbert to Mother Mary Clare, who by then had been Superior of the Sisters of the Love of God for some four years. Mother Mary Clare instantly recognised in him a priest whose contemplative quality, wisdom and experience made him the very person she needed to help her build up the spiritual resources of her Community which, after some years of great difficulty, were at a low ebb. It was as their spiritual Father and Warden that in his last six years Gilbert was able to pour out on these Sisters so much of what he had learned from God in the course of his life, and to find his own vocation coming to fruition. The output of sermons, addresses, and retreats was prodigious, while his own identity as prophet, priest and *staretz* (to use the word of which he himself was an embodiment), attained a wonderful harmony and simplicity.

Prophetic Gift

We mentioned earlier that Gilbert grew up in a time of gathering crisis which brought apocalyptic consequences on much of the world. This was never again to be followed by a period of tranquillity—except perhaps for those entirely blind or indifferent to the signs of the times. Gilbert, however, possessed an exceptional power to read them. He made a thorough study of many of the political and intellectual currents of his time (including especially Marxist-Leninism), he read continuously and widely. But, like many of the true prophets, he saw every instance of human choice between self and God or self and the other—however weighty or however trifling the issue—as a crisis, a moment of judgement; and thus he spoke continually in crisis terms—*these dark times, the*

crisis in the Church, the world crisis, 'my dear, you are being brought under judgement'. He didn't exaggerate the importance of such choices in themselves, he kept them in proportion, but he wanted them to be recognised for what they were: *The purpose of crisis*, he said, *in the providential overruling of world history [and in the lives of individuals] is to compel choice and initiate action, not to continue diagnosis*. Who can say, in retrospect, that he was wrong? It was this which lent such urgency to his guidance of souls—always: '*the axe is laid to the root of the tree'*—but also, such hope and confidence: *'When these things come to pass, look up, for your redemption is at hand*.'

The intentions already mentioned with which his life was offered to God, and which were also the intentions of every Mass he celebrated, were these:

The sanctification of the priesthood—holy men of prayer to guide God's people to holiness.

The care and nurture of contemplatives—men and women in ordinary walks of life, often very lonely people—whom he spoke of as *lighthouses*.

The recovery of the great tradition of contemplative life and prayer—within this process he saw religious (and the contemplative communities in particular) as *citadels* or *fortresses* in the forefront of the battle against evil.

All these intentions combined to serve the strongest intention of all: that *humankind, drawn to respond to God's love made known in Jesus Christ should be restored to its original beauty in the image and likeness of its Creator.* We hear such words from time to time and are perhaps used to them but, calmly considered, this over-arching intention is somewhat breath-taking. It encompasses the whole of what we mean by creation, redemption and sanctification—all that we know of the work of the Trinity. For Gilbert, to live and suffer for that end, for which 'the whole creation is groaning in travail', was simply his daily lot. And for this and his other intentions he did suffer—real poverty, real misunderstanding, real hostility—for much of his life.

The conviction that the Church urgently needed contemplative lives (embracing various degrees of solitude) followed naturally from this prophetic vision of mankind under judgement, because the job of the contemplative as he saw it was to be a *watchman in the spiritual battle for human souls.* Not only such individual lives (*lighthouses*, which of course exist in their myriads, did we but know), but also communities (*citadels*) dedicated primarily, and at best exclusively, to such prayer, to a corporate liturgical discipline based on the Eucharist, and a rule of common conduct—these there must also be. *A contemplative Community should be a home for contemplative prayer, where those praying in the world can come for refreshment, renewal and guidance*. The lighthouses and the light-seekers alike would come to them if the citadels remained faithful to their calling.

Recovery of the Great Tradition

What did Father Gilbert mean by the 'great tradition', and why did it have to be recovered? In a word, the great tradition is the good news of Jesus Christ, entrusted to the Apostles and Evangelists, with the injunction to all who will listen: *Be reconciled to God*. Simply that. Father Gilbert did not look back to a golden age of Christendom when he said: *In the New Testament there is progression only in a chronological sense. There is no progression in itself. It IS and is to be because He who speaks is Being … The Gospel brings eternity into time. Every Eucharist is the realisation of that.* So Tradition included everything handed on from that incarnational root—the whole of scripture, doctrine, liturgy, sacraments, *ascesis*, the witness of the saints, mystical prayer, pastoral ministry—all the God-given means to the great end of which he never lost sight. He taught nothing outside of that Tradition. His originality lay not in the content of what he taught, but in where he placed his emphases and the authority with which he asserted them. It's only fair to say that not everyone found those emphases attractive, and many in the Church flinched from them. They disliked his stress on conflict, on spiritual warfare and on martyrdom. But he could only teach what he knew. He had

authentic knowledge of the *'terror of the Lord'* as well as of the riches of his love, and he simply could not deliver his message without urgency. His tone was that of St John in the Epistles: 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.' It was not a natural preference for what was most difficult that drew him to master the controversies of the early centuries and their outcome in the ecumenical Councils of the patristic age; or to the desert tradition of solitary combat with the powers of evil, and to Cassian its greatest exponent. At every level the Holy Spirit was equipping him for his work in the Church, a work of prophecy and wisdom, rather than of mere scholarship or intellectual endeavour.

Recovery for him meant the unitary understanding of the life of prayer, as an extension within time of the timeless mystery of Redemption, and this he found in the spiritual masters of East and West alike; above all perhaps in St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. *Listen to those who speak out of knowledge,* he would say, *they are the ones worth listening to*. It was because he saw that ecclesial and formal unity could not be recovered by patching the rents in the body of Christ, but only by recognising and confronting the evil powers bent on maintaining the separation by which Christians wound that Body and enfeeble its witness to the world, that he laid such stress upon purification, conversion and perseverance. Where mind and heart are at one in the unitive prayer which is the climax of God's work in the soul, and in fact its normal development, there unity is already given, and the lovers of God meet under His banner. In their prayer they draw with them those whom they bring on their hearts to the Father. *Intercessors are not people with long lists, but those who persevere in standing at the foot of the Cross, for the sake of the world.*

Father Gregory CSWG, Superior of the Anglican monastic Community in whose foundation and training Father Gilbert played no small part, has shown in an essay written for the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, how Father Gilbert was able to recognise that the mystical traditions of East and West not only come from a common source, but despite differences of emphasis and articulation, remain inherently one and the same. At a time when (in

the nineteen fifties and sixties) there was a flowering of new editions and translations of the Fathers and of the spiritual classics, the beginning of a kind of convergence of many strands of tradition, Father Gilbert could bring to inter-Christian dialogue that mature, many-dimensional understanding of Tradition as a whole, which was likewise never absent from his discourse or his counsel, however personal and particular the matter might be. Shameful and abhorrent as the deviations and betrayals of Christendom have been throughout two thousand years, the recreating work of the Son of God can never be undone, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit will never be withdrawn, and, as he continually insisted, *God never leaves himself without witnesses*. In this sense, Father Gilbert was one of the great ecumenists of his time.

As a Western Christian and priest of the Anglican Church he was perfectly clear about the weaknesses of his own tradition (even while in himself he manifested many of its strengths). He had no illusions about the accommodation of the Church of England and of other Churches to the secular *status quo*, or about their neglect of the commandment to love God and neighbour. He doubted their fitness to stand fast in *the battle of the mind* which had already begun and was being waged on many fronts and in many undercover ways throughout the world. But despite a forthright mode of expression and a certain combative strain in his character, he was never anything but loyal to the Church of his baptism and obedient to its hierarchy whose authority he accepted. He didn't waste time in destructive criticism and he shunned, as an instrument of the Father of lies, anything like accusation of the brethren. At the level of ecumenical dialogue he was able to steer clear of polemic, of confessional claims and counter-claims. He had learned, in his own words, to *seek for points of unity and stand on those rather than on principles.*

Personal Direction in the Life of Prayer

Not much time remains to speak about Gilbert's way of personal direction, both corporate and individual. Perhaps one of his own definitions sums it up best:

Direction is the art of guiding souls so that they shall respond most readily to their graces …. It implies a settled relationship between director and directed, not merely by way of giving and seeking advice, which would leave open the private judgement of the one directed, but rather a relationship resulting from prayer and careful search in which the soul has found the guide upon whom it feels it can depend. Being sure of this, the soul has adopted the avowed intention of obeying the counsels of that friend.

Here is the characteristic stress upon God's initiative and the soul's response. The guide is the one who sees where the Holy Spirit is leading and gives the encouragement to follow Him. He exercises no power other than that submission. *Never try to get ahead of the Holy Spirit*. But here too his view didn't contract to focus only on the individual. No one's religious devotion was allowed, if his influence prevailed, to dwindle into self-centred piety, obsession with the cult or the outward trappings of religion. *A contemplative,* he might say, *is sometimes like a poached egg, can't see beyond its own bit of toast.* The soul he was guiding would soon learn that he or she was being enlisted in a spiritual army where what mattered was vigilance, renewal of the mind, faithfulness, self-loss. To a community he would say: *'We are not here to make a decent job of things. We are here to be His witnesses. … The white martyrdom of suffering the contradictions of disobedience is the* typical *Christian life*.' The challenge, however strongly or however gently and humorously put, was always to move on, to go further. *If your job is climbing, you must climb. There is no discharge in the warfare of the spirit.* Always he reminded people of their freedom of choice: *We can choose to gather with Christ or to scatter with the enemy. We can choose* (in the long term) *whether to burn with a clear steady flame for the glory of God or to splutter out in our own fat grease.*

Here is a somewhat longer extract from a Sunday afternoon recreation … which turned into a conference.

To be a contemplative doesn't necessarily mean being in a contemplative community; but you have been called specifically to that; and it is something which is brought out by the Carmelites perhaps even more than by St Benedict. You are called to that balance of contemplative prayer and contemplative life which looks to the flower, at least, of unitive prayer in this world, and that is what you have to show forth in speech, conduct and writing …. It calls for the presence of conversion *in the wholeness of consecration, the full understanding of what we mean by virginity, the bringing in of the heavenly view. That is the angelic life you are called to lead in this world … So you must be careful that all your prayer, right from the beginning, should look to the End.*

You are to flower into the life of union; that is your right in a sense, and we would fail you if we did not teach you that it is so, and did not help you to fulfil it. Here is where the work of the priest comes in …. In Confession the priest has to help you to see yourself in the light of God. A confession in which you don't see yourself in the light of God is not worth making; it is only what you think about your silly self. A wise confessor will take it to pieces and ask you: Why? It is all part of the one thing ….

In your relationships with the world that is passing away your witness should be to true conversion. It is not just a question of how much you want to help people, of how easy it is to talk, but it is the overflow of the life that you are living in your intimacy with our blessed Lord that is the real point. We do not speak much of the Bride of Christ, but it is the word of the Bride of Christ that is worth listening to. The interesting person, the stimulating conversation—well, the world can give that.

It will be already clear that prayer, in Fr Gilbert's understanding, could never be sought for subjective reasons. Anyone who simply wanted a richer and more satisfying devotional life would either have to get help from someone else, or be ready to change their objective. The mystical prayer of which he had knowledge was

something that could only be prepared for by a long practice of ascetic discipline, penetrating to the unconscious levels. *Prayer is only prayer when it becomes the whole person.* That is to say, the whole of life, its relationships, its use of memory and imagination, its energies, above all the activity of understanding, affection and will are to be offered for radical transformation. He used the classical western terminology of the three ways: purgation, illumination and union, to identify terrains of spirit which, though each characteristic of a certain stage of growth, could recur at any point on the journey. In this he was in no way original, but his cosmic vision and his often agonised awareness of human alienation from God enabled him to see prayer—the dialogue of love's response to love—as the most direct means of entering into Christ's work of reconciliation by bringing our own small, twisted hearts into harmony with the boundless love of the divine heart and the boundless energy of his will for the healing and hallowing of the entire creation.

It is not the purpose of this talk to map out a spiritual journey whose contours will be familiar to everyone present. Father Gilbert's guidance is on record in an archive of many hundreds of pages, little of which has yet been published. All we can do here is lift the lid of the box and point out a few of the tools which the contemplative must learn to use if he is to become in this craft, a fellow-worker with God. In Gilbert's view such tools were as indispensable to those who had been led to the Spiritual Espousals as to those who would regard themselves as the merest beginners in prayer. *The veracity, the truth of our prayer, can only be tested by the level of our purgation.* And purgation, both of sense and of spirit, is what we shall need till the end of our days to set us free to love as God loves, and to allow his divine energies free course in all the channels of our nature. So, for instance, *renewal of the mind* through lectio divina*, brooding on the words of scripture*, *recollection round a point of truth* could not be relaxed, however familiar the Bible might have become; *Obedience* which both expresses and strengthens the *re-direction of desire* to choose God rather than self is enabled by the steady rhythm of surrender and

response in which our loving conversation with God is maintained. The purpose of spiritual reading is not to lay up intellectual riches, but to increase desire for the knowledge which only God can give. The further we are being led towards the marriage feast, and the more we are emptied of the useless clutter of passions, the greater our need for the *fullness of mind* in which we can see the world behind, around and before us in the light of God.

Gilbert believed that vigilance in these things would remain necessary throughout a person's lifetime, even when many of them had become habitual and brought with them much freedom and spontaneity. These are the disciplines, inspired by love, which help the seeker to hold his course among the many kinds of deviant mysticism, watery spirituality, and psychological substitutes for discipleship, which are as much on offer today as they were in the early Church. By these and other means our human endowments of love, understanding and will, reach their full potential. For a religious community, Gilbert regarded the Rule as the means *par excellence* whereby the microcosmic life of the individual is reconstituted (not conditioned) in the order of mutual service and respect, making it totally available to God. He spoke often of the heightened dangers that beset anyone who has reached a level of contemplation where the Holy Spirit's action has superseded the ascetic striving of the person, and prayer is more receptive and less arduous. Like St Teresa of Avila and St Seraphim of Sarov, when asked why so few sincere souls attained the prayer of mystical union, he would answer: *through lack of perseverance*. The danger of settling down in *the plains of Moab*, that is to say, in a cosy state of devotion and ease of outward observance, was the temptation *to think one has done enough, or can at least play around to satisfy the desires and aptitudes of self, which the rigour of the night of sense had kept under.* Should this happen, *The devil will shortly let such a one fall into sin and shake that idle complacency!* This kind of observation was characteristic of Gilbert, and by no means as discouraging as it may sound. At his most serious he liked to make us laugh, and he rarely intimated that he was speaking only to those whose prayer life was fully developed and whose virtue was

unassailable. The tools of our trade were to be the same whether one was a humble apprentice or a master of the craft.

There was always enormous encouragement to move on, to start afresh. Penitence, renewal and conversion were possible at any minute. *'Sorry, God, failed again; help me to do better next time!'* He liked to say that if you fell off the spiritual ladder you would be picked up and put back on the same rung where you fell off, not on the bottom rung. There could be no going back unless you drifted into living only for this life and what it has to offer, ending with death. To do so would be nothing less than tragic, for what God offers us is not an enhanced life as the reward for a lot of grind and discipline, but transfiguration of our whole created nature in preparation for an eternity of love, such as we have no words to describe, in the Kingdom of the Blessed Trinity. Discipline and self-denial are only a trifle of the cost of that, for suffering does not diminish but actually increases as our vision is purified; the rending knowledge of separation and sin goes hand in hand with the increase of love and longing for God. Father Gilbert warned, with all those who speak out of knowledge, that union is inevitably preceded by dereliction. In the words of his friend and contemporary T.S. Eliot:

> We must be still, and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion
> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation …

It is thus that we become witnesses, however fragile, from our place within the throes of human distress, global anxiety and the tribulations of a society which has no unity of purpose. Our part is not to ameliorate (though what we *can* do we must do), but to become one with the Prayer of Christ.

On the Feast of the Transfiguration 1967 Fr Gilbert celebrated the Eucharist for the last time and preached his last homily in our Chapel. Afterwards he walked slowly out of the sacristy, a decidedly weary, stooped old man. 'You know', he said, 'this is a strange season of the year when the kings go out on campaigns to

do battle with each other … and you feel the weight of it, my dear.' Six days later, he had the first of two heart attacks, and on the eighteenth of August he died. For two or three days his body lay in St Columba, his half of the little bungalow in our convent grounds. He was fully vested in white linen and a white and gold chasuble. In his hands were the little silver paten and chalice which he used for administering sick communions. It was a sight one does not forget; not only did he look majestic and beautiful, but his whole frame, and especially his face, radiated light, peace and fulfilment to such a degree that even the candles around the bier seemed faint and dim. Remembering his cryptic words at the door of the sacristy, I thought of how, after the great battle of the kings in the Vale of Siddim, Melchizedek, King of Salem, 'brought forth bread and wine, and he was the priest of the most high God'. Allowing for some confusion of thought and feeling, what I seemed to see was the totally recollected, totally receptive servant of God, ordained to bring the peace-making elements of the broken body and the spilt blood into the heart of the battle. And what I and others glimpsed was the consummation of one who in life was a sacrifice of love, and in death a king of peace.

One of the letters which flowed into the convent when he died was from the then Bishop Antony Bloom who wrote:

> I am distressed for his spiritual children … especially as I think there is no one in the Anglican Church, in fact perhaps in any Church, not only of his quality but of his line of thought …

There never was any prospect that one person would do justice in one talk to the memory and the legacy of Gilbert Shaw—'the greatest priest', the same Archbishop Antony has said 'that I have known in any tradition of the Church'. I hope that in touching only upon certain aspects of his 'line of thought' which are not much in evidence in spirituality today, I have not distorted what was really the very simple message of a humble man, unshakeable in his love and service of God, unwearied in his care for souls.

FELLOWSHIP RETREAT

While this retreat was originally established for members of the Fellowship of the Love of God, we now welcome all who have any form of association with us, or who are exploring contemplative prayer. It is a silent retreat for about twenty to twenty-five people, with talks each day given by the leader.

This year the Retreat will be held from

11-13 October 2002
(Friday evening to Sunday afternoon)

and led by

Revd Sandy Ryrie
at
Morley Retreat House, Derby

The cost per person is £72.00. There is a non-refundable booking fee of £10.00 and the balance of £62.00 should be paid not later than 27 September.

Cheques should be made payable to SLG Charitable Trust Ltd

Booking forms are available from:

Mrs Debbie Davies, 48 Bickerton Road,
Headington, OXFORD, OX3 7LS
Phone: 01865 763 251 e-mail dbd@bodley.ox.ac.uk

RUNCIE: ON REFLECTION. An Archbishop Remembered. Edited by Stephen Platten. Canterbury Press, 2002. Paperback, £12.99.

Von Hügel used to tell us we needed two conversions: the first, from the world; the second, back to the world. An odd way to start a critique of an assessment by a distinguished symposium of the primacy of a recent archbishop. And yet their own critique suggests it. Repeatedly, the individual witness alludes to the humanity of Robert Runcie; and by humanity is usually meant a capacity to affirm the world, on the basis of Hegel's formula that 'whenever I say Yes I tend to be right, and whenever I say No I tend to be wrong'. One felt the enlivening force of such affirmation in the first words uttered, by Robert himself, at his enthronement: 'May God bless this place, and all this company'. We instantly felt we were one. The editor of these essays himself testifies to the 'extraordinarily rich humanity' at the root of all his work, honed, as he suggests, by the open traditions of the Oxford Greats school, but even more, perhaps, by his rooted conviction that we are only fully humanised as we are fully Christianised. 'His faith was a faith of all the senses', we heard in his funeral sermon. 'His was an incarnate religion.' But whatever the source, the impact was incalculable: Andrew Brown describes 'the man in the flesh' as 'possessed of tremendous natural authority'. All this, 'combined with an extraordinary intelligence in his dealings with people' which 'gave him formidable qualities for the role that had been handed on to him'.

Granted, then, such natural and supernatural equipment, we are inevitably led to ask what he supposed he was doing when he turned his hand to his multifarious tasks. The Editor, speaking of Robert's choice of friends to help him with the job, says 'his role was to focus through the office the essence of Christian truth for his age'. And here his priorities were supremely important: God's Kingdom, God's world, God's church, and only then the Anglican Communion. Incidentally, Douglas Hurd, bravely, but not absurdly, ventures the opinion that 'the Church of England can claim to be the most effective collection of active citizens at work in our society'. Isn't this

the Lord's word of encouragement to Elijah about the 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal put in its twenty-first century dress? Be that as it may, it was for this somewhat reduced body of English Anglicans that, as Mary Tanner put it, he saw the essential ministry of the bishop as one of keeping the church true to the implications of the gospel. And in doing this, 'he made Christian truth seem personally as well as intellectually attractive: in that sense, he was a witness, or, in the Greek, martyr'. David Say, however, takes us further by quoting, a little more in detail, from a speech on Church and State to the Coningsby Club in London in 1984, in which he set out the principles which governed his intervention in political matters. 'First, there was the need to unpack the moral principles relating to any issue. Secondly, Christians must speak up for the poor and the powerless, both in body and spirit. His third principle was designed to be a reminder that no country is an island in more than the strictly geographical sense; that "belonging" these days has an inescapable global perspective. The fourth principle he described as particularly Anglican. It was the responsibility to resist the mindless cults of unreason, both in religion and political life, and to strive for loyalty to truth.'

Perhaps we should leave the final verdict to *The Tablet*: 'The tabloid rottweilers have been hungry for his blood precisely because he will not endorse their own rotten values … this resistance to the humbug which masquerades as a lofty demand for clearer moral leadership is not the only reason why future historians will recognise Dr Runcie as one of the great Archbishops of Canterbury.'

Great, but never pompous. Richard Chartres ended his Memorial Service address in the Abbey by saying that 'after Robert laid down the burden of office … he became more himself. The playfulness of earlier years revived. His sympathies continued to enlarge. He made no secret of his cancer but, far from becoming self-obsessed, he found that his ability to encourage others who were locked in the same battle increased.' Already the grain of wheat, falling into the ground to die, was preparing to bring forth much fruit.

JOHN BYROM

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND CYBERSPACE: Extra-connected Living by David Pullinger, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2001. £8.95

In a 1984 article entitled 'Computers in the Parish' in the magazine of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, the Revd. Brian Cowell described exciting new possibilities for 'microcomputers' in parish life: word processing, databases for record-keeping and multiple mailing, and the whole area of religious education. He was wary, though, of a scheme to 'find a way to link Anglican computer users together into some kind of electronic network'. Although it was technically feasible, he wondered why Anglicans might wish to do this!

This article shows, now that computers for everyday tasks and linking up with other computer users via email and the Internet are facts of life as much for Christians as for the rest of humanity, how quickly information technology is changing. All attempts to reflect theologically can only be steps in an ongoing process. This book by David Pullinger (a Visiting Professor of Middlesex University and the former Director of the Society, Religion & Technology Project of the Church of Scotland) is such an attempt. I suspect, indeed, that even the title is already somewhat outdated, since the subject is often now referred to as 'Information and Communications Technology'. The book is one of a new series on major contemporary issues in the arena of Christian ethics.

The religious communities too are engaged in the process of reflection. The organisation of Anglican communities in this country devoted its 1999 and 2001 conferences to this subject and to the related issue of personhood. We are having to explore issues additional to the ones faced by society as a whole. Is it, for instance, in keeping with the spirit of the religious life to spend money on computers, and if so, what are the criteria? How does the instant connectivity with others, both those long known and loved and others newly encountered, relate to the radical call of Jesus to leave all and follow him? Is there a danger that the obvious value of a communication which takes place in complete physical silence could be counteracted by lack of inner silence resulting from absorbing the sheer volume of information imparted? Should

websites be used to advertise for vocations? Is instant achievement, e.g. being able to order a book online from another country with a credit card, somehow at variance with the regular, rhythmic monastic life with its values of non-achievement, waiting in silence and simply being there for God and the world?

The author of course does not explore these particular issues, but he offers reflections on the ethical issues with which the Church as a whole must engage. The age-old sense of community based on geographical location and face-to-face encounter is now supplemented by other groupings where distance means nothing and where we reveal only as much of ourselves as we choose, or indeed create for ourselves an entirely new persona if we so wish. Information is held about us on databases. It may be inaccurate or intrusive, but getting it changed may prove impossible. Although this may fall short of electronic tagging as such, we ourselves can be tracked even as we move about our lawful business using our credit cards and mobile phones. Who is the self in this situation? Who forms the community, and who is my neighbour?

In the midst of all this, Pullinger affirms the incarnational importance of bodies, as against what he calls 'the multiplicitous self' of fictitious identities. He assumes that most technological decisions are made on the basis of self-interest and argues for an ethics which eschews power and control in favour of a sense of responsibility for others and the promotion of an equitable use of information and resources.

According to Pullinger, it is a temptation to see the future as finalised, since the norms of behaviour with regard to cyberspace are not yet established. The decisions should not be left solely to those with the technical expertise and the power and incentive to benefit. Pullinger urges Christians to be involved in shaping the future from within what he calls 'communities of faith'. They should engage tactically with those who have the power and should ensure that decisions are made on ethical grounds as well as on technical criteria. For the Christian, the ideal community is one which knows the presence of Christ within it. To seek to impose absolute ethical norms, however, was not the way of Jesus.

Although many had hoped for Jesus to reveal himself as the promised Messiah by liberating them from the occupying forces, instead he created controversies. Although he acted from a position of obedience to the Law, he called for every area of life to be re-examined.

I personally would have liked more mention of, and reflection on, the ever-increasing threat from viruses. When the book was written, the first of the major email viruses had already appeared. I have for some years thought the virus writer, together with the writer of email hoaxes, scares and chain letters, to be the virtual equivalent of the bomb maker in the real world. The perpetrator cannot know in advance the identity of the victims and the scope of the physical, emotional and financial misery caused.

This book is comparatively short (144 pages of actual text, plus notes, glossary, etc.) and it contains little explicit theology and some confusing sociological jargon. Nevertheless, it is to be welcomed. It is a good start.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

FATHERS AND ANGLICANS: The Limits of Orthodoxy by Arthur Middleton, Gracewing, 2001. £17.99.

Those with an eye to allusion will think of G.L.Prestige's famous book, *Fathers and Heretics*, and wonder whether the Anglicans are being numbered with the Heretics, or whether Canon Middleton wants us to see them as allied to the Fathers and in some way inheritors of their wisdom, faith and task. The sub-title does not help, for *limits* can operate in a restrictive or a liberating way, so that ambiguity persists, at least until we get into the foreword.

In fact anyone who tries to assess Anglicanism in the light of the Fathers may feel that any fair judgement is bound to be ambivalent. Canon Middleton has done justice to that ambivalence, but also, perhaps, been impeded by it in his task. That task appears to be to show that the patristic mind has had a formative, enlightening role in Anglicanism, and should continue to do so, but because his survey of the past produces, to say the least, mixed results, his prospect for the future is also burdened with uncertainty.

Part One, on the Reformers, shows that appeal to the Fathers was always a part of Anglican apologetic and a constituent of Anglicanism's official formularies. Part Two, on Hooker, Andrewes and the Cardines, in some brilliantly compiled chapters, shows that a deep and detailed knowledge of the Fathers was essential to the classic Anglican position worked out in their time. Enough of the appeal of these writers comes over to the reader to make him or her wish for a more immediate acquaintance with their work. This is judicious but effective advocacy.

Part Three considers the opposition which arose to this position, not only from Calvinists but also from Socinians, Arians, Unitarians and Deists, and the way it was met, notably by Waterland. The going is certainly harder at this point, requiring as it does some familiarity with the issues in dispute. The conviction deepens, as one reads these chapters, that the Anglican appeal to the Fathers had always, up to the eighteenth century, had a defensive and polemical edge. It is true that Andrewes (and there may well have been others who did not venture into print) loved them for themselves and not merely for their potential in controversy, but the unhappy way in which post-reformation theology has been dominated by controversy certainly shaped people's perception of patristic authority.

This is expressed clearly in Part Four, where we find that the Tractarians discovered in the Fathers a far richer resource for the life of grace than most of their predecessors, and began to argue on patristic grounds against some of the things which had, on the same general grounds, been formerly defended. The effect of this is to leave one uncertain whether, in spite of Canon Middleton's advocacy, the idea of a serious reference to the Fathers in Anglicanism can really be sustained. Of course it has had its place, as one element among several, but perhaps more as a deposit to be picked over than as a living testimony to be received.

This uncertainty seems to have been decisive in the final chapter. Here there is no attempt to look closely at the place of the Fathers in Anglican theology and prayer between the time of Newman and the present. If there were it would be difficult to avoid

giving careful scrutiny to the way some of Anglicanism's most distinguished patristic scholars have, as constructive theologians, put forward views that are highly critical of the Fathers' reasoning and conclusions, or, again, to the relative ineffectiveness of the patristic bias in first-degree studies and clergy education. The strategy that might begin to meet our current needs would involve a programme of patristic studies which were of demonstrable significance to our present situation. Canon Middleton is polemically effective in characterising this situation with its relativism, post-modernism, political correctness and general superficiality, and he is persuaded that the Fathers have much to say that would help us engage with it. But the engagement itself is not undertaken here. At best we are shown why we need it.

KENNETH MASON

ON HUMAN WORTH by Duncan B. Forrester, SCM, 2001. £17.95

This is a book about poverty. Poverty in this country, and poverty on a global scale. From its front cover, an old tramp reaches out his hands in a characteristic begging gesture. The book has been sitting on my table for a week or two now, and this image has been disconcerting—every bit as disconcerting as the requests for cash that are part of the daily experience of all of us on the streets of our big cities. Anxiety about how to respond is a frequent topic of conversation—particularly among those who belong to the churches.

There is about such conversations nowadays a frequent sense of powerlessness: just what can we *do*? I have a strong memory of noticing, week by week, the breakdown of the Welfare State and the growing evidence of inequality on the streets of London. In the late seventies the care of those who slept out rough in Soho was in the hands of one Franciscan Friar, who worked out of St Anne's Vicarage. It was tough, but on the whole he coped, diverting the young to specialist centres and doing his best to link the old lags with existing agencies. After 1979 the task became totally impossible. Soho was besieged by the homeless. Eventually he and SSF discreetly withdrew. My daily walk from the tube station to

work passed dozens of men (and women) sleeping on the heating ventilators of the hotels and in shop doorways. The sense of outrage among Christians at such growing poverty in the early eighties led directly to the Faith in the City report. Its impact was vast. Bishop David Sheppard visibly discomfited Norman Tebbit on prime time television. Urban problems were high on the national agenda for the next decade as a result of the churches initiative. At least we were doing *something.*

But why our present sense of powerlessness? Inevitably the problem has become more complex, and no debate about poverty now can afford to ignore the impact of globalisation. Poverty at home is inextricably linked to poverty abroad. But concern is muted too because we have a left of centre government with an agenda for social inclusion. Any voice of concern now is met with a barrage of statistics and policies all of which, we are assured, represent the only agenda available for rolling back the tide of inequality.

One of the strengths of this book lies in its analysis of influential academic thinking about inequality. It supplies us with an understanding of the grammar of equality and inequality in a way that can enable individuals to enter what is now a complex debate. Particularly instructive is the analysis of the Borrie Report of 1994 in comparison to the Beveridge report, which shaped the Welfare State in the post-war years. Where Beveridge grew out of a long line of thinking, with links to Tawney and Temple, as well as Beveridge's own experience in the East End of London, Borrie has fewer antecedents. The sincerity of its intentions are not in doubt. But it also (perhaps inevitably) had an eye to the electoral opportunities of Labour. It was strongest on equality of opportunity. Equality of outcome was largely disregarded. Hence present government policy: Welfare to Work, New Deal and increased educational opportunity are the panacea, and a Labour Government was able, more or less comfortably, to retain Tory spending plans for its first two years. Consistently in the last election Blair refused to answer any question related to the evidence of growing inequality of living standards in this country, even under his government. In 1999 the Rowntree Foundation reported that a quarter of the UK

population was living in poverty, more than at any time in the last twenty years. It is a trend that gains little notice in Government circles.

But if the book is good on social theory, its strength lies in the sustained passion through which the arguments are shaped. It begins with an encounter, on a bridge in a southern Indian slum, with a man called Munuswami. It is the gulf between Forrester and Munuswami, and Forrester's passionate concern to understand its dimensions, which literally haunts these pages. It is as if Munuswami is always present, and the arguments are shaped by the need not so much to improve his lot (though that is a goal) as to find a place where Munuswami can contribute to the ending not only of his own plight, but the plight of us all in the rich world. Munuswami's poverty, Forrester asserts, impoverishes me. A Christian answer sees him as someone of equal worth, whose words we need to hear and whose presence will enrich us.

But can there be a Christian answer in a post-Christian world? Forrester makes a compelling case for the fact that there is such an answer, and that it is crucially necessary. All discourse on equality has its roots in the vision of our equal worth in the eyes of God, and the book traces the development of this from the Bible to present times. The Enlightenment agenda sought to diminish, though not abolish, the religious elements. Benjamin Franklin wrote, in the final draft of the Declaration of Independence, that it was 'self-evident' that 'all men are created equal'. He meant men (not women) and white men not black. But the religious resonance was still there, and Martin Luther King cleverly exploited it in the civil rights movement. The religious quality of the language opened up the larger possibilities within the idea. Today's language of equality, however, is flat. Behind Borrie lies the idea that equality is the 'considered conviction' of 'most people'. Forrester is right to say that visions do not arise from consensus. This is part of the current problem. What is needed is the kind of vision that will gather together a concerted attack on a problem that shames us all, were we ever to have the courage to face it squarely. Only by Christians reclaiming ideas that are properly theirs, and changing the dimensions of the debate, putting the language of possibility in

place of the language of expediency, will we ever begin to reverse the structures that keep us apart from the beggars on our streets. This book is essential reading, with a power to enable us to act as well as to understand.

DAVID BARTON

REVELATION: Vision And Insight by Ian Boxall, SPCK, 2002. £12.99.

In this book Ian Boxall has produced a readable and timely introduction to the most obscure and difficult book of the New Testament canon, and made a strong case for taking it more seriously than is usual in the mainstream churches.

Many years ago, I was invited to join a group of devout but very Protestant laypeople for their regular Bible Study. They were, on the whole, conservative but not fundamentalist, but on one occasion they had a guest speaker who set out to demonstrate that we were living in the Last Days. One of the 'proofs' he offered was the establishment of the state of Israel, which he saw as the direct fulfilment of God's promises to his covenant people, a proposition which I found both theologically and historically dubious. Believing it to be an idiosyncrasy of private interpretation, I did not take it too seriously, but it is alarming to discover from Boxall that it is widely believed by a politically powerful strand of American Protestantism, and helps to account for the massive and uncritical support of the United States for Israel. That millions of people read the Book of Revelation as a detailed and literal account of the immanent end of the world, and use it to demonise all of whom they disapprove, is deeply disturbing, and presumably it is because of this that the mainstream churches approach it rather warily. The Orthodox Church forbids its reading in public worship; Anglican and Roman Catholic lectionaries use it sparingly and tend to confine themselves to a few purple passages. Boxall argues that it is not an appropriate response to the misuse of Biblical texts to exclude them from public worship; rather, 'the bizarre and sometimes dangerous usage of the Apocalypse by particular groups over the centuries may be the direct consequence of the relative neglect of this book by the churches. The appropriate response to a difficult and dangerous text

is not to ignore it but to face it head on, and engage in some solid teraching.' This is precisely what he sets out to do.

In the first place, he takes seriously the possibility that John describes actual visionary experiences, bearing in mind that mystics have to describe what they have seen and heard in the imagery provided by their own religious and cultural heritage if they are to make sense of it at all. John's echoes of Ezekiel and Daniel are not simply literary borrowings, but attempts to make intelligible a profound and disturbing experience.

Before we can assess the relevance of the Apocalypse for Christians in the twenty-first century, we need to ask ourselves what it meant for Christians in the first century. Boxall argues for a date just after the death of Nero and claims that 'the real danger for many of John's first hearers is not so much persecution as complacency and accommodation.' The author, a Jewish Christian—who could well be one of the 'sons of thunder'—takes an extremely negative view of the Roman Empire, seeing it as the current incarnation of idolatrous Babylon. 'John's apocalyptic unmasking of the satanic nature of the great empire of Rome surely calls forth in every age a similar unmasking of the godless and oppressive empire, by a Church which continues to regard this text as Scripture rather than an obscure writing of merely antiquarian curiosity'—or, conversely, as a detailed account of events expected literally to take place at some date in the probably near future. If Boxall's interpretation is right, then John would have more sympathy with those who see America as the 'great Satan' than with the American fundamentalists who claim his authority for their views—except that, although the book is full of violence, it is not an incitement to violence. Rather, the disasters it describes are the natural self-destructive consequence of evil, and the victory of God's people is through their following of Jesus, the Lion of Judah, who turns out to be a lamb and to conquer by being slain. John writes from 'the underside of history', from the point of view of the powerless who recognise that political and economic power is invariably idolatrous. 'One of the reasons for the popularity and potency of the Apocalypse among marginalised and vulnerable

groups may well be its capacity to empower those who appear powerless … Despite superficial differences, it shares with the canonical gospels and Paul the gospel theme of reversal, that God's power is made perfect in weakness, that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly". In short, it removes the veil which obscures true reality, investing those despised in the world with their true significance.'

Boxall does not claim that his is the only possible reading of the Book of Revelation. On the contrary, he sees its images not as symbols each standing for one thing only and waiting to be decoded, but as 'dynamic and polyvalent'. In consequence, they invite 'many different ways of seeing and, through seeing, the possibility of a greater insight into the mystery of God.'

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

Spiritual Stars of the Millennium edited by Selina O'Grady and John Wilkins, Continuum, 2001. £9.99.

At the end of a year, a decade, a century, the urge to look back and pick out the best seems irresistible. Here we have the best (Christian) lives of the last thousand years. Originally appearing as a weekly column in *The Tablet*, each of the fifty one chapters distils the life of a spiritual star (or two, in the case of William and Catherine Booth). 'Spiritual stars' is a designation which allows a good many to be included who do not qualify for Catholic sainthood—because they are Protestants, or because they lived too recently, or because…why not *St* Julian of Norwich? why not *St* Angelico?. A particular feature of the selection is the presence of those who communicate with us not in sermons or theological treatises but in poetry, fiction, music, painting.

The editors explain that they did not aim for an equal balance of men and women, black and white. In fact women are well represented, although it's interesting to note that only one, Catherine Booth, was a Protestant—Simone Weil was not formally a Christian at all. The preponderance of Europeans is much more marked: Asia and Africa are represented by Swami Abhishiktananda, Mother Teresa and Charles de Foucauld. As the

preface says, this imbalance might well be corrected if a similar volume were to be selected for the next thousand years. Leaving aside the question 'Will there be a next thousand years?' I wonder if it will be possible to say of fifty outstanding third millennium Christians that they had a profound influence on their age, and not merely on their fellow believers.

Each chapter has a different author, so there is a wide variety of approaches. All include a biographical outline; most a summary of writings, analysis, quotations. Philip Sheldrake, writing about George Herbert, devotes almost all his three pages to the poem 'Prayer the Church's banquet...'. Michael Paul Gallagher, writing about Ignatius of Loyola, imagines how he would begin a film of his life, and gives us a tiny glimpse of his own engagement with the saint. David Maw gives us, to illuminate the profoundly religious music of Johann Sebastian Bach, little more than the information that at his death, he left a number of theological books marked with his own underlinings and comments, among them 'Where there is devotional music, God with his grace is always present'. We are left, as is surely right, to let the music speak for itself.

You will know something about most of the 'stars', but it is likely that you will gain a fresh perspective on many of them, or have corrected what you thought you knew. It's sad to learn that Martin Luther probably did not utter the simple and stirring 'Here I stand, I can do no other' but something more complex and less memorable. However, in exchange we are given his last, stark, written words: 'We are beggars. That's the truth'.

I was disappointed that, in turning the articles into a book, the editors had not given a few signposts to help readers venture beyond these introductions—not just 'Suggestions for Further Reading' but where to see Blake's engravings, which recordings of Bach's St Matthew Passion best convey its spiritual depths, where to find communities living in the spirit of St Dominic, Mary Ward, Dorothy Day. Somehow a spark of the fire with which these stars blaze has to set us alight, even if we will never be more than flickering candles by comparison.

SISTER CATHERINE SLG

BOOKS RECEIVED

Priesthood and Society (Revised New Edition), by Kenneth Mason, Canterbury Press, 2002. £12.99.

Perfect Freedom: Becoming the Person We Were Meant To Be, by Jane Williams, Borders Series, Canterbury Press, 2001. £4.99.

Living on the Borders: Connecting Inner and Outer Worlds, by Esther de Waal, Borders Series, Canterbury Press, 2001. £4.99.

Risen, Ascended, Glorified: Meditations for the Days from Easter to Trinity, by Martin Dudley, SPCK, 2002. £8.99.

Dialogues with Silence: Prayers and Drawings by Thomas Merton, edited by Jonathan Capaldo, SPCK, 2002. £9.99.

The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God is hoping to make available some of the wisdom of Sister Jane, who was Reverend Mother from 1973 to 1988, and a friend and guide to many.

A book is in preparation, and it may be that readers of the *Chronicle* have letters that they would be prepared to lend, extracts from which, with their permission, would be incorporated into the manuscript being compiled. Please write to Sister Avis Mary SLG, Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres, Oxford, OX4 1TB. It is possible that a publication will be part of the centenary celebrations in 2006.
Jim Cotter of Cairns Publications is co-ordinating the selection and doing the initial editing on behalf of the Community.

HELP WANTED AT BEDE HOUSE
from August 2002

Would you like to spend 6 months living at Bede House? This is a small house in the country (not on a bus route). We are looking for someone in sympathy with the monastic life, able-bodied, and in good health, to join in the prayer, help care for guests, and work in the house and garden with the Sisters. Full board and accommodation provided.

Please apply to Mother Rosemary at Fairacres if you are interested.

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