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COMMUNITY NOTES

NOW IS THE TIME, in the northern hemisphere, for praying in the dark. The sun sets before Vespers, chapel is quiet and dark, except for a light shining on the icon, and a red votum light on the altar. There are usually a few Sisters praying there before the Office, and sometimes I slip in to join them. Long before I joined the Community, when I came as a visitor, I would watch the kneeling figures from the visitors' chapel and then, when I was back in London and busy with other things, I'd remember the light before the Blessed Sacrament at Fairacres and long to be there. I am sure that the Sisters coming and going from their intercession time in chapel had no idea of the effect that they had on me. And the Sister kneeling in front of me the other day will have had no idea that her silhouette spoke eloquently and invitingly of prayer: her whole body alert and attentive, her back straight, her head raised, all-of-a-piece, relaxed and still.

Prayer in the dark like that does not need words, but presence, poise, and a mixture of contentment and longing. Prayer before dawn with no more than a candle and the curtains open, waiting for the light, likewise has no need of words, and no need of witnesses. Or, simpler still, prayer in the night, when 'the heart will muse in silence on Christ and his appearing'. *And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.* (Isaiah 45:3).

At the end of October we invited local people especially local Muslims, Buddhists and Brahma Kumaris (from their centre in Nuneham Courtney) to share that kind of silence with us. We used the refectory, a more 'neutral' place than chapel and so more hospitable for our guests, and sat on benches, chairs or cushions. At the request of the Imam those who were unused to prayer or meditation without words, silently read or recited the Quran. Unfortunately I was away at that time myself, but I have been told what a still and relaxed experience it was for everyone, something that we hope to repeat from time to time. In its simplicity it is both consistent with our own life and commitment, and with the neighbourhood and times in which we live. In August when we heard of the death of Fr Roger Schutz of Taizé we decided to hold a

special service of Taizé chants woven in with silence and readings. On that occasion too a number of local people joined us, and we are doing something similar in preparation for Christmas.

Sr Anne returned to St Isaac's in the middle of October to remain there for the rest of her life with the Community's blessing. All of us, as well as many friends in New Zealand who know and value the prayer and beauty of that place, will be interested to see what God has in store for the life there.

You will be tired of hearing about the closure of Boxmoor, but it has again been delayed. At the time of writing, the property still belongs to SLG, but is under the guardianship of an organization called Camelot who put in temporary residents. This means that although the Convent was closed on 31 October, and there are no longer any Sisters living there, the buildings are not standing empty but giving a home to people who need one.

On 7 October Sr Mary Joseph of the Joy of the Cross died, a few weeks short of her eighty-seventh birthday and in the forty-third year of her Profession. On her Profession day (the Feast of St Joseph 1963) Mother Mary Clare commented at recreation that 'there was a real brooding of the Holy Spirit over the Profession this morning, everything coming together in the one offering. Therefore let us go forward to Easter with great joy as a family renewed by the power of the same Holy Spirit, that we may enter more deeply into the hidden sanctification of the daily steps in time. Remember the words of St John of the Cross: "One pure act for the love of God can do more for the glory of God and the world than all the manifestations of this world's pomp and power."'

We regard a Sister's death as the 'consummation' of the offering to God which she makes in Profession, so it is not surprising that there was 'a real brooding of the Holy Spirit' over her journey towards death. For her it was often confusing and troubling, sometimes feeling much too long (she had thought she was dying on previous occasions and on her birthdays would express surprise and gratitude at having been given yet another year) and sometimes horribly and unfaceably short. But she plodded on, and as her mind became less and less anchored in the here and now, it seemed that she was gathering up her whole life, including unfinished, difficult, and unspeakable parts from long ago. This was

hard for her, and hard to watch, and yet, and yet …. The Thesaurus tells us that the *consummation* is a 'perfect ending', 'the bringing of something to a satisfying conclusion, or the final satisfying completion or achievement of something'. Sr Mary Joseph lingered for a while after being transferred to the John Radcliffe Hospital and eventually died there, but there was nothing sad about her death. Her body, her whole demeanour in death, reflected a 'final satisfying completion or achievement of something', 'everything coming together in the one offering'. For years she had felt that she could not pray or even believe in God, and yet her prayer for others, and her faithfulness to the prayer of the Church in the daily Office, continued. Many people, including many who knew her only by correspondence, relied on that, were comforted by her prayer, and, rightly, counted her as their friend. The 'something' finally achieved and satisfactorily completed is between her and God, but, with St John of the Cross, we can affirm that it has a usefulness and significance that transcends her personal story. Thanks be to God.

Much the same can surely be said of the Life Oblation of Oblate Sr Dorothy of the Good Shepherd, who died, aged ninety-five, on 20 November, in a nursing home in Virginia. We give thanks for her spunky faithfulness and love of the Community, and will include an obituary in the next issue. We also give thanks that two Oblate Sisters have recently made their Life Oblation: Oblate Sr Sheila Margaret of Christ the Servant made Life Promises on the Feast of St Luke and Oblate Sr Carol of the Mercy of God made Life Promises on Advent Sunday. And Donna Williams became a Novice Oblate on the Feast of St Margaret of Scotland (16 November) when she received the Oblate Sisters' habit.

Next year, 2006, will see the one hundredth birthday of our Community. We are going to observe the centenary year with a number of Community events, including two occasions when friends and associates will be invited to celebrate and give thanks with us. You will be notified about these in due course, meanwhile don't miss the flyers which we are sending out with this issue of the *Chronicle.* The orange one tells you about a new book from Cairns Publications; it is being published especially for our centenary, and will be available from SLG Press after May 2006.

Also in connection with our centenary, we aim to double the number of *Chronicle* readers, so we are making a special introductory offer of two free issues in 2006 for new subscribers. To take advantage of this, please complete the blue form with the name and address of a friend who does not already receive the *Chronicle*, and return it to us. Or pass on the form to anyone who might be interested and encourage them to send it direct. More introductory offer forms are available on request. We also want to underline how much we value the loyal support and interest of our existing subscribers and we do not want to make the mistake of dropping anyone from our list unnecessarily. Please ensure that we receive your subscriptions by 1 February.

Lastly, it is with some sadness that we shall say good bye to Patricia Clare on 8 December when she completes three years as a nun in First (i.e. annual) Vows. She has been with us long enough to make strong bonds and lay enduring foundations, so we will miss her and the gifts and brightness she has brought to the Community. As she follows her heart in seeking some other context in which to live out the call to pray her life, we wish her well and pray for God's continuing blessing upon her.

For each one of you, for those you love, and for the world in all its need, may Christmas and the coming year bring the blessing of peace.

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TRANSFIGURATION AND DISFIGURATION

KENNETH LEECH

... a cloud came and overshadowed them: and they were terrified as they entered the cloud (Luke 9: 34).

THERE IS AN ANGLICAN church in New York City called the Church of the Transfiguration, but it is much better known locally as 'the little church around the corner', a title which is even printed on the notice board. A North American student who did a placement with me in the East End of London over ten years ago told me that, after a month, she had come to mistrust two English expressions which she had encountered when asking for directions to places. The first was 'You can't miss it'. This, she said, translated, meant 'It is very difficult to find'. The second was 'It's just around the corner'. This, she said, meant that it could be anywhere from five yards to ten miles away.

But the Church of the Transfiguration 'around the corner' witnesses to the truth that transfiguration, the dazzling light of the glory of God, can occur anywhere. We sense that glory in the midst of the common and the ordinary, as Francis Thompson said 'between heaven and Charing Cross'. It is in the midst of the common life, not apart from it, that we experience the glory which dominates this feast. The late Bishop Ian Ramsey was always saying that there are moments 'when the penny drops'. He would then add: 'This is what I call a cosmic disclosure situation'. It usually happens in ordinary places, often in unexpected places and at unexpected times. Transfiguration happens 'around the corner'.

Very little attention has been paid in the western church to the Transfiguration. While St Leo the Great in the fifth century, and St John of Damascus in the seventh century preached on it, it was not until 1457 that Pope Callistus III introduced the feast into the universal calendar of the Roman rite. Among Anglicans, it did not survive the Reformation, and its celebration did not figure in Anglican liturgies from 1549 to 1928. I would be interested to know if there are any Anglican churches in England dedicated to the Transfiguration, though there are many in the USA. There is one

Roman Catholic church in Kensal Rise in West London, but I am not aware of others.

Nor does the centrality of glory, so important biblically, figure much in the collects for this feast. The collect prescribed in *Common Worship* calls on us to 'bear our cross' but says nothing about our transfiguration. The Roman collect is certainly better with its reference to 'the splendour of your beloved sons and daughters'. The Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church in the USA prays that we may be 'delivered from the disquietude of this world', though, apart from death, I am not quite clear how this is to take place! By far the best is that in the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada: here we pray that God would deliver us from darkness and change us into his likeness from glory to glory.

It is also depressing that there has been little theological writing about the Transfiguration apart from Bishop Michael Ramsey's book *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ.* It is significant that Ramsey was greatly influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy. In the Orthodox churches, there are almost always three icons present in the smallest church—the Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and the Resurrection. In this tradition, the stress is on both the glory of God and the glory of humanity as central, while sin is viewed as, literally, accidental to human nature (which is why, rightly or wrongly, the Orthodox do not like Augustine very much!).

To turn from Mount Tabor to the horror of Hiroshima might seem obscene, while to suggest that there were similarities might seem blasphemous. Yet there are twisted, demonic similarities between the two. In each event there was brilliant and dazzling light, and Robert Jungk entitled his book on the Hiroshima bombing *Brighter Than A Thousand Suns*.[1] There was a cloud, and I cannot

[1] Robert Jungk, *Brighter Than A Thousand Suns: a personal history of the atomic scientists*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1958. The phrase 'the light of a thousand suns', related to the vision of God, originates in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 11, Verse 12. See the English translation of Juan Mascaro, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Penguin 1962, p 90. See also Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Significance of the Bhagavad-Gita for Christian Theology*, Dr Williams's Trust, 1968. I was interested to see that the phrase also appears in the 1991 hymn by Alan Gaunt, 'Transfigured Christ': 'Transfigured Christ, none comprehended,/Your majesty, whose splendour stuns/All waking souls whose light transcends/The brightness of a thousand suns.'

imagine that those who experienced the bombing of Hiroshima could not have identified with my text—'a cloud came and overshadowed them: and they were terrified as they entered the cloud'. But the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima was a kind of demonic antitype to the cloud of transfiguration: it could be described as a cloud of cosmic disfiguration—of God's 'beloved sons and daughters' as of the earth itself.

And there was revelation. I am struck by the frequency with which commentators on Hiroshima (including Noam Chomsky in *The Guardian* on 6th August 2005) use terms such as 'apocalypse' and 'apocalyptic'. Apocalypse means unveiling, revealing. At Mount Tabor it was the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ which was revealed, and, by implication, the potential glory of human beings made in God's image. At Hiroshima it was the human potential for destruction, for cruelty, for incalculable violence, which was revealed. Each event told us a story about our potential for good and for evil.

This feast, so neglected in the west, is rooted in the gospels and in the testimony of early Christian writers. Both Matthew and Mark use the word 'transfigured', while Luke does not, preferring the word 'changed'. What is often missed is that, first, transfiguration precedes resurrection: it occurs in the midst of perplexity, imperfection, and disastrous misunderstanding. Within a few verses of Luke's account of the transfiguration, the disciples are urging Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy his enemies. At this late point, they still haven't 'got it'. Secondly, transfiguration does not apply to Jesus in isolation, but to us. The two crucial texts here are Romans 12: 2 and II Corinthians 3: 18. Few, if any, English versions translate the word used as 'transfigured', though it is the same word used in the account of the event on Mount Tabor. In Romans, Paul urges us to 'be not conformed, but be transformed', or, literally, 'transfigured'. In II Corinthians, we are said to be in process of being transformed (transfigured) from glory to glory. In each case, the Greek word is the same: 'metamorphosed', transfigured. It is this emphasis, on our own transfiguration, on our sharing in the divine glory, which is missing in so much of our western Christian thinking.

Transfiguration can and does occur ‘just around the corner’, occurs in the midst of perplexity, imperfection and disastrous misunderstanding. The hope of glory does not lie in a return to a lost paradisal innocence, but in a movement forward, in the midst of perplexity, imperfection and disastrous misunderstanding, towards the Kingdom of God, which is only manifested through the encounter with evil, injustice and frailty. Nowhere in the twentieth century was this put so powerfully as in Edwin Muir’s poem ‘One Foot in Eden’. (I have no doubt that the sisters at Burwash were often reminded of it by the late Hugh Maycock!). In this poem, Muir rejects the idea of a return to paradise, and stresses that the movement forwards, through perplexity, imperfection and disastrous misunderstanding, is the only possible way. I ask you to read Muir’s poem in the light of the transfiguration and of Hiroshima:

One foot in Eden still, I stand
And look across the other land.
The world’s great day is growing late,
Yet strange these fields that we have planted
So long with crops of love and hate.
Time’s handiworks by time are haunted,
And nothing now can separate
The corn and tares compactly grown.
The armorial weed in stillness bound
About the stalk; these are our own.
Evil and good stand thick around
In the fields of charity and sin
Where we shall lead our harvest in.

Yet still from Eden springs the root
As clean as on the starting day.
Time takes the foliage and the fruit
And burns the archetypal leaf
To shapes of terror and of grief
Scattered along the winter way.
But famished field and blackened tree
Bear flowers in Eden never known.
Blossoms of grief and charity

Bloom in these darkened fields alone.
What had Eden ever to say
Of hope and faith and pity and love
Until was buried all its day
And memory found its treasure trove?
Strange blessings never in Paradise
Fall from these beclouded skies

This sermon was preached at St Anne's Church, Manchester, on 7th August 2005 for the Feast of the Transfiguration and the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

THE EXPERIENCE OF STROKE AND THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

BEN DE LA MARE

IN THIS PAPER, I have tried in the first instance to describe the experience of stroke, and to set my own story in the context of more general observations on strokes and on the appropriate care of stroke patients. The paper makes clear that the stroke brought my active working life to an abrupt end, but I am keen to stress that in my case at least the thinking must go on. The production of this paper offers a test case of this last proposition. The paper does not attempt to survey my whole working-life (mainly as a C. of E. parish priest) and its interaction with my faith; but it does try to explore some of the consequences for faith, and for prayer, prompted by the stroke.

There is a personal story of sometimes bewildering complexity behind every stroke. 'But why is stroke any different from other serious illness?' This paper seeks to identify some of the distinctive characteristics of strokes; but I leave it to others to answer the question more adequately. It only needs to be stated here that all strokes, in some measure, affect mental processes—sometimes profoundly—and we easily underestimate the extent to which our performance is affected by our states of mind.

I am not the only stroke patient who hates the intended sympathy of: 'I know just what it feels like'. We have all lived before and after stroke. We know very well the effect it has on energy levels, staying power, getting things completed, appetite and zest for life, mood and much else. For some of us, these all culminate in the effect of stroke on faith, and prayer, and moral urgency. If our interlocutor has travelled all these by-ways of the human spirit, and others too, then perhaps he/she does know 'what it feels like'.

My title invites the attention of a wide range of readers. For some, who are already experts in the field, I can only offer the testimony of personal experience set alongside a more hidden and elusive human discipline. Certain stroke victims who have made good recoveries have set it all down before, in books or in interviews. One, Rosemary Sassoon, most helpfully mixes her own experience with valuable advice from experts in the field. Many other people lack direct knowledge or experience of this condition; and it is for them that I shall include some general information about the impact of strokes.

My brain surgeon was a little surprised when I raised the question of 'spiritual impact'. He had plenty to say about the process of physical recovery; and he was even more interested in stimulating a revival of mental appetite. But he left it there. I took his point; and so I shall attempt here to begin to answer my own question. My training was in theology, which is why I believe that all pastoral ministry within the Christian church should come under the searching scrutiny of theology. That scrutiny ought to extend to cover the personal experience of the minister.

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We shall begin from the trauma itself. Bad things had happened in the past, but this was something quite new. It might help if we were to speak of a brain attack. That does convey something of the violence of the impact. For it affects everything, especially that decision that has to be made: *should* life should go on? During that shadow time when consciousness was allowed to return, I was dimly aware of a choice still to be made: 'to live or not to live'. Was it as simple as that? Perhaps: perhaps not; though I do distinctly

remember a period when, to me, extinction really didn't matter. The raw experience of existence was so awful. Even then, however, I could still understand my value to those who are closest to me. This may go some way to explain my reported response to the innocent question: 'What shall I tell them in church tomorrow?' following my restoration to consciousness. I replied: 'Indestructibly hopeful'. I don't remember saying this; but others have said that it's authentic, and I'd like to think that those two words brought a smile. They also offer just a hint of a life sometimes disciplined by the study of theology and, with hindsight, I suggest also that the decision not to give up might have been shaped by the words of Jesus beginning: not my will/*not what I want, but …*

In those early days of returning awareness, and right through my two months in hospital, I seemed to be faced with the withdrawal of God. I have said to friends that 'I was reduced to praying, because that was almost the only thing I could gladly do'. That sounds odd, but then the circumstances were strange and unfamiliar; and bodily weakness may have made the mind more alert. Let me fill in the picture. I didn't eat for a fortnight. I couldn't read. I was uninterested in the radio, and I even lost my taste for classical music.

Now, in spite of my immobility, the determination to focus mind and heart together on the task of prayer prevailed. It was a prayer of the utmost simplicity. Often, just a single word repeated. I think that it sought to drain off lingering self-pity and make more room for the love of God. God's absence was real enough, but his love was conveyed through the constant care that surrounded me. There is a paradox for tidy thinkers. And now let me add another: over all those weeks of rehabilitation, God's providence was strongly felt, but not his presence.

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I alluded earlier to other bad experiences in my life. One at least relates to the matter of this paper. Almost exactly seven years before the stroke I had become seriously ill; and on that occasion I had to endure two weeks in hospital before the doctors decided that the rigors and a violently fluctuating temperature were being caused by a heart infection (sub-acute bacterial endocarditis or SBE). The

illness had already sapped my energy; but after two months I had to face the further blow of not getting better once the infection had been driven out. At this point, on my first encounter with the cardiologist, I was offered a drastic remedy: open-heart surgery *in a fortnight*, with mitral valve replacement. I can still remember how this decision came to me as welcome relief but to Clare as another brutal shock.

In the early stages of this illness, I hadn't much appetite for reading or for prayer. But, on my first trip into hospital. I took with me a copy of the poems of George Herbert, and I tried to read one poem a day. My instinct must have told me that he would best nourish the spirit, when more conventional prayer dries up. When the awesome day of the operation came round, with the inevitable two hour delay, I had arrived at 'Obedience'; and these lines leaped from the page and imprinted themselves on my memory:

O let thy sacred will
All thy delight in me fulfill!
Let me not think an action mine own way,
But as thy love shall sway,
Resigning up the rudder to thy skill.

At that critical juncture, Herbert spoke to me as one who is thoroughly at home in the language of prayer (often in the robust style of the Psalms). So, once his words had sunk in, I knew that I must neither seek nor claim any special favours from God. Still, the operation was successful; and after another four months off work, I resumed the full round of my duties, until this second blow struck.

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For the general reader, it is necessary to emphasise that stroke comes in many forms; and that it leaves its survivors with very diverse outcomes. Doctors do not need telling this, but lay people do. For in some encounters with those who have suffered a stroke, the condition is obvious. But in others, because the signs are far from evident, the actual disabling effect of a stroke may well be underestimated. This paper envisages that some readers will come to it with medical expertise and others with a particular concern for

the life of the Spirit. It assumes that they share an interest in pastoral care and in the practice of empathy; but, especially with the latter group in mind, we need to set down some basic information.

It has been stated that, after cancer and heart attacks, stroke is the third commonest killer in this country. What is less well known is that it leaves more people disabled than any other condition. It should not be difficult to think of people known to us who are clearly affected by a stroke; but few are aware that children suffer strokes, along with a thousand cases a year affecting the under thirties and some ten thousand a year among those of working age.

We must distinguish between two very different ways of arriving at similar outcomes. Strokes are more often caused by blood clots in the brain. But many, like mine, are caused by bleeding in some part of the brain—cerebral haemorrhage, to use the correct medical description. If the victim survives the stroke, then its lasting effect will largely be determined by the particular part of the brain affected by the trauma. In my case, the bleeding took place in the *cerebellum*. Some of the effects of strokes cannot be concealed, as when a degree of paralysis brings consequent disabilities and dependence on a wheel-chair; the same is true when there is a slurring of speech with facial disfigurement. Even though an erratic sense of balance, which follows a trauma in the *cerebellum*, will make walking problematic, this is less evident to casual observers. Many other transient or temporary effects may be experienced; and there will often be an unpredictable pattern of recovery, much influenced by the presence, or absence, of willpower.

Stroke recovery brings with it complex, sometimes stormy moods: all in all, an intriguing psychology. So, stroke presents a varied picture, mixing visible and not so visible effects. But stroke patients will be quick to remind you of important common characteristics: e.g. the loss of feeling or sensation, and tiredness. ('Tiredness becomes a fact of life.' Rosemary Sassoon)[1] Another that should not be overlooked is an often well-concealed anger or frustration. To conclude these general comments, I stress that we are not only required to care for the survivors but also for the suddenly

[1] Rosemary Sassoon, *Understanding Stroke,* Pardoe Publishing Ltd, 2002.

bereaved. For many are killed outright by stroke, which represents a severe shock to the system. (‘It is like being hit over the head with a sledge-hammer.’ Peter Crawford)

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Before we can seriously address my main theme, I need to focus on the experience of recovery from stroke; and initially this was dominated by physical recovery. Early on, I had to persuade myself to eat—sweet things were a particular problem; and even the familiar cup of tea lost its appeal, and had to be drunk in the hope that its charms would return. Throughout the first six months I battled hard to regain mobility. Once home, my regular visits to the neuro-physiotherapist played a crucial role; before that, equally important, was the help from the hospital physiotherapist. They made sure that the physical structure was put in the way of best functioning. Therefore going for short walks, twice a day to begin with, was more than mere bodily exercise. Stroke patients with potential for improvement thrive on perceptible signs of progress. (‘Last week I walked a mile.’) Equally, we are wise to fear those who talk knowingly about our impending arrival at a ‘plateau’. Both patient and carer have to resist the very idea of a plateau; instead, they must foster the ambition to go on getting better—whatever that means precisely.

My first conscious encounter with the consultant neuro-surgeon marked a critical moment in my recovery. This was four months on and after two months back at home. He was watching me closely, more closely than I realized; and in response to my enthusiasm for walks, the effect of his comment was ‘Yes—but! To what end? Where is the mental stimulation?’ He had caught me on the raw, and I knew it. So, a whole new field of endeavour opened up before me; and, after another two years, I am more than ever determined to look for new challenges and to discover areas of life with which 1 can engage effectively. With reduced mobility and limits on energy, thinking and writing play an important role in my daily routine; and often a heavy mood limits the fruitful time, especially for the very physical activity of writing.

After that meeting with the surgeon, I began deliberately to read more demanding books. I tried to make myself write more letters;

but I still find this surprisingly difficult, as well as the routine of keeping on top of communications in general. I am shocked that tiredness can provoke the unheard 'Oh, I can't be bothered'. Good things, however, have been achieved during this past year: a lecture on my grandfather, the poet, has been written up. A paper on George Herbert has been revised and, more amazing, I have written and delivered a new paper on Herbert to a conference. So, I begin to realize that each of these bursts of mental toil have offered me targets that I can achieve; and, more importantly, they have given me possible evidence of the life of the Spirit reviving. The testing of my spirit is made clearer when I offer this summary: after a year of recovery and rehabilitation, I had to cope with retirement after thirty-seven years mainly in parish ministry. For the two months before I retired, I went through the motions, doing only 'light duties', which has to mean 'doing just what you want to do'. Retirement came as a huge relief; but it was not total.

Thanks to the generous attitude of the Principal of my college, an avowed agnostic, I was enabled to continue in part-time chaplaincy among students. This gave me the sense of a continuing pastoral role, just when I had to let go of my established position; and it was a time when reading and writing did not come easily, but sociability was returning. Since then, much has changed in my condition. I am ready now to bring my chaplaincy to an end. This continuing of a small piece of work has also had a part to play in understanding the life of the Spirit. In such a secular institution, you might well ask: 'Where is God in this set-up?' To me, God has shown himself as the giver of inner freedom. Being somebody, and yet in institutional terms rather an unimportant cog, has helped me to keep my eye on God. The unfulfilled potential of the role has strengthened faith, which is never the worse for a sharp dose of self-knowledge.

We return to weighing up the testing that followed retirement. Its severity only struck us when, after a six weeks' extension, we finally moved house in mid-January. We were lucky to be moving less than a mile across the centre of Durham. At the beginning, we had to pick our way around some hundred and fifty packing-cases, many of them laden with books! Some of our friends thought that we would never get them all opened; but we did. We more or less

put the new house in order in the first four months, in spite of the distraction of having to complete the clearance of our very spacious vicarage in which we had lived for more than twenty years. I don't really know how we did it. I had so little energy; and at first, so little strength. I couldn't leave *everything* to Clare; but we should never underestimate the potential of collective will power, even though it has its dangers.

This dramatic conclusion to the year of my stroke may seem to focus chiefly on physical testing; but that only tells half the story. For I came to realise that this great upheaval in *my* life, but also in *our* life together, had much to say about the life of the Spirit. An unsought break in my life's pattern did not provoke a spiritual crisis; but it did make me face the reality of change, and gave me glimpses into the meaning of resurrection.

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During the long weeks in hospital it was one thing to have to make myself eat; but I had also to rekindle my appetite for life, my zest, my *joie de vivre*. I could, and still can, be very negative. A black period would settle on me like a cloud. I had to work hard on stretching my stamina and staying power; and I needed to mix with other people. I often spoke of my need to rejoin the human race. Later, there were things like not being allowed to drive, which I accepted, reluctantly. I also became aware of a longing to make myself reconnect with God. I know it cannot be done just like that; and yet something changed. We shall return eventually to the question of the life of the Spirit, and to the ways in which it may be reshaped by the upheaval of a stroke; but first we must hear a little more about the practical effects of recovery, and their implications.

Throughout that first year I was busy relearning some very basic skills, like walking, and sustained reading, and being sociable. These three not so random skills represent three essential strands in the rope that holds our human nature together. You may prefer to regard them simply as three facets of our human make-up.

The first concerns the fact that we are *embodied*. In learning again how to move across a room, and then how to re-appropriate the practice and the pleasure of walking, we are attending to the most basic needs of our bodies. I am more aware now than I was

before the stroke of the necessity to maintain a good level of bodily health. This does not, must not, constitute an end in itself; but after a major trauma, we know all too well how much our physical form and our bodily functioning shape and influence all aspects of our human being. So, let the recovered enjoyment of walking stand for the complex realities of embodiment.

What then of intellectual activity: of the kind of thinking that might lead me back to writing? In the early months of recovery, the surgeon had helped me to accept that the activity of walking needs to be complemented by the activity of thinking. This humble word covers so much that is common to human experience; but it also has a privileged place in the work of philosophers. I am trying to find the means of setting down in words and images what belongs to everyone. Most people rightly shy away from defining ideas like *mind* and *intellect*. I am now much more aware of the physical effort that goes with these apparently non-physical activities. For now it may be enough to say that an interest in ideas has come back, with increasing force. So, as I have been looking for new ways of testing my stamina, I have realised that thinking must lead on to writing. It may be obvious to others, but for us stroke cases, trying to find our way back into life, all that goes with thinking is much more deliberate. 'Do we want to expend energy on *that*?' More than two years on, writing, with all the mental and physical labour it entails, has become a key activity; but it was well over a year and a half before the ability to focus my mind effectively for writing came back.

There remains a third and crucial strand, waiting to be woven into this picture of our human makeup. A fragment of personal history gives us a way in. We already owned a house in Durham, but much work needed to be done on it before we could move in. The work on the new house involved both of us in the business of planning and decision. It also entailed complex and rewarding human relations. If, at this critical juncture, I had not regained the art of being a sociable creature, I would not have been much help. Instead, the urgency of the work to be done, and the need to plan and talk through a variety of different projects drew me in. In this critical hour, I had rediscovered my love and care for buildings, *and* the pleasure of engaging with people, which is also a hard-learned

skill; and it is much more than mere sociability. I prefer to say that we are *relational* creatures. Our creativity, our very humanity, thrives on our engagement with others.

It can be argued that the best of our notions, that is the fruits of our mental activity, benefit from being challenged and even from being proved wrong by others. Where there is no relationality, we are truly disabled. It is like losing a limb, or being paralysed. In the early days of my recovery, random visitors were not made too welcome. They, unwittingly, showed up my need to learn again how to relate. I could only gauge its importance from the experience of having to ration my sociability. I can see now that an excuse was available: 'I'm weary.' But, in time, that had to be challenged and then overcome. It is not quite the same as losing your taste for sweet things; and yet, like that, it can be relearned.

There is more to be said about those so-called random visitors. I knew then, and now I know better, how much care was taken in bringing visitors to my bedside. Clergy in hospital can easily be overwhelmed by well-meaning colleagues, but this did not happen to me. On the contrary, some visitors sensed the need to come alongside me in my undiagnosed *spiritual* isolation. It is unlikely that they knew precisely what they were doing for me, but it is as though they represented God; and at the time, I will not have been thinking of there being any *spiritual* significance in their presence. This is what makes any talk about 'the life of the Spirit' so difficult to articulate. Nevertheless, while I was going through a real experience of desolation, the reality of God was mediated to me by people. It was chiefly by their presence and by what they did; much less by what they said.

From friends and family, and from many expert carers in the hospitals, I was being made to think anew about the character of God. 'If there is a God, then what is he like?' One part of me seriously doubted whether I could come up with an answer. But another voice would not let me give up; and for this second voice, the clue may have been found in the unshakable conviction that I was still a *Christian*. I can see now that, as for other thoughtful Christians facing a crisis, it was the person of Christ himself who stood across my path—like the angel who barred the way for Balaam's ass—saying to me: 'I have been here. Don't be afraid of

the darkness.' The mysterious alchemy of faith must originate in a stirring of God's love; but still this rediscovery of the importance of relationality—of valuing people and being valued by them, and of being moved by the love of others to return their love—all these very human exchanges offered me a way back to God.

The stroke patient, who is trying to fight back and to join in some of the hurly-burly of so-called normal life, ought to be aware of those three strands in our human make-up. Most people will take them for granted, but we have had to work at them. That much applies to all who suffer a stroke, but this paper springs from the further question that began to press on me, during my apparent recovery and return to sociable life. By now, I seemed to have accepted that *God is*. (I hesitate to define the meaning of those two small words!) But this very practical question remained: 'How do I re-connect with God?' For I had experienced a real severance—loss—emptiness—vacancy. I never forgot the core language, that is the language of prayer. However, it is one thing to be able to convince (and to comfort) others that I have an answer; and quite another to convince myself!

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The passing of time is beginning to confuse my tenses. Three years have passed since my stroke. My immersion in the life of the Spirit is closer now to where it was before the stroke. Habits of thought about God *have* reconnected with earlier knowledge and practice; and yet the actual practice of prayer has moved on. There is more time, and there are fewer pressures; but those gains are balanced by the real loss of energy. Now I know that physical tiredness affects me to the spiritual centre of my being. So, an inner discipline requires that I learn to wait. For God? Not precisely; but I must wait for the gift of prayer. I have known what it is for this gift to seem to be withheld; but now confidence—and with it, faith—grows stronger. I am willing to wait.

In those first weeks, it was reassuring to find that I still knew my way around the spiritual classics. I would welcome the arrival in my head of lines from Mother Julian of Norwich—'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well'; or a phrase from *The Cloud of Unknowing*—'short prayer pierceth heaven', or just a single,

repeated word from St. John of the Cross—*nada, nada, nada, nada, nada* ('nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing'); or even the closing words on the bookmark belonging to St Teresa of Avila—*solo Dios basta*. ('God alone suffices'.)

To my increasing surprise, and delight, this now seems to be where I want to spend my time. The day ought first to make room for my pondering the deep things of God and the real difficulty of living a recognisably Christian life; only then should I direct mind and heart to the world's mess and all its anguish. I am learning to cope with enforced retirement; and in my daily routine, I seldom need to rush around in expense of nervous energy. Instead, more solitude makes me attentive to an insistent inner voice, which asks 'Are you for God?' And in spite of all my agony of spirit, I hear my prompt reply 'Yes!'

Out of this story of a life restored, does it make sense for us to try to *locate* the life of the Spirit? Part of my answer has already been given: 'in solitude' and 'as an unsought gift'; and we might fill that out by saying 'in a setting of God's choosing'. For me, however, another answer must also be offered. For, in spite of all its faults, its follies and its failings, the Church must be the first place for me to seek evidence of the life of the Spirit. I have tested the truth of this assertion. Not only can I say with honesty that I still love the Church, but also I understand well that the Church has been good to me. Now, as time goes on, I relish more and more the recovered status of lay Christian; but even this status is qualified, since from time to time, I still enjoy the privilege of presiding at the parish communion. It is a pleasure to be just a part of a praying community again; and I greatly value those around me in a village congregation, where it is evident that Christian love and care, respect and lightness of heart are all at work.

It seems as though, after stroke, I have been stripped down, could it be to essentials, in regard to the life of the Spirit? Now I am spared most of the burdens of administration. Now, in all my engagement, and disengagement, with or from people, I shall try to give a more complete response to that inner voice. For I want to say in body, in mind and in all relations (not only human!) 'Yes to God, in all the mystery of divine being'; 'Yes to Jesus Christ, who is that mystery made visible', and 'Yes to the Spirit of God, whose energy

informs our prayer and shapes all the good in our lives'. And with slowly increasing conviction, I try to say 'Yes to life, in all its unexpectednesses'.

To conclude: I *see* a little less (the bleeding affected the optic nerve); but perhaps I hear more acutely—noticeably the birds. And much that was always striking and beautiful now moves me more. 'A greater intensity?' That sounds good! But when it comes to human suffering and the spoiling of the natural world, I sometimes experience a closing down of emotions. (I referred earlier to a loss of moral urgency.) Or, is that nothing to do with the consequence of stroke?

It may be relevant to this paper to report that a long-standing interest in the seventeenth century poet George Herbert seemed to be switched off for at least a year and a half; and then it came back to life, as evidenced above. (He has a phrase for every twist and turn of life: 'in age I bud again'.) Herbert is the master of metaphor and of the anatomy of the spiritual life; and he prompts me to make an ending with the suggestion that the life of the Spirit is a great river. It flows on with a strong current. It carries us in a certain direction, but it does not depend upon me or you. It speaks to us of the strength and the continuity of God's love for us, and for all that he has made. We may find it harder to accept that the stirring of the Spirit brings disturbance into our lives; and that includes the disturbance of death. But, uniquely in my experience, the Spirit of God takes away fear, and replaces it with love. And that I now know to be true, with a knowledge wrung from the experience of faith.

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FEAST OF THE HOLY NAME

DAVID BARTON

THERE IS A FOLK story from Egypt about the names of God that I often used to read to children. It tells of a young boy, son of a farmer, who one day is given a baby camel as a present. The camel becomes his dearest companion, and they spend hours playing together in the fields of his father's farm on the banks of the Nile. But as the camel grows the boy notices something about his friend—an inner sadness, loneliness, that somehow, for all their friendship, cannot be touched.

It is about this time that the boy's father begins to teach him to pray. Five times a day father and son go out together with their mats under the shade of the trees, and the boy learns the prayer positions and learns too the names of God—all ninety-nine of them. Allah is a God of a hundred names, but the hundredth name is known only to God. As he commits the ninety-nine names to memory, the boy ponders the mystery of the unknown name, and suddenly one day he has an idea. Would it not be wonderful if his beloved camel could know the hundredth name of God? Something so special would surely lift his gloom? He talks with his father. 'Allah always answers sincere prayers', his father tells him. All that day the boy prays. And in the night he wakes, again conscious of his friend's sadness. He takes his prayer mat and goes down the long path to the wide, empty banks of the great river. There by the light of the moon he pours out his heart in prayer for his friend. As the sun rises it seems to him that out of the silence there is what might be an answer, the sense that something is settled, given. He creeps back to bed, sleeping late that morning. When he wakes, his father and the camel have long ago gone out to the fields. Hastily he runs there, and as he looks at the camel pulling his father's plough he knows that something is different. His step is lighter, and when they come close, he sees a new light in the camel's eye in place of the sadness. 'You know, you know', he says. But the camel only looks away with a serene face. Camels cannot talk, and anyway those who dimly grasp the final name of God cannot speak of it.

Like all great stories, its simplicity belies its depths. And children are not confused by the ambiguity of whose sadness this is. They know that we, all of us, carry about an inner self, experienced at times as a kind of sadness—indeed that we are frequently a mystery to ourselves. We are named and we are known, and yet what is deepest and truest about us is an inner, unknown world, a self which has a strange autonomy. It is part of us with which we frequently struggle, as if we carry an inner ache, which in our worst moments can seem to be a flaw. It is in times of crisis that the mystery of who we are is most apparent—a vulnerability we would often rather deny. The wisdom of the story is that it points children to see our flaws not as deficiencies to be corrected, but as a mystery to be accepted as part of our wholeness.

And the story suggests that the only context for such a learning is an infinitely more profound mystery. The Islamic tradition of the hundredth name itself grows out of the experience of the God of Israel, about whom we learn in another, more ancient, encounter. Moses, a man deeply perplexed about himself—born Hebrew slave, raised Egyptian prince, but seen as a danger by both peoples—flees to the mountains with his sadness, seeking out the mystery of who he is. There, totally unexpectedly, he encounters the unfathomable mystery of God. When that deep unknown meets our frail unknown we are remade. The God who announces himself to Moses from the burning bush is certainly a God known in experience, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But the name by which he makes himself known points away from that to the unknown, ‘I am what I am’, or ‘I am what I will be’. Choose whichever translation you want, it hides more than it reveals.

In the history of Israel the four letters by which God became known were never pronounced. It matters that we should remember that the holy one of Israel is always receding from our sight.

The point about the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus is, I take it, to do with the fact that in Jesus God is named, named and present, named in a way that announces his purpose, a specific person in a time and a place, who said and did things we know and can understand. In Jesus the mystery of God becomes a here and now reality. Reading the gospels it is the earthiness of Jesus that strikes: his pleasure in company, the hands that heal, the one to whom

sorrows can be brought to be dispelled. In three short years Jesus seems to have stamped himself firmly on the minds of his generation. His name brought, and still brings, recognition of an unforgettable identity. But the more we encounter him, the more Jesus becomes a mystery, beyond all possible explanation. His 'I am' statements echo the name that cannot be spoken and collapse our rational thinking. And on the cross Jesus recedes into the darkness, the suffering servant, a nonentity who is unrecognisable. The Jesus who is named becomes the Jesus who has no name, who disappears from our sight in silence, just as God disappeared before Moses into the dark clouds of Horeb.

The question always is, do we recognize the whole Jesus? Or do we stay with just one aspect of him, the familiar, the easily named, the reassuring? On the road to Jerusalem Jesus prepares his disciples for what will happen and calls on them to take up their cross and follow, and they hesitate. It is an understandable hesitation, a place we often occupy. But we need to remember that in the end Jesus cannot be divided. He is an indivisible whole, both named and unnamed, to us. Our personal truth and our understanding of him depends on our readiness to embrace it all.

So we need to let ourselves follow him as he calls us from the known to the unknown. He asks us to inhabit our own deeper territory welcoming it, embracing it as a sister or a brother, despite what seems to be its darkness. In doing that we will learn of him in ways we cannot imagine. It is not that he will no longer comfort us, this is not an either or. He is always the same and he always carries our burdens. It is simply that he has other ways of holding us, which we would never have expected left to ourselves, and so must experience afresh. The long journey down the path, and the wide spaces of the river-bank, the nights of our vigils, are the places of our learning, places which, in the end, he offers to us as a gift. And when our frail unknown meets the Jesus who is beyond all our knowing we are remade.

REMEMBERING BROTHER ROGER OF TAIZÉ

DAVID BARTON AND MURRAY ROGERS

On August 16th this year Br Roger, the Prior of Taizé, was murdered in the Community Church at Taizé while at prayer. The following article combines the memories of Murray Rogers and David Barton each of whom knew Taizé at different stages of its development as a community.

ROGER SCHUTZ was Swiss by birth, and Reformed by faith. He came to the village of Taizé in Burgundy because of its proximity to Cluny which, during the middle ages, was one of the great monastic centres of Europe. Schutz, Max Thurian and another brother, all from the reformed churches, conceived of a religious community which they hoped would transcend the boundaries of Catholic and Protestant and begin to live a life beyond them. It was not an isolated hope. Not far away in Lyon, the Abbé Couturier and Père Maurice Vilain had set up a centre of Unity some years before. Couturier's influence was widespread, and the work of Schutz and the Taizé Community are, in many ways, the fruits of his inspiration.

The new brothers were welcomed to the village and given the hospitality of the tiny Romanesque Church—itself built by Cluniac monks. But the second world war was just beginning, and Taizé found itself on the front line between Free and Vichy France. For a while the brothers smuggled Jewish refugees to safety in the South, but soon they were warned that their own lives were in danger and it was necessary to leave. So it is the return after the war that really marks the beginnings of the community.

At first the large farmhouse they occupied next to the church was filled with refugee children from the Basque Country who needed a home in the post-war chaos. Eventually they returned to Spain, and in their place, one by one, Catholic and Protestant men began to arrive. From the very beginning Taizé was marked by connections that crossed all barriers, whether of nationality or church. The Abbé Couturier had founded what he called 'The Invisible Monastery', which had within it an extraordinarily wide range of people and traditions—the Ecumenical Patriarch

Athenogoras, Archbishop Helda Camera of Brazil, Murray and Mary Rogers, then living in rural India, Ilse Friedeburg of the World Council of Churches, and many others, including Schutz. This group was held together by its prayer, above all its prayer and work for unity. Many of them found their way to the farmhouse in Taizé to become part of Roger's wider circle At the same time the little community slowly began to shape its worship, drawing on some of these diverse traditions.

It was gifted in its brothers: Max Thurian set about the theological work in a series of influential publications, and another brother shaped the music and the worship. But at the heart of it all was Brother Roger whose charism then, and indeed to the end of his life, was magnetic. His prayer and his vision drew together what could easily have been a random series of connections into a living, deeply attractive, community. From the outset it was the worship that drew people. The brothers in their white choir robes knelt in the little church three times a day, Roger always at their centre. Unaccompanied, they sang the newly written Gelineau psalms, Lutheran hymns, and Russian chant, punctuated by long periods of silence. An early visitor was Cardinal Roncalli, then Papal Nuncio in France, later to be Pope John XXIII. He called Taizé 'the little springtime of the Church'. And indeed it was. Throughout the fifties its fame spread, mainly among the young of the churches who sensed its freshness and vitality. Groups of Catholic and Protestant students from all over Europe would arrive at Easter and during the summer for a week at a time, camping nearby and joining in the worship. Eventually, by the early Sixties, the pressure on the little church was too much and a large concrete church was built higher up the hill to accommodate the crowds.

But the key moment in Taizé's life at this point came with the student rebellions of 1968. In universities all over Europe students began to challenge their teachers and the whole way in which their societies were ordered. It was an extraordinary eruption that shaped the lives of many people from then on, teachers and students alike. In Tübingen a certain Professor of Theology, Josef Ratzinger, was deeply troubled by his students' challenge. In France Schutz's response was characteristic. With some of the brothers he travelled to Paris, where a violent student uprising had met an even more

violent police response. The students were invited to Taizé for the summer to think through what had happened. It was an invitation that was entirely open. There were no conditions. The community simply offered a space for thinking. Thousands took up the offer, camping on the hill around the new church. It was not an easy option for the community, and anyone visiting Taizé that summer could not help but be aware of the tensions. Arguments often went on long into the night, the brothers—and Schutz in particular—facilitating. Schutz's book, *Violent for Peace,* is a record of that period, and to an extraordinary degree his presence in those talks shifted their focus from a violent clash with authority to a committed engagement with poverty and injustice. Nor was his connection to the visitors merely in groups. Every day saw him standing in the church, sometimes for two or three hours, meeting them one by one for a brief personal encounter. It was a custom that became a mark of subsequent Taizé summers. At the end of that summer Schutz issued a formal invitation to return the next year for a further *rencontre*, and again thousands took up the offer. Students from France met with others from Poland, Spain, the UK. Later they went from Taizé to the *favellas* of Brazil, and the shanty towns around Delhi. Each summer from then on the *rencontres* were given a theme, and an increasingly international gathering took part in the discussions, with a follow-up during the winter in a different country each year.

But however political the discussion became there was never any doubt that at the heart of Taizé lay the worship of its community, a context which changed everything. It was, and still is, an extraordinary experience to be in the church with up to 6,000 mostly young people (sometimes more; the walls had to be taken down to cope with the numbers), and to see them return three times a day, day in day out. Taizé at that period also seemed to be a place of privileged ecumenical worship. On Sundays the Eucharistic president might be a Lutheran or a Catholic Bishop. Who it was never seemed to be a matter for comment or discussion. The worship called out deeper levels of engagement. That was another aspect of Taizé which still holds good. Many leave at the end of their week's stay to holiday elsewhere, but quite soon return, drawn back not by the discussions but by the worship. Often they choose

to camp at a distance from the main field to keep the extra time as a silent retreat and a chance for reflection. There can be few places which have for so long achieved quite such a rounded appeal to young people. Most of the obituaries of Schutz spoke of Taizé as an extraordinary ecumenical centre that had achieved its recognition in the 1990s, and Roncalli's much earlier remark about the 'little springtime' was attributed to John Paul II. The truth is that Taizé's extraordinary achievement began forty years ago and has continued consistently since.

That is one miracle of Taizé achieved by Schutz. The other, hidden, miracle is that the community itself has survived at all, indeed that it has flourished. Year in year out the community has been surrounded by young people in their thousands. Each year brings fresh demands to initiate new projects. The chapel is a vast public amphitheatre. No one should underestimate the pressure of that. 'It is like living in a goldfish bowl for months on end,' a brother once wearily remarked. The mixture of vision and determination in Schutz who has consistently led them through this, can only be guessed at. In an address to the community in 1968 he asked:

> Who are we? A small vulnerable community, held up by an irrational hope, the hope of creating harmony between the children of baptism and between men everywhere … called on to do a task which is quite beyond them, and who, in spite of limited numbers, try to answer every appeal made to them, no matter from which direction. Nothing could come of this attempt if we were not, each within himself, dedicated to persevering in a struggle for Christ which is frequently gruelling and hard. At any time any one of us can become a victim of pride. At that moment vanishes what was once a simple response to a call, and in its place emerges something else, a need for power. And so much is exploding like fireworks around us. Persevere! … Who are we? We are a tiny community, with many human failings, which is often buffeted, but which is always able to find its feet again because it is supported by a presence which is greater than itself.
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> *Violent for Peace* p.49

That sense of the presence of one greater than the community was remarked on by many who visited Taizé after Schutz's death. It was an extraordinarily public death—there were over two thousand

people in the church at the time. The next day counsellors were at hand, but the routines that always marked each summer on the hillside went on as usual. Schutz had brought Taizé to life, but it was now responsible for its own life—and perhaps had been for a long time. And there was something about that death, shocking as it was, which might be understood. Schutz had always set himself to recognize and face aggression in all its forms, whether the exploitation of the poor through aggressive capitalism, or the physical violence of some national regimes. But he always sought also to understand it, to harness its energy and turn it to good. He was rare among churchmen in the sixties in his lack of fear of the student aggression and his readiness to channel its energy. 'All men', he wrote in 1968, 'whether Christian or non Christian are basically aggressive. It is how we use our aggression that matters.' We can turn it to spiritual experience, which can produce a passive kind of pietism, or we can, as Christians, advocate armed aggression in the face of oppression or exploitation. 'But the Gospels are not meat for the fainthearted. Only those who are aggressive in spirit can posses the kingdom of Christ. Do not despair! Between structural deadness on the one hand and sheer nothingness on the other, there is another alternative.' His way was to help each person discover the reality of that alternative for themselves, to find the way they could be 'violent for peace'. To die facing the violence of someone unable to be in charge of their own aggression is appalling, but it fits with so much about the man. And it serves as a reminder of a message and a direction for the Christian faith which we owe to him and which we should not forget. 'In the midst of the violence that surrounds us today', he once wrote, 'there is hope which is alive and challenging.' That hope lives on in the changed lives of many, many thousands who were touched by this extraordinary man.

TO BUCHAREST AND BACK

SISTER ISABEL SLG

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS ago, well before traces of metal fatigue could be detected in the Iron Curtain, Sister Eileen Mary made an ecumenical pilgrimage across Europe. It took her first to religious houses in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, thence to Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia, and finally to Romania and Serbia where she renewed friendships made on a visit two years before. In 1978, with her cousin, Sister Mary Angela, she returned to Romania for Holy Week and Easter staying for a month at the Monastery of Varatec in the Carpathians. Articles written for the *Fairacres Chronicle* in 1973 and 1978 describing their experiences still make absorbing reading while on their return, both as diarists and *raconteuses*, they quickened the interest in Romanian Orthodox tradition and monastic life, which had been growing among us since Fr Donald Allchin first brought Fr Dumitru Staniloae to Fairacres in 1970.

In the intervening years, as many of our readers will know, awareness and love of Romania and its Christian people have continued to be nourished by friendships, by study and by the steady flow of ecumenical traffic to and from the continent. But between 1945 and 2006 lies a dark tract of history which is still under investigation as the bitter legacy of Communism begins to find its place and proportion within the nation's story. Even now Romania, for all the optimism and verve of its younger generation, has not yet fully emerged from the enforced descent into Soviet tyranny, and its sequel of home-bred dictatorship and 'stolen' revolution.

The five-day visit I made in May this year was at the instigation of two clergymen: James Ramsay, Chaplain at the Church of the Resurrection in Bucharest, (formerly Anglican priest at the ecumenical parish in Blackbird Leys, Oxford), and Alexandru Popescu, Orthodox deacon, physician and research associate at Balliol. *Chronicle* readers may recall two articles contributed by Alex, 'Tradition as the Transfigured Cross' (Spring 2001) and 'Reflections on the Diabolic' (Spring 2002), both of which shed light upon some appalling aspects of atheistic Marxist-Leninism and the grim programmes carried out by its satraps in Romania.

My visit was necessarily brief and almost entirely confined to Bucharest. I saw nothing of the beauty and variety of the Romanian landscapes and monastic settings which so captivated our two sisters in the Seventies, but I knew myself to be following the trail they had blazed. Despite the lapse of time, despite the evident arrival of capitalism on the pot-holed streets of Bucharest; despite the worn resignation in some faces, the zest and vitality in others and the harsh contrasts confronting us at every turn, some years of initiation by Alex Popescu into the martyrdom of his country persuaded me that at certain points I was, for a moment, in direct contact with the inner spirit which in all these people had survived years of ideological violence inflicted on their society and culture.

I was in a city that was resurgent in a different way from the bombed cities of Britain and Germany after World War II. Those cities rose again on their foundations, and of course many churches were included in the reconstruction programmes. But Bucharest manifested a kind of life that was independent alike of civic pride and civic squalor, a life of the spirit, burning in the inner sanctuaries of churches standing always open, always extending to some two million citizens the invitation to come and see, to enter their heritage of faith, to venerate the icons, and listen in to the liturgical converse with heaven maintained there every day of the week. This life had been crushed but not stamped out during four terrible decades, when churches and monasteries had been closed down or demolished in great numbers. It had continued to flourish wherever religion—not always without compromise—had been able to win a degree of tolerance from the state. Among the believing people country-wide the Prayer of the Heart, so deeply intrinsic to Romanian Orthodox piety, was perhaps the only thing left to them that was by definition impervious to infiltration by Securitate agents. Its practice in the prisons and torture-chambers of the regime empowered the martyrs to attain a triumph of the spirit, which is no less inspiring in those survivors who harboured neither rancour nor desire for revenge. For a few days I was privileged to have a glimpse of that life in the capital city.

The original pretext offered for my visit was to meet Romanian Christians for dialogue and mutual encouragement in the context of the recent revival of the Romanian branch of the Fellowship of St

Alban and St Sergius. I was eager for this and at the same time apprehensive, remembering Francis Bacon's dictum that 'he that travelleth into a country before he hath some entrance into the language goeth to school and not to travel'. My interpreters made communication almost easy, but how I should have loved to speak in Romanian with the people I met! There had been some vague talk of a conference. I wondered just as vaguely if I would be required to say something at it. In the event no conference took place or was ever again mentioned. That might have been disconcerting for an expectant *conférencier,* but for me, what actually filled those five days, the imaginative programme devised by both my tutelary guides, was far richer, far more instructive than any conference could have been. I stood with them beside memorial crosses erected to those who had died when Securitate bullets rained down on the crowd from the nearby Hotel Continental in December 1989. I met women artists of striking talent who are working in the finest tradition of Romanian iconography, and whose work was being exhibited in the Anglican Church. I visited the Patriarchate now occupying the splendid palace which until 1990 had been the Romanian Parliament. There we were all three met by Father Tita, the representative for external relations, and heard from Bishop Ciprian, who will visit the UK next Spring, of his desire for closer contact with Anglican religious, and of the abundance of priestly and monastic vocations in his country. I stayed overnight at the still unfinished Cristiana monastery, a new foundation of young nuns who will shortly open a hospice for terminally ill patients. Although we had no common language, and for once no interpreter was on hand, the warmth of their hospitality and the joy of praying with them in their beautiful new church were enough to ensure a real if inarticulate rapport.

In a country which lacks virtually all the components of a welfare state but which does have an Orthodox Church of enormous vitality, I was able to see a little of how this vitality is translating into the care of the most needy, notably in certain parishes which have the support and friendship of Fr James. Set up by the Romanian ecumenical association of Churches AIDRom, the St Macrina Centre provides a home for street children and children whose parents cannot afford to support them. Here Fr Gabriel and

his helpers have created a sheltering and nurturing haven, with basic discipline (e.g. a requirement to attend school), plenty of good food, companionship and fun and, as a matter of course, participation in Orthodox faith and worship. In the small dormitories, icons were hung alongside the usual adjuncts of a boy's bedroom. A thirteen year-old nodded towards a photograph of Fr Galeriu, a widely-revered priest who had recently died, saying simply, 'He was my spiritual Father'.

In another inner city church, lavishly restored by the widow of a Romanian general who died in a Soviet prison camp after the war, the parish priest and his wife (parents of another priest and two seminarians) have built a refuge for homeless and indigent old people, which they run with the help of a few volunteers. An atmosphere of utter kindliness and peace pervades this modest place, where soldiers who returned from years of active service, often disabled, a priest and his wife ejected from their parish, and a few others—all totally without resources—can find dignity and safety.

Stavropoleos is a small historic church on the edge of the financial district, the warmth and glow of its spirit palpable even from the street. The beautifully restored monastery attached to it houses a museum of exquisite church artefacts and a library which reminded me poignantly of Bede House. About eight nuns, all young, live there serving as curators, librarians, bookbinders, and as guides to the random visitors who find their way into the little sunlit courtyard, ablaze with geraniums and pot plants and dotted with memorial crosses.

Perhaps most memorable of all was Coltea Church, almost adjacent to the great hospital of the same name, the first in Bucharest. Built in the early eighteenth century, both church and hospital are undergoing renovation with funds supplied, significantly, by Siemens, suggesting a tacit recognition of the interdependence of body and spirit. Wooden scaffolding on three floors reached to the dome of the church, while icons of every description, removed from their usual places, were indiscriminately hooked to the vertical beams, enabling the faithful to venerate them undisturbed while work was in progress. A quick look behind the royal doors revealed a jumble of building materials and ecclesiastical lumber. Small, patient queues kept forming in front of

a dark icon of the Mother of God, of astounding beauty and power, its glass surface dimmed and smudged with countless kisses and perhaps tears, as women and men prostrated, lingered and then moved reluctantly away. The parish priest, a disciple of Fr Staniloae, who had counselled him to abandon his doctoral studies in order to devote himself to the restoration of his church—which was shut down during the Ceausecu years—told us how on the night of the dictator's downfall, 21 December 1989, he went into the church and rang the bells. He showed us in a glass-topped cabinet, together with some bloodied scraps of newspaper preserving the date, an assortment of small coins thrown down in Revolution Square and stained with the brown, dried blood of people killed or injured then and in the days that followed. From that night Fr Mehedintu had resolved to celebrate the Liturgy every day in his church, where he felt the presence of Christ not only in the Eucharistic elements but in the spirit of his young compatriots who had laid down their lives for their country and its faith.

The first evening of my visit had been spent in a quiet walk with James, Alex and his mother around Cernica Monastery which since the early seventeenth century has been one of the nerve-centres of Romanian Orthodoxy, a noble complex of buildings and a city of monks (at present eighty-four in number). The monks had just finished singing Vespers and the sun was going down in flames behind the lake. A bunch of young boys, heirs of the Tradition guarded and handed on by Saint Calinic and so many spiritual fathers trained at Cernica, were playing football outside the seminary a few yards from the spot where Fr Dumitru Staniloae and his wife are buried.

When on the following Saturday morning we alighted from the Heathrow coach we had boarded at the same bus stop almost to the hour, five days earlier, it was at the end of probably the fullest week I had ever experienced, only a part of which is described here. It had included such a feast for eyes and ears, so much enlargement of mind and spirit, so much family hospitality and merriment, enhanced sometimes by the presence of children. With time for reflection, I had begun to see what Romanians mean who claim it as a historical truth that their nation, unlike others, was not converted but was *born* Christian. I had indeed been to school, or rather to kindergarten, but what prizes I had brought home with me.

Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa, Sarah Coakley (ed), Blackwell Publishing, 2004, £17.99.

The title of this collection of essays reflects a trend, evident in theology at the present time, of which its editor, Sarah Coakley—a formidable critic of established positions—is a leading and stimulating example. But in undertaking to bring this book to the attention of our readers I must begin by confessing that my thinking on Gregory of Nyssa is largely confined to his homilies on the Song of Songs, supplemented by Daniélou's selection of texts from Gregory's mystical writings, *From Glory to Glory*, first published in English in 1962, and much read in the Community in the years following. Thus I am hardly competent to judge the necessity of replacing old thoughts with new, above all on the question of Gregory's trinitarianism, since I have escaped being formed by the misreadings of the standard text books 'familiar to those in the English-speaking (and especially Anglican) world from the pages of such indispensable introductory guides as Prestige, Kelly, Hardy and Richardson, and Wiles' (p.2). I shall, therefore, provide a full list of the seven essays which make up this book, the titles of which give an excellent idea of its contents, followed by a taste of the introductory essay, before focusing on the essay which, *Chronicle* readers will not be surprised to learn, is of special interest to this reader, concluding with a brief look at the final essay.

The seven essays are: 'Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song'* by Sarah Coakley; 'On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as Seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods'* by Lewis Ayres; 'Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context' by Michel René Barnes; 'Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology' by Brian E. Daley SJ; 'Under Solomon's Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs'* by Martin Laird; '"Person" versus "Individual", and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa' by Lucian Turcescu; and 'The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*' by David Bentley Hart.

Professor Coakley's introductory essay, 'Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*', provides the ground-plan of the book, and she begins by describing the present upsurge of interest in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-395) which, she notes, is arguably three-fold: 'First it corresponds to the notable resurgence of trinitarianism in post-modern theology'; secondly, there is the interest in Gregory's 'fascinating views on asceticism and desire'; and, thirdly, there is a 'new appreciation of [Gregory's] distinctive apophaticism'. Into this 'rather confused context' (because 'these three interests have tended not to find integration in any one author'), these essays on Gregory have been brought together, 'marking a new moment in the interpretation of his *oeuvre*, one that the contributors believe holds creative promise both for the patristic exegete and for the systematician' (p. 1-2).

Under a section-heading entitled: 'The End of the "de Régnon" Paradigm, and What Lies Beyond'—a reference to a Jesuit who published an influential work on the Trinity in 1892—there is a passage which conveys something both of Coakley's approach and of the contents in general:

> Could it be … that the lurking influence of de Régnon's classic work on the Trinity has fixated both Easterners and Westerners, and for over a century now, on a reading of Gregory as 'starting from the three and proceeding to the one'; and so—according to a further elaboration, most famously associated with John Zizioulas—normatively instantiating the so-called 'social Trinity of the East', a 'communitarian' understanding in which 'personhood' is somehow *prior* to substance? This is a view which has certainly both fuelled and bedevilled ecumenical exchange in recent decades; and it is ironic to find Lossky at points directly dependent on de Régnon on this issue, and Zizioulas on Prestige! To have the 'West' attacked by the 'East' on a reading of the Cappadocians that was ultimately spawned by a French Jesuit is a strange irony. (p. 4)

Coakley goes on to tell us that it was a conscious editorial decision to invite the contributions of Orthodox (Turcescu, Hart), Roman Catholic (Barnes, Daley, Laird), and Anglican (Coakley, Ayres) scholars who have 'converged on a reassessment of Gregory's significance as one refusing to be "boxed" into the

stereotype of an "Easterner" rudely confronting the supposed "mentalism" of "the West"'. Coakley continues: 'Especially important in this collection, then, are the contributions of the two Orthodox scholars: Turcescu challenging Zizioulas's polemical reading of the Cappadocians as supposedly routing "Western" essentialism, and Hart drawing attention to the profound commonalities between Gregory's and Augustine's trinitarian instincts' (p. 4-5.)

The essay I wish to focus on is that by Martin Laird, 'Under Solomon's Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*'. Laird is the author of a fine book on faith in Gregory's writings[3], from which the present essay develops the theme of desire. Laird begins by considering the contributions of four writers (Mark Hart, John Behr, Rowan Williams, and Morwenna Ludlow) to the re-evaluation of the nature of Gregory's theory of asceticism in general and of the relationship of desire to the rational faculty in particular.

First, of Hart's re-reading of Gregory's *De Virginitate*, Laird writes that Hart (not to be confused with David Bentley Hart, the contributor to this book) redresses the tendency to read this early work as a clear exaltation of celibacy over marriage, arguing that Gregory is more fundamentally concerned with showing how the soul's desire for union with God may in fact be reconciled with the needs of family and community life that arise from the body, once the truer nature of spiritual development is understood. Laird, continuing to present Hart's thought, goes on:

> Marriage is ultimately viable for the Christian in so far as it is founded on the very quality that makes Christian celibacy viable, i.e. non attachment. With respect to the ultimate goal of union with God, the problem is not properly understood in terms of marriage versus celibacy. Marriage too leads to a life of contemplation … . The problem with desire, therefore, is not that it is concerned with the body *per se* but that the soul seeks ultimacy in what is not God. It is a problem within the soul itself. The healing remedy is not disembodiment but rather dispassion (*apatheia*). Hart succeeds in showing that ultimately for Gregory

[3] *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge and Divine Presence*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

> of Nyssa the ascetical focus is shifted away from celibate versus married to the proper training of desire, whether celibate or married. (p. 78)

The second writer, John Behr, argues, from a study of *De hominis opificio*, that the basis of Gregory's 'ascending perspective' is the desire which all things have for the good and the beautiful, and ultimately for God himself. Far from derailing the search for God, desire is, as it were, the homing instinct for God. Behr shows that for Gregory the problem with desire is not due to its involvement with the body. It is the evil husbandry of the mind which perverts movements of the soul into passions. In the present climate, in which it is assumed that it is the *body* which requires sexual expression, this is, it seems to me, a crucial point. Behr makes it in particular against Christopher Stead with whom the third writer, Rowan Williams, also takes issue.

According to Stead, Gregory repeats Aristotle's mistake of regarding man simply as an animal with reason added on as an extra capacity. Stead reads Gregory as giving us a 'picture of the human subject as a core of rationality with impulse added on.' Human realization, then, would be a question of separating impulse and desire out of the rational subject's project of attaining union with God. For Williams such a reading of Gregory will not do, and he argues that for Gregory the human being does not 'consist of a rational core with some embarrassing additions.' While it is undeniable that desire poses a problem, it is likewise undeniable that it is part of the solution. For, as Williams shows, desire is part of the rational subject, 'part of how mind realizes itself'.

The fourth writer, Morwenna Ludlow, notes that desire is dynamic and malleable. It can be aligned to materialistic impulse or to the good itself; in either case it is shaped accordingly. Rather like iron, desire can be purified of its impurities, and in such a purified state 'the soul will naturally be attracted to God, as like is attracted to like.' Desire focused on God is 'the deepest and most true expression of humanity.' If the ideal state of desire is dispassion (*apatheia*), this does not mean the disappearance of desire. '*Apatheia* is thus not the absence of desire but freedom from any materialistic impulse or passion.'

Laird tells us that these four studies represent 'what might reasonably be called the *status quaestionis* on desire in Gregory of Nyssa' and that their value lies in the fact that they clearly shift the topic of desire out of a bifurcated anthropology (reason over here, desire over there) into an intrinsically unified, subtly multi-levelled, and dynamic anthropology'. For the human being 'to attain union with God, the former scenario required that desire be rooted out.' In this scenario, as presented by these four writers, 'desire cannot be rooted out if divine union is to be realized' (p.79). Laird, passing on to the subject of desire in the Song of Songs, writes:

> If passionate desire were eradicated from the search for union, there would be no union. It is precisely desire properly educated and trained that enables the bride to search for the Beloved throughout the transcendent realm into the realm of unknowing where, at long last, she finds her Beloved in the darkness of faith. For Gregory of Nyssa there is a fundamental continuity between the noetic-erotic grasp turned in on itself, and the noetic-erotic *ungrasping* that is brought transformed into the Holy of Holies [the Song of Songs] where, communing with God, it is ever dilated, ever being filled without, paradoxically, ever becoming full. (p. 80)

Laird then asks: 'What sort of education of desire does Gregory of Nyssa envision?' And he concludes his survey of the four writers by saying that, taking them as a new point of departure on this question, what follows in his essay 'will examine how Gregory of Nyssa sets this out in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*'. The ten further pages are too dense and too deep to be summarized. They must be read.

There is one other essay, the last in the book, called 'The Mirror of the Infinite' by David Bentley Hart, one of the two Orthodox contributors, with which I should like to close—or, rather, *cannot* close without a mention. Bentley Hart (as I shall refer to him to avoid confusion with Mark Hart) is that mixture of a polemical and a mystical theologian which Orthodoxy has a gift for producing.[4]

[4] David Bentley Hart is the author of a major work, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, Eerdmans, 2203, which Mother Rosemary is reading at this moment with great enthusiasm, and to which I look forward when it becomes available.

Thus he begins his essay with a most satisfying swipe at both Eastern and Western notions about the Trinitarian theologies of the other, and continues rivetingly for a page or two, leading to a consideration of the similarities between Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine:

> One should also note, at the outset, that for Gregory, no less than for Augustine, the divine image is first and foremost the possession of each individual soul, in the mystery of her simultaneous unity of essence and diversity of acts.

But what the essay is working towards is 'the one motif that pervades Gregory's thought most thoroughly … that of the mirror'. There is more, and I am tempted to quote the whole of the last page which describes beautifully the desirability of Eastern and Western traditions turning to each other in charity in the hope of each finding mirrored in the other those hidden depths that neither is competent to recognize in itself. But an earlier passage must have the last word:

> In a sense, the infinity of God's glory is reflected in the insatiable eros it awakens: as the soul always bears the impress of what she mirrors, one glimpse of the divine loveliness leaves an ecstasy ever unexpressed in the depths of the mind … And, no matter how far the soul ventures into the infinity of God, she will always yearn for more of God's beauty, to hunger for his sweetness, nor will she ever find any end to the reality in which she moves—and herein lies the ultimate truth of the soul's similitude to God. (p. 120)

SISTER EDMÉE SLG

Glory Descending. Michael Ramsey and his Writings, by Douglas Dales, John Habgood, Geoffrey Rowell and Rowan Williams. Canterbury Press, 2005. £18.99.

'No church can flourish without prayer and a deeply rooted belief that is intelligently wrought, and clearly and compassionately expressed.' In that single sentence Douglas Dales, the editor of this second book marking the centenary of the 1 hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury's birth on November 14, 1904, gives the rationale for this fine 'Michael Ramsey Reader' and for the plans and events that gave rise to it.

The volume is the result of the confluence of three distinct interests related to the recognition of Michael Ramsey's stature in twentieth-century Christianity, and to the respect and devotion that he inspired. First, to mark the centenary itself, Ramsey's former student Douglas Dales conceived of an exposition of Ramsey's thought and witness that was published as *Glory*. *The Spiritual Theology of Michael Ramsey,* (Canterbury Press, 2003), a book that he hoped would be complemented by a volume of Ramsey texts. At the same time, plans were afoot to mount a public commemoration of Ramsey both in the United States, where the Ramseys spent much time and had many friends, and in England at the places that had been significant in his ministry. During 2004 those Anglo-American events took place. Addresses and sermons were given by the contributors to this volume. Those two interests account for the shape and content of *Glory Descending*: half given to Ramsey texts, half given to texts on various themes by the centenary contributors. The third interest in the publication of *Glory Descending* is that of Canterbury Press, who has used this volume to launch a laudable series entitled 'Canterbury Studies in Spiritual Theology'. As is the case in this study of Ramsey, the phrase 'spiritual theology' must be read broadly; they are not studies of what used to be called 'ascetical theology' strictly speaking. Rather, the phrase points to an interest in theology that is intended to have spiritual—could we say existential?—consequences. Certainly from that angle *Glory Descending* fits the bill and sets a standard we must hope will be equalled in the volumes yet to come.

The texts of Part One, 'A Michael Ramsey Reader', have been admirably selected and judiciously modernized by the volume's editor, Douglas Dales. With an eye keenly focused on the overall shape of Ramsey's theology (everyone's theology has its own distinctive contours, of course,) and the pastoral needs of the church, Douglas Dales has divided the selections into four sections that together cover the church year: 'The Word of God' (Advent to Epiphany); 'The Cross' (Lent and Passiontide); 'The Lord of Glory' (Easter and Ascensiontide); and 'The Body of Christ' (Pentecost and Trinity). Each of these sections includes a short preface by the editor, placing the texts within the framework of the broader themes discernible in the Ramsey corpus as a whole. Liturgical reference

points aside, Dales's categories also highlight the quartet of themes that made Ramsey's theology his own: his enduring commitment to 'Biblical Theology' (probably more Neo-Orthodox than 'Liberal Catholic' in fact); his insistence that the Passion is not just a phase in God's redemptive act but an eternal posture as the condition of love and communion; his ground-breaking exposition of 'glory' as key to both who Jesus is and how we become like him; and the theme of the Body of Christ, the church, as an unavoidable point of impact for all of the above. Here is more than 'luminous spiritual teaching' (p. 246). The reader who is looking for a viable, indeed rich, shape to his or her theology (Ramsey called it 'the majestic unity of the Church's faith') will find it here.

The second half of the book, Part Two ('Reflecting on Michael Ramsey') and Part Three ('Epilogue'), includes the addresses and sermons of the public centenary occasions. Given to different audiences in different places, the reader will find them repetitive here and there, and may perhaps be caught off guard by their various styles, lengths and complexity. At the same time, it means that in the second half of the book as well there is something for everyone.

There already exists, of course, a small but helpful body of secondary literature on Michael Ramsey. All of the contributors to this volume offer insights that correct, expand and deepen the interpretation of Ramsey's life and witness so far. For instance, John Habgood's sermon 'Michael Ramsey: Man of God', at first sight a nice but not terribly incisive reflection on Ramsey the man, actually offers great help in elucidating the influences and style (we used to say *attrait*) of Ramsey's spirituality (help that somehow never quite comes from Owen Chadwick's *Michael Ramsey. A Life*). A full account of Ramsey as a spiritual master will have to dig behind and beyond John Habgood's account; but this short piece gives important clues to the would-be spiritual historian.

Douglas Dales's two main contributions, 'Living though Dying; Suffering and Sanctification in the Spiritual Theology of Michael Ramsey', and 'One Body—the Ecclesiology of Michael Ramsey', are what I would call devotional exposition. They are admirable in capturing in a synchronic way two key elements of Ramsey's

thought. Taken together, they elucidate how spiritual insight and experience and theological reflection are but strands in a single cord.

Bishop Geoffrey Rowell brings to his address 'Michael Ramsey, Transfiguration and the Eastern Churches' a characteristically wide network of sources and perspectives on Ramsey's witness as a theologian and as a tireless advocate of Christian unity. As in the case of Habgood's piece, Bishop Rowell provides rich elucidation of Ramsey's intellectual development and commitments from material (in the Lambeth Palace archives) solicited by Owen Chadwick for his *Life*. Again, those who wish to deepen their understanding of Ramsey's intellectual biography will find many prompts here. Geoffrey Rowell is especially good at bringing to the consideration of a theme witnesses that are 'ecumenical' in time and space. When it comes to the theme of transfiguration, then, we are able to see Ramsey's 'rediscovery' of it for Anglicans as the re-appropriation of a forgotten strand in our tradition, one that links us still more deeply with 'the One Body'.

For Archbishop Rowan Williams, who provides four of the nine expository pieces in the second half of the volume, Michael Ramsey is a dialogue partner in the on-going conversation of contemporary theology. Less an historian than a systematic theologian (for lack of a better phrase), the Archbishop tackles characteristic concerns in Ramsey's writings and seeks both to rephrase them for, and develop them in, our own situation. 'The Christian Priest Today' revisits Ramsey's classic volume on priesthood by the same name but offers the Archbishop a chance to begin to forge his own equivalent volume. I find that one of Williams' gifts is to intuit how Ramsey himself would have made his case if he had not been constrained by Edwardian conventions. Williams puts Ramsey's essential points in psychologically and otherwise apt ways that Ramsey never could have done. One senses that an act of 'traditioning' is happening under one's very nose. Similarly, with his 'Theology in the Face of Christ' on the themes of transfiguration and theological aesthetics generally the Archbishop puts Ramsey's small but great book *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* into a larger perspective and, more importantly, creatively extends its argument in expounding the very character of the church, and theology's role in speaking of and to the church. In 'The Lutheran Catholic'

Archbishop Williams argues in his own way for the connection between Gospel and church order (not restricted to episcopacy) that Ramsey so influentially expressed in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Finally, the Archbishop's sermon 'True Glory' recalls Ramsey's concern in such works as *Sacred and Secular* for a genuine Christian humanism. '"Humanism"?.. .The final point of human liberty, the ultimate assertion of human dignity, is to be free with God's freedom' (p. 243). Not Ramsey, yet Ramsey. Again, an act of traditioning.

In retrospect, the array of centenary addresses would have been strengthened by a contribution on Ramsey's work as biblical critic and interpreter, so key was that to his own theological 'method'. Perhaps that will come in the next wave of Ramsey interpretation.

In the meantime, all of this is rich fare for a wide constituency. Only the illiterate could not benefit from some part of *Glory Descending* (and even they would be drawn by the luminous picture of Ramsey on the cover!). Bishops, clergy and lay ministers must read it, if not all at once, then as a regular form of 'spiritual reading' or in preparation for pastoral opportunities. Religious and lay people alike will find much to prompt and deepen reflection in this testimony to Archbishop Michael Ramsey. And it may even be—and this should cause us no surprise—that those who read it become a little more holy, a little more like him.

CHARLES MILLER

L'Eredita Spirituale di Gregorio Magno Tra Occidente e Oriente, edited by Guido Innocenzo Gargano, Il Segno dei Gabrielli Editori, Verona, 2005. 22 euro. ISBN 8888163549

Gregory the Great, by John Moorhead, Routledge, Oxford & New York, 2005. £8.99. ISBN 0415233909

The l400th anniversary of the death of Pope St Gregory the Great was marked by a conference of distinguished scholars in Rome in March 2004, whose papers are published in this substantial volume, some of which is in English. From the other side of the world comes a brief but lucid introduction to Gregory's thought, written by the Australian scholar, John Moorhead. Gregory has been well served in recent years by studies in the English language, notably *Gregory the Great and his World,* by R. A. Markus, (Cambridge, 1997) and

Gregory the Great—perfection in imperfection by Carole Straw, (University of California Press, 1988). To these should be added the fine translation of his homilies on the gospels, published by Cistercian Studies in 1990. In the world of Anglo-Saxon studies, the degree to which the earliest English church bore the impress of his influence and teaching throughout its development is becoming more and more apparent, with important implications for understanding the breadth and depth of his influence, exerted through the English missionaries to Germany, on the shape of the early medieval church in Europe.

John Moorhead has produced in his introduction a masterly overview of aspects of Gregory's spiritual and pastoral significance. His book is one of a useful series introducing the early Church Fathers, and his bibliography provides a good starting point for further reading. He has included extensive translations of important parts of Gregory's writings, not all of which are easy of access outside university libraries. In his chapter on the Bible there are passages taken from Gregory's *Moralia* on Job and his *Homilies on Ezekiel*. There are also some of his gospel homilies, followed by further key passages from the *Moralia* illuminating Gregory's pastoral approach to people. The strength of the book lies in the writer's sympathetic appreciation of how Gregory approached the Bible, and in his understanding of the remarkable psychological insight that Gregory reveals in his various writings. It is a useful introduction but perforce limited in its scope.

The collected papers from the Rome symposium are of another order and together they constitute an important and valuable volume on many aspects of Gregory's spiritual influence. The volume has been beautifully produced, and meticulously edited by Father Gargano, who is the Camaldolese prior of San Gregorio al Celio in Rome and a distinguished professor of theology. The publication is sponsored by that monastery, the Anselmian Institute on the Aventine, and the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

The range of the book is remarkable: after an excellent introduction, papers examine the relationship between his contemplative ideal and monasticism in Gregory's time, the significance of the figure of the wife of Job in his *Moralia*, and his relationship to contemporary Byzantine theology. His role as a

mystical theologian is examined afresh, as is his whole theological method, and the manner of the preparation of his *Homilies on Ezekiel*. The latter part of the book considers his continuing influence in the medieval church: the influence of his *Pastoral Rule* in the Carolingian period, Anglo-Saxon perceptions of him over several centuries, his influence upon Peter Damian and his presence in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The book concludes with a fascinating consideration of his influence upon the decree *Verbum Dei* of Vatican II. The whole publication is commended by Cardinal Kasper, head of the pontifical council for Christian unity.

It is very fortunate that the monastery founded by St Gregory in his own home on the Celian hill, from which the missionaries came to England in 597, is in the care of the Camaldolese monks, whose initiative enabled this symposium and publication. The ethos of their order, which has existed for a thousand years in the Benedictine tradition, combines the eremitical, communal and missionary aspects of the monastic life in a manner close in spirit to the teaching of St Gregory himself. Like him, they are faithful witnesses to the vitality of *Lectio Divina*, the meditative approach to the actual language of the Bible, as the gateway to contemplative spirituality.

DOUGLAS DALES

The Creativity of Listening: Bill Kirkpatrick, DLT. £10.95.

When I first started working in Soho in 1976 Bill Kirkpatrick had just left. But the rumour of him was everywhere in central London, in St Anne's Soho and Centrepoint. He had ended up, someone later said, as an 'urban 'ermit' in Earls Court. It was a transition which, this book makes clear, was only one of the many remarkable transitions that has characterised Bill Kirkpatrick's life. Born in Canada and fostered as a child, his first encounter with religion was as a teenager through Fr Aelred Carlyle, who, much earlier in his life, had been the Anglican Abbot of Caldey. Now a Catholic Priest, and an old man, Carlyle was chaplain to the local penitentiary, where he had to accompany men to the gallows. He was also chaplain to the nursing home for the elderly run by Kirkpatrick's parents. Carlyle conveyed to the confused young seventeen year old a message that he has never forgotten. He listened to the pains and

problems of this boy, and did so in such a way that he sowed the seeds of a lifetime's vocation. 'God does not know how to reject anyone—only humans can do that', he said. 'God is our ultimate lover.'

Those words read like a text for every page of this book. It is hard to categorise what is written here. In part it is a book about counselling, and one that I will turn to again and again for its wise advice about the creativity of listening. But it is also partly an autobiography, though alas, in a way that is all too short. Bill Kirkpatrick trained as a male nurse at a time when few men did. He was in at the beginnings of the first drug dependency units, and then of a new branch of nursing, that of the Community Psychiatric Nurse, where he played a significant part in shaping what is now an accepted and vital part of local medical services. I found myself longing for more flesh on the bare bones of the story he tells, because somewhere here is a window onto important aspects of all our social history.

However, autobiography for its own sake is not Kirkpatrick's purpose. It is only relevant as it begins to reveal the healing that comes in his 'co-creative listening'. This is, above all, a book written by a healer, by someone who knows how to listen to another's story and open himself to it. He heals because he himself is always aware of his own need for healing, and because he sees the other person, however pained and broken, as the one who will bring that healing to him. So throughout this book we meet those who come to his flat below the pavements of Earl's Court to share their troubled lives. These are stories that stand out of the text in bold type, vivid and moving, as if they were milestones—as indeed they are. Because that is the other theme of this book: it is an inner journey of a long and ever deepening pathway into God. But what it tells us, in contrast to many other books of spirituality, is that such a pathway is never solitary.

I emerged from this book with a new, and, I hope, humbler recognition that we are always in need of healing, and that healing is always in the hands of another. The book ends with a quotation from Harry Williams, which seems to sum it all up: 'As we share what we are with each other we shall discover that it is in each other that we live.' It is a text that needs to be engraved on the hearts of anyone who listens to their neighbour in need.

DAVID BARTON

Piecing Together, David Scott. Bloodaxe Books. £7.95.

In a recent review of a collection by the winner of the Forward Prize for Poetry, the reviewer remarked that the early Christian Fathers condemned poetry. It is not a reference I have come across, and, given the flourishing tradition of Christian poetry from earliest times, it is a stricture that has been widely ignored—thankfully! One of the delights of the Anglican tradition is its wealth of poetry and in particular the long line of poet clergy, right down to Archbishop Rowan. It is significant that the Littlemore Conference in Oxford this summer included an evening of poetry with readings by Archbishop Rowan and David Scott. Small wonder. We live in the middle of a wonderful flowering of poetry. Poetry is a celebration and affirmation of life. And it was fascinating to hear, side by side, the two different voices that are the strongest expressions in our time of the long Anglican tradition.

David Scott has always been the poet of what someone once called 'the humble epiphanies associated with weathered objects and places'. But at the end of his 1998 *Selected Poems*, there is a set of poems that seem to be more strongly influenced by his role as a priest, and which move the quiet but hidden religious tone of the earlier pieces to a different level. It is a change that is hard to define because, if anything, the reticence that has been a characteristic of the earlier poems is even more marked here. But there is a poem entitled 'A Priest at Prayer' which gives a hint of the inner eye which has brought this about: 'From prayer to prayer involves/ a dwindling, a way of being/ that accounts for weariness … the passive tense, a waiting to receive,/ out of bounds of what is right/ or wrong'.

That passive sense, and the awareness of receiving, of being surprised by what is seen when the watcher/prayer surrenders any construct or personal ideas that might be imposed on reality, emerges as the underlying source of this latest collection. A poem entitled 'A Boat on lona Bay' quite took my breath away on first reading, and I have returned to it again and again to see how it is done.

> So many times my pen has tried that boat:
> How she rests in the water as if nothing

Could bother her; how much she enjoys just floating,
Waiting release from the anchor.
The slight laying back of the masts and rigging
Is very satisfactory. Happy in herself, breathing
As if she might have just been drawn
Through the tight neck of a bottle, and raised
And rigged full-sail, upright.

Nine lines, a miracle of compression and simplicity (just think of what could be said about boats and Iona!) done with just three sentences, one short enclosed by two long. The sentences dragged over the rhythm of the lines create a sense of movement, in contrast to the central word *anchor*. But in the end, whatever the construction, it is the force of the observation that strikes: here is a *boat* living, breathing and all that it is and can do leaps out and fills the mind from these finely written lines.

Scott uses the same contrast of movement and the fixed object in 'On thinking of not throwing the old road map away', a sonnet that records Scott's anxious car journeys to and from the hospital where his wife was critically ill. On his journeys an old boot appears by the side of the road, unmarked on the map, of course, but becoming a pivotal point on the journey. An old boot implies loss, abandonment; despair hovers below the surface. But this boot is transformed into a talisman, symbol of hope, 'to watch and wait/ and wonder about a brain being mended/ a life being sewn back into place.' When the life is sewn back, the boot vanishes—no longer needed, the hope fulfilled. This is a remarkable poem, holding together anxiety and hope, the mundane business of travel and everyday life, the mystery of healing, and the miracle of life. It is typical of the pleasures of this collection, where Scott offers us so many poems of great depth, inviting us in, opening the mind. It is a mark of his skill as a poet that only after a number of readings does their considerable craftsmanship become clear.

But there is another aspect of this collection which seems to take the development of Scott's poetry in what may be a new direction. Emily Dickinson once said that a true poem was one that made the hairs on your head stand up. And for me, his verses on a contemporary painting, 'A David Jones Annunciation', did just that:

In such an ordinary room
the angel came skidding to rest:
she on a bench of prayer
he to get news off his chest.

The poem bounces through its ballad verses powerfully and amusingly, but in such a way that we never lose sight of the depth of what is happening here. And as the last verse slows to an emphatic halt something mysterious emerges. This is a poem opening the doors to the territory of faith. '"Yes" brought the world to its knees.' In another ballad, 'Caedmon's Song', the mystery that has for so long been the recurrent focus of Scott's poetry, is made even more explicit. This is Scott at his best. He captures something slightly restless here, an airy stirring, a pressing in through the gaps we leave in a life that can never be tidied up as we would want, by locking uncomfortable things away, out of sight:

Wind through the consonants,
air through the vowels
starlight through the planks,
God in the outhouse.

As always with Scott, the incidental details matter: unexpectedly, in the moment before breakfast (an echo here of that earlier poem on prayer, 'love meeting Love before the house wakes up') as he looks through the windows of a B&B, onto a farm that has grown round the ruins of an old Abbey, mystery reveals itself in a moment's glance:

God
of the nearer presence
and the long view
I saw you and I sing of you.

In a four line, four verse poem Scott eloquently conveys the rapture of the moment. But it is the explicit, almost credal affirmation of that last verse which surprised me. On the one hand it places Scott firmly in the tradition of Donne and Herbert and Traherne. But on the other hand it begins to separate him out from the generality, and from the astonishing wealth, of other contemporary poets. Neil Astley's two collections for the excellent Bloodaxe, *Staying Alive* and *Being Alive* (in both of which Scott has a place) are poems to sustain us through extraordinary times. But, for all the insights,

contemporary poetry does not really 'do God'. Mystery and wonder are there, but not God. Like much else in the contemporary literary world, religion in general and Christianity in particular are treated, at best, with suspicion. So, for the Christian reader of poetry, Scott's song is wonderful to hear. It is hard to tell what readers in general will make of this, but it will be important and interesting to see where it takes him next.

DAVID BARTON

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Art of God: The Making of Christians and the Meaning of Worship, Christopher Irvine, SPCK, 2005.

Lit by the Light of God: Prayers and Meditations through the Year, Melvyn Matthews, SPCK, 2005.

Means of Grace, Hope of Glory: 500 years of Anglican thought, compiled by Raymond Chapman, Canterbury Press, 2005.

The Mystical Language of Icons, Jolrunn Nes, Canterbury Press, 2004.

Encounter, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, DLT, 2005.

Breathing, I Pray, Ivan Mann, DLT, 2005.

Aspects of Islam, Ron Geaves, DLT, 2005.

Befriending the Stranger, Jean Vanier, DLT, 2005.

SLG PRESS: RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Gift of Theology: *The Trinitarian Vision of Ann Griffiths and Elizabeth of Dijon*, A. M. Allchin, £3.00.

Sacrifice and *Spirit,* Michael Ramsey, £2.00.

RETREAT OPPORTUNITIES IN 2006

17–19 March (Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) at
Marie Reparatrice Retreat Centre
Wimbledon, London, SW19 4RB

To be led by Sr Clare and Sr Adrian SLG

Cost: £76.00

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Llangasty Retreat House, Llangasty, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7PX
Wales

To be led by Fr David Barton and
Mother Rosemary SLG

Cost: £160.00

Booking forms are available from
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