FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

COMMUNITY NOTES

SERMON FOR THE FEAST OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

David Barton

MARIAM IN ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX DEVOTION

Colin Batell OSB

THIS IS THE NIGHT: THE AMBIGUITIES OF PASSOVER

Kenneth Mason

BETWEEN BUCHAREST AND OXFORD

Donald Allchin

EVENTS OF SALVATION AND MOMENTS OF INTIMACY

Bernhard Schünemann

BOOKS

Simon Barrow Michael Paternoster Douglas Dales
David Barton John Scott Joanne Whittering

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COMMUNITY NOTES

WHEN the light of Christ was proclaimed at the Paschal Vigil this year I hardly noticed the candle, because I was captivated by the beauty of Sisters' faces as the light fell on them. They seemed *old* (I am not going to say who I am referring to!) and yet new-born, transformed from their everyday selves, their Rembrandt faces so revealing that I hardly liked to look. The business of these Notes is to record events and changes which have occurred since the last *Chronicle*, but as I reflect on what to say it is the sight of my Sisters in that light which I most want to record.

Since the beginning of this year three Sisters have left the Community: Sr Diana (Diana Pulvermacher), who had been with us since Epiphany 1997 and made her Profession in 2002, did not renew her Vows on 24 February. Sr Eilidh (Eilidh Campbell), who entered the Community in June 1998 and made her Profession in 2002, did not renew her Vows on 14 April. Sr Andrea (Andrea Kastner) who entered in November 2002 and was clothed as a Novice on Low Sunday last year, reached the decision after Easter to leave and has returned to Canada. Behind these bare facts are three different stories and three very different women. All of them were drawn by God's love to Fairacres, they shared in and contributed to the life of the Community for some years; each of them has made a significant difference to us, we give thanks for them and for their time with us. Their departures have shown us, among other things, what a challenge it is to re-find a place in today's world, and that leaving as well as staying calls for faith, hope and love. We pray for them all and wish them well.

Sr Julia of the Divine Compassion died at Fairacres on 28 February at the age of 85. She will be remembered for her radiant smile and a zest for life which never left her. She was always interested in whatever was going on. At her funeral a magnificent vase of proteas, the national flower of South Africa, reminded us of her love for that country and that the seeds of her SLG vocation were sown when she was working with Gonville ffrench-Beytagh in

what was then Salisbury, Rhodesia. Euphan, her sister, was able to be with us during Sr Julia's last weeks, a comfort to her and to all of us as we watched her whole life being gathered into the transforming love of God and the fullness of life in him which we believe to be hers now

At the present time the Community consists of forty Sisters in Profession. Five are resident at Boxmoor, three of us are in New Zealand, Sr Ellinor is permanently in a nursing home, and Sr Mary Kathleen is living as a hermit at Crawley Down. The wisdom of the plans we made at Chapter last year to close Boxmoor has been confirmed and we await the result of our application for outline planning permission so that we can put the property on the market.

There continues to be a steady increase in SLG Oblature: Jennifer Small was admitted as a Postulant Oblate on 16 January, Eileen Oates on 5 May, and Joan Hindle on 19 May.

A Visit To St Isaac's

After Christmas I flew to New Zealand to be with the Sisters at St Isaac's for three weeks. It was five years since my previous visit and I was impressed by how like it was this time, despite the long journey, to making a pastoral visit to an SLG house anywhere. It was so easy to slip in and be at home. While I was there we had an unexpected visit from Bishop Bruce Gilberd who, when he was Bishop of Auckland, had first invited SLG ten years ago to 'come and help'. It was also good to meet Bishop David Moxon again; he has now been appointed as the link person between religious communities in New Zealand and the Synod of Bishops. Although SLG is rather isolated in the Northland, we continue to share concerns and meet when we can with the Community of the Sacred Name (Christchurch) and the Society of St Francis (Hamilton) and, of course, to value the presence of Fr Brian SSF at St Isaac's. But chiefly 'just being' there, in the rhythms of the place and of the local community, is an education in praying and living.

When I returned from New Zealand there was a lovely surprise—Sr Sylvie from Bose had arrived to stay for six weeks while she attended an English course. We hope she will return, and

that next time there will not be the disaster of heavy snow at Bose in her absence. Also in February I attended with Sr Isabel Mary the launch of Alex Popescu's remarkable book *Between Sacrifice and Suicide*, which is the subject of a review article by Canon Allchin in the present issue.

News From Ordo Pacis

In March, I went to Germany for a poignant occasion. Sr Maria of Ordo Pacis had written to me in February explaining that after much prayer, discussion and planning the Sisters of the Ordo Pacis Common Life had decided to disband. Since the late 1960s there has been constant exchange, lively friendship, and mutual enrichment between our communities. So I went to Cella St Hildegard to be with them (it was so good to see their home at last, and just in time!), and to be among those sharing in their final Eucharist on 10 March. What we experienced then showed me how an ending made in faith can be dignified, graceful and full of blessing. Sr Maria, Sr Anke, Sr Luise, Sr Susanne and Sr Waltraut made this declaration:

> We believe that our common life with all its fragmentation is taken up in God and blessed and will bring forth fruit when, where and how he will it. We entrust ourselves to him now in our parting too.
>
> You all know how much we have reached our limits with our life in community. During our time of sabbatical we examined our vocation afresh and finally reached the decision to bring the life in community within Ordo Pacis to an end. We are clear that our step is a far-reaching one for our entire Sisterhood, but we want to make the decision now, while our combined strength still suffices.
>
> We want to continue to respond with entire self-offering to the call of God which has come to us and as we have vowed in our Profession; we agree, however, that we must now let go of the features of our life which have bound us to one another. That means:
>
> By common accord and full of trust, we free one another, so that each may continue her path of celibate commitment to God.
>
> By common accord and with gratitude, we release one another from our 'community of goods' in its various aspects.

> By common accord, we free one another too from the obedience which we have vowed.
>
> With great thanksgiving for all the blessings which we and many have received, we also bring to an end our independent liturgical life in community within Ordo Pacis and within the Church. We ask you, Frau Wiefel-Jenner, as the pastor (warden) of Ordo Pacis to confirm this step of ours as a witness and to give us your blessing.

Frau Wiefel-Jenner, who had preached, and Sr Marie Luise, the celebrant, and several others present, gave a personal blessing to each Sister conveying the good will, love and prayers of all of us. The five of them then left to take off their choir robes. In a gesture which could hardly have been more eloquent they then returned carrying their robes and laid them, one by one, at the foot of the cross. And then, hesitantly but with growing confidence and naturalness, conversation began to flow; certainly something important had changed, but relationships held, life went on, and I was driven to the airport to catch a plane home.

An International Conference With Roman Catholic Sisters

My third journey abroad this year was to Rome at the invitation of the UISG, the Union of General Superiors of Roman Catholic Congregations of women religious. Three years ago I had the privilege of sharing in their Plenary Session and it was no less inspiring to be with them again this May: some 800 women from all over the world addressing the topic, ‘Women Disciples of Jesus Christ, Bearers of Reconciliation in our World’. The programme included hearing stories from Ireland, Burundi, and Iraq and the opportunity to reflect on the material presented in small groups as we went along. We benefited from simultaneous translation in five languages and further sharing over meals and during breaks.

The 2001 Plenary had culminated in a declaration which expressed determination ‘to address insistently at every level the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children with particular attention to the trafficking of women’. I was impressed to hear how energetically and effectively this is being carried through, especially in Albania, Nigeria and Romania; and to learn that Italy, partly as a

result of Catholic pressure, now has the most advanced legal structure on victims' rights. Through the Vatican Secretary of State the UISG is also working with the UN on this issue. So a public declaration is not necessarily just words or a waste of time! Another fruit of last time's plenary was the decision to hold the UISG Assembly last year in Nairobi as a sign of solidarity with African women religious and to experience the strengths of religious life there.

During our pre-Pentecost retreat week I have been gradually assimilating what I received in Rome and passing on some of it at Fairacres each day. There is too much to summarise! The need for reconciliation in our world is clear and desperate, and we saw how it must be accompanied by action to change the socio-economic realities behind so many conflicts. We saw how there is also need for reconciliation within the Church, between the churches, and within our Congregations and Communities—'but we were not founded to heal ourselves, we were founded to serve the world in which we live'. We heard again and again how the process of reconciliation turns upon willingness to give and receive forgiveness, requiring patience, truthfulness, a willingness to listen and the gift of seeing people in a new way. And all this requires dependence on God—commitment to reconciliation; not a strategy but a way of being in the Spirit.

If I manage to remember only one thing from the Conference, I hope that it may be what the Pope said in the general audience we attended in St Peter's square: 'Do not despair'. 'The psalm [30] is an encouragement never to despair of God's saving power, even in the face of death.' As far as I know, I was the only non-Catholic and the only contemplative (in the technical sense) at the conference this time. I was warmly welcomed as an Anglican Sister and I participated fully with everyone else, an illustration of a remark made by one of the speakers: 'Distinctions must be cherished, but distinctions need not separate'.

At Home

The opportunities for attending conferences multiply and it requires discernment to know which to attend and whom to send. As well as

valuing the content we value the friendships that develop, and often remain, through these meetings. In June Sr Patricia Clare will be attending a Buddhist-Christian Inter-monastic Conference at Mirfield, entitled ‘Transforming the Heart’. The participants include many who attended the memorable ‘Faith in Awakening Inter-monastic Conference’ at Amaravati in 1993, and is especially for those who have been professed more recently. Part of the intention is for the participants to talk over the experience with their communities when they return and engage them in the questions of dialogue.

For a couple of years now we have arranged a Community Conference for ourselves at Fairacres in January, and that has been fruitful. This year instead we invited Fr Peter Allan CR to come and talk about the Eucharist with us, focussing on the dimensions of theology, liturgical practice and community living. We were in good hands; the two days he spent with us at the beginning of March were stimulating, instructive, and enjoyable. As a result we have been singing hymns and alleluias every day in Eastertide. I hope we will go on, both with the singing and with the work which we can do to celebrate the Eucharist more really and fittingly.

A celebration of another kind happened in chapel on the last Sunday of Easter, when a group of local friends came and made music with us and with some of our neighbours. It was an ‘interactive concert’ with a programme that included madrigals, guitar duets, folk songs, rounds and lute-playing, all performed with aplomb and great professionalism. We haven’t done anything quite like that before and it was certainly a success, including a cream tea in the garden afterwards. And finally, the day after Pentecost, our Priest Associate Douglas Dales, the author of *Glory, The Spiritual Theology of Michael Ramsey*, gave us his enthralling lecture on the same theme.

The collect for the Feast of Pentecost marks the ending of Paschaltide, but it is a prayer for all seasons, and is no less apt for new beginnings as well:

Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

8 May 2004

DAVID BARTON

A FEW MONTHS ago I led a session on 'Spirituality' with a group of women and men who are training for ordination. The brief was to introduce them to whatever aspects of contemplative prayer I thought would be appropriate. So I devoted part of the session to Julian of Norwich. And because it was all quite new to this group, I told them a little about her life before I went on to discuss some of the things she wrote about.

What interested me was the way the later discussion developed, which was not at all as I had expected. Several people in the group wanted to probe the link between Julian's illness and her revelations. You will remember that Julian was struck down when she was thirty years old. She could not speak and was virtually given up for dead. It was at this moment that the revelations were given to her which would then occupy her for the rest of her life. And it was the idea that physical illness might be the gateway to a more profound understanding of God that the group chose to ponder.

We are sometimes very functional in our treatment of illness—prescription will sort it out. Or we ponder psychosomatic links, sometimes going round in endless circles about them. But that illness might be, as it were, a visitation from God is not always an idea we entertain. And that possibility opens the door to some other surprising possibilities: that illness might be the invitation to wholeness, that it might manifest all we need to know.

If we lived further East we might not be so surprised at all that. Tradition has it that the Buddha himself, immediately after his enlightenment, was ill, unable to speak and thought to be near to death. Ramana Marharshi, the twentieth century's great saint of Hinduism, was similarly struck down at the age of sixteen. His family were not particularly religious. They had no idea what to do with him. But when he came round he knew something he had not

known before, and he was quite changed. The rest of his life, like Julian's, was spent unwrapping the knowledge. And like her, he stayed in one place and never left it.

I make that connection because there seems to be something here that is to do with our expectations of our Christian life of prayer. Is the spiritual journey a road we travel because we enjoy it and are comforted by it? Or because we have seen the truth and long to see more? None of that is especially wrong. But so often we think of our inner life in terms of a journey, a quest. Julian's experience suggests something rather different. What happened to her—though she had prayed for a revelation of God—was totally unexpected, shattering the categories of everything she knew. It was not to go on a journey of exploration. It was to be invaded, changed.

The question for us is: do we dare, not to probe, but *to be probed by* the ultimate awesome mystery which is God? And then to take the consequences of that? 'No human being can see me and survive', God tells Moses. To dare to stand in God's presence and see even God's back is as much as Moses can bear.

Julian, I think, tends to slip into our minds as someone offering deep reassurance and comfort: 'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.' But we cannot take that side of her in isolation. There is another, quite extraordinary statement of hers that illustrates what I mean: 'Between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness.' You have to read it twice to get the impact—we would normally polarize the wrath and the forgiveness. But both are ruled out. Why? There is no forgiveness in our encounter with God because who we are as sinful people is already understood and forgiven.

Julian is telling something way beyond forgiveness: that God sees us, and in us sees Christ. And in that gaze, looking on us in our broken humanity with such compassion, everything that is not-Christ is burned out and destroyed. We are fragile little things, easily crushed, like a hazelnut. We are totally held in being by God. And indeed, like a hazelnut, if we are to flourish we have to fall into the ground and die. We cannot take Julian without the totality of her

experience: our encounter with the awesome, unnameable God is transformative.

Abhishiktananda came nearest to articulating the actual experience of this, briefly recording it in terms we can understand. In what turned out to be the last months of his life his inner self seemed to move to new depths. To his friends it was as if he blazed with glory—'he shone through every inch of his being. An inner apocalypse', someone said. And then he was struck down, suddenly and unexpectedly, with a heart attack. Most of us would have some predictable things to say after such an experience. Abhishiktananda writes about it immediately afterwards in such a way that you realise that the heart attack was the consequence of something else: '*My soul magnifies the Lord*. Who can bear the glory of transfiguration! Of our discovery as transfigured—become what Christ is: I am.' That is the inner dynamic of Julian too, which is easily forgotten when we simply isolate the words that are the fruits of her experience.

So we who are contemplatives, each in our different way, need to take note of all of this and ask ourselves what we think and expect of this way of life. God's eyes always gaze on us like a mother. We are cherished as if we are God's only child—Christ himself. And we must always be open to the pain of transformation and change that that implies.

FELLOWSHIP RETREAT

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MARIAM IN ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TRADITION AND DEVOTION

FR COLIN BATELL OSB

According to legend, our Lady visited Ethiopia while a refugee from the Holy Land. The Holy Family passed over Ethiopia on a cloud pulled by four lions. As she looked down at this most beautiful of all lands, she asked where it was, and on being told, she at once placed it under her special protection. Tradition also relates that the Church of the Flight into Egypt (*Qwusqwam*) located in Upper Egypt was miraculously replicated in Ethiopia after it had been destroyed by the Muslims.

It is easy to dismiss such stories as charming legends, but we need to ask what these stories are telling us rather than what actually happened. We need to approach them in the same spirit as we approach the stories of the miracles of St Benedict as recorded in the Second Book of St Gregory's Dialogues. Just as those stories aim to show that St Benedict is on a par with the great heroes and heroines of Biblical faith, so Ethiopian tradition is asserting that our Lady has *dunamis*, the power so often referred to in the New Testament that enables one who has it to overcome all the forces of evil and even control the forces of nature, just as her Son did during his earthly ministry.

We have to suspend the mind-set that comes with a positivist mentality which refuses to recognize that God and his saints are accessible and that miracles can and do happen. At the same time the divine transcendence must be acknowledged. Mary is patron and protector of Ethiopia rather as medieval England saw itself as Mary's dowry.

A very highly developed role is given to Mary in the Liturgy and iconography of the Ethiopian Church as well as in popular devotion. One of the fourteen Eucharistic Prayers (*Anaphora*) is of the Blessed Virgin Mary and she is close to the faithful who simply call her Mariam. Whenever her name occurs in the Service Books of the Church it is written in red. A casual observer might accuse

Ethiopians of making her almost a fourth person of the Holy Trinity, but this would be a gross misunderstanding. While popular devotion may sometimes go beyond the limits of official teaching, that teaching is in accordance with the Alexandrine Christology inherited through the close links with the Coptic Church.

What does it mean to say that Christ is both human and divine? He is One Person and the two natures exist in him without division. While no human formulary is adequate to express this mystery, the early Church excluded certain errors that seemed to compromise the humanity or divinity present in the One Person of Christ.

The Ethiopian Church follows the Christological teaching of St Cyril of Alexandria. The Council of Ephesus in 431 affirmed that Mary is *Theotokos* (God-bearer, Mother of God) which had been denied by Nestorius, as a consequence of the unity of the two natures in Christ. St Cyril spoke of the 'one incarnate nature of the divine word' which he thought, wrongly, was a phrase attributable to St Athanasius. There is no division in the person of Christ, that is to say, he did not do some things as a man and others as God. The principle of the exchange of characteristics, *communication,* (Greek *antidosis idiomatum*) means that what can be predicated of him as a man can also be predicated of him as God and vice versa. It is wrong to call the Ethiopian and other Oriental Churches Monophysite. They would accept the Chalcedonian formula provided it is understood dynamically rather than as just a moral union of natures.

The devotion given to Mary is a consequence of what is believed about Christ. The Antiochene view might seem different, but in fact Syrian devotion to Mary is found at a very early period, for example in the hymns of St Ephrem. We should remember that the Nine Saints who came to Ethiopia in the sixth century were Syrian. Ethiopian devotion to Mariam goes back at least to the writings of St Ephrem, some of which were translated into Ge'ez by the Nine Saints. The same devotion is also found contemporaneously in the writings of St Yared, the founder of the Ethiopian musical tradition.

The Orthodox Church has often preferred to express its theology in the language of poetry and liturgy rather than in the dry formularies of dogmatic utterance. If at times the East can appear more speculative and less precise in its theology, it could well be argued that it is affirming in a different way the same truths enshrined in such Catholic doctrines as the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of our Lady.

The history of the cult of Mary in Ethiopia shows a unique form. (Alas, one modern term for a Protestant in Amharic, the principal language of modern Ethiopia, means 'enemy of Mary'.) 'Jesus Christ was born for our salvation. He who does not believe in his birth from the Holy Virgin Mary, let him be anathema.'

The Mother Church of Ethiopia from about 332 AD is the Metropolitan Cathedral of *Debre Tsion Mariam* (Our Lady of Mount Sion) *un Aksum*. This is the oldest church in the country and contains the original Art of the Covenant, said to have been brought by Memelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. Every Church has a copy of the Ark (*tabot*) which can only be seen by the Guardian of the Ark who, once appointed, remains in the church compound for the rest of his life. On the back of the *tabot* in Aksum are written in Ge'ez the words: 'Our Lady of Mount Sion.'

The ark is a focus for the presence of God, just as our Lady too, as Ark of the Covenant, is a focus for the God present in her womb. At the Annunciation she became in a unique way the dwelling-place of the Lord.

This is the reason for the prominent place in the Liturgy, in hymns and prayers and in personal devotion of the Mother of the Lord. This also explains her prominence in the very distinctive Ethiopian iconography, especially important in a country where many people are illiterate. The devotion is a consequence of Christological belief. Her role in the Liturgy was formalised by the emperor Zara Yacob in the first part of the fifteenth century when there was a great revival in the cult of Mary.

Zara Yacob was especially devoted to Mary because he believed he owed his life to her. His barren mother conceived him

through the prayers of Mary and vowed him to the Virgin at his birth. If some of the expressions seem extreme, e.g. ‘Mary should be honoured as her Son’, this should be seen in the context of Orthodox Christology and beliefs about deification (*theosis*). ‘Truly the Lord is with her’, as the angel announced, and she cannot be separated from her Son.

A prayer to Mary says: ‘Now listen all you Ethiopian men and women. You are slaves of Mary who received you as a tithe so that you might be her gift from her Son. Always take refuge with her because she is capable of saving you from all evil.’ Such ideas find their parallel in some western Counter-Reformation devotion: ‘Venerate and invoke and pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin. Let them fly with utter confidence to this most sweet mother of mercy and grace in all dangers, difficulties, needs, doubts, and fears. Under her guidance, under her patronage, under her kindness and protection, nothing is to be feared, nothing is hopeless.’

The twenty-first day of every month is a Marian feast and there are thirty-two feast days in her honour. A much treasured work extolling her merits is the *Miracles of Mary*, translated from Arabic into Ge’ez in the time of the Emperor Zara Yacob. It is read on Sundays and on her feasts at the end of the Liturgy with a sung refrain following. The book contains stories and legends from Mary’s life after the crucifixion of her Son, and was condemned by Pope Gelasius in 494 because of possible misuse, though it remained very popular in Europe for many centuries after that. There are three hundred and sixty-six stories, many showing how erring monks were assisted by Mariam. Parallels to many of the stories are found in western traditions. They were written to exalt the role of Mariam who is ‘higher than the cherubim and infinitely more glorious that the seraphim’. ‘Mary means guide to the Kingdom of heaven. The whole world was made for the sake of our Lady Mary. Our Lady is purer than the angels. Our Lady Mary knows the mind of God. Honour her for she is the redeemer (cf. co-redemptrix) of you sinners and she is the giver of grace to him who serves with good service.’ Even before her death she was taken

mystically into heaven and shown what would be hers. cf. St Paul's experience in II Corinthians 12:2 ff.

Nevertheless, Mary is a creature and part of the created universe. 'Glory be to God who created you for us, flesh from our flesh, bone from our bone. Through you we found salvation, and you became the harbour of life from the storm of destruction by the Incarnation of the Son of God for you.'

One very popular Marian feast is *Kidane Mehret* (Covenant of Mercy) which celebrates on the 16th day of each month, and especially in the month of *Yekatit* the Covenant made between Christ and His Mother. The story is told as follows in the Ethiopian tradition: Our Lord asked Mary, 'What shall I do for you?' Mary replied, 'It is concerning him who makes my memorial, builds a church in my name, clothes the naked in my name, visits the sick, feeds the hungry, gives water to the thirsty or comforts the grief-stricken, gives joy to the distressed or copies my praises, names his son or daughter in my name, or chants hymns in my name, reward such a one as that.' Our Lord answered her: 'Let it be as you said. I shall fulfil all your wishes. Was I not incarnated for this? I swear to you by myself lest I deny this covenant.' Mary's wishes and her will are, of course, entirely one with that of her Son. Cf. John 2:5.

Ethiopian churches often have terrifying pictures of judgement, heaven and hell. To be saved or damned is a reality that cannot be avoided. But there is another truth as well which needs to be balanced alongside this. The Lord is full of mercy and compassion. This may be illustrated in the life of the famous Ethiopian cannibal Bela Sew (his name means 'man-eater'). He ate even his wife and children and terrorised the neighbourhood where he lived. One day he met a leper and was about, as he thought, to enjoy another tasty meal when the man asked for 'water for the sake of God, for the sake of the martyrs and the righteous, for the sake of the name of our Lady Mary, the God-bearer'. The cannibal gave up his intention of eating him and gave him water. When the cannibal died the angels of darkness assembled, assuming he was theirs, but our Lady came and asked if he had done any good deed and was told of his single act of kindness to the leper in her name. Mary thereupon

invokes the Covenant with her Son, who tells her ‘I shall not deny my oath’. The scales are brought to weigh his good and bad deeds and the cannibal is found to have devoured seventy-eight people. Then Mary puts a handful of water on the other scales and this tips the balance in his favour and he enters heaven and joins the redeemed.

We may find this and other similar such stories whimsical or naïve. But that is to miss the point. The point is that the mercy of God is greater than anything you can imagine and we all need to come to God asking not for justice but for mercy.

Our Lady has a double virginity. ‘The Holy Virgin in two ways, Mary the God-bearer’. These two ways, virgin in body and mind, are identified with the two wings of the great eagle of the Apocalypse (Revelation 12:14). ‘As for Mary, she is eternally immaculate and eternally holy—it is impossible to say of her that she was unclean at such a time and clean at such a time. There was no time at all when she was unclean’, i.e. she is sinless.

The twentieth century Athonite monk and saint Staretz Silouan echoes this in his spiritual experience. ‘I was listening in Church to the reading from the prophet Isaiah and at the words, “wash you, make you clean”, I thought, maybe at some time the Mother of God sinned if only in thought. And marvellous to relate in unison with my prayer a voice sounded clear in my heart saying, “The Mother of God never sinned even in thought”. Thus did the Holy Spirit bear witness to her purity.’

The Lord is with her. The power of the most High has overshadowed her ‘that Holy Spirit has not separated from her even for a moment or a blink of the eye and for ever and ever it will live in her without separation’.

Another text reflects the same idea. ‘There never was a time when a bad thought entered her mind and there was no time either when the thought of the Holy Spirit was removed from her heart. Therefore, we say Mary is Virgin in two ways—in body and in mind.’

We are moving in a strange yet wonderful world whose presuppositions may be very different from ours, but not one so

very different perhaps from the world of the New Testament. Mary has to be seen in the context of the Church whose Mother she is. The Hebraic element in Ethiopian Christianity should also remind us that a Jewish mother is not usually weak, passive and submissive in the negative sense. If she is meek and gentle of heart it is because she is one with her Son in all things from the moment of his conception as a human being until now. That is why she is honoured above all other of God's creatures and can truly be venerated as the Mother of God. That is why we believe, as one Ethiopian put it to me, in one God and one Mary.

The above is the second of two talks given at the East-West Christian Monastic Meeting at Minster Abbey in September 2002, and published here by kind permission of the Benedictine Community, Priory of St Mildred, Minster Abbey.

THIS IS THE NIGHT:THE AMBIGUITY OF PASSOVER

KENNETH MASON

A ONCE PROMISING friendship can sometimes turn out badly when it is pursued. Someone who showed an attractive wit reveals, on deeper acquaintance, a too ready instinct for malice. A promise of warm attachment turns into an unhealthy dependency. Something similar seems to be happening with the Christian Churches' interest in the Jewish Passover, especially as it has come to feature in the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.

Of course Easter and Passover are essentially one—the Paschal celebration under different but not wholly opposed perspectives. Even the undemonstrative liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer acknowledged the tradition that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, and proclaimed Christ as 'our Passover' in the Easter Anthems. But nothing drew attention to the details of this coincidence, or led us to consider what meaning the Passover had in itself before our Lord set his own meaning upon it.

Recently this has changed. Many churches now celebrate a form of Easter Vigil in which the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red

Sea is a required reading. The *Exultet*, even in the abbreviated forms which modern liturgies allow, still makes much of the parallel between Israel's exodus and Christ's passion and resurrection, and this is naturally reiterated in the blessing of baptismal water that follows. The keynote is liberation—explicitly 'from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land'.

But perhaps most striking of recent introductions is the practice of celebrating a Passover Supper in accepted Jewish form on Maundy Thursday, either as part of the eucharistic liturgy or in close relation to it, so that the drama of the week may affirm in detail the themes and atmosphere of our Lord's last meal before his passion. It is true that we know so little about Jewish practice at that time—what was done, and whether it varied from one household to another—that we cannot be sure that present-day Jewish practice assures us of what Jesus would have done with his disciples. We can, though, enter into the intention that shaped the Passover before his time, and which has continued to shape it among his Jewish brothers and sisters since.

These things make us aware, in a more vivid way, of the Jewish inheritance which was native to our Lord and is ours through him. The Church's claim to be 'Israel' does not imply a repudiation of the inheritance of ancient Israel, nor of those who continue to live by it. Rather, the celebration of the Christian Passover in a manner which is more open to the intentions and affections of the original Passover can have some very salutary effects. Passover celebrates the gift of freedom and of a land to a landless people. It reminds us of the form God's grace may take before it is spiritualized and handed over to the theologians for analysis. Its emphasis on the Land brings home how bitter the experience of exile really is, in a way that those who are at home in the world and exiles only from heaven can hardly imagine.

That being said, it can still turn out that the recovered emphasis on the ancient passover, in its context in the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt to Canaan, is in certain ways uncomfortable, and even inconsistent with other aspects of the faith we share with Israel. Passover has a dark side, and fairly obviously dark if we only look

at it plainly. We may try to come to terms with it out of loyalty to our undoubted Israelite inheritance, but a feeling may persist that we should not come to terms with it. Its new meaning, in Christ, is not consistent with its old meaning.

This feeling possessed me forcibly when, on one such occasion, we came to the part of the Passover in which the plagues of Egypt are recalled. As each is named in turn the diner places a drop of wine on his or her plate. The effect for us was bizarrely humorous. We were taken with a childlike glee that might have been appropriate to the conclusion of a fairy story, as though disaster for the Egyptians was of no more moment than the downfall of Rumplestiltskin. It conveys a particular horror to realize that if these plagues occurred at all it was not at all like that.

In a similar way there has been for a long time a joking way of saying that the Hebrew scriptures do not tell us what the Canaanites felt about the liberation of Israel. Of course, the narrative acknowledges their misgivings, their resistance to occupation and extermination, but wholly without sympathy for their case. Readers of the Bible are meant to identify themselves with Israel and take pride in their victories.

The Church uses the psalms to praise God, in words like, *Who smote great kings, for his mercy endureth forever* (Ps. 136). If we ask what these kings, Sehon and Og, did to deserve this perverse mercy, the answer is that they refused to let Israel cross their territory so as to invade the Canaanite lands beyond: they did, in truth, what plucky little Belgium was applauded for when in 1914 she stood between the Kaiser's army and France.

The Exodus, as celebrated in the Passover, is regarded as a paradigm of liberation, but it is aspects of the story such as these, not at all hidden or disguised, which may leave us wondering whether the whole notion of liberation is not too much tied to the point of view of the liberated. Once any sympathy is allowed towards those who suffer in the liberating process, without coming to share in its outcome, it becomes possible and even obligatory to ask whether it was worth the price that other people were made to pay for it. Were the plagues of Egypt, necessary as they may have

been, proportionate either to the goal of liberation or to Egypt's sins? Did every house in Egypt have to suffer the death of the firstborn, having already handed over a good deal of treasure to the Israelites, in order that Israel's liberty should be assured? Is it really something to celebrate proudly, that we were bought at such a price?

Now, it is possible to blunt the edge of these questions by suggesting, quite reasonably, that the historical reality was not what the sacred narrative represents. Among responsible biblical historians, those who believe that the exodus took place at all still see it as a rather small, historically insignificant event. At most a clan or tribe of those who subsequently became Israel would have been in Egypt and experienced deliverance. Egypt suffered no recorded disaster on the scale of the Exodus plagues, nor were all the Canaanites exterminated to make room for Israel. On the contrary, it is probable that most of the Canaanites ended up within Israel, and not all under duress. If we allow that Israel emerges as a historical political reality only with the formation of the Davidic Kingdom (and this is more than some would allow with confidence) then we can say that the exodus theme also emerges as one of the myths of identity of that kingdom: not the only one, and probably not the most important. Its adoption as the national myth, the central narrative of all, involves the abandonment or subordination of other, sectional or local myths, and only in this sense can it be said that Canaan had to be exterminated in order that Israel should inherit the land. 'Israel' and 'Canaan' are not rival peoples, but rival narratives employed to identify a single emergent people.

However, so sophisticated an account of the matter was not available to ancient Israel, since a myth that comes to its adherents along with persuasive political reasons for adhering to it cannot serve the function that a myth should serve. It cannot say, 'here, rooted in divine reality, is the reason why you are what you are, and are called to be what you are called to be.' So we are forced to think that those who anciently celebrated the Passover as an anamnesis of the Exodus and entry into the Land, seriously believed that it was a true historical account and definitive of their character as a people,

however many injustices and oppressions inflicted on other peoples that might imply.

There is one major reason why these injustices are not normally adverted to, or at least not as injustices. That is that the liberating process is wholly the work of God. Israel is God's chosen people; the benefit of liberation and occupation of the Land is owed them by ancient divine promises; the deeds which bring them out of Egypt and into Canaan are God's own acts.

> … not by their own sword did our ancestors take the land … But your right hand, your arm, and the light of your countenance, because you were gracious to them (Ps. 44).

When God gives effect to his own choice, accomplishes his own design, seeking his own end, there is in Kierkegaard's phrase a 'teleological suspension of ethics', or as the Bishop says in *City of Bells*, 'No one wants to be bothered with morals at Christmas'. But if somebody raises objections because morals continue to bother them, they may induce a reply in kind: 'Who are you to blame God for his actions?' The trouble with this kind of answer is that it stands very near the assumption that those who benefit from God's actions forfeit the right to challenge them, and those who suffer from them are in the wrong anyway. We see how close the ancient Israelite view comes to this when we consider two ancillary reasons given for God's actions, namely that the Canaanites were notably immoral and that Israel was itself the victim of oppression. It has to be said that theological purity has no need of such reasons. God needs no justification. That such reasons are admitted is a sign that motives other than those of faith are having their effect on the story's telling.

The condemnation of the Canaanites probably had its origin in a desire to warn Israel against their practices, but it appears as well as a warning against compassion towards them in their fate:

> For the wickedness of these nations doth the Lord drive them out from before thee (Deut. 9:4) … because of these abominations (18:12) … the land is defiled, therefore do I visit the iniquity upon it (Lev. 18:24).

The argument is like the harsh predestinarian judgement that those whom God does not save have no case against him because their damnation is deserved. But as there, so here, the perception remains that those elected to salvation are no better. This is the principle burden of the prophets, and, in the Torah which enshrines the Exodus tradition, Moses repeatedly reproves the Israelites for their stiff-necked rebelliousness against God. In their humbler moments those who know God's grace know that they don't deserve it. How then can they accept it without misgivings, especially when, as between Israel and Canaan, the salvation of one requires the damnation of the other? It is easier to see it as a matter of desert, and what tips the balance of desert in Israel's favour is that in Egypt they were oppressed victims.

The victim status of Israel in Egypt is everywhere assumed in the narratives, but the historian, asked to substantiate the assumption, will go warily. God brings Israel 'out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace', 'out of bondage', though whether the Israelites were really worse off than other subjects of Pharaoh is hard to determine. Had not Israel's patriarch Joseph bought the whole population of Egypt for Pharaoh? (Gen. 47:20). The decree that Israelite boy children should be killed at birth is a significant element in the story of Moses but it does not appear that Moses is the only male Israelite of his generation. It may be that Israel is a victim, rather, by definition, as a suitable recipient of God's favour.

Certainly, and in some ways paradoxically, the story which justifies Israel's destruction of the Canaanites and their occupation of Canaan as their own land, also carries with it a strong sense of mercy, not only as a property of Israel's God but as an ethical disposition that Israel should emulate. Israel is continually reminded that it was not for its size, strength or virtue that God loved and chose it for his people. From the beginning it has been intractable, perverse and deserving of humiliation. And for this reason Israel must be considerate towards the humbled of the earth, the poor, the slaves and the stranger, because she was all these things in Egypt. So it turns out that the same book which demands the destruction of

all that is strange to Israel also legislates for a generous protection of strangers (Deut. 7:2 and 10:19).

It may be that, in the social context in which the documents of Torah were collated, the exodus narrative has little if anything to do with warfare over the occupation of land. In the period of the Persian Empire, Israel was in no position to displace other peoples in its own favour. The scope of possible action was restricted to the definition of Israel itself. Returning exiles defined it as the covenant people of the one God, but there were also other groups like the Samaritans, the people of the land who had not been in exile, and perhaps some remnant of the Jerusalem priesthood, all of whom had norms and aspirations that went back to the period of the monarchy. 'Canaan' in this perspective is a metaphor for the religion(s) of those groups and perhaps for their political interests as well. 'Canaan' is identified as the source of all those features of Israelite society which, say, the party of Ezra wanted to abandon as compromising the true faith of Israel, and those who value those features are condemned by association with it.

The power of this metaphor is manifest in the ideas which are released by it and with it, including some that claim the highest theological respectability. Beside the idea of grace as both gift and obligation, there follow the notion of elective and covenant love, and the conviction that God's promise, and not human strength or virtue, is the only real guarantee of security. Israel, when defined by such a faith, is defined by its humility.

Whether such humility is to be identified with the humiliation of a victim depends on how the word *victim* is being used. It is interesting that the word itself is not used in the Authorised Version of the Bible, and its use in English theology seems to date from the nineteenth century when it came in as a term in Catholic eucharistic theology. Here it means whatever is offered to God in sacrifice (where older usage would speak of the offering, gift or oblation) but perhaps with emphasis on death as the means by which offering was effected. This is an odd usage, and certainly distinct from the idea that people are made victims by the hostility or oppression of others. And yet there may be an important clue to victim experience in this

uncertainty about meanings. Perhaps we need to entertain the notion that God's demand for sacrifice, or even his tolerance of our willingness to offer it, is oppressive, at least as a first step towards a more qualified judgement.

When God tells Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice—as we might now say, as a victim—is that not oppressive? It is true that the ethical character of the action is completely redefined by two aspects of Abraham's willingness to undertake it. First, he is wholly one with the victim in his intention. He is giving over to God all his hopes and joys, his dearest possession, in the confidence that they become the more his own by being God's. Second, he does this in a spirit of adoration. It does not occur to him to condemn God for what he demands, and this is in reality the only way in which a 'suspension of ethics' is possible. The victim can decide not to identity himself as a victim of oppression, as the one whose rights have been transgressed, but rather choose to see himself as the one through whom God's purposes are accomplished, however obscure or painful they are to him personally. In the sacrifice of Isaac God appears as both oppressor and saviour. Judged, so to speak, objectively, as by someone not personally involved, both descriptions have an equal claim to validity, yet cannot be reconciled. It is the adoring trust of the victim which reconciles them, and shows them to be one with the mysterious love which chooses and calls men and women to be God's friends.

This too is a metaphor for Israel's standing before God, set at the beginning of the whole story to provide the foundational definition of that status. Israel, in Abraham, is the elect victim of God's love and purpose in the world. Neither aspect of the definition can be given priority over the other because in God they are one.

Problems arise because Israel is unable to unite them perfectly in itself. Sacrificial victimhood and oppressive victimhood do not look alike, and to speak of either as a way of election seems only to make confusion worse. If stress falls on the word *victim* it is not difficult for election to be seen, however obliquely, as having no purpose but to punish Israel for the world's oppressions. This may

account for the curious way some Jewish humour is directed ironically against the Jews themselves. On the other hand, if election is stressed, it may be concluded that Israel has rights conferred by God that others cannot claim, and has them precisely in virtue of its being a victim. This kind of transformation of suffering into arrogance emerges in the covenant prayer of Nehemiah 9, when it is said,

> So the children went in and possessed the land, and you subdued the inhabitants of the land before them, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands … so that they might *do with them what they would* (9:24; my emphasis).

But then the same arrogant complacency shows itself in Christian circles—in this as in other ways truly 'Israel'—when it is asserted that because Christ's sufferings are complete, those chosen in him should expect to live free of suffering. This is a long way from the mind of Christ as he speaks of St Paul,

> he is a chosen vessel unto me … for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:15 f.).

It is nowadays a common hermeneutical dogma that God's favour is towards the oppressed, and the idea of Israel as elect victim can be said to confirm that. It is, though, part of that idea that Israel should not seek to impose a temporal rationality upon it, consigning the status of victim to the past and retaining only the election for the present. But this is what the ordinary human sense of justice protests against, believing as it does that victims are owed redress and compensation, and that the one thing victims should not do is to take their oppression upon themselves, since that is both a self-betrayal and a betrayal of the God who favours them. The victim, it is argued, loses his or her innocence and becomes guilty when he or she is complicit in his or her own suffering and so responsible for it. 'Oppressor' is always a title for someone else.

This leads to a construction of the idea of the elect victim in which the first step towards repentance, and so to liberation, is the discrediting of the point of view of the oppressor. It then follows that all scripture, tradition and history is to be interpreted in favour

of the victim's cause, and this interpretation cannot be expected from anyone who does not share the victim's point of view. And this may lead on to a state, more or less permanent, in which victims can honestly plead that they want peace with their antagonists while demanding that, coincidentally their sense of outraged justice should be satisfied. It is this that makes so many current political conflicts insoluble—whether between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Israelis and Palestinians, indigenous peoples and European settlers, and sometimes, it seems, men and women.

The problem is sustained by the conviction that the status of victim must be transferred away from its present holder—but to whom? If we say, to the oppressor, we shall be told, quite accurately, that the oppressor already sees himself as a victim, and the transference proposed will simply give him better grounds for doing so. Every act of redressive justice creates a new injustice and a further demand for redress. And if this is the way of things, the exterminated Canaanites become the ultimate saviours because as the total victims they take themselves completely out of the way and leave the future open to a new *shalom*.

There is, however, another possibility, though hard to realise and especially hard to express in political terms. That is that the status of victim does not have to be transferred, and that when the oppressed become aware of their oppressed status, they have the option of retaining it, creatively, redemptively, sacrificially. This calls for the kind of faith which lets God be both oppressor and saviour, and each for the sake of the other. It is the kind of faith which prompts Jesus to say both, 'the Son of Man must suffer' and 'you shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven', and which identifies him in his passion as our paschal Lamb—the true Passover.

BETWEEN BUCHAREST AND OXFORD

DONALD ALLCHIN

EVEN the cover tells you that there is something exceptional about this book, **Petre Ţuţea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide* by Alexandru Popescu. There is the striking photograph of the back of Ţuţea's head, the rather daunting quality of the title, the paragraphs of commendation from three Oxford professors of theology, and from Canon Michael Bourdeaux, Bishop Kallistos Ware and the Archbishop of Canterbury. In this book we have the first major presentation of the work of Petre Ţuţea, one of the outstanding representatives of the Romanian Orthodox tradition during the twentieth century. For the first time his work is made available to the world outside his native country. From the start Dr Alexandru Popescu is to be congratulated for the way he has undertaken this pioneering task, bringing his readers into new and largely unexplored territory. Only as we read the book do we understand how much there is to discover.

For the difficulty of writing, and to some extent of reading, such a book is not only that Ţuţea's name is unknown in the West. Very little of the quality or character of the intellectual and spiritual tradition to which he belonged is familiar in our English-speaking world. A recent book which sets out to present just one aspect of that tradition to us, Father Nicholas Stebbing's *Bearers of the Spirit,* a study of the role of the spiritual father in contemporary Romanian Orthodoxy, itself comes up against this problem. As a matter of fact, the theme of Father Nicholas's book is by no means unrelated to Alexandru Popescu's. Indeed, *Between Sacrifice and Suicide* contains an invaluable appendix on the history of Hesychasm in Romania, something which would provide useful background material to Nicholas Stebbing's work. The tradition of monastic prayer is of central importance to both these writers.

One way in which Popescu helps us to situate ourselves in relation to his subject is to remind us of the names of some of the Romanians who came into exile in the West in order to escape the

tyranny of the communist years, and thus became internationally known. Among them would be the playwright Eugene Ionescu, promoter of the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, the outstanding abstract sculptor Constantin Brancusi, on whom Ţuţea wrote, above all perhaps Mircea Eliade, the historian of religions, distinguished professor in Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s, a man who had a deep respect and affection for Ţuţea.

But perhaps the contemporary who can most help us to situate Ţuţea is another Romanian theologian who like him, saw the inside of the communist prison world and refused to leave his native country, Father Dumitru Stăniloae. The two men were almost exact contemporaries, (Ţuţea 1902-1991, and Stăniloae 1903-1993). Together they span the twentieth century; both lived to see the end of the Ceauşescu tyranny which finally collapsed at Christmas 1989. At the very end of their lives they became publicly recognized figures, appearing on television and radio, true representatives of the older spiritual tradition of their country. But it must be recognized that despite similarities of situation the position of the two men was very different even in the last third of their lives. Of the two Ţuţea was the more isolated and the more genuinely hampered by his post-prison situation. From 1963 onwards, after his release from prison, Stăniloae could resume his position in the life of the Church, could take up again his work as professor of theology in Bucharest, and after a time receive permission to publish again and even to travel to Western countries. Thus he was able in the1970s, to revisit Germany and to come to Britain for the first time, on three memorable occasions staying at the convent at Fairacres. Ţuţea’s situation was very different. As a layman in the 1930s he had worked in the political world. In the communist period he was much more clearly and definitively marked out as an ‘enemy’.

When he was finally released from prison in 1964, after almost fifteen years of imprisonment, Ţuţea was assigned to a one-roomed flat on the eighth floor of a tower block near the centre of Bucharest. Here he lived alone. His conversations with visitors were recorded by the bugging devices of the Secret Police. Like others he

acquired the habit of discussing all important questions out of doors. He became known as 'The Philosopher of the Streets'. Even if the Secret Police were shadowing you, as they well might be, they probably couldn't hear what you were saying and wouldn't understand it if they did. During the last twenty years of the Ceauşescu regime Ţuţea wrote steadily on theological and philosophical topics. Only someone of great determination and courage, of exceptional intellectual energy and faith, would have had the capacity to continue to write and to work at his writings when he had absolutely no immediate prospects of publication. Working under these conditions it is not surprising that his style acquires at times an idiosyncratic and baffling character.

Popescu remarks, 'Ţuţea's style is at once laconic, controversial, eclectic, apologetic and subversive. He was the product of the age of *samizdat* and lived much of his life outside the academic establishment. Some of his work has been published [in the last ten years] … much remains unpublished. In the circumstances, his phenomenal memory was the arena in which he developed his ideas. His was a compelling intellect, at once irritating and stimulating (p.29).' So we find that he can be at times remarkably lucid in his exposition, at times cryptic and baffling. As the years went by, he received more and more visitors in his flat and seems to have become more and more impervious to the presence of the bugging devices. Indeed he would sometimes develop his ideas in ways directly intended to disturb and baffle the auditors who would have to listen to the tapes and transcribe them.

Here again Stăniloae's position was very different. He was living with his wife Maria in their tiny three-roomed apartment, cramped but comfortable, filled with books and papers, icons and photographs, the memories of a lifetime. But here too one was always aware of the bugging. Stăniloae also chose to go out of doors to discuss any personal or confidential matters, or indeed to discuss any theological questions where he wanted to try out new ideas or speak of themes particularly dear to him. Some of my most memorable conversations with him took place as we walked back after supper from his flat to the Priests' Hostel near the Patriarchate

where I would be staying, and then back from the hostel to his flat to see one another off. Sometimes we repeated the journey three or four times!

One of the difficulties which I found, at least with a first reading of Popescu's book, was that I began to discover sections of his exposition of Ţuţea's thought which remain more or less baffling to me. Part of the reason for that is undoubtedly the limitations of my own reading and understanding, but part I believe may also be due to the extreme conditions under which Ţuţea was working. It seems that at least some Romanian intellectuals adopted a particularly 'technical' style of writing precisely in order to baffle the communist censors. In the chapter entitled 'Anagogic Typology' for instance, I was relieved to note that Popescu had recognized in a footnote that the text might prove daunting to some readers. 'Ţuţea's incorporation of the anagogic tradition of theological typology into secularized classificatory typology of the neo-Kantian tradition is not purely a linguistic artifice, although probably it is the sort of intellectual device that makes him obscure to many readers (p. 115, note 149).' At least at times, such intellectual devices seem to proliferate to a disconcerting degree.

I point to these difficulties because I hope that they will not too much discourage others who embark on the reading of this book. If you persevere with passages which seem obscure, you may suddenly find yourself coming to passages of a luminous clarity, full of illumination and insight. I would quote as an example some lines from the end of a chapter whose title might at first sight seem somewhat esoteric, 'The Philosophy of Nuances'. This chapter, if I have understood it aright, circles around the conviction that God has created a universe which is infinitely various and diversified and that to recognize this endless range of variations in the world around us, together with all the lesser variations caused by the way in which human beings perceive things differently, is a way of recognizing the true nature of God's action as creator of a world which is at once many and also one:

> Expressing and communicating the *correspondances* between sensory taste, aesthetic taste, spiritual discernment, intellectual

joy, ontic mystery, vocational activity, scientific curiosity, and social identity—the infinite gamut of creaturely existence—nuances reflect a polychromatic splendour that in God's own time and way breaks forth in the unified light of glory. Through the mystery (with a small 'm') of the incomprehensible known in this multiplicity we are brought to a vision of the Holy, the Great Mystery such as it was revealed to the disciples on Mount Tabor (p.261).

In such a meditation on the diversity and multiplicity of creation perhaps we have a reflection of the fact that at the Office of Vespers in the Orthodox Church the service begins every day with the recitation of the whole or part of Psalm 104, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom has thou made them all.*

In his *Foreword* to Popescu's book Archbishop Rowan Williams writes, 'Petre Ţuţea comes before us here in all his human and intellectual complexity; he is not a two-dimensional saint or hero, he arrives at his transfiguring faith after false starts and a good deal of flailing around in the ferment of pre-war Romania (and what a world that was, still looking for a chronicler who can do justice to the years when Bucharest was one of the most intellectually exciting cities in Europe). But the person who emerges into the light in these post-war years of persecution and humiliation is a truly extraordinary man. One element that stands out most clearly in this portrait is the discovery of a *priestly* calling and identity which is much larger and deeper than any ecclesiastical office. Looking at the theology of Ţuţea's friend and fellow-sufferer, Dimitru Stăniloae, one of the foremost Orthodox theologians of the century, we can see something of a common vision when Stăniloae writes of the essence of priest as giving voice to the prayer and the need and the love of the body of Christ (p. xi).'

The quality of shared vision which unites these two so different thinkers becomes very marked in the last pages of this book in which Popescu seeks to gather together the various strands of reflection and experience which characterize the remarkable man whose work he has been presenting to us.

Ţuţea's thought represents a twofold challenge for the contemporary church. First to accept that human beings do not

have answers—God alone *is* the answer, ultimate and mysterious—and as dependent rather than independent beings they proclaim this Truth. Second, human beings are also *inter*dependent and have a mutual responsibility of loving engagement and interaction (of body, mind and heart) towards each other. This interdependence reflects something of the Trinitarian nature of God in whose image we are made. These defining aspects of faith co-inhere in Christ, who both reveals God and points to the sacrificial demand and redemptive power of love. The universal Church represents the solidarity of the people of God, vulnerable but unconquerable. In Ţuţea's view, individuals are free and peaceful only in church. In prison, they can also experience freedom and peace by being one with the witnessing Church, by keeping alive within themselves the liturgical spirit and the presence of Christ represented by his priest (p. 265).

We see in this paragraph something of how deeply rooted Ţuţea is in the praying and worshipping tradition of Christian Orthodoxy, yet also how consistently open he is to the witness of the Christian West, and indeed to the presence of the manifold grace and wisdom of God, active and at work in the whole creation.

Again in his 'Conclusions' Popescu goes on :

> At one level, for all the complexity of his thought and the densely woven texture of his language Ţuţea's faith remains extremely simple: love of God and love of neighbour, human mutuality and recognition that human beings do not have ultimate answers. All his thinking flows from this acknowledgement of creaturely dependence upon the God of love. He wrestles with the question (and invites and challenges all who might chance upon his words to wrestle with it too) of how organized structural Christianity can show forth the Mystery of Christ in the world—a world which continues to live by the quantitative pseudo-mystery of 'numbers', despite the horrors of Communism and of exploitation in the modern global economy. The confession of faith that he offers is simply his life, his personal witness to the crucified and risen Messiah, a realised icon of Christian vision and hope, prayed, enacted, drawn out, and invested with subtle and radiant colour through a living martyrdom, leading not to Stoic severity but to joy (pp. 266-7).

At the end of this article I want to add one further reflection. Petre Ţuţea and Dumitru Stăniloae were, and remain, very different people, deeply united in their free and creative appropriation of the heritage of Orthodoxy, but developing and expressing it in contrasting ways. In an altogether unexpected way both have become quite closely linked with the life of SLG. In the case of Father Dumitru these contacts go back to the nineteen-sixties and seventies, to his memorable visits to Fairacres and to the publication by SLG Press of his lecture *The Victory of the Cross* (1970) and his retreat addresses *Prayer and Holiness: The Icon of Man Renewed in God* (1982). Petre Ţuţea's contact with Fairacres Road has come about through the presence of Dr Popescu in Oxford during the last ten years, and through the long and faithful collaboration which he points to in the *Acknowledgements* at the beginning of his book. 'Creative and sacrificial help with my translations came from [three sisters of the Community] from whom I learnt my knowledge of theology and deepened my love for the English language.' In a way that none of us could have foreseen it seems that a certain amount of traffic has got through between the streets of East Oxford and the streets of Bucharest, so that by God's grace at least some glimpses of the polychromatic divine wisdom have broken forth and been revealed 'in the unified light of glory'. For this we can only be thankful to God, Three in One.

* *PETRE ŢUŢEA between Sacrifice and Suicide by* Alexandru Popescu, Ashgate, 2004.

EVENTS OF SALVATION AND MOMENTS OF INTIMACY

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

IN the Parish Church at Littlemore, which Newman built and Bloxham expanded, there is a remarkable triptych of windows over the high altar. While at first I did not like it very much, over the years it has exercised some power over me. Now, after celebrating the liturgy and praying in the sanctuary for the last seven years, I have begun to grow quite fond of it. And what is more, I have recognized the pastoral power that shines forth from these three strongly representational panels. The windows simply depict the three great events of the life of our Saviour, which have wrought salvation for our broken world. The depiction of these events is surrounded by pictorial references to Old and New Testament stories as well as by artistically arranged quotations from the liturgy. The dominant colours are blue and pale white, as well as some small splashes of deep red. The windows never shine in their full glory, due to an ancient yew tree that thrives behind the sanctuary of the church.

The artist is the little known Louis Davis (1861-1941), who was influenced by the 'Arts and Crafts' movement as well as the beginnings of art nouveau. The occasion of its installation in Littlemore (around 1902) seems to have been to commemorate a predecessor of mine, the long-serving Vicar Thomas Vernon Green. On first viewing it one may well be put off by the strong use of cliché. Joseph, for example, in the 'nativity window' is presented to us as an old European type with a beard, and other figures are also wearing medieval garb. Angels of the baroque-cherubic variety might tend to sink the hearts of those who wish to strip our faith of sugary sentimentality and irrelevance. But it is exactly these clichés that Louis Davis is prepared to play with and work with so that his viewers might receive a new insight into the depth of our reconciliation. For in each of the windows he has added an aspect of intimacy with the power to bring these two thousand year-old events

WINDOW

immediately close to us, into our homes and hearts. As we move from Christmas to Easter this becomes increasingly daring and personal.

In the Christmas window the scene looks traditional enough. But if you look closely, you can see a Littlemore landmark sitting comfortably in the background. It is in fact St George's House, one of the few remaining historic buildings in a parish now filled with contemporary housing. Christmas may have happened two thousand years ago, but its reverberation can be felt here in Littlemore today.

Louis Davis chooses the event described in St John's Gospel (20:27) for his depiction of the crucifixion. Jesus looks down from the cross and greets his mother with the words 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'. In his dying Jesus originates the new family of the church. The disciple and Mary are virtually hugging the cross and they are holding hands, a gesture that might be wholly understandable, but, in my limited knowledge of Christian iconography, is not depicted in this way elsewhere. Over the years this has struck me as a very simple, powerful and truthful expression of what is after all at the heart of our experience: the agony and death of Christ transforms our inability to form an intimate relationship with God. We all know that this is so and that it should be so. But we do not know why the suffering of Christ is apparently necessary. Traditionally we are pointed to the depth of our sin to find the answer to this question. But Louis Davis helps us to lift our heads and to behold the sheer love contained in this strange sacrifice.

The word 'strange' in the context of Christ's suffering comes to my mind because one of the greatest challenges that our contemporary world might want to put to us is to explain the cross itself. For Christians to continue to invest suffering with redemptive significance poses a counter-cultural dilemma. In a society where the redemptive power of Christ's Passion is little recognised or understood, we might look again at those early images of the crucifixion of Norman and pre-Norman times. Here Christ's face does not show the agony but radiates love and pity. It is this tradition which Louis Davis revives.

The intimacy of the resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene contains a hidden reference to the art and the private life of Louis Davis. In Littlemore the story is told that Louis Davis married far below his own situation in life. In fact he married a servant girl, and, having done so, he was cut off from his rather stiff Victorian family and indeed never saw any of them again. His marriage, though, by all accounts, was a blissfully happy and long-lasting one. His wife became central to his art, and she is the model for some of the key characters in his paintings and windows.

The scene Louis Davis chooses for his depiction of the resurrection shows Mary Magdalene supposing the risen Christ to be the gardener (John 20:11-18). For those who know Louis Davis's work, it is clear that here his wife is the model for Mary Magdalene. The moment depicted is the moment of recognition, 'Mary'. 'Rabboni!'. The window conveys a sense of intimacy transcended. The '*Noli me tangere'* is not met with incomprehension on the part of Mary, but with a sense of confidence in her own worth, rooted in the love of Christ. The mystery of intimacy is expressed in deeply personal terms. The touching may be over, but the artist conveys closeness of a new kind that draws the viewer to the mystery of redemption.

It is a much-analysed fact in our culture that the majority of people describe themselves as 'spiritual' and a large majority of those would even want to describe themselves as 'Christian', and yet most of these do not feel loyalty to any church or liturgy. Formal or traditional churches are not always able to engage the spiritual imagination of believers, let alone those who have lost faith altogether. A church needs to be a place of genuine encounter with God—a space where this encounter can grow into intimacy with Him. '*Cor ad cor loquitur'* was one of Newman's guiding principles, the heart must speak to the heart. There is much longing for intimacy and for the emotions to be engaged in our spiritual search. This is understandable in our western culture where individuals are increasingly isolated from one another by the forces of growing affluence and sophistication. As 'church people' we need to engage with these forces, and where necessary transcend them.

BOOKS

Am I Not Your Lord? Human Meaning in Divine Question, Kenneth Cragg, London Melisende, 2002, ISBN 1 901764 21 4, hardback, pp. 255, £18.00

In terms of engaged observers originating from the West, there is perhaps no one in the world today who is better qualified to comment on the role of religion in local and global societies than Kenneth Cragg. Now in his ninety-first year, and still as acute, analytical and witty as ever, Cragg presently serves as Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Anglican Diocese of Oxford. But it is as a student of, and interlocutor with, Islam that he is perhaps best known. His contribution to the field of religious studies and cross-cultural theology is incalculable. He has served as both a scholar and a bishop in the Middle East and has also held academic posts in Britain, Lebanon, Nigeria and the USA. He is the author of a considerable number of studies in contemporary relations between the Semitic faiths.

Given both Cragg's unassailable track record and the depressing superficiality of much modern commentary on religion, it is a great relief to turn to *Am I Not Your Lord?* The title, of course, has profound Christian resonance. But in this case it is drawn directly from the all-embracing interrogation of Allah in the Qur'an (7.172). The full Arabic quotation and an English translation by the author is included in a series of citations at the beginning of the book (pp. 6-7) which indicate some of the literary, biblical and historical sources informing Cragg's perspective. His viewpoint throughout is thoroughly ecumenical in that it takes seriously both the actual and potential convergences within and beyond the Semitic faiths and civilisations. But it is also honest and realistic. Cragg is no sentimentalist, and his rigorous honesty about the capacity of belief to serve evil as well as good puts him well beyond the comforting solipsisms of religious apologia that can sometimes consume the critical faculties of those whose lives have been dedicated to inter-faith understanding.

In spite of its hard-headedness, however, *Am I Not Your Lord?* is a redemptive work. The final chapter, 'Satan Under Our Feet', contains a clear-sighted repudiation of religiously sanctioned nationalisms, a call to discernment and discrimination (in the technical, non-pejorative sense of the word) among faith communities, and a redrawing of the virtue of secularity away from irreligion and anti-religion. Both the character of the transcendent God and the unity of human beings in a world divided by ideological manipulations are at stake in the confessions we make. Rigorous self-examination is implied in the divine question, says Cragg. If society is not to be overcome by cancer, faith is needed. But if faith is not to turn bad, despair, despotism and false hopes must be overcome. This is the religious quest.

How far is this insight from the destructive religious pride that sanctioned the destruction of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, for example. Cragg exhumes the dark side of faith through a paradoxical exploration of purity in religious thought, relating cleansing rituals to core questions of human and communal identity, to the 'laundering' of global finance, and to the concomitant soiling of politics by the unconstrained passion to control. No one, 'religious' or 'secular', comes away with clean hands. The book takes us on a journey that involves discovering how the human situation is 'minded' and 'resolved' in Islam, how servanthood, covenant, division and unity are narrated in Hebraic experience and in the transformative pedagogy of Jesus; how the legacies of history and theological difference might be handled in relation; how loyalties and meanings may be redeemable; and how we might together learn more about how we are formed (and by whom). The task, says the author, is to move from aversion to embrace within an unfolding vision of the good, that is God.

As ever it is almost impossible to summarize and recapitulate Kenneth Cragg's thought. His treatment of what we think of as commonplace themes is by turns sinuous, counter-intuitive, imaginative, multivalent and polysemic. This is not the conclusion of thought and relationship but an invitation to participate in their

continuous shaping. An impatient, headline-oriented culture will struggle with his words, but struggle very profitably if it dares.

Among the many potential pitfalls in Kenneth Cragg's perspective, one arises directly in the text and another lurks in the sub-title. The first (see especially pp. 165-170) is a Christian one. The author is, without doubt, deeply immersed in Islam and in respect for its great traditions. His is no distanced 'dialogue'; it is an offering (as exposition, appraisal, affirmation and critique) from the heart—one that beats with intensity for what it knows and experiences of 'the other'. Cragg is in no doubt that the God he worships in and through Jesus Christ also moves among those he meets beyond his own household of faith. Yet he is also committed to the distinguishing features of the Christian account of God, the difference made by Jesus's extraordinary embracing of suffering and by his being raised in glory. No cosy pluralist, Cragg knows that difference matters, and that if its value is to be realized it has to be lived through relationship, not wished away by theory. For Christians tempted either to demonise Islam or to mitigate the singularity of their own faith this will be a tough pill to swallow. But it perhaps shows a way beyond the paths of exclusion, inclusion and mutual relativisation which have dominated inter-religious traffic for too long.

The second pitfall is secularisation, which Cragg importantly distinguishes from secularity in civics and statehood. Just as he illustrates so tellingly how ideological secularity is (quite literally) incomprehensible from the perspective of Islam, so some avid secularists will want simply to reverse his sub-title so as to render it 'divine meaning in human question'. The author is well aware of this challenge. What we do with the divine Name is crucial for him. His response, however, is not some unfeasible pan-religious apologetic. It is exposition, on the one hand, and the allocation of different (but shared) responsibilities, on the other. Just as Cragg has entered other religions and cultures in order to discover both hope and difference, so he invites those to whom faith is anathema to reconsider how human beings and the world might be positively reconstrued by what they reject. My only fear, given the particular

and beamed nature of the discourse, is that the effort will be too much for those who would benefit from it most.

The publishers, Melisende (www.melisende.com), are to be congratulated for a first-rate book, well produced. Their other Middle East related titles are well worth exploring, too—not least a fine collection of essays in tribute to Kenneth Cragg himself. *A Faithful Presence,* edited by David Thomas and Clare Amos, was published in March 2003.

The last word should be Cragg's final flourish, in which he explains so cogently and daringly just why his title is about something that matters deeply. 'The voice that spoke out of transcendence did not say. "Am I not your tyrant?" Such a question would have no meaning. Tyrannies do not consult. Neither do they interrogate either themselves or their victims. The enquiring voice did not say: "Am I not your *Shari'ah*?" Nor: "Am I not your *Dawlah?"* Nor again: "Am I not your *Ummah?"* All these, at best, could only be in a serving, not a usurping role, contributory within our entrusted vocation to divine obedience. Nor, yet again, did it say. "Am I not your Pentagon?" The divine question was, and is, "Am I not your Lord?" Of all claimants to our fealty we have in all good faith to say: "Exalted be He above all that ye associate".'

SIMON BARROW

We are grateful to the Editor of 'Connections' for kind permission to include this review first published in/2003, vol. 7.

Bearers of the Spirit, Nicolas Stebbing, C.R. Cistercian Publications, 2003. £17.99.

At first sight a book with the sub-title '*Spiritual Fatherhood in Romanian Orthodoxy'* is likely to prove highly specialised and of limited general interest. I found it in fact both fascinating and challenging. As I read it, I remembered two incidents that occurred towards the end of my active ministry. At a clergy meeting, a Methodist minister told, how, in visiting a strange town, he passed a firmly locked church: the only sign of activity was an out-of-date poster for a jumble sale. Further on, at the Town Hall, a New Age poster advertised a course in meditation. He asked, 'Is it any wonder

that those who are looking to deepen their spiritual life look almost anywhere except inside a church?' About the same time, when Fr Stebbing was in Romania doing the fieldwork for his book, we had two Romanian laywomen staying with us while they attended a course for conservators. The first morning, when I left them at the museum, they said, quite naturally, 'Father, pray for us'. That evening, they told us how shocked they were that others on the course—all Western Europeans or Americans—were interested only in technicalities and had no sense of the spiritual significance of icons. It certainly looks as though the Romanian Church can teach us something.

Romanians speak a language very close to its Latin roots and think of themselves as Westerners surrounded by Slavs, but they are predominantly Orthodox, and their spiritual life owes a great deal to Ukrainian exiles who in the eighteenth century encouraged monasticism and popularised the practice of the Jesus Prayer. In our own day, Professor Stăniloae has translated the entire *Philokalia* into Romanian, with a commentary applying its teaching to present-day conditions. Like the rest of the Orthodox world, Romania was by-passed by the Reformation, and popular piety is still much more like that of the Middle Ages here, with its close integration of religious and secular. Monasticism is perceived as central; large numbers of lay people, intellectuals as well as peasants, turn to monks for spiritual direction, though there are also notable spiritual fathers among the married clergy—and of course all bishops are chosen from the monastic order. The Western distinction between active and contemplative orders does not exist, and there seems to be much more widespread recognition that the real and proper work of monks and nuns is prayer. With the ending of communist rule, young people are flocking to monasteries to an extent not seen in the West for centuries, and they do not see it as fleeing from an evil world, but as the most useful thing they can do to help a sick society.

Running parallel to the apostolic succession of the hierarchy there is another more hidden succession of fathers and disciples, keeping the Tradition alive through the centuries and providing a

genuine living link with the early church. Of each of them it could be said that like the mage Highdrake in Ursula le Guin's *Tales from Earthsea* 'when it came to teaching what he knew, he was tireless, generous and exacting'. Fr Stebbing's book is a study of a number of contemporary spiritual fathers, of their teaching, and of how they are viewed by the lay people who confide in them. It is assumed that no one who is serious about making progress in the Christian life will fail to look for a spiritual father, and that the disciplines appropriate to monks and to those living in the world differ in degree, not in kind. Everyone takes fasting much more seriously than we do, for example, and they approach Holy Communion with awe and reverence and a degree of preparation which we have lost. One remembers that Michael Ramsey was worried by people tripping up to the altar rails every Sunday without much obvious forethought; perhaps we made better communions in the days when most devout Anglicans communicated monthly. Although present at the liturgy every Sunday, Orthodox may perhaps communicate only once or twice a year, and the spiritual father has the responsibility of deciding whether they are ready for communion after hearing a confession, which is much more than a list of specific sins but rather a thorough probing of their spiritual state.

Fr Stebbing deals at some length with aspects of the fathers' teaching which Western Christians are likely to have most difficulty in understanding and accepting; in particular, obedience, dispassion and divinisation. Obedience to any authority outside oneself is unfashionable in the West, but Orthodox spiritual fathers insist that implicit obedience is fundamental to the relationship between father and disciple: it is the way to humility and the antidote to the self-reliance that can lead one astray. However, strict as Orthodox monasticism is, it is not rule-bound, and obedience is seen as a personal relationship between individuals who love and trust each other.

Dispassion is Fr Stebbing's translation of a term derived from, but very different from the Stoic *apatheia*. It does not mean a state of complete indifference, but an attempt to root out the 'passions' seen as the desires and emotions that lead us into sin. It is what the collect terms 'ordering the unruly wills and affections of sinful

men', and the aim is to be without passions in the same sense as this is predicated of God. Indeed, the whole aim of the Christian life is to become like God. The Fathers taught that the Son of God became what we are that we might become what he is: the end of our journey is not simply the vision of God, but a sharing in the life of God. That end is clearly for all of us a long way off, and Fr Stebbing quotes in an appendix a young Romanian theologian's definition of *synergy*, by which the balance is kept between the two truths that we can do nothing without the grace of God and yet we must strive to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

Fr Stebbing wonders how the Romanians, who have withstood so successfully the assaults of dialectical materialism, will manage to cope with the insidious pressures of our kind of materialism against which our churches seem sadly ineffective. In the meantime, whatever the outcome for them—and they certainly deserve the support of our prayers—they have so much to give us now. Materially poor, they are spiritually richer than we are.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

I LOVE, THEREFORE I AM: The Theological Legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony by Nicholas Sakharov, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 2002. £11.99. ISBN 0881412368

CHRIST, OUR WAY AND OUR LIFE: A Presentation of the Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony by Archimandrite Zacharias, St Tikhon's Seminary Press, Pennsylvania, 2003. $18.00. ISBN 1878997742

These two books constitute a fitting and lasting tribute to the spiritual teaching of two of the most remarkable, if hidden, Christians of recent times. Father Zacharias and Father Sakharov are both monks of the Orthodox monastery that Father Sophrony founded at Tolleshunt Knights, near Maldon in Essex, and which still embodies and perpetuates his teaching and spiritual example. Father Zacharias has written a wise and careful summary and study of Sophrony's spiritual theology; Father Sakharov's approach is

more analytical and academic. Both writers, however, remain faithful and self-effacing in their presentation of their subject, who was such a well beloved teacher and Father-in-God. It is a measure of Sophrony's spiritual stature and intellectual integrity that two such complementary and significant studies should emerge in this way. For an Anglican, there are striking parallels between Sophrony's teaching and that of Archbishop Michael Ramsey, whose own debt to Orthodoxy was profound.

Father Sophrony was a Russian Christian who lived between 1896 and 1993. For a time he was a successful artist in Moscow with a keen interest in oriental mysticism, but in 1921 he left the turmoil of his homeland to pursue his artistic career in Paris where he met with some acclaim. During these years he rediscovered the Orthodox faith of his childhood, believing that Christ's command to love others was not simply an ethical principle, but the key to the nature of Being, both human and divine: 'Love emerged as an authentic source of cognition'. He became one of the first students at the Orthodox Theological Institute, created in Paris in 1924, and came immediately under the influence of some outstanding Russian émigré thinkers and teachers, notably Bulgakov, Berdyaev and Florovsky. But very soon Sophrony realised that formal theology could not meet his desire to learn how to pray and to encounter the living God, and so he went to Mount Athos in 1925 and became a monk there at the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon.

On Mount Athos, from 1930 Sophrony was in close contact with a hermit called Silouan, until the hermit's death in 1938. Silouan taught him a great deal about the hesychast tradition of prayer, placing special emphasis upon prayer for the whole world, Christ-like humility and love towards one's enemies. Silouan's inner vocation was, he believed, 'to keep your mind in hell, and despair not'. Upon this foundation Sophrony built his own distinctive understanding of Christian faith and prayer: it is participation in the self-giving love of the Trinity as revealed in the Incarnation of Christ. Sophrony himself became a monastic spiritual guide, and for a time lived in a cave as a hermit after the saint's death. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, in 1947

Father Sophrony returned to Paris in order to bring about the publication and dissemination of Silouan's teachings. He continued the life of a monk while serving in a small parish in the suburbs of Paris. There he wrote his first book about Silouan, which was published in 1952 and which helped to lay the basis for Silouan's canonisation in 1987. It remains his most outstanding work, and it underpins his own teaching in the many other books and unpublished papers that he wrote. During the 1950's Sophrony worked closely with Vladimir Lossky, although important divergences of emphasis emerged between them in their approach to certain aspects of Orthodox theology.

In 1959 Father Sophrony moved to England and created a small monastery in Essex with only a handful of followers. To its life and growth he devoted the rest of his life, until his death in 1993. Much of the remarkable Christian art that enriches its older chapels and refectory there was created at his hand. The monastery is unusual in having no formal rule, seeking rather to focus on an inner asceticism, which expresses itself in the regular corporate use of the Jesus prayer alongside the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The monastery embraces both men and women in a common life and is in many ways an outpost of Mount Athos. Further work by Sophrony on St Silouan emerged during these years, notably *The Monk of Mount Athos* and *Wisdom from Mount Athos*. Sophrony's own most original book was a work of spiritual autobiography, called *His Life is Mine,* which was followed by his final work, *We shall see Him as He is*. These two books encapsulate all that is most distinctive and profound in his spiritual experience and teaching, and remain of abiding significance for all Christians. His influence and publications have now spread world-wide.

Father Sakharov is disciplined and scholarly in his whole approach, tapping many unpublished sources, and this book is a balanced exposition of Orthodox spirituality within the hesychast tradition, as well as a just and at times critical appraisal of Father Sophrony's legacy. He analyses in a fascinating way the various intellectual influences upon Sophrony's formation, and their metamorphosis in response to his living encounter with Christ

through prayer and with the life of the Holy Spirit in a living saint. Sakharov carefully examines the similarities and the differences, weighing up the significance of key influences such as Karl Barth and also existentialism, as well as the thought of the Russian theologians already mentioned. Comparison is also drawn with leading Orthodox contemporaries like Alexander Schemann. No less interesting is discussion of how Sophrony absorbed the teaching of the Fathers in a way that enabled him to see the inner dynamics of their teaching in the light of his own spiritual experience and through his growing participation in the life of God that they originally described. This gives great immediacy and authority to the way in which Sophrony himself writes, as he believed himself to be within a living past moulding a living present, embodied in a saint whom he had known, St Silouan.

Sakharov examines in some detail the key components of Sophrony's spiritual teaching and experience. Fundamental to these was his conviction that the *persona,* or *hypostasis*, revealed in God through Christ is the key to understanding the nature of God the Trinity, and of human existence in relationship to God. "'What does it mean to be a person?"—this question lies at the heart of Father Sophrony's theology.' The story of the Burning Bush in Exodus 3 reveals a God who always exists in dynamic relationship. Therefore *persona* is to be defined as 'the one, who really lives'. *Persona* is revealed not in itself but only in relationship; and what is true of God the Trinity becomes true also for human persons in their relationships, firstly with God, then with each other. *Persona* is fulfilled in relationship, and the hallmark of that relationship is self-giving love that empties itself in order to receive love. In Sophrony's own words: 'Love transfers the existence of the person who loves into the beloved, and thus it assimilates the life of the loved one. So the person is permeated with love.' The divine commandment to love God, and neighbour 'as you love yourself', is given its full depth of meaning in the further command of Christ to love others 'as I have loved you', even to the extent of 'loving your enemies'. This is not so much a state of doing as of being, and at times of suffering too, a sharing through contemplative intercession

in the life-giving love of God the Trinity revealed in Christ. The transformation of human nature into the likeness of Christ is the result of this participation in the living energies of God. But at the same time the distinction between God and the human person is sustained and deepened in its significance; for to this end were human persons created, to exist as objects of divine love, made and re-made 'in the image and likeness of God'. The human person is therefore capable by grace of receiving the fullness of God's indwelling presence and love through the Holy Spirit, thus becoming Christ-like and God-bearing.

The voice of divine love calls human persons to follow the path of Christ in self-giving love: sacrifice lies at the heart of being, and therefore also of prayer. In the thought and teaching of Father Sophrony, the self-emptying or *kenosis* of Christ 'comes to the forefront of his theological concerns. The notion of *kenosis* becomes a controlling feature of his entire theology, but foremost of his teaching on *persona*. As such it shapes immensely his vision of the ascetic life and ultimately of Christian perfection.' In Christ we see into the heart of the being of God, into the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, 'in the act of perfect love which implies complete self-emptying'. To pray is therefore to enter into this dynamic of divine love, of self-diminishment in voluntary surrender and sometimes painful self-sacrifice, so that the life of the Beloved may be received and revealed again in a human person; or as St Augustine said : '*amet se teipso*—let God love Himself through you'.

One of the most striking things about Sophrony's teaching, derived as it was in large part from that of St Silouan, was the way it openly embraced the cost of Christ's self-emptying in the darkness of Gethsemane and Calvary. This is examined in some detail in one of the finest chapters in this rich study, entitled 'Godforsakenness'. Sakharov carefully demonstrates that while there are affinities with Carmelite spirituality and the teaching of St John of the Cross, the roots of Sophrony's perception and expression should be located deep within the eastern monastic tradition. Unlike Lossky, 'Father Sophrony works out a strong theological connection between

kenosis of *persona* and the experience of "Godforsakenness". In fact they are so interdependent that they are used almost as synonyms, merging into one phenomenon.' He regarded the revelation in Gethsemane as one of the most invaluable insights into the truth about God and about human nature: 'it is eternal as a spiritual act'. Christ remains faithful even unto death, a death that includes experiencing being forsaken by God. But the hidden purpose of this is love, for 'faithfulness is the positive realization of human freedom' in relation to God, reversing the fall of man. The result of this is spiritual stability in God, of eternal rest within the faithfulness of God. From this there flows a deep compassion for the world in its darkness, and for the suffering of humanity, which is perceived and experienced as a single spiritual whole. Only in the darkness is the light of the risen Christ discerned, transfiguring the faces of human persons.

The great strength of Father Zacharias' approach is that it makes immediate and compelling the spiritual vigour with which Sophrony wrote and taught. His book is a first class piece of spiritual writing in its own right, distilling the prayer and thought of many years under the guidance of so notable a spiritual father. It is an excellent example of the way in which, in Christianity, so often the teaching of the master needs the expression of the disciple to give it wings. Father Zacharias leads the reader through the gamut of Christian spiritual experience with a sureness of touch and depth that is couched in directness and simplicity. This is a book that could be read and re-read each year with great profit, as well serving as a comprehensive survey of all that Sophrony wrote. The writer and also the translator are to be congratulated on the clarity of expression and balance that are maintained throughout this lovely book. Both writers have rendered great service to the whole Church, as well as giving a sense of the inner dynamic of Orthodox theology, language and prayer.

The teaching and example of Father Sophrony and of his spiritual father, St Silouan, stand as an urgent beacon to the world-wide Church at a time of uncertainty of vision and direction. They demonstrate unequivocally that there is ultimately only one response

to Christ, whose call is to the narrow and afflicted way that leads to eternal life. These two writers have ensured that this demanding path is accessible to any who truly seek it, following the footsteps of such a spiritual guide. For as St Isaac of Nineveh once said:

> His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the Cross, and by death. But how is it with you, that the afflictions on the path seem to you to be off the path? Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints? Or have you plans for devising some new way of your own, and of journeying there without suffering? The path of God is a daily Cross. No one has ascended into heaven by means of ease: in truth, without afflictions, there is no life.

DOUGLAS DALES

The Anglican Religious Communities Year Book, 2004-5. Fourth International Edition, Canterbury Press, £6.99.

This book has been on my desk for a little while, waiting to be picked up and reviewed. Year Books come and go. It sits beside the year book of the Cambridge College I attended, and another from the National Trust, all of them dutiful little volumes of varying utility. But when I finally got round to this one, and made the time to read it, I must confess to being entranced. It *is* a year book, with names and addresses and descriptions. But there is so much more here than I expected. Turning the pages I found myself drawn in. On one level it was a trigger for grateful memory—so many places here I could remember visiting, both recently and in the past, names that were familiar, reminders of people to whom I am indebted and of experiences that are precious. (Brother Tristram SSF smiles from within the pages of his obituary, appropriately since he had large share in the concept of the Year Book itself). And within these lines of print you can also read, and be impressed by, the wide range of views and attitudes that this family of Anglican Religious exhibit. It is one of those books that is ready to yield little bits of new information each time you open it.

It is, of course, a cliché to speak about the difficult times that religious communities are going through. An article by Sister Phyllis Ella CHF, from a community that knows all about falling

numbers, puts that into perspective. ‘We sometimes hear of a community that is closing, or likely to close, being called a “dying Community”. I do not like that phrase, for death, no less than life, is a preparation for resurrection. The community’s offering will essentially go on living.’ It is an observation to be grateful for, and turning these pages at random I find myself moved by that sign of essential life. The Community of the Sacred Passion (CSP), founded for work in Africa, is now a relatively small group of sisters in Leatherhead. But with retreat work, one sister working for the World Meditation Community, and others among asylum seekers in Portsmouth it is clearly a group through whom the spirit is alive and active. And then I remembered the community of sisters they had nurtured into existence in Tanzania—CMM (Chama cha Mariamu Mtakatif, Swahili for The Community of St Mary). A group of us were welcomed by them last October when we visited the remote farm outside Njombe that they run as the base for their novitiate training. It had been a long bumpy ride to get to what turned out to be 150 hectares of dry highland scrub. There were twenty-three novices and six older sisters living in community together. There is no electricity and no running water. Water must be carried up daily from the river, in cans on their heads. Like a medieval monastery, they must be totally self-sufficient. And if that was not in itself enough work, they run a clinic, and a mother and baby unit for the nearby villages, a tree nursery for income, and—in their spare time—are building a large community church with their own hands. It is the kind of grindingly hard life that we westerners rarely see, and never experience. But their greeting of us spoke worlds for the quality of life of this community. We were met with gifts of flowers, and then, in a dancing, singing procession, taken to Chapel for worship. It was the joy and vitality of these young women—mostly aged around twenty—which was so moving. ‘The community’s offering will essentially go on living.’ Indeed it does, and that particular community amply fulfils Archbishop Rowan’s hope in his preface to this book, that Anglican religious communities should ‘be places of joy’.

What is interesting to learn is that of the estimated 2,400 religious in the Anglican Communion, approximately 1,300 are in Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Pacific. That statistic is one we might want to watch, and the interesting question is what communities in the West might learn from the growth in Africa and the East. As Joyce Hugget comments in one of the articles at the beginning of the Yearbook, most people who come from the developing world are disoriented and scandalised by the materialism of the West. She writes about opening her home for retreat to those who work with the world's poorest, listening, identifying their pain and hearing their story. Could western religious reverse the process, going on retreat among the poorest so that at least some of us know what it is like to live beyond the fallout of our materialism? My time in Tanzania was short, yet I still find myself scandalised by that vast gulf between rich north and poor south. It must be the world's most pressing question, yet we barely give it a thought. In this little book religious of both hemispheres are bound up in one volume, their entries jostling with one another as you turn the page, their widely differing experiences juxtaposed. How can those bonds be made real and fruitful? Perhaps Joyce Hugget's article is a pointer to hospitality as a way of learning, of bridging the gulf in a way the secular world seems unable to do.

That is one strand this book opens up. Another is the moving account of a sister who was one of several Anglican religious working at ground zero. One can only guess at the experience of trying to put life together after that incident, as she says, 'one grey shovelful at a time'. The dogs were brought to sniff at her, to remind them of living human scent as they searched the ruins for survivors. That, and her account of her time of retreat in an ashram in Nova Scotia, with its affirmation of the underpinning of all this by the everlasting arms, points to a witness of faith and prayer, a readiness to go into the very depths, which is the call of every religious. 'Beneath ground zero is ground infinite', she writes. The West needs that silent, lived-out witness in its frantic rush towards a future it can barely imagine. If religious are called to *that,* we need to rejoice. She and the writer of another piece also point to

something else at work among religious now: the fruitful dialogue between religious of different faiths. Brother Nicholas SSF sensitively shows how that dialogue can enrich out understanding of the Christian call and not diminish it. For him the Buddhist vow to save all beings illuminates Paul's understanding of shared suffering in Philippians and leads him to the liberating Word of Truth. 'When we embrace the suffering of others as our own, our ego centred self with its likes and dislikes dies. In the end I am a brother … because it is the most loving thing I can do with my life.'

'Death, no less than life, is a preparation for resurrection.' Anglican religious may be few in number, but those of us who know them have cause to be deeply grateful for the way they continue to open the truth of the gospel to us.

DAVID BARTON

Against Establishment: An Anglican Polemic, Theo Hobson, Darton, Longman, Todd, 2003, pp. xiv + 146, £7.95.

The standard of disestablishment has, in the last century, been raised by the more angular bishops: Herbert Hensley Henson in the 1930's and Colin Buchanan in the last twenty (or more) years. So it is good to find them joined by Hobson, a journalist and 'young man in a hurry', as he describes himself. Unfortunately his hurry has led him into a rather strange order of contents. We begin with a chapter entitled 'Establishment since 1953', where the temptation is not wholly avoided of characterizing by decades. With the invasion of Iraq duly noted, the second chapter jumps back to Thomas More and runs through to a final page which manages to include Henson, Michael Ramsey, Runcie and Williams. This journey, called 'Hooker's Ghost: The Anglican Centuries', is made via James I, Hobbes, Coleridge, George Eliot, Dickens and William Temple, among others. The final chapter takes eleven recent defenders of Establishment and examines their arguments, concluding with Archbishop Rowan. It may be clear already that this book offers Church and Social History Lite. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise with an author who calls Newman 'the John Lennon of Tractarianism' (p. 73), and notes that the First World War 'was a

bad advertisement for European Christianity in general (p. 84)'; well, yes.

But it useful to have establishment's defence team put side by side, even if characterized as either Stoics or Defiants, and particularly relevant to have the Archbishop's several shades of utterances on the subject compared and contrasted. 'For all his postmodernism', Hobson claims, 'he is half in love with Christendom.' Yet praise is awarded too: 'he knows the seriousness of the issue'. And the issue, for Hobson, is that of a church formerly and formally held together by the 'national ideal', and now collapsing. Anglicanism has to act as critic of both Protestantism and Catholicism as now known; they both have their members and ways forward, but Anglicanism must die and in so doing create space for a new Christian identity. At least, that seems to be the positive message, although disestablishers will not agree on that route.

Better, then, to be given this book than to buy it; however, it is a short and entertaining read, and a reminder of the cost of being what the Walsingham pilgrim hymn calls '[a] Church now enslaved by the secular power'.

JOHN SCOTT

Dipped Into Oblivion, Sacha Bonsor, Rider, 2003. £9.99.

Sacha Bonsor's *Dipped Into Oblivion* is a short and disarmingly honest account of her decision to undergo neuro-surgery at the age of twenty-six. The angioma on her brainstern which had bled when she was twenty presented Sacha with a stark choice; 'that sooner or later I would live in a very different state from that which I had experienced so far or die … The alternative being brain surgery, had made this fate an imminent reality (p.181)'. The larger part of the book traces the consultations, external developments (crucially the correct UN medical insurance) and the personal discernment which led to Sacha's operation conducted by Dr Spetzler in Phoenix, Arizona in May 2001.

Sacha's journey towards this decision is presented with honesty and humour, understood as an abrupt confrontation with the journey

from childlike dependence to adult responsibility, from a self-confessed naivety to maturity. She writes of the 'gift' of free will, and with it 'the burden of choice'; a prayerful discernment in which no easy answers are 'given' but there is a gradual clarification. All of which takes place in the context of understanding that belief in God, 'humbles a person, and reduces all to a child-like state. I found great strength in this weakness … to drop the façade of strength' (p. 72).

But this is in no way a romanticized journey, and there is great honesty about the snobbishness of those who are more ill towards others less so (a temptation Sacha rejects), and the great fear not of death but of disability. The account of the post-operative pain caused by injury to the central pain-carrying nerve, and the side effects of numbness, muscular wastage, loss of balance, and painful spasms are neither over-dramatized nor under-played. All is peppered with a disarming humour—'There were some things people did not lie about for my benefit, my [pre-operation] haircut being one of them (p. 112).' And, as an aside, there are some reflections on the U.S. health care system worth further reflection.

Both the main text and the quotations at the head of each chapter repay a gradual, thoughtful reading. A great deal would be lost by reading this in a single sitting. It shares a journey about life-threatening choice, and will no doubt fulfil the author's expressed desire to help and comfort others on the same kind of journey. But there is also much which will speak to those (of whatever age) who seek to live honestly before God with the realities of limitations, diminishment and uncertainty, both learning 'the sacrament of the present moment', and the joy of receiving the future as a gift. The author's comment on her tetraplegic friend, Tone, applies equally to Sacha; she too is characterized by 'humour, charisma, and lack of self-pity' (p. 160).

JOANNE WHITTERING

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The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God
give thanks for the election of

SISTER ROSEMARY OF GETHSEMANE

to serve as Reverend Mother of the Community
for a further term of three years.

The Installation will take place on Thursday 24 June, 2004.

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

COMMUNITY NOTES

SERMON FOR THE FEAST OF JULIAN OF NORWICH
David Barton

MARIAM IN ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX DEVOTION
Colin Batell OSB

THIS IS THE NIGHT: THE AMBIGUITIES OF PASSOVER
Kenneth Mason

BETWEEN OXFORD AND BUCHAREST
Donald Allchin

EVENTS OF SALVATION AND MOMENTS OF INTIMACY
Bernhard Schünemann

BOOKS

Simon Barrow Michael Paternoster Douglas Dales
David Barton John Scott Joanne Whittering

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