

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

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COMMUNITY NOTES

AT THE BEGINNING of this week Sr Helen of the Mercy and Truth of God renewed the vows which she made on the Feast of Pentecost a year ago, her Profession Day. A Sister in First Vows renews her vows annually, until she is permitted to make life-long vows, usually after three or four years. The renewal is done very simply during the Eucharist, after the reading of the gospel. She makes her vows, she signs the Profession book, and it is laid on the altar; she is given a blessing, and the Eucharist continues. It is an opportunity for her, with the Community as witness, to reaffirm her resolve in the light of the experience of the past year, and to look forward to saying, 'Yes, for the rest of my life'.

This is, in a sense, what every Sister and Oblate Sister does privately every day anyway, when we get up in the morning and say as our first words:

All glory be to thee, my God, for that thou art, three Persons, one all holy God, very Love. ... I here renew the consecration of my life to thee, in union with the supreme oblation of Jesus Christ my Lord.

And what members of the Fellowship of the Love of God also do in their own daily act of oblation:

All glory be to thee, O God, most holy, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I offer to thee this day my heart, my will and all my life to be a living sacrifice of obedient love to thee....

Again and again, and often again through the day without words, just by a look towards God, we keep reorientating ourselves to God, and counter those pressures which would pull us off course.

Especially first thing in the morning, when one is bleary, it can seem a meaningless or perfunctory act (and on occasion can come out very oddly!) but to make such a prayer, and to do it repeatedly, is important. We plunge into the mystery of the Trinity, no more competent to do so than infants at their baptism. Each time we give ourselves to God, is a bit different; we come with fresh experiences and new circumstances and return to him his own gifts of time and life. Repeated prayers, repeated acts of self-offering, allow for the

fact that we forget and lose sight of our best intentions, and that it takes *time* for love to penetrate all the levels of our being.

The SLG morning oblation is also realistic in that the opening words allow for how difficult it can be to believe in love. We have to spell out again and again that God is *love*, and difficult times make it all the more urgent that we should do so. At Fairacres we listened with sinking hearts to the distinctive drone of military planes flying overhead en route to Iraq, and tried to hold together terrible images of human suffering and the breath-taking beauty of spring in England. The media rings with argument and counter-argument, possible consequences, views and opinions, so much complexity and confusion. And we are conscious that suffering all over the world persists year after year, beyond the capacity of journalists to record it, beyond our power to give hospitality to such a stream of need. To take love as our starting point and love as our end in such a world requires a determined effort, a sense of direction, and stamina. Even—and especially—when overwhelmed we can, as Mother Jane used to say, decide to act *as if* God were love, whatever our immediate perceptions or doubts about it. To do so in whatever ways there are to hand is itself a form of faith, expressing confidence in the fruits of loving actions as opposed to selfish or fearful ones.

Special occasions in the life of individuals and of the Community remind us of the faith and offering that underlie the whole life of our Community. Besides the annual renewal of vows by Sisters in First Profession, we have witnessed the First Promises of Oblate Sister Joan Anna on 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation, and of Oblate Sister Katrina on 8 May, Julian of Norwich's day. On 1 March, the Feast of St David, Louise Lancaster received the habit as a Novice Oblate. A move out of the Community can also be an affirmation of the gift and claim of God's love: Christine Johnson left the Novitiate on 22 April, at the beginning of Easter; we give thanks for her time with us and wish her well for the way ahead. On Low Sunday Andrea Kastner was Clothed as a Novice, taking the name Sr Andrea of Jesus' Living Water. We were delighted that her fellow Canadian, Laurie

Richardson, was with us for that occasion, and that Sr Andrea and two other Sisters were able to go to Tymawr for Laurie's Clothing as a Novice SSC on 14 May. Our two Communities have much in common, including many mutual friends and in particular Fr Donald Allchin, our Warden Emeritus, who, since moving to Wales, has been Warden of the Society of the Sacred Cross.

It is fitting that this *Chronicle* includes an article by Sr Edmée entitled 'The Song of Songs, Fact and Fiction'. Earlier this year Sr Edmée completed her doctoral thesis, 'The Song of Songs and the Eros of God, a study in Biblical Intertextuality' and on 24 May received her D. Phil. from the University of Oxford. Sr Edmée does not do things by halves! Her long-held and passionate conviction that the Song of Songs deserves to be properly understood as the profound mystical work that Christian monastic tradition has always known it to be, led to many years of determined and painstaking work on her part. The result is a magnificent achievement and we are very proud of her.

We have just heard that Oblate Sister Mary John of the Ascension died today, on 25 May at her home in the USA. She has been an Oblate Sister for nearly twenty years and we used to enjoy her visits to Fairacres, sometimes with her husband David, until family needs and her own illness prevented them. We send our loving sympathy to her family and give thanks for her life and her life offering to God.

'Maximise use of your Existing Space' says the advertisement for customised office furniture which landed on my desk as I was pondering these Notes. It is not bad as a maxim for those under pressure, from within or without. After all, however pressed we are, we do still exist and that puts us in relationship to the infinite spaces of God, God's being and God's love. He has made room for us, and even in a very narrow place it is possible to become conscious of that. To do so expands our 'inner space' a bit because it expands our awareness. 'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.' (Rom 10:8) 'And God is greater than our heart' (1John 3:20).

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

VOTIVE MASS OF ST BEDE THE VENERABLE
IN THANKSGIVING FOR THE CENOBITIC LIFE AT BEDE HOUSE

Friday 3 January 2003

JOHN SCOTT

ON 20 AUGUST, the feast of St Bernard, we make a special commemoration here of the sending forth of the first hermits to this place from Fairacres. Perhaps you will recognise this description:

Those who are not in the first fervour of their conversion, but [who] after long probation in a monastery, having learnt in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well-armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert. They are now able to live without the help of others, and by their own strength and God's assistance to fight against the temptations of mind and body.

That sounds to be considerable praise of hermits. The desert is their home and they will need there very little; in fact to be practical, they will need principally a water supply and not a lot more, as the *Sayings* of the desert tell us.

But St Benedict, who has given us this praise of hermits, has nothing more to say about them; for his focus is elsewhere: 'let us proceed with God's help to provide for the strong race of the cenobites'. Whenever I look at St Benedict's Rule, I am struck by that description—the strong race; the original Latin, indeed, seems even stronger—*fortissimum genus*. Hermits can get on with their own thing, for the cenobites are no pale imitation of them; they—you in fact—are a strong race, doing your own work in that strength which is your life together. So I have been wondering quite how to think about the decades of cenobitic life lived out in these Wealden fields. Despite the frankly luscious greenery, which at times almost overwhelms us here, we have to work with the image of the desert, because this place was, first, for hermits. So, the first image is of individuals coming through the desert and discovering what was not previously known or recognised: a source of water; not necessarily a flowing spring or a fountain welling up, but enough for the

maintenance of life, enough for a home and for the spiritual conflict to be carried on here.

And then, as it falls out, the strong race of the cenobites comes to this place as well, not to displace, but to work in their own strength. The first desert image remains, but a second develops and is joined to it. By God's providence it begins to be discovered that this desert source of water has further potential. I think here of St Bernadette at Lourdes, herself often solitary in childhood, starting off scrabbling in a little mud and gravel at the instruction of the 'beautiful Lady', and uncovering almost in a matter of minutes a true and overflowing spring, to which hundreds were flocking within days. Here, though, God has dealt much more gently: the cenobites have not overwhelmed or driven out the hermits and Staplehurst has not been turned upside down by the presence of this House. Yet there has been a true development, for the discovered desert home of the hermits has become, through the cenobites, an oasis. Now, as one who has never actually been in a desert, let alone an oasis, I am dependent here on my own fantasy picture, with a few camels drinking, vegetables growing, palm trees waving and travellers resting in the shade, and I have to ask you to accept this as at least a form of truth. The oasis is such that it can be a true home, whilst never losing its role as a pointer on the way. The desert traveller may well be misled by the changing contours of the sands and will have to navigate by the night sky. Yet, after days and miles of interpretation of the stars, our traveller comes to a fixed point on earth, the oasis, which is recognised to be no mirage, to be the sign of true progress towards the destination.

So I am offering you the image of yourselves and of your work as guardians of an oasis, a place which is no final destination, but a vital one, renewing life and strength. Some travellers will come through only once, as many have done; others, like desert traders, will have cause to be here again and again, grateful for the security of the place, and for the renewed sight of it, a perspective that is so easy to lose when living here, as it were, among the palm trees. But you now are realising anew that the desert is an ever-changing place. As once you discovered the fuller capacity of the water

supply, so perhaps the water is now less in this place, or much greater work to draw. The contours of the sand may be sending travellers in other directions, with new oases to be discovered to fulfil their needs. Or perhaps—what is the life-span of palm-trees?—the shelter of the oasis is coming to its end and must be wholly renewed.

I find that this is the most difficult part of my homily; and so I turn to the patron of this House, one who lived all his life peacefully in one place, yet wrote there of the continual changes and upheavals experienced by this land's Christian people. 'The Ecclesiastical History', Bede calls it, but it might just well be entitled 'A History of Grace'. You give thanks today that God has called you and chosen you and used you in this place, and has given you strength to witness to his continuing Emmanuel, God-with-us, in the desert. Bede House has become, through the cenobitic life, a part of the ecclesiastical history. And what does Bede say when he comes to end of his book, which is, of course not the end? Of Ceolwulf's reign in Northumbria he says that it is 'so filled with commotions, that it cannot yet be know what is to be said concerning them, or what end they will have'. Not, perhaps the note to finish on, so I go right to the end of the chapter, when he speaks again of grace acting in human hearts, and simply says, 'What will be the end hereof, the next age will show'. St Bede the Venerable, doctor of the Church, strong one of the strong race of the cenobites, pray for these your sisters who continue in their journey to God, who is alone our final goal and source. Sisters, according to your vocation, your vows and your Rule, may your life together ever be first and foremost hid with Christ in God. And for this House, surely, the Orthodox have the right words in a combination of prayer, acclamation and even greeting, when they say: 'Eternal memory!'

PRAYER AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST EVIL

SANDY RYRIE

NONE OF US needs reminding that terrible situations exist and horrific events happen in the world around us. We need only to open our newspapers or turn on our televisions to hear of war and violence, or situations of injustice and oppression, or acts of crime or terrorism. When we are confronted by such things, the word 'evil' comes readily to our lips. We sense that events and situations of this kind are not just unfortunate and regrettable: they have a different character which we can only describe as evil.

Evil is a mystery which we cannot account for, explain or understand. There seems to be something which stalks, subverts and corrupts the life of the world—what John Barton has called 'a shapeless horror that threatens human life'. Human life is 'distorted and corrupted by forces which human beings cannot control'.¹ Evil works in hidden, stealthy ways, entering and affecting human life often where it is least expected, and subverting our efforts for good. On the level of human history, the most idealistic enterprises get spoiled by envy and love of power; revolutionary movements to overcome injustice and oppression become new forms of tyranny; religious fervour turns to bigotry and hatred; and the attempt to build a world of freedom, justice and plenty for all is constantly frustrated by hidden obstacles. On the personal level, attempts to make ourselves into better people frequently end in frustration; our virtues tend to make us self-righteous; and our best intentions are compromised by hidden selfish motives. That is not to say that human beings are evil through and through. Being made in the image of God, they are not intrinsically wicked. If there is evidence of evil in the world and in human beings, there is also evidence of great goodness. Human life at the individual and the corporate level is also characterised by kindness, caring, courage and generous self-sacrifice. But these are often subverted and undermined by what

¹ J. Barton, 'Deliver us from evil', *Fairacres Chronicle*, Vol. 33. No. 1. Spring 2000, p.6.

seems like a hidden force which prevents humanity from overcoming the deep flaws in its individual and corporate life.

Confronted by the reality of evil, we can easily find ourselves feeling helpless. What can we do in the face of this intransigent reality? I want here to offer a few thoughts about how people of prayer can respond to this situation. I am not setting out to discuss the big theological issues surrounding the subject, nor to expound afresh the Christian conviction that God in Christ has won the victory over evil, but simply to suggest some basic ways in which we can attempt to engage with the reality and fearfulness of evil through our prayer.

The Struggle with Evil

The New Testament proclaims the victory of Christ over the powers of evil, but it also enjoins us to engage in spiritual warfare against them. The classic passage is in the Letter to the Ephesians:

For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day (Eph. 6:12-13).

Following this, Christian writers and preachers, from the time of the early Fathers to our own day, have urged the need to engage in this struggle. The Desert Fathers saw themselves as engaging in a constant battle against evil in the form of demons. The theme of 'spiritual warfare' was taken up by other early Fathers, and has been continued particularly in the Christian East. Hymns which are still sung in our churches today speak of Christian soldiers fighting the battles of the Lord. We may not always like the military metaphors and some of the triumphalist sentiments, but the idea of spiritual warfare still lives on. So long as evil exists in the world, Christians feel themselves called to struggle against it.

But how are we to do that? If evil is a power beyond human control, what can we do to fight against it? We can try to do so in a number of ways. One way is by attempting to mitigate the effects of

evil on people's lives. By political and personal means we can work to remove or reduce injustices, wars, crimes, and needless human suffering, and there is no doubt that much can be achieved in this way, especially by dedicated, sacrificial and sustained effort. But there is also ample evidence that efforts of this kind, valuable and necessary though they are, do not remove evil or destroy its power. They can be very beneficial in mitigating the effects, but they do not engage with the reality of evil. This reality is spiritual, and the struggle against evil is essentially a spiritual one. It must involve spiritual methods, principally the method of prayer.

There is more than one way of engaging with evil through prayer. One way is simply to cry to God against it. It is significant that the Lord's Prayer, the special prayer of the church, culminates with the petition 'Deliver us from evil'. A concern about evil in the world makes us take this prayer with the utmost seriousness. Using this petition we can acknowledge and face the evil that surrounds us and call to God to rescue us from it. To 'cry to him day and night' (Luke 18:7) against the injustices and cruelties that afflict people and the forces of evil that play havoc with human life is part of the Christian vocation.

Another way is to pray for the perpetrators of evil deeds. It is significant that there is only one place in the Gospels where Jesus tells us to pray for particular kinds of people, and this is when he said, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matt. 5:44). And we know that he followed his own precept when he prayed for those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). To pray for the enemies of society, those who oppress others, who commit crimes of violence, who misuse power for their own ends, and who cause the innocent to suffer, should be a part of the prayer of Christian people. In our corporate and individual prayers we rightly pay a lot of attention to praying for the victims of evil, those who suffer because of the cruelty and selfishness of others. In the name of Christ we need also to pray for those through whom such evil erupts in the life of the world. One of the Desert Fathers said, 'If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for

anything else ... he must pray with all his heart for his enemies'.² Christian prayer must include prayer with all our heart for the enemies of society and of innocent people.

In the Heart

But the struggle against evil involves something deeper and more personal. This is because evil is not just something external: it is deep inside each of us. It does not require very much thought to recognise that violence, vicious crimes, acts of cruelty, regimes of oppression, and institutions of injustice all have their origin in the thoughts, feelings, desires, attitudes and prejudices that exist or arise within people. Certainly, evil seems to operate on a transpersonal level as well. It exists within the structures of society and the network of human relationships in such a way that individual people can get caught up in something evil which is bigger than themselves. But the ultimate seat of evil, and the base of its operations, is the human heart. Used in the biblical sense, the heart refers not simply to our feelings or emotions, but to the inner core of our personality, the seat and mainspring of our thoughts and feelings. It is our essential self, the place where we know ourselves to be 'me', the inmost secret centre of ourselves which no one else can enter. It is here that evil finds its base, its centre of operations. It is from here that evil actions spring. It is from the heart that there arise not only major and terrible evils of violence, and the injustice and oppression which characterise much of human life, but also the individual crimes of theft and murder, and the personal vices of 'avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly'. In the words of Jesus, 'all these evil things come from within' (Mark 7:22-23).

If this is true, we are all implicated. The evil of the world is *our* evil, not simply that of other people. The feelings and motives which lie at the base of terrible deeds are to be found, in some degree, in the hearts of all human beings. While it is obvious that there are some people who carry out particularly wicked deeds,

² Zeno 7, in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, translated by Sister Benedicta Ward SLG, Oxford, Mowbray, 1975, p. 67

people through whom evil erupts in tangible ways in human life, there can be no doubt that evil is located not only in them but in everyone. Those of us who do no flagrantly wicked deeds, who are not guilty of any crimes or serious misdemeanours, nevertheless have the seeds of evil within us. If we do not carry out acts of evil, we may still be harbouring it. In the case of some diseases, even people who have no symptoms and in whom the disease has not burst out, can still be ‘carriers’—they appear to be free of it, but the disease is present in them in a way that is sometimes hard to detect. So it is with evil: it may not be obvious, but if we think it is not within us, ‘we deceive ourselves’ (I John 1: 8). We cannot seriously claim that the avarice, deceit, envy, and pride and other emotions which give rise to situations of evil exist only in other people. To believe that evil can be dealt with simply by punishing, reforming or getting rid of a certain number of evil people, or only by eradicating the social causes of violence and crime, without acknowledging that the evil lies within each of us, is a dangerous error of self-deception—and it is largely by deception that evil exists in people. By its insidious and subtle operation in the heart, it constantly seduces us into believing that the wrong lies in others and not in us. If, then, we are going to struggle in earnest against evil, we need to start with ourselves, acknowledging and accepting that we are in part responsible for what goes on in the world around us.

The struggle against evil is, therefore, one that must be waged deep within us, in our own hearts. How do we engage in this inner struggle? We need to begin by recognising that the way that evil operates within our hearts is through what the early Fathers called the ‘passions’. By this they meant, not some extreme of ‘passionate’ feelings, not only strong emotions of anger or desire, but all those hidden emotional tendencies, ingrained subjective attitudes, deep-seated prejudices and unrecognised motives which lie behind our behaviour and condition our way of being in the world. A passion, in the repeated words of Maximus the Confessor, is ‘an unnatural movement of the soul’.³ These inner urges and leanings, if turned in

³ Maximus the Confessor, ‘Second Century on Love, 16’, and elsewhere, in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, London, Faber and Faber, 1954, p. 301

a negative direction, become destructive passions that deflect us from our relationship with God, and prevent us from being our true and best selves.

The Fathers produced various lists of these destructive passions, which generally included these eight: gluttony, lust, avarice, depression, anger, despair, vainglory and pride.⁴ This list may seem artificial to some of us today, but it was based on the experience of people of prayer and spiritual depth who had examined themselves and acknowledged the truth of what they discovered. These ‘passions’ described the negative things which they found within their hearts.

If we were to attempt to translate the ancient lists of destructive passions into modern terms and concepts we might come up with a list something like this: *the desire to possess*—attachment to material things, letting them govern our life, and deriving our security from them; *the desire to control* what happens to us and what other people do to us, to have our own way, and to be in charge of events, thus closing off the potential of the unforeseen; *the urge to gratify our senses* in an excessive way and to depend on this for our well-being; *pride*—the feeling that we are better than other people and can look down on them; *vainglory*—the love of our own reputation, and the need to be praised and admired; *envy* of the abilities, achievements, reputation or possessions of other people; *resentment* at things that have happened to us or that other people have done to us; *despondency*, in the form of listlessness, a sense of our worthlessness, or a feeling of despair; *anxiety* about what may happen to us, or about our own inner selves.

Such a list may provide some people today with a useful basis for examining their own hearts. But people differ, and others may find it does not adequately describe what goes on in them. If we are to understand the workings of evil within our own hearts and struggle against it, we do not need to adopt these particular lists. Instead, following the example of the Fathers, we can look deep

⁴ This list was first drawn up by Evagrius writing in the 4th century, but was reproduced by others with variations. See Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1981, p. 16f.

within ourselves to discover our own ‘passions’, the kinds of feelings, motives and attitudes which are found within us. That is not to say, of course, that all these are negative or governed by evil. There is much that is good in all of us. But if we are to engage in the struggle against evil we need to become aware of the ‘passions’ which influence and perhaps dictate our actions, and which can come between us and God.

But underneath all these feelings there is perhaps something else. The early Fathers recognised that the basis of all the passions was ‘self-love’, (in Greek *philautia*) or the false love of self. There is, of course, a right and appropriate love of self, a proper valuing of ourselves, and a recognition of our worth and dignity as human beings. But *philautia* is self-love in the sense of the ‘self-centredness that snatches the world away from God to annex it, making neighbours into things’.⁵ When we are dominated by *philautia* our self-interest takes over. This self-love underlies all the destructive passions. It is, according to Maximus the Confessor, ‘the mother of evil ... giving birth to the whole tribe of passions’.⁶ It is this that makes us try to promote and establish ourselves and make ourselves secure, and which casts us down when we don’t succeed.

And yet there is something deeper and more basic still. In the words of Maximus again, ‘the cause of this deviation [of the natural energies into destructive passions] is the hidden fear of death’.⁷ Underlying even our love of self is fear—fear of non-being, of our own nothingness, of the great void beneath us into which we may sink. That is why the psalmists speak with such dread of Sheol or the Pit, of *tehom*, the unfathomable deep, and of the overwhelming waters. It is this fear of the great abyss of nothingness below us that makes us cling to ourselves, and prompts us to boost, support and attempt to sustain ourselves. It is this that casts us down into dependency or despair and arouses our anxiety when our self-promotion lets us down. The destructive passions, whatever form

⁵ O. Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, London, New City, 1993, p. 134

⁶ Maximus the Confessor, ‘Third Century on Love, 57’, in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, London, Faber and Faber, 1954, p. 326

⁷ O. Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p.135

they may take, are all the out-workings of this basic existential fear which lurks within us, often hidden and unrecognised.

It is not hard to recognise these passions and the self-love and fear that underlie them as the means by which evil erupts in the world. Wars, violence, exploitation and injustice all have their roots precisely in them. The hatred and greed which distort human life are the tiny passions writ large. It is the existential fear and its resultant passions lurking in all of us that produce the terrible things that human beings do to one another. If we are to combat the evil in the world we need first and foremost to combat the passions within ourselves. The struggle against evil is fundamentally a struggle with the destructive passions rooted in our own heart, a struggle to free our feelings and attitudes from the distortions produced by self-love and fear.

How, then, do we struggle against these passions and the evil that inspires them? The first and basic thing is to recognise and admit that we ourselves cannot overcome them. Evil is a power beyond our control. God has indeed won the victory over evil through the death and resurrection of Christ; but evil continues to afflict human life. The 'spiritual forces of evil' are still in the 'heavenly places', and the destructive passions still lurk in our hearts despite our best intentions. Through our own efforts and discipline we may have some success in weakening them; but if we think we have got rid of them we frequently find they return through the back door. Attempts to make oneself into a better, more moral and less selfish person may yield some useful results, but the hidden fear and the secret self-love tend to remain, disguised perhaps by a generous and caring exterior. The struggle against the passions seems to be an unequal combat, a battle we cannot win. The victory is in God's hands not ours. In the struggle against evil, and in order to prevent the entry of the passions, we need protection and help from beyond ourselves. Our struggle is not a matter of trying to overcome the destructive passions by our own strength, but of securing for ourselves God's protection, of taking to ourselves the whole armour of God.

Acknowledge and Offer

How can we do this? How can we avail ourselves of the help and protection of God? There are perhaps two things we can do. The first is simply to recognise and *acknowledge* our own passions. This is not as easy and simple as it sounds, because they have a way of hiding themselves from our consciousness. Evil operates in the human heart in subtle, insidious and secret ways. It keeps its power partly by remaining hidden. One part of the struggle, therefore, consists of an honest and searching examination of our feelings and attitudes to discover the hidden passions. It involves acknowledging the hidden motives behind our actions, and facing our secret underlying fears. This can be a difficult and sometimes painful exercise. But the purpose of it is not simply to bring these things to our own awareness, but, more importantly, to acknowledge them to God. Although we cannot hope by our own efforts to get rid of the passions, we can make a practice of bringing them up from the secret depths and laying them openly and honestly before God.

The second thing that goes along with acknowledging is *offering*. Having recognised something of the working of the passions within us, we can offer all of this to God. This means not simply to let go, but to hand over, to ask God to take and accept what we are bringing. Our inner feelings, attitudes and thoughts can all be offered to him as part of our total self-oblation, the complete offering of ourselves. We tend to think of offering God our good gifts, the best we have, and so it may seem strange to offer him the workings of evil. But the offering of our whole self involves everything we have and are—the good and the bad—and our passions are a part of this. We hand ourselves over to God just as we are, with all that is in us.

This provides an opportunity for the activity of God within us. God's way of dealing with evil, revealed and made effective supremely in the cross of Christ, is by transforming it through the process of costly self-offering. When we offer ourselves and all that is in us, our oblation is taken up into and united with the self-offering of Christ, so that God can transform and use even our destructive passions in his own mysterious way. Through the

process of acknowledging our passions and handing them over to God we open our inner selves to the working of God, and so involve him in the struggle. We allow the possibility that the unforeseen may happen, that we may be transformed. To lay ourselves open in this fashion, demands courage. It is a demanding and costly part of our struggle.⁸

The struggle is, of course, an inner one, and an essential aspect of it is that it is carried out above all through *prayer*. It is in the course of prayer that the practice of acknowledging and offering is undertaken. It is before God that we search our hearts to discover our hidden passions. It is in his presence that we recognise them for what they are, and acknowledge that they are a part of us. And it is in the silence of our prayer that we hand all this over to God. Moreover, this requires prayer of a particular kind—the prayer of holding ourselves still before him and being in his presence, the prayer of contemplation in which we wait for him in silence. Having examined ourselves before God and offered ourselves to him, we then wrest our attention away from ourselves and focus on God alone, leaving everything to him, and trusting that he will deal with the passions which we have handed over to him. Waiting on God in silence we direct our attention, our thoughts and our love entirely towards him. He alone is our victory and our protection, and to turn our attention to him and rest in him is a key element in the struggle with evil.

The Evil of the World

But what about the evil round about us, the horrors of war, injustice and crime, which afflict the world which we spoke of at the start? Does our engagement with evil in the depths of ourselves have any effect on the evil in society?

If it is true that evil is a power beyond us, a spiritual reality whose principal place of working is within the human heart, then the struggle against it in the heart is part of the cosmic struggle

⁸ This perhaps painful acknowledgement before God of the true state of our inner selves, and the offering of it to God, resulting in God's acceptance of us as we are, is not an alternative to penitence and receiving forgiveness as traditionally understood, but is another way of describing the same thing.

against evil. The destructive thoughts and feelings within ourselves which we acknowledge and offer to God are not just ours: they are our little bit of the world's evil. To lay this before God so that he can transform it is to engage with the power of evil in the place where it has its roots. To seek to eradicate it from the life of the world without paying attention to what is taking place in our own hearts is to avoid the essential struggle and to fall prey to evil's deceptions. By acknowledging and offering what is happening within us, we are facing, not only the evil within us, but also the evil which, by its subtle deceptions, spreads its net over all of human life.

The struggle with evil, then, is essentially something we participate in through prayer. This may be done through our continuous calling on God to deliver us from evil, and through our intercessions both for the victims and for the perpetrators of evil deeds. But it is also done through the rigorous searching of our hearts and the acknowledgement of our motives, attitudes and feelings in his presence, through our laying all this before him in the offering of our whole selves, and through our remaining still before him in silent openness. Through this deep work of prayer we engage secretly and silently in a struggle with evil both within us and around us.

AN APPRECIATION OF BEDE HOUSE

HAMISH FULLERTON

I FIRST went to Bede House early in July 1970 on what Sister Jocelyn Mary, then the sister-in-charge, later called the first ‘Soho day’: Ken Leech took a group of us from St Anne’s, Soho. I returned in August with a Dutch friend to stay for the weekend. We were the only guests, and I remember that after the Eucharist on Sunday we had breakfast with Sister Jocelyn Mary and Sister Anne, as she then was, under the apple trees by the house. This evokes the pastoral idyll that Bede House has been for me. It was pastoral in both senses of the word, because the scene expressed the heart of the countryside and because the hospitality was pastoral in the other sense of the word. It was an idyll because the scene is set in the eternal ‘great time’. In a similar way in those early years recreation after lunch on a Sunday is set in an eternal scene in the sitting room with Sister Jocelyn Mary, Sister Isabel Mary, Sister Margaret and Father Paul Wessinger, then the chaplain, sitting around the fire, and the ball of conversation being tossed effortlessly from one to the other. It was in the sitting room too that Sister Jocelyn Mary would welcome me with a refreshing glass of orange when I arrived on a warm summer evening from a week teaching in a London comprehensive school. It didn’t escape people’s notice that I became rather a frequent visitor to Bede House. Ken Leech has recalled how once Sister Jocelyn Mary, with that wonderful sense of humour she had, nodded towards the old caravan which was by the garage and said to him ‘Hamish’s caravan’.

On that first Soho day I met Sister Eileen Mary, who happened to be staying at Bede House. So began a wonderful friendship which was renewed the following summer when, with the other members of an international travelling cell preparing the Council of Youth at Taizé, I visited Fairacres for the first time. Those were the years of her travels in Romania at the request of Michael Ramsey. Inspired by her and encouraged by Hugh Wybrew, whom I met at Bede House just before he became Anglican chaplain in Bucharest, and with advice from Donald Allchin, I set out myself for Romania and

had the remarkable experience of travelling there during school summer holidays. The friendship with Sister Eileen Mary continued through her years as sister-in-charge at Bede House and when she returned later as a hermit sister. One of the great comforts of my life is that I featured in the rogues' gallery—photographs mounted on a piece of card—which she had in her hut. By a blessed providence, when I was staying at Bede House during Lent in 1999, I saw her in the garden the morning before I left and so was able to say good-bye to her before she died in July.

When I began the Southwark Ordination Course, I found it difficult to do the research and write essays at the same time as teaching and running an English department in a comprehensive school in Kilburn. My solution was to go to Bede House during half terms and write my essays there, where of course I had the run of the library above the chapel. Years later, when I was working in a parish, I would go there for a long weekend in Advent and in Lent. This meant that in the period before Christmas, when the mammonization of our society reaches colossal proportions, I was at Bede House and could return relaxed to London to face the rigours of Christmas. It also meant that a number of Christmas and Holy Week and Easter sermons had the inestimable advantage of having been born at Bede House. One Lent, when I was feeling particularly spent, I remember working in the raspberry patch. There was something very restoring about being so close to the ground among the soil.

You never quite knew whom you might meet at Bede House. In my copy of *The Art of Prayer*, I treasure as a book mark the card which Mother Mary Clare gave me one Holy Week. After Easter in 1977 Jan and Peter Selby and their first child, Ben, were staying. Years later Peter was to prove a true pastoral bishop and father-in-God when, as Bishop of Kingston, he rescued me from the scrapheap. During Lent in 1999 at sext I saw a figure on the other side of the chapel, whose face I thought I recognised. Could it be? Indeed it was. Afterwards, as we walked towards the house for lunch, the figure held out his hand and said, 'George Carey'. He and his wife, Eileen, were staying in a hut for a few days. So I had the repeated experience of washing up after lunch with an Archbishop of

Canterbury. Or I might see Tim Miller, part of the St Anne's connection, whose coastguard cottage in Suffolk has become a kind of Bede House on the shingle.

Near Bede House, on the other side of Bowling Alley Wood, is the old orchard where sometimes in May I would listen to nightingales. Beyond Hartridge Manor Farm is the footpath which leads through a field towards Brewers Wood and where I once put up a woodcock from some boggy ground. Only eight years ago I was discovering still more footpaths beyond Hazelden Farm and Hocker Edge. In the other direction is the flat land towards Marden Thorn, where a footpath leads through orchards and across a large, muddy field to Widehurst Wood. Then I could return by Snoad Lane and the hop fields and be back in time for that quintessence of worship, vespers in the chapel on a Sunday evening. Or was the quintessence of worship the Easter Vigil, when the birds started to sing as we sang the first alleluias? If, under God, in some small measure I have lived authentically the call to be a priest, then Bede House has had a great deal to do with it. What Bede House has been is something eternal. It can never be lost.

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THE SONG OF SONGS: FACT AND FICTION

SISTER EDMÉE SLG

THE DEVELOPMENT of western thought since the seventeenth century in a rationalist, humanist direction has created countless casualties of the spirit, among which much of the Old Testament must be reckoned, and of its books none more than the Song of Songs. This biblical book is peculiarly vulnerable to the spirit of the times, and exegesis of it—unless of the first rank—tends to reflect the fatuities of the period in which it is written, as Marvin Pope shows with subversive intent in a hundred and forty pages on ‘Interpretations of the Sublime Song’.¹ From the middle of the eighteenth century a secular interpretation has dominated, beginning with dramatic and pastoral idylls in which the chastity of the heroine provided the model for the unfortunate women of the times, followed by a Freudian reaction from the beginning of the twentieth century, in which wish-fulfilment theories manifesting the desire of our times to discover in ancient literature a ‘pre-Fall harmony ... relived in a private paradise’,² have ousted all other interpretations.

But it is not possible to understand ancient texts from within a perspective—that is, the Freudian perspective—which is itself a response to modern history. Moreover, the sexual interpretation is not as innocent as it appears. The underlying motive of many modern works on the Song is an evident desire to evacuate it of the meaning it once conveyed to a Rabbi Akiva, an Origen or a Gregory of Nyssa. A hostility to mystical theology is a decisive element in most modern commentators with the consequence that, being shorn of the meaning which made the Song a candidate for the Bible, theories have to be constructed to account for its inclusion. I have selected just five fictions on which to focus.

¹ Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, 1977. Pope makes sport of all that is silly in the tradition but also, alas, of all that is good, so that his commentary, although extremely useful in the more serious discussions, is of very mixed value.

² Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 1985, p. xxv.

1) The theory that the Song was originally written with erotic intent, and its nakedness rapidly covered over with an allegorising blanket by both Jews and Christians.

This theory emerged early in the twentieth century, probably in the wake of Paul Haupt's influential study of the Song, published in 1902, which pioneered a sexual interpretation not yet surpassed—as far as I am aware—for graphic, physical detail, generating the question: if the Song was written with erotic intent, how did it find itself among the sacred scrolls? The answer to this reasonable question has been: it must have dropped in by mistake, and was discovered too late by a startled body of biblical redactors and such-like who then had to concoct a respectable interpretation for it. A variation suggests that it was *first* given an allegorical meaning and then proffered for inclusion. Both these views are current. Either way—it is thought—its presence created a problem for subsequent generations, and this is dealt with by theory number two:

2) That the Song, on account of its manifestly erotic nature, was nearly excluded from the canon.

The text on which this now universally-held notion is based comes from the Mishnah, Yadaim 3:5, in a discussion on what constitutes second-degree impurity, in which the difficult concept of defiling the hands is central, the difficulty being that it means the exact opposite of what one expects it to mean. Thus, in the Yadaim discussion, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs are both agreed to defile the hands, namely, are considered sacred, until Rabbi Judah declares that the Song of Songs renders the hands unclean but there *is* disagreement regarding Ecclesiastes, against which Rabbi Jose claims that Ecclesiastes does not render the hands unclean but there *is* disagreement about the Song of Songs. Rabbi Simeon ben Azzai is then brought in to say that he has heard a tradition from the seventy-two elders that the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes render the hands unclean, at which point we are given Rabbi Akiva's famous declaration:

Heaven forbid! No one from Israel has ever disputed concerning the Song of Songs that it does not render the hands unclean, since the whole world is not worthy of the day that the Song of Songs

was given to Israel. For all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies, and if they have disputed they have not disputed concerning it but concerning Ecclesiastes.

The passage ends: 'According to the opinion of Ben Azzai they disputed, and thus they concluded.' That is, the tradition of the seventy-two elders, that both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs render the hands unclean, prevailed on the authority of Ben Azzai. Before discussing the question of canonicity thought to be implicit in this passage, we may note two further 'fictions' to which it has given rise, providing theories three and four.

3) The Song of Songs was only saved from being expelled from the canon by the great authority of Rabbi Akiva.

Akiva's authority was very great, but no authority in the Rabbinic schools was great enough to silence contradiction, and Akiva's opinion was, in fact, contradicted as often as not, as anyone familiar with either the Jerusalem or the Babylonian Talmud would confirm. It is significant, then, that Akiva's claim, 'no one in Israel has ever disputed concerning the Song of Songs', is met without contradiction. Even so, the discussion is concluded on the authority of Ben Azzai, not on that of Akiva.

4) The other 'fiction' arises from an attempt to reduce Akiva's 'all the Scriptures are holy' to 'all the Writings are holy'. This is possible because the same word in Hebrew, *Ketuvim*, is used both for 'Scriptures' and for what came to be called in Judaism the third division of the Bible, the 'Writings' (the first two being Torah, namely, the Pentateuch and the Prophets). The claim of Akiva that the Song of Songs is the holiest of all the holy books is so baffling in the present climate that attempts to modify it are not surprising. Thus editors, commentators, and the like, tend, wherever the Yadaim passage is quoted, to supply a footnote against 'Scriptures' giving: 'i.e. Writings', or 'Hagiographa', this last being the term frequently used for the third division of the Old Testament. This solves the problem in regard to rating the Song higher than the Five Books of Moses, but it hardly solves it in regard to the Writings themselves: more holy than the Psalms? Moreover, whether the

three divisions of the Bible had emerged in Judaism in Akiva's day is shown by John Barton in *Oracles of God*³ to be unlikely, but whatever be the case, Akiva should here be understood as referring to 'all the Scriptures'.

Returning to theory number two, 'the Song was nearly excluded from the canon', the category of 'scrolls which defile the hands' has given rise to the assumption that those which did not were excluded from the canon. John Barton has argued against this assumption. In *Oracles of God*, quoting Megillah 7a, he notes that 'two other books are also mentioned about whose capacity to cause uncleanness there was some dispute: Ruth and Esther'. He goes on: 'This surely confirms that canonicity is not the point at issue; neither of these books was of doubtful authenticity.'⁴ In a later book,⁵ Barton tackled the subject afresh, adding to it first Martin Goodman's view of the background and development of the notion of 'defiling the hands',⁶ and, second, Jewish attitudes to the Tetragrammaton.⁷ Having outlined these, Barton goes on to note that the three books about which questions are asked regarding their capacity to impart uncleanness, Esther, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, all share one characteristic in common: the holy Name does not occur in any of them. In this connection Barton notes that Christian books could apparently be a problem because they were not scriptural, yet did contain the Name. He goes on:

The problem addressed in m.Yadaim 3:5 is the equal and opposite one, of books that were scriptural yet lacked the Name. It is this that is anomalous about them, and that is the reason why they were debated. It has nothing to do with any attempts to expel them from the canon.

Barton's view, that the discussion on Ecclesiastes and the Song 'has nothing to do with any attempts to expel them from the canon',

³ The subtitle is: *Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile*, 1986. See especially Chapter II, 'The Law and the Prophets'.

⁴ Ibid. See pp. 68-71 for a discussion on what 'defiling the hands' might mean.

⁵ *The Spirit and the Letter: Studies in the Biblical Canon*, 1997. See Chapter IV, 'Writings of Holiness', especially the section 'All Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands', pp. 108-121.

⁶ 'Sacred Scripture and "Defiling the Hands"', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1990, pp. 99-107.

⁷ The holy Name which, in Hebrew, consists of four letters, YHWH.

must surely prevail, and had the discussion been confined to Ecclesiastes would be accepted without further argument. But in regard to the Song, the problem is that ‘everybody knows’ that it was nearly expelled from the canon on account of its ‘erotic’ character. The Rabbis, it is said, were worried about it—hence the discussion. This is so often repeated that it has attained the status of incontrovertible fact, even for scholars. We see a recent example in the Introduction to the four scrolls of the Song found at Qumran, and translated in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, in which a single paragraph succeeds in encapsulating the whole range of contemporary attitudes to the Song:

Because of its frankness and unabashed celebration of sexual love, some of the early Rabbis and early church fathers were disturbed by this delightful little book, interpreting it in a variety of ways that played down its sexuality. Some early Jewish and Christian sages found the contents plainly unacceptable and attempted to block its acceptance into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Certain Rabbis, however, recognized the Song of Songs as Scripture but sought to interpret its contents in terms of the relationship between God (the *lover* or *bridegroom*) and Israel (the *beloved* or *bride*). Many church fathers who also accepted this book as Scripture interpreted it as depicting the relationship between Christ and his church. But in more recent times both Jews and Christians have increasingly come to recognize the sexual and romantic nature of the Song of Songs. This trend is to be welcomed by our various faith communities, since it affirms that the God who created us is concerned with our sexuality and romantic dimensions, that these are significant aspects of marriage, and that religious people can enjoy them without shame.⁸

Yes, indeed to this last point! But we have already been reassured concerning it at Genesis 1:26, when God says ‘let us make humanity in our image after our likeness’, and goes on to bless the first couple with the words, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’. For the rest of the

⁸ Op. cit., translated and with commentary by Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, 1999, p. 611.

passage from the *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* there is not a shred of evidence,⁹ which brings us to fiction number five:

5) The Rabbis and the Church Fathers were worried by the erotic character of the Song.

To take the Rabbis first, the evidence in the Rabbinic literature is solidly the other way, the Song having been written, it is always said, by Solomon under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If any difficulties had been felt they would have been expressed above all in the Talmud. Here I have counted exactly a hundred references to the Song all of which cite it identically with the other books of the Bible, that is, as scriptural proof-texts or as providing catchwords. One example of particular interest occurs in the discussion of the meaning of dreams in Berachot: ‘Those who see the Song of Songs [in a dream] may hope to attain piety’ (57b). Thus the anathema pronounced against anyone singing the Song in a secular context (b. Sanhedrin 101a; also Tosephta Sanhedrin XII,10, where it is attributed to Rabbi Akiva), does not show concern about the character of the Song, as it is always now assumed, but concern about blasphemy. The possibility of putting a blasphemer to death in this world no longer existed for the Rabbinic authorities, but it remained in regard to the next. Hence, they declare, there is no portion in the world to come for the person who blasphemes by an impious use of the Song.

On the Christian side, there is similarly no evidence of concern regarding the book itself, only the same concern, vividly expressed by Origen, that it will be misread. In the Prologue to his Commentary Origen notes two types who should refrain completely from reading this book: spiritual infants and carnal adults. Of the first he says that ‘just as in infancy and childhood we are not affected by the passion of love, so also to those who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life ... it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings’; and of the second, he fears that ‘for any man who lives only after the flesh ... the reading of this

⁹ A reviewer of this book, otherwise commendatory, also uses the phrase ‘not a shred of evidence’ in connection with a quite different topic (*Book List*, 2000, p. 55), so the work evidently needs to be used with care.

Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal.' Commentators make sport with these thoughts of Origen, especially Christian ones. But since Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), Jewish scholars have taken very seriously the passage in Origen which follows them:

For they say that with the Hebrews also care is taken to allow no one even to hold this book in his hands who has not reached a full and ripe age. And there is another practice too that we have received from them—namely, that all the Scriptures should be delivered to boys by teachers and wise men, while at the same time the four they call *deuterōseis*, that is to say, the beginning of Genesis, in which the creation of the world is described; the first chapters of Ezekiel, which tell about the cherubim; the end of the same, which contains the building of the Temple; and this book of the Song of Songs, should be reserved for study till the last.¹⁰

After setting out this passage, in a seminal chapter called 'Age of *Shiur Qomah* Speculation and Origen', Scholem writes: 'There is no doubt but that this quotation refers to the fact that esoteric teachings were connected with the four texts enumerated',¹¹ and he goes on to link the passage in Origen with the *Shiur Qomah* literature, *shiur qomah* 'the measure of the stature', meaning in this context 'the body of God', a literature which in turn links with the passage in the Song, 5:10-16, where the male figure is described.

I have not tackled the subject of the relationship of the *Shiur Qomah* literature to the Song in my thesis—it would have departed too far from my subtitle: 'A Study in Biblical Intertextuality'—but I have included a number of links I believe I have detected between the Song and the Jewish mystical literature, notably with what, since Scholem, has been called *Merkabah*, namely, 'Chariot' mysticism.

¹⁰ *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, R. P. Lawson, 1957, pp. 22-23. Lawson's translation and excellent annotations make the work highly accessible and there is no excuse for commentators citing Origen from secondary literature (e.g. the NICOT Commentary on the Song, 2000).

¹¹ *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 1965, p. 38.

Therefore, abandoning my title, 'Fact and Fiction', since what follows cannot be categorised as either, I should like to take three pages from my thesis which give an example of one of the links to *Merkabah* mysticism I have attempted to draw out in my study of the Song.

In a chapter called 'The Garden Temple' I examine the nine occurrences of the word for 'garden' in the Song, all of which I understand to refer to the Temple. The verse which follows is at Cant. 6:11:

I went down to the nut garden,
to look at the green shoots of the valley;
to see whether the vine had sprouted,
and the pomegranates had blossomed.

The word for 'nut', *egoz*, occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, but it was to have a long future in medieval Jewish mystical writings. In a brief but dense paper called 'Hokmath Ha-'Egoz [Wisdom of the Nut], its origin and development',¹² Joseph Dan describes finding two MSS of a short, independent treatise called 'The Secret of the Nut' (*Sod Ha-'Egoz*). The first MS ends: 'This is the end of the exegesis of the verse "I went down to the garden of nuts,"' and ends with an obscure reference which the second MS fortunately clarifies with: 'All is explained in the Book of *Heykaloth*', that is, Dan goes on, 'the Book of the Holy Celestial Palaces, one of the basic texts of Hebrew mysticism', in which *Merkabah* mysticism is found. Dan is responding in this article to an earlier one by Alexander Altmann called 'Eleazar of Worms' *Hokmath Ha-'Egoz*',¹³ and although Dan makes some important points against Altmann, the earlier article is also full of interest. Eleazar, a Kabbalist (c.1160-1238), endeavoured, Altmann writes, 'to give a new interpretation to the *Merkabah*, and to this end elaborated in a number of places the mystical significance of the nut as an image of the *Merkabah*', that is, the chariot. Altmann goes on to say: 'It is not unlikely that the detailed symbolism of the nut as

¹² *Journal of Jewish Studies* XVII, 1966, pp. 73-82.

¹³ *Journal of Jewish Studies* XI, 1960, pp. 101-113.

found in the writings of Eleazar of Worms is a novelty introduced by himself.’ Against this Dan brings the evidence of earlier writings and, in particular, the Midrash Rabbah on the Song, at VI.11, on the verse ‘I went down to the nut garden’, where there is a description of the tribes of Israel in the desert (cf. Numbers 2) as organised like a nut of which Eleazar’s treatise is clearly reminiscent: ‘Just as’, according to the Midrash, ‘a nut has four quarters and a court in the centre, so was Israel encamped in the wilderness, four standards, four camps, and the tent of assembly in the middle.’ This, Dan says, ‘is an unusual and unique metaphor very similar to that in the *Secret of the Nut*’. He goes on:

It is important to note that according to the Midrash the organisation of the tribes in the desert reflects some divine order, so that we find no conflict between the two metaphors describing the earthly tribes and the celestial chariot as reflected in the structure of the nut.

In the light of the interpretation of the nut as a symbol of the Divine Chariot, the obscure term, *Yorde Merkabah*, ‘the descenders to the Chariot’, applied to the group of mystics who practised *Merkabah* mysticism, must be based on the verse ‘I went down to the nut garden’. This is seldom noticed. Scholem himself writes:

The paradoxical character of this term is all the more remarkable because the detailed description of the mystical process consistently employs the metaphor of ascent and not of descent. The mystics of this group call themselves *Yorde Merkabah*, i.e. ‘descenders to the Merkabah ...’ and this name is given to them by others throughout the whole literature down to a late period.¹⁴

And again, in a later book, Scholem writes in a chapter on *Merkabah* hymns from the Greater Hekhaloth, that the mystic is instructed to recite these hymns before and during his ecstatic ascent to heaven which, Scholem goes on, ‘in a very curious and so far unexplained change of phraseology, is always referred to in this text as a *descent* to the Merkabah’. And in a long footnote he tells us: ‘In an eschatological context we find the expression “he went down to

¹⁴ *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Third Revised Edition, 1961, p. 47.

the garden of Eden”, although an *ascent* to Paradise is indicated.¹⁵ More than twenty years later David Halperin writes on the phrase that he is unaware ‘that anyone has since proposed a convincing account of its logic’, and he offers the hypothesis that it refers to going down into the Red Sea, and gives his grounds for this suggestion.¹⁶ Altmann, however, in the article referred to, has noticed the origin of the phrase:

The interpretation of the nut as a symbol of the Divine Chariot is suggested by the biblical phrase ‘I went down into the garden of nuts’ (Cant. 6:11), which was held to refer to the contemplation of the realm of the *Merkabah*. In the terminology of the *Yordey Merkabah* the mystic has to ‘descend’ to that visionary experience, and the expression, ‘I went down’ fitted the situation very well indeed. The ‘garden of nuts’ could easily be identified with the ‘garden’ (*pardes*) *par excellence* by which the object of mystical contemplation is commonly designated in *Merkabah* mysticism. To what extent the *Yordey Merkabah* made use of the symbol of the nut is difficult to establish.¹⁷

There is clearly more to be understood, and perhaps when the scholars of Jewish mysticism turn their attention to the Song itself they will unveil those mysteries of its language which are accessible to observation.

Meanwhile I should like to suggest that the term *Yorde Merkabah*, the ‘descenders to the chariot’, might yield its meaning at another level of knowledge, suggested to me by those Syriac hymns which, using the imagery of Ezekiel’s vision, depict Mary as the chariot of Christ.¹⁸ The word *merkavah*, could, then, stand for everything that is meant by the Hebrew word, *meyim*, ‘inward parts, intestines, bowels, belly, heart’ but figuratively the ‘seat of the feelings’, as also the Greek word *splangchna*. This possibility immediately suggests another. If the *Merkabah* mystics are descending to the seat of the feelings, their practice is likely to be

¹⁵ *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Faces of the Chariot*, 1988, p. 227.

¹⁷ Altmann, ‘Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokmath Ha-’Egoz*, p. 101.

¹⁸ See in particular the hymn on pp. 99-100 in Sebastian Brock, *Bridge of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, 1994.

the same as the monks of Eastern Orthodoxy, known as Hesychasts, when they refer to their practice of prayer as ‘putting the mind in the heart’. Hesychasm appears to belong to later history, but the article under this title in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes its distant origins as extending back to the fourth to fifth centuries. This means no more, of course, than that written materials are not available earlier.

The importance for my thesis of this interpretation of the term ‘descenders to the chariot’, and of its link to going down to the nut garden in the Song, is that in my final chapter, ‘The *Eros* of God’, I interpret several verses in the Song in the light of what is known of the practice of mystical prayer, notably the verse, ‘I sleep, but my heart is awake’ (5:2). I believe, as did many earlier commentators on the Song up to the modern period, that this, and other verses such as, ‘stir not up nor waken love ‘til it please’ (2:7 and 3:5) is what the Song is ultimately about and, in our dramatically different climate, it has been very good to discover that study of the Hebrew text, combined with some knowledge of the Jewish mystical literature made available since Gershom Scholem’s pioneering labours, can yield the same conclusion.

The above is a slightly revised version of a lecture given in the University on 12 March 2003.

REFLECTIONS OF AN OBLATE SISTER

OBLATE SISTER EVELYN SLG

THE BEGINNING—for me—was Fellowship House. When I first came to the Community in 1967, the nuns still observed strict enclosure, so everyone who came stayed at Fellowship House. This was run by Oblate Sister Anna, a retired teacher, who lived there and always provided a warm welcome and motherly guidance. She cleaned and cooked for us, sat in the Visitors' Chapel, found the right places in the books—and generally made sure we behaved ourselves. In part it was Anna, the person she was, that made me want to be an oblate, almost from the first day. She told me much about Mother Mary Clare, making her seem like a figure from ancient mythology; she taught me a great deal, and tried to instil a bit of patience, saying repeatedly, 'You can't be an oblate until you can run Fellowship House'. Today, when some of the Oblate Sisters go to house-sit at Boxmoor and Bede House, when the nuns hold their annual general Chapter, I grin and think of Anna—she would have been proud of us!

Anna told me that there were oblates in SLG almost from its inception, though originally they were more like lay sisters, going out to do the shopping and other practical things that nuns were not then able to do. This form of oblature did not prove very satisfactory and was dissolved by Mother Mary Clare soon after she became Superior. After a period of experimentation she and Father Gilbert restored oblature in the form we know it today. This led to fairly rapid growth; when I was clothed in September 1968 there were eighteen oblates in life promises and two in annual promises. We met in Chapter once a year, a gathering that combined business with retreat and some of what we now do in Oblates' Weeks. There was an Oblate Mistress (Sister Ruth), but not yet an Oblates' Council.

What I mostly remember from those early days was the pleasure of meeting the other Oblate Sisters. They were all fascinating characters and many made substantial contributions to the life of the Community. Oblate Susan seemed to be around most of the time, always busy in the garden. She was responsible for much of its

design—the trees at the bottom of the garden and the little woodland were largely of her planting. Oblate Sister Evelyn Christina, with her business training and legal experience, was instrumental in obtaining charitable status for the Community. Lilian, a fine musician, helped to produce a Community book of carols, while Frances, tiny and frail-looking, was an expert nurse who gave sterling service in the Infirmary. In terms of service to the world outside Community, Oblate Anna Grace must be mentioned—she founded and ran the Spafford Children’s Home in Jerusalem. One of the great privileges of oblature was getting to know such people and learning from them.

But the one person I did not meet was Mother Mary Clare. My director had sent me to see her, but she was busy caring for Father Gilbert, who died a few months later. I remember the bell tolling when he died, and everyone gathering in Chapel. Mother told us of the manner of his going, and there was something in the way she did so that made me feel SLG was where I belonged. Then she became seriously ill herself, so it was quite a time before I met her.

Since the enclosure was then so strict, oblates did not go inside until after they were clothed. I shall never forget that day. I knelt in the Visitors’ Chapel, at the railings—which vanished some years later—wearing that heavy, scratchy habit. The Oblate Guardian put the scapular, over my head after it had been blessed, then that stiff white collar and the veil—I was afraid to move! Then the magic gate opened and I was allowed INSIDE! It was quite a culture shock—all those nuns, customs I knew nothing of, like being expected to bow to anyone in authority, and line up in the proper order for processing into refectory—I never did master the pecking order. Then to top it all, in the afternoon I was told to go into a parlour and wait—Mother Mary Clare would meet me. I had been sitting there for a while when an imposing-looking lady swept in. I leapt to my feet, gaped at her, and then burst out, ‘Oh, you’re real after all!’ Mercifully, she laughed heartily, and after that I too could relax. That sort of start in SLG seems pretty well unimaginable today.

Many years later, when I had got to know Mother Mary Clare much better, we used to go to Wales together once a year. On those occasions she talked a great deal about the Community and its development—I wish now that I had taken notes. The thing I most remember was the breadth of her vision for SLG. She saw a monastic life that was all-embracing; a common life open to the world and practising the monastic virtue of hospitality, thereby providing a teaching function; the development in our day of monastic scholarship and the link with the university; the *lavra*, with its huts for solitaries clustered round a chapel, and again, open to the world for rest, refreshment and learning; and of course the fully eremitical life.

I can remember the start of Bede House, and the sisters preparing to move there, and my own excitement and longing to go and see what it was all about. And in the fullness of time I was allowed to go and stay for a bit, though I never met the hermits at Bede House. That was something reserved for our trips to Wales. The hermit sisters there were all very much individuals: Sister Helen Mary on Bardsey Island, Sister Winifred in her caravan way out on the headland facing Bardsey, Sister Teresa on her hilltop, accessible only on foot, and Oblate Sister Anita in a tiny cottage in a very rural hamlet—her faithfulness despite many difficulties was often a source of encouragement to me. It always seemed miraculous that all these sisters, so different from each other in personality and life-style, were yet all doing the same thing and continuing to be Sisters of the Love of God

The final element in Mother Mary Clare's vision was, of course, the oblate sisters. Both she and Father Gilbert, in the work of directing and counselling, could see the need for the contemplative life in the world to be strengthened and supported, not only through exposure to the Community, but by being rooted in it. The first Oblates' Chapter in 1963, attended by thirteen oblates, was mainly an attempt by Mother Mary Clare and Father Gilbert to describe their vision of the new oblature—the report is well worth reading. Both of them saw the new development as being within the monastic tradition and an integral part of the Community, necessary

for the spreading of deeper, monastic, spirituality into the world and for bringing a deeper knowledge of the needs and concerns of the world into the common life. Mother Mary Clare said ‘that the Community was bringing into being for SLG and for the Church a mode of oblature which did not at that moment exist elsewhere’. We were recovering a mode of oblature particularly suited to present day needs. Most of our oblates lived in the world, though some lived inside the enclosure for a time for a special reason, but all were allowed inside so that they could absorb the spirit and be re-invigorated, so that their renewed vision of the meaning of the contemplative life and prayer could be carried out into whatever sphere of service God had called them to. Father Gilbert began his address by saying, ‘Do appreciate the importance of this Chapter, which is a recovery of the close connection between the total witness of the Religious Life and the coming and going of those who took that witness into the world in the early days of monasticism’. He then went on to compare us to frigates, going out from the grand fleet to carry the flag into the world.

Like all visions, this new thing had to be lived to become real and to grow and develop, as all living things have to do. And so it was. The last thirty-five years have certainly seen growth in numbers, development and change. Quite a few of the early Chapters were concerned with our definition of ourselves. The buzz phrase of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s was ‘organic unity’, which was an attempt to define oblature, not as some kind of outer circle, but as an integral part of the Community. No other religious order, as far as I know, defines oblature in the way that we do. It is a concept difficult to explain, and at first it was also difficult to accept—as anything so very new was bound to be. But gradually we grew into the Community, felt accepted, and could become more ourselves. The Rule had been revised in 1967 in line with the Nuns’ Rule, and we revised it again to make it more intelligible to seekers unfamiliar with monastic terminology. No doubt we shall have to do it again, some day. There is nothing static about tradition! Procedures for admission changed too—when I came, one had to be a member of the Fellowship for one year, then came clothing and a

novitiate of one year, followed by annual promises—all a bit precipitate. I lived for years in fear and trembling of tripping over the habit, dropping that unwieldy antiphoner, or doing the wrong thing! The habit too has changed—I like to think we now feel secure enough as members of SLG to be able to affirm difference as well as unity.

Oblature has changed over the last thirty-five years; community life too has changed, and SLG is now preparing to move into something new. But the thing that holds us together and roots us all has not changed. For me it is all summed up in the words over the intercession board in the cloister: ‘In stillness nailed, to hold all time, all change, all circumstance, in and to Love’s embrace.’ Monastics often talk about being nailed to the cross of the order, and I guess that is one way of expressing the difficulties and tensions of the common life. But we too are nailed, by our circumstances and also by ourselves, our personalities and our failures. Mostly it feels more like being trapped! But that is just the point. From that trapped position, in the common life, in solitude, in the circumstances of the world, we reach out to God, in union with Christ on the cross, offering ourselves for the life of the world. And for me that commitment is the deep tap-root from which life in SLG, in all its various forms, will always spring.

BOOKS

GLORY, THE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY OF MICHAEL RAMSEY by Douglas Dales, Canterbury Press, 2003. £16.99.

It is not often that the cover and title of a book match its contents quite so closely as is the case with Douglas Dales' new study of Michael Ramsey. The radiant photograph of the Archbishop as an old man (taken during one of his extended visits to the Episcopal Seminary, Nashotah House, in Wisconsin, a place to which he and Lady Ramsey became deeply attached in their retirement years) suggests, more powerfully than words can, the way in which the different elements in Michael Ramsey's make-up—his faith, his prayer, his whole way of being—had come together into a remarkable wholeness and unity. It is the great strength of this book, written by one who, already as a student at Cuddesdon, got to know the Archbishop particularly well, that it brings out this deep underlying unity in Michael Ramsey's life and teaching, a life and teaching which now in the twenty-first century we need to rediscover and evaluate afresh.

Douglas Dales' book is based on a close and careful reading of the Archbishop's published works, works which spread over a period of almost fifty years. Since, as he points out, 'almost all of Michael Ramsey's books are out of print', this book includes 'a significant number of quotations directly from his writings, in order that his voice might be heard again by those who remember him, and perhaps for the first time by a new generation of Christians in England and abroad'.

One of the many strengths of the book is that it reveals the inner unity of thought and direction which is to be found in that long and varied collection of writings. Certainly there are changes of emphasis, style and approach, as between *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* in 1935 and *Be Still and know* in 1982, but beneath the changes there are the continuing convictions which mark the whole and give it its striking coherence.

The book falls into three parts, each with three chapters, Part One 'The Meaning of the Cross', Part Two 'The Primacy of

Worship’, Part Three ‘The Church’s Life’. The titles of the various chapters are phrases taken from Michael Ramsey’s own books, for instance ‘Living and Dying’, ‘Set Apart in Awe and Mystery’ and ‘An Event Born in Eternity’. At first sight these might suggest a life and reflection wholly set on the Church’s inner world of faith and contemplation. But, as Douglas Dales is careful to point out, for the Archbishop inner and outer, Church and world, human and divine could not be separated. Indeed for him they were indissolubly linked.

He believed that true prayer entailed, however, an active passivity, placing oneself within the divine will, whatever the personal cost ... To pray in this way is to enter deeply, as Bonhoeffer did in Nazi Germany, into solidarity with human suffering and need, and by so doing to engage with evil at its spiritual root. Bishop Michael once said, ‘We are not sinning if we are unsure of the answers to hard questions. We are sinning if we do not think or care.’ ... Throughout his writings, and particularly among his public utterances as Archbishop, there ran a constant thread of informed concern for situations where human life was being oppressed by evil; at home, racism and immigration, the rights of prisoners and the future of the death penalty; abroad, apartheid in South Africa, economic development in former colonial countries, human rights abuses in Chile, the ravages of communism. He was not afraid to go into situations of conflict and controversy ... He believed that the light of the gospel of Christ had to shine in the darkness and at times be directed into the darkness (pp. 46-7).

But at the heart of it all there was his perception of the need for unity within the human heart and mind and will, at the very centre of human life. Douglas Dales quotes from a notable but forgotten address given in 1938 to the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. ‘He urged his hearers to attend to the inner schism within Christian life, the fragmentation of thought, worship and behaviour common to all churches and to each individual Christian. He believed that Anglican-Orthodox exchange could help illuminate and heal this interior division. Doctrine, worship, life, utterly interpenetrate one another. Christians are called by the Lord to an inward catholicity or

wholeness ... of the mind the heart and the will.’ For at the heart of every Christian there lies hidden through baptism the unity of Christ himself, his belief, his worship, his life: ‘This Orthodoxy lies deep within us all’ (p. 121).

This vision of unity, inward and outward was profoundly influenced by the Archbishop’s contacts with Orthodoxy, not only in his early years but throughout his life. It owed much too to his contacts in the thirties with outstanding continental contemporaries, Karl Barth, George Florovsky, Regin Prenter. But it was also rooted, as Douglas Dales shows in his final chapter, in his sense of indebtedness to the Anglican tradition itself, as it had developed from the time of Hooker and Andrewes in the seventeenth century, on into the nineteenth century, with Keble and Maurice, Westcott and Richard Church, and then on into the time of his own early teachers, particularly Charles Gore and William Temple. Here too is an inheritance which perhaps we can see in a new perspective as we look at it in the light of the twenty-first century.

If the cover of the book is exceptional, so in another way, is the blurb on the back. We are told there that the book has been published to mark the centenary of Michael Ramsey’s birth in November 1904. Surely it would be truer to say that the book has been published *to prepare* for the celebration of that centenary! Is it possible that by the end of 2004 we might have the re-publication of some of Michael Ramsey’s outstanding works and a new and more fully ecumenical evaluation of his significance in the life not only of Anglicanism but of the whole Christian family? If that were to happen it would be a fitting tribute to Douglas Dales’ own striking and penetrating study.

A.M. ALLCHIN

HOLY LAND, UNHOLY WAR—Israelis & Palestinians by Anton La Guardia, John Murray, 2002. £9.99.

The author of this remarkable book was the Middle East correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* from 1990 until 1998, and is now the diplomatic editor for that paper. He has produced a very thorough and balanced account of what he describes in one chapter

as the Hundred Years War between the Arab population of Palestine and the Jewish settlers, who first started arriving in significant numbers towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is a rare achievement to be able to enter so deeply and sympathetically into the feelings, aspirations and resentments of both sides of this tragic and apparently intractable situation. This is a book of the utmost value for anyone concerned with the present conflict and its likely development. It will induce a fair-minded understanding of the religious dimension as well, although it is perhaps less fully informed about the plight of the Christian Arab population under Israeli rule.

The story is full of paradox, fulfilling the bleak words of Yeats that preface the book: *Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart*. In the opening chapter there is the graphic image of the suitcase as a symbol of each people, Jewish and Palestinian: 'The creation of the state of Israel brought to rest the image of the Wandering Jew. Now it is the Palestinian who restlessly roams the world.' (p.3) The author examines closely the origins of Zionism, and how the unlikely idea of a Jewish colonisation of their ancestral homeland came to birth. He explains how blindness to the native population of Palestine was the price paid, which is still being paid, for resolving the problem of European Jewry, as the horrors of persecution took their toll throughout the twentieth century.

The strength of this book is in the rich seam of sympathetic anecdotes, and discussions with parties on both sides. These give real insight into the mind-sets of various groups among both Jews and Palestinians, and dispel any superficial caricature or polarisation. The writer is a good listener, and there is much to listen to in this book; it repays several readings, and should be at hand whenever the crisis within Israel flares up. He is also a good historian, laying to rest many myths that surround the genesis of this conflict. For example, he points out that it was the Soviet Union that helped secure the survival of Israel in 1947-8, equipping it with arms, and striving to prevent America from suspending the partition of Palestine under the auspices of the United Nations. (p. 365) Indeed this book is the vindication of an historical approach,

because both sides have been so deeply traumatised that, as in the Balkans, history itself has become part of the torment. The parallel between Serbia and Israel is a striking one: a radical sense of insecurity. The author concludes with an acute analysis of why the last round of peace talks failed, and why in the end their proposals for a settlement will have finally to be addressed.

DOUGLAS DALES

IMAGES OF JESUS by Anselm Gruen, Continuum, 2002. £9.99.

This is a lovely book by a foremost spiritual teacher in Germany, who is also a Benedictine monk. This is the third of his recent books translated into English from German, and it is very well done. The aim of the writer is to build a bridge between the gospels and modern life, which is securely anchored in each reality, and strong enough for a person to move back and forth across in the pursuit of the love of Christ.

The writer is a person of prayer, with a long experience of spiritual thought and direction, the hallmark of which has been set by the stability of his monastic life and a genuine dialogue with those in his care. After a brief introduction, reminding the reader of the hard realities in the midst of which the life and ministry of Jesus were set, he paints fifty images of Jesus, each of which is a carefully examined facet of his person and ministry. They embrace Jesus the Jew, the drop-out, the one who refuses power. They explore Jesus in his relationships with women and with his friends, his impact on people, both reconciling and divisive. There are sensitive meditations on most of the familiar symbols by which Jesus is described in the Gospels, the light, the water of life, and the shepherd. The book is thoroughly Christ-centred, but also very humane and wise in its insights, and in its sincere and sustained attempt to address contemporary questions and needs. Each meditation concludes with searching questions that probe inner attitudes and values, trying to establish the relevance of the example and ministry of Jesus for individuals and communities today. If there is one weakness it is in a certain line of psychological analysis

and application; but this does not have to be taken uncritically, and does not really detract from the book's fundamental value.

The Epilogue draws the reader close to Anselm Gruen himself, and it is characteristically self-effacing and understated. It reveals a person steeped in and at home in the Benedictine spiritual tradition, whose relationship with Christ is central, a relationship anchored in the Eucharist and in the use of the Jesus Prayer. This is a book to be read and re-read, and it will be of long-term value to individuals, small groups and religious communities alike. Whoever translated this book is to be warmly congratulated on the excellence of his work.

DOUGLAS DALES

ART AND WORSHIP Alcuin Liturgy Guides (2) by Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine, SPCK, 2002. £9.99.

Over the past decades since the introduction of the ASB, parishes throughout the country have been rethinking their whole approach to worship. At first, in the case of the ASB the words were under scrutiny, which made for a degree of awkwardness and interference with the flow of services. Now every aspect of the liturgy and its setting is being reconsidered, including music, art and architecture. The Art and Christianity Enquiry has provided a broadly-based forum for debate, and London, Durham and now Leeds have very active chaplaincies to the arts. At parish level, however, it can be extremely difficult to negotiate the many difficulties of reordering the architecture and commissioning works of art for the setting of worship.

In *Art and Worship*, Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine are at pains to emphasise that this is a 'manual, a small book to hold in the hand, to guide the reader as he, or she, looks at the terrain of art and worship'. It is specifically not intended as an exhaustive academic analysis of the theological, historical, artistic and liturgical dimensions of the subject. This is intended as a short, practical introduction to a crucial, but too often neglected, aspect of worship. You would think that in today's culture no one would need

reminding of the power of the image to attract, to encapsulate and to convey emotion and meaning, but the use of art and images in the context of worship strikes deep and complex chords that reverberate both with our feelings for the calm depth of icons and with a residual fear of forbidden idolatry.

The subject is vast, highly sensitive and fraught with pitfalls. Undaunted, the authors confront the history of the theological development first. From the time of the early Christians in their house-church at Dura Europos about 240 CE and in the catacombs of Rome, art was used to embellish places of worship and commemoration. In a dozen pages the theological issues and developments are sketched from the early Christian and Judaic to very recent studies by Richard Harries and Jeremy Begby; this is a very English and Anglican book, which is not surprising for an Alcuin Club publication. Its purpose, after all, is for parish use in the development of their worship. The text has to be short enough to be digestible, yet specific enough for readers to know where to find more information in areas relevant to their own situation. The book is remarkably successful in this; still, to have an average of a century per paragraph is economical to a degree.

The second chapter gives us just more than a dozen pages for a complete history of art in the Church. Paragraphs in this story have to work equally hard, with one of them spanning five hundred years, but the text does allow intended readers in the parish to begin to situate themselves in a historical perspective.

This book clearly has pace, but it gears down to do the real work in the central chapters: 'Encounter and Communication', 'Viewing Art', and 'The Art of Worship'. These explore the breakdown in the relationship between the Church and the arts and then give examples where it has been successfully bridged. 'Viewing Art' provides a thought-provoking discussion of the questions involved in commissioning a work. 'The Art of Worship' talks of the liturgy itself as an art form.

All this will be enormously helpful and even inspirational for people in the parishes. Here the pace comes not from the ground covered by the argument or by the centuries flashing past, but from

the excitement of the authors and their commitment to the subject. To encounter Antony Gormley's 'Angel of the North', or 'Sound II' in the crypt of Winchester Cathedral and discover in them a non-discursive theology, uncovers enormous potential for art within the liturgy. For art to work within the liturgy it must function appropriately, 'or to put it another way: How does the work enhance the life and purpose of the church as a eucharistic community? How will it confront the worshipper with a living challenge?' (p.46). These questions cannot simply be answered prescriptively; they are best explored by way of examples. In the English context two obvious examples are the cathedrals of Winchester and Chichester. At Winchester the re-ordering of the Swinestede Chapel as a special commemoration of St John the Evangelist and the Apostles of the Sea is fully co-ordinated to enhance its theme. Similarly, at Chichester there is a wonderful progression in the South Aisle from the font and the baptismal mural by Hans Feibusch, via the John Piper tapestry, past very ancient remains halfway down the route, and the Graham Sutherland 'Noli me tangere' at the end of the aisle. Finally the Chagall window, ending the series with 'let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!', co-ordinates all the art into a single psalm of praise. Considered as a whole, Winchester Cathedral, on the other hand, is replete with images and full of extremely beautiful passages, but never comes together in a single unified act of praise, but as the authors themselves say of Sherborne: 'everyone who visits here must decide for themselves'. Whatever judgement is made must be made on the totality, not simply on the quality of the individual piece.

In 'The Art of Worship' the liturgy is discussed very appropriately in musical terms as a symphony with counterpoint between divine initiative and human response all bound up in deep (even layered) structures. The architecture contains these structures and resonates with memories and associations.

Even if the reader disagrees with some of the qualitative judgements or feels that the sum of the parts is being treated rather than the whole, the main argument of this book is extremely attractive. There is an aspect of the treatment of art that is rather too

comfortable. The authors take Robert Grosseteste's statement that 'God is supremely simple, supremely concordant and supremely appropriate to himself' as an analogue of beauty. Then, along with C. S. Lewis, they say 'Beauty then is that which in a work of art, lifts us up heavenward, that which transforms or transfigures our souls if only for a moment towards a glimpse of the greatest truth, that is God' (p. 49). Such epiphanies are certainly important, but is it only the serene perfection in art that matters? Antony Gormley's 'Angel of the North' is more sublime than beautiful in that sense, and much of contemporary art eschews the type of beauty presented here, grasping rather at the 'beauty' of the encounter through the creative struggle itself—a more difficult beauty, a difficult process, and often a difficult artist! We are told 'good art is durable, never ephemeral' (p. 62), but as soon as you say that, art has moved on, just where you have forbidden it to go!

Ever practical, the book ends with a useful summary of legal aspects of introducing art into the church building. It is a disappointingly prosaic conclusion—the real power is in the excitement and commitment of the preceding chapters. Still, *Art and Worship* presents a hugely stimulating discussion that makes a significant contribution to healing the communication breakdown between the Church and art, because it will help equip parishes to add new dimensions to their worship through an engagement with the arts.

ALLAN DOIG

Revd Allan Doig is Chaplain of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

ANGLICAN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION by Peter Ball, Cowley Publications, Cambridge, Mass. USA, 1998. \$12.95.

Anglican Spiritual Direction by Canon Peter Ball is an interesting survey of a challenging subject. In Peter Ball's view his book is a 'kind of anthology' and certainly the ground covered and the quoted evidence provided supports this claim. Peter Ball discusses religious writings which span the centuries, and he deals first with those masters of the spiritual life of the 'pastoral tradition' as he defines it. The *Revelations* of Mother Julian of Norwich, the work of the

author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of the Caroline Divines are examined in the context of a specifically Anglican spirituality as he attempts to come to grips with that concept.

There follows something of a leap into the nineteenth century Catholic Revival in the Church of England, and further examination of figures as diverse as John Keble, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Mother Harriet CSMV and Bishop Edward King, to mention but a few. One must concede that Canon Ball's book, conscientious and wide-ranging as it is, is also of necessity somewhat superficial.

Written as it was for a specifically American readership and published in the USA by Cowley Publications, *Anglican Spiritual Direction* would benefit (as well as having Endnotes at the conclusion of each chapter) from having an Appendix. Peter Ball draws extensively from writers on spirituality as well as spiritual direction well known to Anglicans, and as he advances into the nineteenth and then the twentieth century, names like Evelyn Underhill, Father Andrew SDC, Reginald Somerset-Ward and Kenneth Leech are likely to be familiar to many of us in a way that Urban T. Holmes III and Joanna Bowen Gillespie, both American, probably are not. Canon Peter Ball has dealt fairly extensively with these people and many others, and has shown particular interest in the defining of spiritual direction itself, and therefore of spiritual directors. He has also traced the growing awareness, where one exists on both sides of the Atlantic, of the relationship and the overlap between counselling and therapy in a psychological sense, and direction in a spiritual.

This is interesting and Canon Ball has pointed the way to more intensive study of a subject he himself has had to deal with somewhat summarily. It is inevitable, therefore, that he should have described in comparative detail the methods and teaching of Reginald Somerset-Ward and Father Hughson OHC, to take two examples, and dealt with far less authority with the theology and prophetic vision of Father Gilbert Shaw. Such is the nature of selection, yet selectivity is the only possible way of dealing with subject-matter as vast as this and people as diverse.

There is much to be learnt in *Anglican Spiritual Direction* and the author is to be admired for the clarity of his approach and the efficient way he has collated and organised his material. I cannot help wondering, however, whether the ‘special genius’ which Peter Ball considers to be a specifically Anglican contribution to spirituality is not rather more an integral part of the great tradition of religious experience as this has been expressed throughout Christendom in literature and theology; and expressed in this particular case down the centuries in the writings and teaching of mystics and of men and women of prayer.

ANN BONSOR

BOOKS RECEIVED

Joy In All Things: A Franciscan Companion by The Franciscan Association of Great Britain, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2002. £14.99.

Entering into the Mind of God by Anthony Phillips, illustrated with crucifixes by Michael Finn, SPCK, 2002. £7.99.

Signs of Your Kingdom by Michael Perham, SPCK, 2002. £4.99.

The Song of the Lark by Mother Mary Agnes SOLI, SPCK, 2002 (3rd impression).

Walking the Edges: Living in the Presence of God by David Adam, SPCK, 2003.

Choice, Desire and the Will of God: What More do you Want? by David Runcorn, SPCK, Feb 2003. £8.99.

Body and Soul: A Spirituality of Imaginative Creativity by Fintan Creavan, SPCK, Feb 2003. £8.99.

Wholly Alive: Integrating Faith and Everyday Life, by Roy Williamson, SPCK, Feb 2003. £7.99.

To Love and Serve: Being the Body of Christ in a Changing World, by Jonathan Draper, SPCK, Feb 2003. £8.99.