

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

COMMUNITY NOTES

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Tom Wright

RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE IN MODERN ROMANIA

James Ramsay

HEAR MY VOICE

Anon

VOICES FROM THE TRADITION II

Sheila Watson

'LET IT BE'

HOMILY ON THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Sister Avis Mary SLG

MERCY

Sister Clare SLG

DOROTHY SUTHERLAND

Lindalou Friesen and Sister Isabel SLG

BOOKS

David Barton Douglas Dales Andrew Thomson John Scott

Sister Christine SLG Sister Clare SLG

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COMMUNITY NOTES

THE COMMUNITY (originally the Congregation) of the Sisters of the Love of God began on the Feast of the Holy Cross in 1906. There is no record of how we got our name or why the Community started on Holy Cross day, but we can surmise that the first Sisters saw the connection and that the Love of God and the cross, together, are deep in our Community foundations, essential to our life. The cross of Jesus is the sign and pledge of God's love. Today we are painfully aware of atrocities and torture worldwide, of human beings persistently doing each other to death in terrible circumstances, so the strangeness of that assertion, for all its Christian familiarity, is not lost on us. In our centenary year, why and how can we celebrate the cross and make of it a festival? Here is St Theodore, a ninth-century Byzantine abbot, on the subject:

How precious is the gift of the cross! See how beautiful it is to behold! It shows no sign of evil mixed with good, like the tree of old in Eden; it is all beautiful and comely to see and to taste. For it is a tree which brings forth life, not death. It is the source of light, not darkness. It offers you a home in Eden. It does not cast you out. It is the tree which Christ mounted as a king his chariot, and so destroyed the devil, the lord of death, and rescued the human race from slavery to the tyrant. It is the tree on which the Lord, like a great warrior with his hands and feet and his divine side pierced in battle, healed the wounds of our sins, healed our nature that had been wounded by the evil serpent.... We are given life instead of death, incorruptibility instead of corruption, glory instead of dishonour.

We are to see in the fact and manner of Christ's dying the reversal of the tragedy which bedevilled us in Eden. On the cross the hope and promise which run through Biblical history, despite all evidence to the contrary, is fulfilled limitlessly and abundantly: humanity, creation, are made well again. Because of that healing, which is cosmic in its dimensions, the Tree of the Cross is seen to bud and flower, laden with fruits of wisdom, goodness, life, beauty and freedom. It is not the suffering or cruelty of the cross which are glorified—far from it—but Christ's stupendous achievement, and the recognition that this 'great deed', to borrow Mother Julian's phrase, is our best clue to God's nature and action towards us. 'God so loved the world...'; 'No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.' (John 3: 16 and 1: 18).

Why then are we still so beset by wars, waste, wilful violence, misunderstanding and tragedy? It is as if what happened in that moment of history is too much, such an explosion of love that mere time cannot contain or cope with it. God does not break what he has created, so successiveness goes on, but now, in and through history, the drawing of transforming love can be felt and identified. It makes all lack of love the more painful, and the desire to answer love with love, to bring our life in tune with what God has accomplished, all the more urgent. That, now, is what time is for and what our own life times are for. Those who founded our Community felt and responded to the sheer abundance that flows from the cross, and we are still learning how to do the same. In each generation there is more, new newness of life and we cannot 'do' it; especially we cannot do it if we forget that creative Love is God's great deed and not ours, and that the issue must always be his and to his glory. Here is a taste of how previous Reverend Mothers of the Community have expressed and experienced it:

Mother Mary Frances (in a conference to the novitiate)

'The first great occupation of our life is the contemplation of JESUS offered and accepted, labouring, suffering, dying, rising, always conquering through the power of undefeatable love, and revealing to us the Father. That is the burden of all our teaching here, because it is the meaning of our life. That is the atmosphere in which we must learn to live. Sometimes the stress will be on one aspect of the offering, sometimes on another; but more and more as we are made free of the things of self, we shall be used by the Holy Spirit for his own purposes. Our lives, closely united with the life of JESUS, will be taken and used in a way quite certain to effect its end, though we may not know here and now how this is done. At one time it may be the pure adoration of GOD that holds us; at another time it will be the suffering of the Sacred Passion, and we shall be asked to feel the weight of darkness and of sin. If we give ourselves simply and freely to each experience as it comes to us from the hand of God, we shall be furthering the purposes of Redeeming Love. Divine Love will find in us a channel for all the power of its mercy, tenderness and strength. Learn to be free.'

Mother Mary Clare (in a talk in St Paul's Cathedral)

'Sometimes our idea of prayer is so limited and we believe in all good faith that it is we who are doing something by praying and by holding the dying world to God, when the truth is that if we offer ourselves completely to him, it is our blessed Lord through us who holds the world to himself.'

Prayer is not a technique of human wisdom but an oblation of the self to God. It is our business to let God flow out through us that the impossible may be done.'

Mother Jane (in a letter to a Sister)

'At Compline I was suddenly violently convicted of the truth of what we'd seen and said yesterday afternoon about not getting bogged down in others' tangles ('sharing sorrows' is different, and good). I remembered two people I got bogged down with, and I saw it as my doing them a damage. It made me want to underline to you the need for fierce observance of the 'thus far and no further' of our skinned concernedness. And the essential of looking at and trusting (hopelessly) God through all.'

Mother Anne (in a letter to a Sister)

'I think the important thing is not to look at those "hectic hopeless spasms" in self reproach but to see the ache and the loneliness coming from a much deeper source where there is also joy in God. And as we think of the "hectic hopeless" world situation and are part of it, our work is indeed to learn compassion. It's a long learning but it's a sure learning. May God bless and strengthen us in it—indeed continue the work he has begun.'

...and Mother Rosemary (in a note to herself)

'Don't underestimate God's Love!'

News from St Isaac's

The Sisters write: 'On 7 May at St Isaac's we had a remarkable service of thanksgiving for the life of SLG in this place. The Right Reverend Waiohau Te Haara, who had welcomed the sisters over ten years ago, preached the homily and Chris Honore (who became a Priest Associate earlier this year) and Wiritai Toi conducted the service in Maori and English. The singing was wonderful and we reckon over eighty people fitted into chapel. Sr Anne welcomed the guests who included Sr Anne CSN, Br Brian SSF and two of his Brothers, along with two Roman Catholic Sisters. She also named in her welcome each of the SLG Sisters who have lived here, as well as Richard Buck and David Barton who had visited as the Community's Wardens. Bishop Ben Te Haara read a letter from Bishop David Moxon on behalf of all the Bishops of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia. He wrote to express their appreciation of SLG's time at St Isaac's, and their gratitude to the Community for answering the invitation in 1995, and for allowing Sister Anne to remain at St Isaac's permanently.'

We then went to the Opononi Hotel where we sat looking over the harbour and had a delicious meal. In the course of the meal a number of people spoke about how much the presence of the sisters has meant and how they will be missed. Sr Susan and Sr Helen, who return to England very soon now, were both presented with a gorgeous bouquet of flowers and a kite (a Maori flax basket). Sr Helen's Renewal of Vows at St Isaac's the following day flowed out of that, and was another day of celebration and thanksgiving.'

Although after 9 June Sr Anne will be the only SLG Sister at St Isaac's, there is no doubt the life of St Isaac's will continue and that she will be cared for and helped by the local community and our friend Leah.

For the moment we are almost all gathered at Fairacres, and the Convent feels quite full and busy. Oblate Sr Jennifer of the Indwelling Christ made her first Annual Promises on 25 January, the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. At Candlemas, 2 February, Sr Avis Mary returned from a five month sabbatical, spent almost entirely in Germany. During that time, she had the opportunity both to experience life in a small closely-knit town in the south easternmost tip of the Bavarian Alps, right on the border with Austria, and also to renew many friendships, most notably by visiting the Carmelites at Dachau, Berlin, Weimar and Birkenwerder and various Sisters of Ordo Pacis.

On 20 February Bishop Richard Harries, our Diocesan and Visitor for nineteen years, came for a farewell visit; our love, gratitude and prayer go with him and his wife, Jo, as they move on to a new stage in their lives. On 26 February we rejoiced with Sr Adrian of the Peace of God on the Golden Jubilee of her Profession and enjoyed a festive Eucharist and meal with some of her family and friends.

I was very blessed to be given a 'mini-sabbatical' at the beginning of Lent and spent two restorative weeks at Holy Hill Hermitage in the Ox Mountains on the west coast of Ireland. It was my first personal contact with the hermit monks (in their usage 'monk' refers to both men and women) of the Spiritual Life Institute who write of themselves: 'Like our Carmelite ancestors, we spend much of our life in silence and solitude, striving to offer to God a pure and undivided heart.' My hunch that we and they are kindred spirits was confirmed, and I hope that the link may continue.

On 5 May we finally said good bye to the Convent of St Mary and the Angels, Boxmoor, when the sale to George Wimpey, the largest house-builders and developers in the country, was completed. Although that is a

relief, we are sad to leave neighbours and friends who have supported us there so faithfully for so long.

Please do all join with us in giving thanks for the first one hundred years of SLG life, and pray that we may go forward into the future with wisdom and courage.

MOTHER ROSEMARY SLG

TELEPHONING THE COMMUNITY

Best times: 10.30-12 noon; 3.30-4.30 p.m. and 6.00-7.00 p.m.
Sunday and Friday afternoons are ordinarily covered by an answer phone, but messages are cleared after Vespers.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

*A Sermon For Epiphany 2006, Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the Profession of Sister Mary Magdalene SLG*

TOM WRIGHT

‘ARISE, SHINE, for your light has come; and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.’ There is a sense of gathering excitement in the third and final section of Isaiah, as the royal figure of the early chapters and the Servant of the middle section are combined, and further transformed, into the king who rescues and judges, the one at whose appearing God’s own glory is revealed, and the new heavens and new earth are brought into being. And when we reach the New Testament, which draws so lavishly upon Isaiah as a whole, there is a sense of lightness, of completeness, as that excitement comes to a head, even though we ought still to be shocked at the vulnerable little boy, at risk in Bethlehem under the threatening eye of the powerful ruler in Jerusalem. Central to the paradox of Christianity is the claim that, in this little boy, the glory of the Lord is revealed, for all peoples to come and worship.

This theme of the glory of the Lord, the glory promised in scripture, fulfilled however strangely in Jesus Christ, celebrated in Epiphany at the coming of the Magi, launched upon the world in the gospel as described in Ephesians—this theme of the glory of the Lord is utterly appropriate for a day on which we celebrate the revelation of the love and glory of God in

the cheerful and prayerful life of Sister Mary Magdalene, to whom we in the family persist in referring as Auntie Linny. I had just turned seven when Sister Mary Magdalene made her profession, and I don't have any memories of her before that date; indeed it came as a surprise to me that she had been here at Fairacres for only fifty years, rather than sixty or even seventy, since to me as I grew up she seemed such a natural inhabitant of the place, and the place a natural habitat for her. No doubt things were never quite that easy, as they never are in any community. But the fact remains that half a century is a good stint and worth celebrating in itself.

But of course mere survival, though noteworthy, is not so important. What matters is what someone does with that long time; and those who know her best will say that Sister Mary Magdalene has drawn deeply on the riches of the Christian tradition, not least the invitation to explore and contemplate the glory of the Lord, and to become a fountain of wisdom for others, from near and far, who seek to join in that exploration of wonder, delight and discipline. That is why the writings of von Balthasar have been so important for her, as they have been for an increasing number of Anglicans in the last generation. Von Balthasar, like our own Michael Ramsey, explored afresh the tradition stemming from Irenaeus, and behind him of course St John, that the glory of God is to be seen in a fully alive human being, and that the definition of a fully alive human being has to do with the vision of God. Jesus Christ himself is of course both the prototype and the source of that full and overflowing human life, a life full of God and full of the vision of God: 'we beheld his glory, glory as of the only son of the father, full of grace and truth.' Von Balthasar emphasized, at a time when such ideas were even more unfashionable than they are today, that true theology is done in prayer and community, both of which, while celebrating the presence of God in the world of creation and in all human life, simultaneously pose a disturbing challenge and question-mark against the way the world, and human life, currently are. And when you put the picture together that way you can see why that vision was and is so appealing to one who has given her life to the deeply counter-cultural work of prayer, contemplation, community and the guidance of others towards the overwhelming and redeeming vision of God.

Perhaps, at the risk of embarrassing her, I can just flesh that out a little bit. One of our family legends is of how my grandfather, Sister Mary Magdalene's father, found it impossible to comprehend, let alone support, the decision of his beloved middle daughter to hide herself away in a convent. My grandfather had fought in two wars, been wounded and decorated, lost a brother and a brother-in-law, run a business through the

Depression years, been a JP and a Deputy Lieutenant and sundry other things. He was a man of action. Perhaps inevitably, he saw the call of the cloister as something negative. Indeed, there is a sense in which he was right to do so, because, precisely as in von Balthasar, this life of prayer, contemplation and community rightly stands over against the over-busyness of the western world, a standing rebuke to the drift of our culture towards war and money and hyperactivity. Happily, some years later my grandfather relented, and with characteristic self-deprecating humour went out into the garden and literally turned over a new leaf, and the relationship was restored.

But, as all who come here to Fairacres know very well, this community, and Sister Mary Magdalene as one example of its life, has been and is anything but negative. It is lively—imaginative, enquiring, supportive, knowing more about the wider world and church than most other people. We have always said in our family that if you want to know what's going on just ask Aunty Linny. She not only knows, but has been praying about it. In fact, we have said semi-seriously that we should be drawing short straws and nominating someone else from the family to be trained up to take over from her in due course as the chief family pray-er. Certainly we are, like many around the world, consciously indebted to her ministry, and that of this whole community, for your sustained prayer on our behalf.

The glory of God is a human being fully alive, and the life of a human being is the vision of God. That is the Epiphany vision, the Fairacres vision, the von Balthasar vision, the Johannine vision, and ultimately of course the Jesus vision. It is a vision of extraordinary, though always surprising, beauty and it is that beauty that I invite you to contemplate for a minute or two longer.

The story of the Magi is full of beauty. Foreign sages making a long pilgrimage with strange gifts, themselves full of power, beauty and foreboding, visiting a blustering old despot but going instead to fall down before a little boy, and all at the behest of a beckoning star on the one hand and a scriptural prophecy on the other. No wonder it has been painted so often. But the beauty of the story points beyond itself, as beauty always does in von Balthasar's theology, inviting us to recognize, in our response of contemplation and wonder, a direct analogy to the responding awe and love evoked by the presence of the living God. And of course for Matthew the two are perfectly fused, because the Isaianic overtones of his story resonate so powerfully with the revelation of God's glory as the promises to Israel are fulfilled and the rulers of the world come to pay homage. Nor

is the beauty in any danger, as our own approximations so often are, of collapsing into mere sentimentality, because the powerful brooding presence of Herod reminds us that this beauty is always contested, always a light shining in a dark world, and that when the true king of the Jews appears he must, as Isaiah saw, be despised and rejected by mortals, must tread alone the winepress of God's wrath.

And what I want to suggest to you this morning, bringing together the Epiphany theme with today's special commemoration, is that the beauty of God, the glory of the Lord which we see in Jesus and, in a measure, in all his saints, is meant not only to draw us upwards but to draw us forwards, onwards in time to the promised moment when, in another Isaianic promise, the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Present beauty, whether that of a landscape or a string quartet or the smile of a little child, is powerful but incomplete; but its incompleteness lies not in the fact that it is a signpost to a different world altogether but in the fact that it is a partial filling of this world, God's lovely but flawed creation, with God's glory, and that it points on to the promised complete filling, when God will be all in all. That, as I have argued elsewhere, is the high road to a fresh Christian understanding of aesthetics. Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles with Herod threatening in the background, is a classic moment in the story of partial and anticipatory fillings-of-creation-with-glory. And, as such, Epiphany is full of hope, and encourages us to look with hope at every glimpse of beauty, every sign of that fully alive humanness in which we learn to recognize the glory of God.

That, in fact, is what we celebrate when we give thanks for this community and all who have made it what it is, and within that for Sister Mary Magdalene and her fifty years of faithful prayer. The best enclosed communities are not, at their very heart, a retreat from the world, but a celebration of what is promised *for* the world. Paul writes in Ephesians of the unity and holiness of the church as a sign to the powers of the world that their time is up, that Jesus is Lord of all and will one day unite all things in heaven and earth. When I used to visit Aunty Linny here in my undergraduate days I had never heard of a theology of sacred space, and indeed my theology then would have been resistant to such a thing. And yet as soon as I stepped inside the door of Fairacres I knew this place was different. You can feel it. That's why people come from far and near. William Tyndale, in one of his more humorous moments, caricatures the mediaeval idea that monastic communities store up a treasury of merit into which more sinful mortals can tap by proxy, and for a fee: 'So', he says, 'if

your wife gives you nine words for three, go to the Charterhouse and buy some of their silence.’ But, for all that this idea was shamelessly abused in some parts at least of the Middle Ages, there is a deep truth there: that the daily round of prayer and work, of contemplation and spiritual and theological reading and writing and pastoral care, all contribute to a sense that, though this place is more still and quiet than the busy streets around, it is actually a lot more fully alive than they are, charged more obviously with the grandeur, as well as the humility, of God.

And it is for this reason, of course, that men and women cross land and sea to come here and learn both silence and wisdom. Because this, too, is a place of pilgrimage, in two senses: first, most obviously, in that, like the Magi, people from near and far somehow know that they have to come here to find what they are most deeply looking for, second, in that those who spend their whole lives here engage on a different and deeper pilgrimage, a journey towards the heart of God, and not least towards God’s future, towards that filling of the world with God’s glory for which the only analogy is the somewhat perplexing one of the waters filling the sea. That is the paradox which makes this place what it is, and which stamps unforgettably those who are shaped by, and in turn help to shape, its life over the days and decades. We come here as pilgrims to learn about another pilgrimage; glimpsing glory, we come to gaze and grow and learn to look for more. We do so under the uncomprehending and sometimes threatening glance of the Herods of this world, both the power brokers who carve the world up to their own advantage and the sneerers and scoffers who see no point in either kind of pilgrimage. But it is we, not Herod, who see the glory of the Lord, and fall down gladly before his face. And we therefore give thanks today for this community, for Sister Mary Magdalene and her part in it down the years, and above all for the glory that is made manifest to the world in Jesus Christ and in all those who are fully alive in him—the glory that will be fully unveiled when, in consummation of our present partial vision, we come to see him face to face.

The Right Revd N. T. Wright is Bishop of Durham

RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE IN MODERN ROMANIA: SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

JAMES RAMSAY

Historical Context

THE MODERN STATE of Romania came into being, broadly speaking, with the unification of Transylvania and the ‘Old Kingdom’ of Rumania in 1918. This ‘Old Kingdom’ itself dated only from 1859, when Ottoman-controlled Wallachia (the Vlach lands) and Moldavia were united. These historic moments of unification arose from a long and complex development of awareness of Romanian identity amongst the Romanian-speaking peoples, a development in which the Orthodox and Uniate (Greek Catholic) Churches played a crucial role through Romanian-language education and publishing; but the essential shaping of modern-day Romania occurred (just) within living memory, very different from the history of the English nation. John of Gaunt’s lines in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, ‘this sceptered isle ...’ with their revealing conflation of Scotland and Wales into ‘England’, already reflect a robust, lyrically promotional sense of national self-confidence.

By the end of the Second World War the country’s territory had again changed, with the loss of northern Bucovina, Bessarabia (now Moldova and south-west Ukraine), and southern Dobrogea (now in Bulgaria). For a brief period between the two World Wars, despite a fearsome gap between rich and poor, the young Romanian nation demonstrated remarkable economic and cultural vitality, and enjoyed democratic government. All too soon, however, dictatorship, war, and then Stalinist Communism (not exactly sanctioned, but agreed to, at Yalta) took over. As tens of thousands of Romanians were executed, imprisoned, or deported after 1947, the conviction that ‘the West will not leave us to our fate’ helped buoy up hope—until it became clear there would be no intervention. Nevertheless, armed resistance to Communism continued in Romania for at least a decade. This historical framework is important to bear in mind when we read, for instance, about ‘nationalism’ in Eastern Europe today, especially in connection with the relationship of Orthodox Churches to the State. We need to be aware both of our own assumptions (as political ‘winners’ over several centuries) and of the significance of discrete national identity for peoples whose boundaries have been subject to endless Great Power manoeuvring.

And we should remember that the dictator Ceausescu was courted by the West for his anti-Soviet nationalism—which, rather than affirming the ‘personhood’ of Romanian identity (a legitimate opposition to impersonal Soviet internationalism), fed a self-proving ideology that in later years developed into the personality cult of the Dictator. The majority Romanian Orthodox Church, seen as the ‘national’ Church, was tolerated, and of course systematically infiltrated, to serve this anti-Russian programme, although Ceausescu clearly envisaged the eventual total abolition of religion. The Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church, being considered not properly ‘Romanian’, and lacking a strong organisational base in the West to defend it, was outlawed, and its property given to the Orthodox, creating a situation that is today a source of ecumenical tension and juridical dispute.

Religious Context

Religion (almost exclusively Christian) is a visible part of everyday life in Romania. Bookshops and pavement stalls carry substantial works of theology and spiritual teaching. People of all generations cross themselves when passing a church. (I once had the privilege of riding at typical speed, dodging potholes, in a taxi that was living testimony to the lack of MOT restrictions at the time, with the driver holding his mobile phone in his left hand, crossing himself with his right hand, and steering with his knees.) During Lent and Advent restaurants offer fasting menus, even McDonalds advertises fasting-burgers.

Perhaps a key factor in Romanians’ sense of themselves as ‘inherently’ Christian is that Christianity was not imposed, but freely adopted. Tradition has it that the Apostle Andrew brought the Gospel to the Black Sea-Danube Delta area, whence it spread through a process of reception amongst the local Dacians, who already had a belief in the immortality of the soul. One has the feeling that people in Romania are by and large at home with their religion. Religious preoccupations are perfectly mainstream. I was put on my mettle one afternoon when someone called at the church, saying, ‘I’m only an engineer, but I’d like to know the Anglican interpretation of “Lead us not into temptation”’.

Figures published a couple of years ago by the National Commission for Statistics give an interesting profile of Church adherence. Of the approximately twenty-two million population, very few people described themselves as atheist or without a religion. Over 86% were Orthodox. Non-Orthodox were surprisingly few, given their considerable social and

cultural impact (the largest groups were 4.7% Roman Catholic, 3.2% Hungarian Reformed). Other denominations represented were Pentecostal, Greco-Catholic, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian, Evangelical, Hungarian Lutheran, Old Believers, German Evangelical. The once flourishing and powerful Armenian community only registered 776 members. Moslems were no more than 0.3% of the population, while the total Jewish population (very significant prior to the Second World War) was recorded at just under 6,200.

Relations between the officially recognised denominations are cordial, except for the painful issue with the Greco-Catholics (one and a half million prior to 1948), who are trying to reclaim their churches. The Orthodox argue that most people in the former Greco-Catholic parishes are happy to remain Orthodox, and that more discussion is needed. The Uniates say discussion is leading nowhere, only one Archdiocese (Timisoara) has returned all expropriated churches. A potential ecumenical opportunity has become a sad squabble.

Relations with what are termed neo-Protestant Churches (including Baptists) are, as elsewhere in the former communist world, bedevilled by cultural and economic differences. Well-funded, largely from the US, the 'neo-Protestants' are viewed by the Orthodox and other older established denominations as proselytising groups, preaching a moralised gospel that fails to engage with the historic actuality of the Church. Their criticisms of the majority denominations (as corrupt and compromised, doctrinally 'unsound' and hidebound by local tradition) are in turn criticised for being naïve and/or ill-informed, and their social action is often accused of having a hidden agenda. The historically recognised denominations, still struggling to come to terms with the past, and seeking the way forward in a rapidly changing society, can feel patronised and threatened by outsiders who see Romania as in need of 'conversion'. The idea of conversion as a lifelong process in which all have something to learn from each other, waiting together upon the Day of the Lord, is alien to this religious climate. On both sides, there are those for whom the line between truth and heresy is clear and unproblematic, and who claim 'fundamentalism' as a positive virtue against secular 'relativism'. Of concern among various religious and human rights groups recently has been the way in which government legislation effectively privileges the Orthodox, contrary to the Constitution. A similar situation obtains in Bulgaria and Serbia, and the matter has been referred to the European Court. At the same time, nevertheless, within Orthodoxy there are many who seek new ways of witnessing to the Gospel, respecting Tradition, yet also looking outward

with courage and respect for other traditions. One movement in particular, *Oastea Domnului* (the Lord's Army), has a vigorous, in some respects more Westward-looking approach. The Anglican Church is accepted alongside the established 'Romanian' Churches—the Romanian Orthodox Church acknowledged Anglican Orders in the 1930s—but current controversies within Anglicanism make the need for continued lively, informed, and loving contact between our two denominations all the more vital, both at the personal and the organisational ecclesial level.

With regard to charity ('the other Liturgy', 'the Liturgy after the Liturgy', 'the Liturgy of the Brother'), Churches are gaining experience through numerous projects, often in partnership with foreign organisations, in a society which has no effectively functioning State welfare. Forbidden under communism to engage in anything other than religious ritual, they had no chance to develop the kind of professional community ministry which has enabled Churches in the UK to play a key development role within local neighbourhoods. In the UK the sacramental dimension of Church community work is usually implicit rather than explicit. Here, without the cushion of widespread affluence, our ultimate dependence on God is more nakedly evident.

Church and State

In 2005 I attended a celebration of 120 years of autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and eighty years of its being a separate Patriarchate. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople was present, along with the President, the President of the Senate, the President of the Romanian Academy, and former King Mihai. I was moved to think of the changes that had taken place in Romania during the years that were being remembered, changes that were both exhilarating in terms of growth of national consciousness and pride, cultural vigour, prosperity, and realisation of resources, yet also crushing and shaming in terms of brutalisation and ideological abuse. In one sense, the Orthodox Church had remained constant throughout, visible through its buildings and Liturgy, invisibly active through prayer and sacrament. This has left in many people's minds a sense that the Orthodox Church is the most trustworthy of all the public institutions. It should be added, conversely, that many people deplore the compromises of the past and the Church's present failings, real and imagined.

The emphasis of the occasion was on the future and on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Shortly beforehand, agreement had been reached on a

vexed issue, reflecting the ‘national’ status of Orthodoxy—the building of a patriarchal cathedral that will give focal recognition to what is the largest Orthodox Church outside Russia. On the drawing board for over a century, this project had provoked discussion as to the appropriateness of a new ‘national’ cathedral when the social and economic needs of the country remain so great. Furthermore the principle of monumental architecture is controversial in a city dominated by the inescapable results of Ceausescu’s civic grandiosity and destructiveness. The allocation of prime public space for this project, albeit controversial, expresses the centrality which religion (and specifically the Orthodox Church) has in Romanian society.

The Importance of Architecture

Integral to the distinctiveness of Romania’s architectural heritage is its sense of scale in relation to the landscape and local community, a harmony that at once reflects and proclaims the spirit of this ‘meeting place of East and West’. Ceausescu’s systematisation plan, and his razing of a quarter of the old city of Bucharest (including a number of the capital’s historic churches, the exoskeleton of the soul, so to speak) to construct an environment worthy of materialist Man, was intended to create, literally, a soul-less society. This was at odds with his use of Romanian national identity to assert independence vis-a-vis Russia, in the interests of which nationally important religious buildings were maintained; but in general, as elsewhere in the Communist world, sacred buildings were put to other use, abandoned and desecrated. The intention was also to destroy the traditional village architecture and lifestyle, evolved over centuries in symbiosis with local geography and climate, folk traditions and wisdom, that constitute such an offence to rationally planned human self-realisation. Now the carcasses of vast concrete byres, factories, and fruit farms are testimony to the failure of a forcibly imposed eradication of history in the name of historical dialectical materialism; and, as in Renaissance paintings that set Christ’s Nativity among broken classical columns and arches, Incarnation is proclaimed—a washing line strung between two 100-metre long concrete sheds, or a modest area of apple orchard nursed back into production amid acres of neglected trees. In one monastery church I visited, the internal frescoes up to shoulder height were erased, as if with shiny black wax, where cattle had rubbed against them during the years when the church had been used as a cow stall: almost *despite* my ‘theology of the humanity of Christ’, it brought home to me the reality of the stable at Bethlehem.

The Reality of Abstraction

A Latin language, Romanian often works through the abstract. Rubbish bins might be ‘destined for the cleanliness of the city’, where in the UK they would simply read, ‘Litter’. Yet this tendency to work from the abstract (uncongenial to traditional Anglo-Saxon empiricism) makes sense in a culture that, for instance, sees painting, music, liturgy, architecture, charitable action, and ecology all as branches of theology.

We in the West tend to see theology in terms of dogmatic formulations, and proceed to ecumenical dialogue (and, all too often, judgement) on that basis. In Romania theology is rooted in liturgical and monastic experience: a Romanian Orthodox theologian will ‘do theology’ with a *duhovnic* (spiritual father) in a monastery where (organic) farming, bee-keeping, craftsmanship, and hospitality are the context in which Prayer of the Heart is ceaseless and celebration of the Divine Liturgy, often attended by busloads of visitors from distant towns as well as local villagers, is mission.

Of the essence of this spiritual tradition is human scale, personal relationship, sense of process, as opposed to logical construct, codifiable value systems, and striving for articulation and permanence. Traditionally, Romanians have built in wood and brick more than stone; their distinctive art forms, though with notable exceptions (such as the famous painted monasteries of southern Bucovina), are in transient or fragile folk mediums—ballads and dance music, embroidery, carpets, costume, paintings on glass, wood carving, and popular traditions. These have freshness and vitality, and an extraordinary capacity to be surprising and new, whilst completely ‘traditional’. By contrast, the artefacts that aim at permanence and memorialisation or consciously artistic expressiveness (almost invariably following Western, or occasionally Oriental, fashions) tend to be at best picturesque, at worst derivative and provincial. With the exception of the occasional small palace and traditional *conac* (manor house) and the remarkable, still flourishing tradition of church art, to which we shall return later, the *genius loci* has been expressed most movingly by anonymous artists working in a tradition whose greatest creative moments—marks, notes, patterns, gestures—have possibly not survived.

‘Moral Fibre’ and Political Destiny

At no point have the Romanian peoples tried to build an empire or impose their culture—though one can point to instances where this is disputable,

for instance in some Romanians' attitude toward the Hungarian minority in Transylvania since 1918, or the ubiquitous and shocking contempt for Rroma, which discredits Romania as it does other Eastern European countries. Equally, some might argue that the Romanian lands simply failed to produce any great empire-builder, no Caesar or Napoleon. Not uncommon among Romanians is a kind of inferiority complex with respect to the West, at this lack of a 'healthy', supposedly normal, wealth-grabbing period of historical development. One hears voiced, directly or indirectly, both in Romania and outside, a self-fulfilling criticism that the country has failed to forge a 'proper' (*vertical*) dignity for itself, just as today it still struggles to 'get its act together' politically and economically. This is, however, a feeling based on certain assumed values that are themselves open to question. To those who are willing to see it, there is something more complex: a challenge to consumer-materialist values and accounts of history.

Alternative Values

Certainly the Western-modelled nationalism of the early twentieth century encouraged a self-assertiveness that flourishes today in entrepreneurial bullishness. This aspect of Romanian 'spirituality' should not be underestimated: the deities of the Western market cult have a powerful hold on the imaginations and hopes of a people still at the edge of 'the European project'. Alongside the natural and Godly longing for a better life that probably most people in Romania share, there also exists a dispiriting craving for the supposedly lush grass the other side of the fence (i.e. the EU frontier, or the Atlantic Ocean); along with this goes a widespread cynicism, not often openly expressed, a sense of the country being part of the pitch of a wider Great Game played for oil and new markets. Perhaps as a consequence of the ambivalence of Romania's European status, few Romanians seem to take a broader world view and to appreciate their country's relative prosperity in global terms.

Those who serve the gods of consumer-materialism must vigilantly compare themselves against others who are better off. They must constantly be discontented and on the alert for self-advancement. By contrast the Church proclaims the blessedness of a peaceful soul. Contentment, self-restraint, patience ... these desiderata of all the great spiritual traditions challenge the globally dominant economic polity, which requires cultivation of ever fresh needs and appetites. The virtues of civil society evolved in the capitalist democracies are compromised not only by many of the (economic and military) structures which assure the stability

of those democracies; but also, spiritually, by this tacit duty of citizens to help ensure the health of the market by consuming what the market needs them to consume, rather than what they themselves need or desire to consume. There is a spiritual conflict here, which one senses more in Romania, with all its tensions and contradictions, than in the UK, where by and large ‘spirituality’ is promoted as a personal religious option, disengaged from the economic realities that enable us to enjoy that option. It seems to me that in Romania, people’s understandable desire for a standard of living felt to be *civilizat* (however much envisaged in terms of what they see on TV), is accompanied by resistance to the trivialising pressures of conformist individualism that are the hidden levers of the ‘free’ market.

This resistance—a disinclination to swallow economic improvement as the panacea to all ills—is not evident. There is no vocal lobby championing an alternative view of life in which values of the spirit are discussed and fought for. Rather, it is a kind of diffuse non-co-operation with the task-orientated, achievement-hungry syndrome to which we in the West have reduced civilization. The product of an intuitional intelligence, it penetrates society in an undifferentiated way, integrated in ordinary life, in habits of behaviour, not always virtuous. Westerners working in Romania often feel frustrated by what they interpret as passivity, obtuseness, or inability to take responsibility; and Romanians themselves are expert at lamenting these ‘qualities’ in their psyche. Some people, Romanians and non-Romanians, might dismiss my view that there is evidence here of a genuine counter-culture rooted in a different value system. Conventional wisdom is to invoke the shifts of acute poverty, and the effects of fifty years of totalitarian conditioning and centuries of corrupt government under the Ottomans, as explanation for Romania’s slowness to adapt to the market economy. Yet the pundits of conventional wisdom fail to acknowledge a reality that persists *despite* those overwhelming factors of historical suppression: a vigour and intelligence—albeit expressed in a kind of reticence, almost shyness, rather than extroverted outworking—that reflects a dimension of human experience not easily accessible, yet rejuvenating and revivifying.

This intelligence, of sensibility, is apophatic; manifest, as I have already suggested, in the familiar, the transient, a sense of something shared; originality communicated through Tradition, having within it something universal, rather than the originality of the towering genius achieving universality. Eucharistic fellowship rather than transfiguring statement.

Fatalism and Humility

Traditional Romanian churches, modest in size, conveying the mystery of the humility of Christ, have what is often described as a quality of ‘monumentality’. They open up an inner world vaster than that evoked by many grander edifices. Yet this inner world is not as we might seek it. It has a sacrificial dimension, with which modern Western sensibility is not at ease. Entering through an open arcaded porch, magnificently painted, one is plunged into apparent confusion: glints of splendour, sacred narrative overlaid with kitsch and artificial flowers, parochial jumble, saints’ relics—a couple of roses and a sprig of basil placed with coins on a reproduction icon—a beautiful, damaged eighteenth-century panel leaning against a back wall by the blessed water. Arches, apses, towers embrace us as we are, with our muddles, cross-purposes, and longing for what cannot even be called a goal. Our experience of entering, leaving, perceiving of the building within its context of hills, valley, village street, or deliberately obscuring communist blocks, and what we give of ourselves, here is the start of a journey through the Divine Liturgy of God’s work and delight in creation. It is a journey to be travelled alongside the hesychast in a remote cell keeping alive the centuries-old tradition of contemplative prayer; the parish faithful clubbing together to build an old people’s home next to their church in a run-down area of Bucharest; the mini-skirted girl, who has stuck an icon onto one corner of her computer screen, who gives you your receipt when you pay the electricity. It is a journey of hope and perseverance, where many dream of emigration or sit fine-tuning their analysis of why things will never change.

Pattern and Message

It is often said that of all Orthodox countries Romania is most open to dialogue and relationship with non-Orthodox. Pope John-Paul II’s visit in the 90s (the first visit of a Pope to an Orthodox country for centuries) was widely welcomed and appreciated. This openness perhaps comes from the Latin base of the Romanian language that allows easy communication with the West. At the same time, Slav, Turkish, and ancient Dacian elements, together with nineteenth-century French and twentieth-century English linguistic imports, convey a constant process of becoming. There has been no synthesising literary moment in the history of Romania, for all the great achievement of the ‘national poet’ Eminescu. Rather than a weakness, as some Romanians find it, I believe this creates a culture that is protean and inclusive as opposed to academic and isolationist.

For the great historian Nicolae Iorga, the most important determinant of Romanian identity is Byzantium. After a strong Westernising trend in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century saw a Byzantine revival which sets the style for the phenomenal number of churches and monasteries being built or restored at the present time. The quality of this art varies. Often a triumphalist spirit flourishes: a wooden village church with haunting frescoes (... a Magyar soldier massacring innocents...) is closed in favour of a marble-faced edifice with 'Byzantine-by-numbers' decor. Elsewhere, by contrast, contemporary artists achieve results that are indeed a spark from the great fire of Byzantine doxology. Confidence of design and composition, boldness of execution, convey an energy that, as suggested already, is not self-promoting or even strongly apparent. It serves the Liturgy. The didactic content and ennobling style are the whole object; yet they respect the concept of a decorative (celebratory) whole, at once studied and intuitive.

Gift

The triumphalist strain in post-1989 Romanian Church life has antecedents in the splendid cathedrals built in Transylvania following the unification with Wallachia and Moldova. How deep the current amazing vitality of monastic and church life runs, history will judge—there has recently been a drop in the number of vocations. At all events, the monasteries (men's and women's) of Romania at the present time offer a remarkable, probably unique spiritual opportunity. For centuries the philokalic tradition of the Prayer of the Heart survived in the Romanian Lands, giving sustenance to the monasteries of Athos at one point, and also, through the work of Paissy Velichkovsky, influencing Russian spirituality and literature. This tradition continues. For all the sense of a 'Church militant' one sometimes feels in contemporary Romania, there are still voices proclaiming that Christ's kingdom is not of this world: the humility and compassion of Jesus conflict with the values of the age—even the great values of continuity and authenticity—when these become 'sacred cows'.

Whereas the Western Enlightenment was anti-religious, in Romania Enlightenment ideas were introduced by the Churches. Intellectual antipathy to religion, almost the norm in the modern West, is not widely evident in Romania. What 'enlightened' Westerners consider superstition—veneration of relics, kissing of icons, repetition of prayers—is not automatically assumed to be contrary to reason. I sense here a reason that is not rationalistic, but rooted in awe, a mind not claiming to transcend the creaturely (neurobiological) world, a condition that paradoxically is

comfortable both with death and intense ascetic effort, the former as a definitive condition of life, the latter as a prerequisite of abundant life. This quality of being at home in the creaturely world is behind the common observation (alluded to in the political context) that Romanians have a streak of fatalism. That cliché, apart from a racist overtone, again reflects the Promethean ethos of Western culture that sees death (and its corollary, failure) as the greatest evil, something almost unnatural (or at least merely part of a contemptible ‘nature’), at best the springboard of philosophy and human greatness measured by longevity (physical durability or ‘eternal’ renown).

A celebrated, and most disturbing Romanian folk ballad, *Miorița*, is often cited in evidence of this ‘flaw’ of national character. In this poem a young shepherd sweetly accepts the news, told him by his ewe lamb, that two other shepherds are planning to murder him. Instead of preparing a defensive initiative, he seems to rejoice in an ecstatic mystical vision of union with the cosmos. This dysfunction of ‘the selfish gene’ is shocking. But is it really more shocking than the dedication of brilliant minds and billions of dollars annually to the creation of new means of killing and maiming human beings in the name of defence, that we happily (fatalistically?) accept as sadly necessary in the ‘real world’? The seamless garment of the created cosmos, in which life and death are woven as one, is alien to our culture of categorisation. But there is something within the spiritual life experienced amid the Danube and Carpathian definitions that breaks taboos. It requires some humility and courage even to be aware of it.

Like a lamb to the slaughter? Turn the other cheek? No, Nike is goddess of victory, and that is the logo that sells. How far does what I have written about Romania reflect a society that is still largely rural and not heavily industrialised? A country in which it is still possible to hear silence and see night skies. A country in which Biblical images of sheep and grain and sweeping a room to find a coin are immediately related to life, not merely figurative. A country in which the distinction between payment and gift, merit and grace, is not tightly legislated.

We are most of us tourists in the Kingdom of heaven, with more or less informed spiritual guides. It is only when we allow what we find there to change us, when we lose our life, that we know the place. Will Romania lose its life, as it grows more prosperous and Westernised, to find it? Or will the gift that Romania has to offer—from St. Andrew, from Byzantium, from the land that gave shelter to the hesychast monks fleeing Athos after the unthinkable fall of Constantinople, the land abused by the West’s morbid Dracula fantasies and commercial exploitation of the unconscious,

the land of salt and gold, tribute of boys and girls to the Ottomans, modern nodal point of human trafficking—be acceptable to us? And will we ourselves be changed in that giving and receiving that is the reciprocity of Love?

The Revd James Ramsay was formerly Chaplain at the Church of the Resurrection in Bucharest

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HEAR MY VOICE

ANON

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!

Lord, hear my voice!

Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

HOW DO YOU find God in a nightmare—in a place of confusion, fear and overwhelming distress? Children having nightmares know the answer to that; they cry out, probably a confused and inarticulate cry at first, not directed to anyone in particular, but one that will usually attract the attention of any adult who hears it. Recently I went to see *The March of the Penguins*, a feature length documentary film charting a year in the life of emperor penguins in Antarctica. Every year the adult penguins make the seventy mile trek from the sea to their breeding ground where they mate. Each male and female in a mating pair then take it in turns to keep their one egg warm while the other treks back to the sea to get food, returning to relieve their mate so they in their turn can get food. This process continues after the chicks are hatched until they are able to fend for themselves and I was struck by how the father penguins take time in the early days of their chicks' lives to learn their particular cry so that when they return from the long trek to get food they will recognise it amidst the very considerable noise and chaos of a vast number of other penguins and their chicks.

But what happens if we lose our voice? We speak of those who have no power or influence in a particular situation as having no voice or of their voices not being heard, and one group of people for whom this can be true are those suffering from some form of mental illness. A few months ago, I was admitted to a locked ward in what might best be described as an 'old-style' psychiatric hospital where I rapidly learned what it is to lose your voice in that kind of way, and the concomitant erosion of identity that it brings.¹

How did the loss of voice manifest itself? To begin with, simply having a diagnosis of mental illness can cause a voluntary silence. Although one in four of us will suffer from some form of mental ill health at some point in our lives, people are usually far more reluctant to admit to it than to physical illness, perhaps because it can have associations of character weakness or moral

¹ While I am glad to note that much good work is done by dedicated and compassionate mental health professionals in some areas, the following observations are based on my experience as a patient in a particular hospital, although I have been in two other hospitals which have also shared elements of what I describe.

failure (a sense often felt all too keenly by the sufferers themselves, even if they know that imbalances in their brain chemistry or other factors are responsible for their condition), and also because there is still a measure of stigma attached to it. For my own part, I told few people when I was in hospital; I didn't want them to know I was ill in that kind of way. Whereas well-wishers are keen to visit people in medical wards, visitors to psychiatric wards are more rare and often look embarrassed or fearful when they do come, unsure about what to expect and perhaps finding it hard to locate the person they know beneath the symptoms of illness and the effects of medication.

Being in a locked ward also brings its own kind of voicelessness. Locked away from the rest of society, as if in prison, within a closed world where rights previously taken for granted (like the right to come and go as you please) are denied, or have to be requested, it can be hard not to feel in exile or disgrace. Despite a current emphasis in healthcare policy on partnerships in care, encouraging healthcare professionals to take notice of the patient's wishes when they make their care plans and certainly discussing them with the patient, at no point in my stay in hospital was I consulted or informed about my care plan (indeed at the time I didn't even know such a thing existed, other than noting that when I made requests they were usually turned down on the grounds of 'not being in the plan') and another patient on the ward, protesting about a decision to do with her care, was told by her doctor, 'Your desires are of no concern to me'. For the rest of us this message was conveyed more indirectly but no less forcibly.

Access to the doctors or the senior nurses caring for us (both of whom held the power as regarded any decisions as to what we could or could not do) was very strictly limited. Generally speaking we saw the doctors only at the weekly ward rounds (intimidating affairs where up to eight or nine other mental health workers might be ranged around the room into which we were summoned) and the senior nurses remained in the staff office. In order to make requests (and permission to do almost anything other than sitting, watching television, smoking, sleeping or eating had to be requested) patients had to approach the most junior nurses who would then (if they had the time and inclination) convey the request to the more senior nurses. Very frequently we were not told the results of our requests unless we persisted in asking (and those who did persist were often labelled as nuisances and told off) reinforcing the sense that we were people of little account who could be kept waiting or else left uninformed about decisions affecting our lives.

Physical surroundings and conditions also conveyed the message that we were people of negligible value. On my admission to hospital the bed I was given was made up with two worn, torn sheets bearing the logo of another health authority (and presumably thrown out by them) that barely covered the mattress and a 'pillow' that consisted of a pillow case stuffed

with rolled up towels. When I requested a blanket, I was told there were none and I'd have to make do with a sheet. There were two toilets for the ten female patients, only one of which ever worked. When that one developed a fault, we were told to use the other, defective, one which was only partly attached to the wall and clearly unsafe. In a situation where people were mostly too depressed, too mentally confused or too frightened to protest, and where those who did could easily be ignored, a request for an emergency plumber did not seem to be a high priority.

In common with many other patients, I found that there seemed to be a lack of time or interest on the part of those caring for me in attending to what I had to say, or in my thoughts and feelings; it seemed that everything about me had become reduced to 'symptoms'. When the psychiatrist seeing me for what I had thought was a routine out-patients appointment decided that I should be admitted to hospital, I became distressed and frightened and said that I didn't want to go into hospital; this distress was immediately labelled 'agitation' and treated as a symptom that was viewed as further evidence of my need to be admitted and for the agitation to be 'managed' with medication. Another patient on the ward who had large credit card debts that she was slowly paying off in weekly instalments made repeated requests to be allowed out to go to the bank so that she could make these payments. When she was told this wasn't possible she became more and more anxious, fearing (very justifiably) that if she did not keep up her payments, the credit card companies might demand the full amount. The reasons for her anxiety were always dismissed, her anxiety being seen simply as a 'symptom' unconnected to any event or set of conditions, and she was left feeling desperate and unheard. On one occasion I asked if I could be allowed out to honour a commitment to accompany a very sick friend to an important hospital appointment. In making the request, my sadness at the plight of my friend and my worry that I might not be allowed to honour my promise to her made me tearful, as did the inevitable turning down of my request. The nurse to whom I made the request and who eventually conveyed the decision to me regarded me curiously and noted that I 'seemed tearful' without making any enquiry as to why that might be or acknowledging that the tears had any cause.

When your voice is not heard or is discounted and your thoughts and feelings, the reasons for your distress, are not attended to, or else are pathologised as symptoms (a very reductive view of humanity) you start to feel you are losing your identity and that your particularity doesn't matter. For some of us who had been admitted to hospital in circumstances which precluded packing any belongings or a change of clothes before we came in, and who had no-one to bring us any, all that could be offered (for male and female patients alike) was a set of green nylon pyjamas. Our clothes

also reflect something of who we are and to be reduced to wearing institutional pyjamas day and night was a further erosion of individual identity.

Locked away from society in what felt like a place of nightmare, where it seemed my voice wasn't heard—or else was discounted—too frightened and confused to think, let alone pray, how could I find God in those particular depths and how could I believe that he heard me? I remember one Sunday in hospital when, desperate to find him—my request to go to the prayer room (elsewhere on the hospital site) turned down—I had shut myself in the airless bathroom in a bid to find some silence and solitude, hoping somehow I might manage to pray, but only able to cry hopelessly, my cries seeming, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, 'like dead letters sent/ to dearest him that lives alas! away'.

One place where I found the kind of compassionate acceptance that is also present in God, however, was in and through the other patients. There was Maggie, with whom I shared a room when I was first admitted and who, on my first frightened afternoon, introduced herself and encouraged me to ask her if I needed to know where anything was or what to do. Even though quite ill herself, she offered me friendship and care. All of us, staff included, noticed that Rima, her voicelessness compounded by the fact she spoke little English, was eating her meals on the draining board by the kitchen sink, unable to find a seat in the cramped dining area, but it was Maggie who made sure there was always a place for her so that 'she doesn't feel left out'. This, despite the fact that Rima had trashed Maggie's room a couple of weeks earlier.

Then there was Angie, who came to visit her young adult son every afternoon, tolerating abuse and anger when he was having a bad day. Laying aside her own concerns, she was always willing to chat to other patients and befriend them, to play board games with them, give them cigarettes, run errands. It was Angie who, on the day that staff had noted I was tearful, asked me the simple question, 'What's the matter?' following up her enquiry with a hug, a cup of tea and a sympathetic ear. She heard my voice and listened to the person within the outward expression or 'symptoms' of distress.

People like Maggie and Angie, not Christians, reminded me of Jesus in their willingness to come alongside people with compassion and a particularity of love. In the Gospels we see Jesus consistently recognising that people are more than their manifestations of distress or illness and hearing the particularity of their own voice and need below the immediate cry (even, as in the case of the woman with the haemorrhage, their silent one) for help. He is unafraid to ask the simple question, as to Bartimaeus, 'What do you want?' and is prepared to listen and respond to the answer. He is the one who was prepared to go to the place of exile in which Legion

found himself (perhaps not a million miles from the locked ward of today), listening to him and finding a way to help that took into account Legion's fears and desires, rather than imposing a solution on him. He concerned himself too with ensuring that the former Legion (previously named and known only by what troubled him) was clothed and could be respected and recognised as his individual self.

Jesus too has been to a place of exile where his voice was discounted, misinterpreted by Pilate and others, in his Passion. He knows what it is to be someone on whom people are afraid and embarrassed to look, 'from whom (they) hide their faces' (Isaiah 53: 3). He knew what it was to feel unheard by and estranged from God in his last agony on the cross as he uttered that final 'loud cry' (Mark 15: 37) and after he had uttered that last loud cry he descended into hell, the realm of those without hope or voice. In these things, perhaps, there may be some hope and comfort for those feeling unable to find God in the nightmare confusion and estrangement of mental illness. For not only has Jesus been to the darkest places, but just as the Father *did* hear that inarticulate and desperate cry from the cross, so (like the father penguin) he will also hear and recognise our voice, our crying out, amidst the noise and confusion within and without and will hasten to find us. And just as Jesus was raised with the marks of his wounds and was recognized by the disciples as the person they had known, so this hearing and response will encompass all that we are—the wounds of illness included but not defining us—all that makes us ourselves and loved with a love prepared to go to the darkest places to find us.

VOICES FROM THE TRADITION II
FRIENDS OLD AND NEW
SHEILA WATSON

‘BISHOPS CANNOT be contemplatives, according to Francis de Sales, but I am sure archdeacons are much more likely candidates.’ This was the Warden’s opener, as he tried to persuade me to share with you those who have mattered to me in terms of prayer and looking at life. Foolishly seduced by the challenge, I realize that usually I find myself ‘hearing voices’ rather than being faithful to one only. Life is such that I need a number of friends, a company of earth and heaven, to get me through. So it is a few of the friends who have accompanied me over the years that I want to thank for their music and for their ability to draw me back to what really matters.

The challenge ‘to pray without ceasing’ in Thessalonians (5. 17) has always fascinated me since I was drawn to Christianity as an undergraduate. An early friend was the Russian Pilgrim, in R. M. French’s translation, who gave me an inkling of how it might be possible to aspire to the idea. I read spellbound his account of walking with the Jesus prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner’. He simply repeated it and walked—always and everywhere. It is not everyone’s prayer or method, but still, when I am too full up (or too empty), it enshrines all that needs to be said. It acts as a reminder. It offers a prayer as simple as a heartbeat. It tells me that if I walk alongside the pilgrim and the prayer (even when nothing more is possible) God will find me eventually.

It was years later, in the early days of being an archdeacon, that my friend the pilgrim gave me his second gift. I was struggling (and of course still do) with how to pray amidst the vagaries of the archdeacon’s life. At times it felt as though all the norms had been taken away—no immediate community to pray with, no set daily round to keep me on the straight and narrow, no church or altar—but hundreds of other factors in their place. Then I recalled one of the pilgrim’s stories, that strange incident where he gives away his Bible, saying ‘I gave away the book that told me to give away everything I had’. He reminded me of that basic tenet in the spiritual life of the need to ‘let go’ even of the most precious. Not something to seek or even to enjoy, but, if it is what is forced by circumstance or required, the way to walk with God anew. I caught a glimpse, thanks to the pilgrim, of the world I now inhabited and what it offered in its diversity and unpredictability as well as what it demanded.

So I set off with the load lightened on the present journey, in which, a national survey of archdeacons tells me, I spend on average sixty-three days per year in the car; and where, as a colleague in another diocese said,

we ought to warn all those yearning for preferment of ‘how little glamour’ and ‘how much eating sandwiches in a lay-by’ is entailed.

But if the pilgrim helped, if you like, to keep the engine ticking over, it is another group of old friends who have sometimes cleaned the windscreen and offered moments of sanity in the chance to look beyond. De Caussade and that sacrament of the present moment, which does not actually require acres of time. One of Ian McEwan’s characters describes the conundrum when he says, ‘I have spent my whole life discovering that the moment you enter the present fully you find infinite space, infinite time, call it God if you want’. Glimpses come again of the mystic gift, whether Blake :

To see a world in a grain of sand
Or heaven in a wild flower
Hold eternity in the palm of your hand
And heaven in an hour.

or Traherne :

You will never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins and you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars.

They form a happy corrective to the all too familiar pattern of ‘Christ being born between the ox of our passion and the ass of our prejudice’, in Evelyn Underhill’s phrase. Blind to the truth, we miss the chance to see with the ‘eye of the heart’ and to look with compassion on others and ourselves.

It was Augustine who made the connection between prayer and the ‘eye of the heart’ for me. Augustine, my ambivalent friend, who dates back to postgraduate days; ambivalent not just because of his views on women or subsequent influence on western thought but because, as was said of Varro the grammarian, ‘he wrote so much, it is amazing he had any time to read; and he read so much, it is amazing he had anytime to write’. Augustine can be overwhelming. Yet he is full of gems and, when I have persevered, he has illuminated and cheered me up.

At one stage in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (and *De Quantitate Animae*) Augustine describes seven steps to wisdom or contemplation, i.e. the full vision of God. At the fulcrum between worldly wisdom and a striving after the divine is the eye of the heart (*oculum cordis*). Along with compassion, it forms the dividing line between *scientia* (knowledge), and *sapientia* (contemplation). From here the soul sees, glimmering in the distance, the light of the Trinity, the full vision of God. But beware, says Augustine, the full glory can never be seen in this world involved as it is in time rather than eternity. Therefore the active and the contemplative are mixed. Progress in the contemplative life can only be made in proportion to progress in the active life: the two are inextricably bound.

It is that compassionate eye of the heart, that mixture of the active and contemplative which so richly offers the chance to banish or get in proportion those silly, worldly frustrations. We see it in Augustine when he advises a fellow bishop, Possidius of Calama, to be cautious in forbidding gold jewellery and fine clothes. He is maybe surprisingly wary of charging people with sin without due consideration of the social customs of the time. Sometimes this proves sound advice for archdeacons as well as bishops! And it can be what leaves a little gap for contemplation of a different kind, for that yearning for God, rather than giving in to our passion or prejudice. When I do the latter I inevitably remain bogged down in the less important minutiae of the church or the world.

For many of us outside the cloister, and for some within, prayer happens amidst life in the fast lane rather than the slow lane; that is our current twenty-first century mix of active and contemplative. And as I have stumbled along, trying to avoid the speed cameras (Bucks is full of them), new friends have helped as well old. Not all voices of the tradition belong to the past. Present ones who have interpreted the tradition for me have been particularly welcome.

‘Better to arrive on good form than well prepared’ was a typically self deprecating remark from Robert Runcie’s lips. It has stayed with me. Not as an excuse for lack of preparation (though there is more than enough of that) but as a reminder that contemplation involves ‘the other’, God and neighbour. I do them a disservice every time I am not on good form, fully present to them, but instead prove distracted, anxious and with my mind on someone or something else.

Or sometimes it is a new friend, an angel unawares, like the one who spends his professional time ‘looking’ and draws me back to the hard essentials in Lent. The London art dealer who described a recent exhibition where one of the paintings amidst a series that were of trees and of light was a crucifixion. He was full of admiration that a private buyer had bought it and planned to put it up in his house. ‘It’s a brave man who is willing to look at the crucifixion’, remarked my friend. He is right. We are often too glib about our pictures of the cross.

Yet there is something which draws people to those aspects of the Christian story, maybe like mediaeval piety. I think of the thousands who flocked to ‘Seeing Salvation’ at the National Gallery: an exhibition full of images of the passion and of suffering. I do not believe this is a voyeuristic pleasure in violence, but an innate understanding that the God who knows what it is to suffer and whose glory is in a divine love that never lets go offers a gift more glorious than one who watches from afar.

Mother Julian tells us it is love. Successors of all kinds bear her out. Eric James introduced me (metaphorically) to ‘the woman who could not die’, Julia de Beausobre. He writes:

Her first husband had been killed in the concentration camp. She herself had been appallingly tortured. So I had expected to meet someone emaciated and crushed. But she had a remarkable radiance, dignity and stillness. It was the simplicity of what she had to say that astonished me. It was as though she had pared everything down to its essentials. When I asked her how she survived in the camp, she replied: 'It was simple, really. I tried to love my torturers, because if I loved then I would not be adding to the evil in the world, and they would not have succeeded in adding to the evil in the world by making me hate them. But if I loved, it just could be that it might have some effect on them, and even reduce the amount of evil in the world. So', she said, 'at the simplest level of prudence Christ's way of love and trust and forgiveness seemed to be the only way.'

Thankfully most of us do not find ourselves tested in situations like hers. But her amazing example is a constant encouragement when the pressures of the situation or attitudes of individuals are at their most wearisome. When the frustrations of an archdeacon's life are at their worst, they take my eye off the heart. Julia de Beausobre pulls me back to that core of seeking how to love.

But all these friends from the past are friends in the present who provide the courage to pray even when the light seems to have gone out for me or those I am with. They remind me that it does not stay out. For the glimmering light of the Trinity beckons. We may not be certain of when we shall catch our next glimpse, but the eye of the heart will see. For 'sooner or later you will *see* if only for a minute but no-one can anticipate the moment. It comes when one least expects it. It does not last but the certainty which it conveys does last.' (Evelyn Underhill).

These are just a few of the friends who provide the trifocal specs for a short-sighted archdeacon; the ones who keep me looking for the contemplative road. But bishops are not all bad, even to archdeacons, and St Francis de Sales was a little too hard on himself and others. For he has been the firmest of guides to staying on the road. On one of a series of Caithness standing stones carved for the millenium by Richard Kindersley, the distinguished letter cutter, are inscribed some words of St Francis de Sales, the key to the heart of all prayer :

'Do not try to be anyone but who you are; and try to be that perfectly.'

The Revd Sheila Watson is Archdeacon of Buckingham

‘LET IT BE’

Homily on the Feast of the Annunciation

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

*Then Mary said ‘Let it be with me according to your word’.
Then the angel departed from her.*

I WAS TEN years old when the Beatles came to power! I remember walking with my father in the woods near our home some time in the first years of the 1960s and telling him about this new pop group, not yet all that famous, but they surely would be very soon, because there was an amazing originality and directness about their writing and singing. Some years later, the Beatles recorded a song written by Paul McCartney after he had had a dream about his own mother, Mary, who died when he was fourteen. The connection of the words of the song with Mary’s words to Gabriel (whether or not Paul was conscious of that when he wrote it) is clear:

When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me,
speaking words of wisdom, let it be. And in my hour of darkness, she is
standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be, let it
be, let it be. Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.

And when the broken-hearted people living in the world agree, there
will be an answer, let it be. For though they may be parted, there is still a
chance that they will see, there will be an answer, let it be, let it be, let it
be. There will be an answer, let it be.

And when the night is cloudy, there is still a light that shines on me,
shine on until tomorrow, let it be. I wake up to the sound of music,
Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be, let it be,
let it be. There will be an answer, let it be.*

As individuals and as a group, the Beatles knew their times of darkness and longing. Two of them now have already, before they grew old, themselves passed through their time of darkness, through the valley of the shadow of death. And the writer of the song, Paul McCartney, has had to stand by and watch as Linda, his beloved wife of many years, was taken from him by illness and death.

If Mother Mary comes to us, speaking words of wisdom, then we know that this is not some saccharine lady in white, telling us that everything will be all right, or at least it will get better, if only we are good and say yes. This is the woman who may, to begin with, have been inexperienced and naive, but who knew a sword piercing her own soul: ‘At the Cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus at the last ...’ (*Stabat mater dolorosa*).

Perhaps we are having some experience of the valley of the shadow ourselves. Perhaps we are sick or depressed and seem to have no hope of getting better. Perhaps we are standing at the foot of the Cross, as we

watch helplessly while someone we love suffers, not able to do anything very much, and even our best efforts getting it wrong somehow, or seeming useless and irrelevant, and certainly not being devoid of self-interest. Or we suffer the effects of some trauma we experienced long ago, or are burdened with guilt for something which, try as we may, we cannot put right. We might be wrestling with the effects of some hurt done to us, which we are not able to let go, however much we attempt to do so, or which we even think we have forgiven, until it returns unexpectedly, back again in another form. Perhaps someone even appears to have gone out of the way to be gratuitously unkind in our daily life—and it seems to me that often hurts come apparently out of the blue, either when we very mistakenly assume that everything is all right, that we know where we are with someone, so to speak, or when we are very vulnerable, and these hurts can sometimes be hardest to let go of, to let be...

At all these times, we struggle in our hearts to find comfort, to find an answer. And it will come, but we may have to wait a very, very long time. Sometimes it seems to me not to have been fair play that Gabriel, having dropped such a bombshell, did not stick around for Mary, did not stay to see that she got on all right after what had happened! But the angel, the *angelos*, the voice in the heart, the message heard deep within, has changed us for ever and we carry now the fruit within, in our changed experience, in our ability to 'let it be'.

I am reminded too of Jesus and his struggle in Gethsemane to say his own 'let it be...' What must have been asked of him, in terms both of facing the valley of the shadow of death and in terms of forgiveness! Even his closest friends let him down when he most needed them. He was vulnerable, and he asked them to stay and pray. There was not much that they could have done on the Mount of Olives, except just be there helplessly for him. And they did not manage even that. They fell asleep. They let him down. But he accepted it. It was time to let it be, to move on, time for the next bit of the passion story to unfold...

Now another cameo from my own past. The time is about twelve years on from the rise of the Beatles, and I am on a train from London to Birmingham, just before Christmas 1974, a young student, returning home for Christmas. The train is fairly full, and I get into conversation with a fellow passenger, more than three times my age. She worked for a charity in London, was moving towards retirement and wrote hymns which had been published. She told me how hard she herself found it to forgive, how this was something with which she struggled and struggled. But then suddenly there had come a moment of grace, when she had looked to the Cross and seen in a flash, blindingly clearly, how small all the things she resented had been, when compared with the self-giving love of Jesus on the Cross. She had written a hymn about it. In the course of that ninety-

minute train journey, she recited it to me (I can still hear that now, over thirty-one years later!) and she also wrote it down for me. It is now in several hymn books, including Hymns for Today, Hymns Ancient and Modern and the New English Hymnal, and there has even been a recent translation into German by a Methodist minister in Zurich. Her name was Rosamund Herklots and she died in 1987. What she wrote was:

Forgive our sins as you forgive, you taught us, Lord, to pray,/but you alone can grant the grace to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart,/that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart?

In blazing light, your Cross reveals the truth we dimly knew:/what trivial debts are owed to us, how great our debt to you.

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls, and bid resentment cease:/then, bound to all in bonds of love, our lives will spread your peace.**

Whatever our personal (or even corporate) time of darkness, whether some sorrow, bereavement or guilt, or some need to let go of a past hurt, what is asked of us is not some kind of passive pseudo-holy indifference, or that we try to be 'good' by thinking thoughts that seem to us to be acceptable. We have to wrestle with the angel—to question, argue and dispute directly with God—and then to listen to the angel, the message heard deep in the heart. Perhaps then we may know moments of grace, such as came to Sir Paul McCartney, such as came to my companion on the train, Rosamond Herklots, moments which they have shared with the world in verse. Perhaps in our times of trouble, in our hour of darkness, when the night is cloudy, yet we shall find that there is an answer of sorts, that there is a light which shines on us, that there is the sound of music and that we hear again in a new way the words of Mother Mary: 'Let it be, let it be, let it be...'

* Lyrics by John Lennon/Paul McCartney. © Northern Songs/Sony/ATV Music Publishing. All Rights Reserved.

** Words by Rosamond Herklots (1905-87) by permission of Oxford University Press.

MERCY

Part of an address given at the FLG Retreat, 17-19 March 2006

SISTER CLARE SLG

AS WE PROGRESS on our Christian journey we make the alarming discovery of how far short we fall of the glory of God, that our best efforts are tainted with selfishness, and that anyway our circumstances are far from ideal. Our journey becomes a search for mercy, which is to say a gaining of a right perspective of ourselves and of God, his majesty, mercy and love, and of his power to heal and transform through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The desire for mercy is a very joyful thing. It is not that we have to grovel and have a terrible opinion of ourselves; we are to have a true opinion of ourselves, which when linked to a growing realisation of the mercy and love of God leads us on a journey out of the prison of self into the freedom of God. The request for mercy is a response of love rather than fear, as can be seen in the various stages of a Sister's journey: 'I desire the mercy of God and liberty to bind myself to him in Profession.' It is a realisation that we are not what we were created to be, but instead are caught up in our fallen nature. In that realisation we can find freedom as we are released from the need to keep up appearances and be good by our own efforts, which tends to lead us to deal with the symptoms of the problem instead of the cause. Instead we become willing co-operators with the Spirit as he works a transformation from the inside out. St Paul struggled with the contradiction between who we wish we were and what we find ourselves to be, what he calls in the Letter to the Romans 'sin living in me'.

For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7: 19, NIV)

It is of course a painful process; we thought we weren't too bad, but as we progress in prayer we find out that not only are we worse than we thought, but we seem to be getting worse than we were! And we have to go through all the process of letting go of the things that we turn into idols in the place of God and rely on, our image of ourselves, our favoured ways of praying and worshipping, all the things that we rely on or gain satisfaction from apart from God. A very descriptive image of what happens is that of an onion being peeled, and you all know what removing the skin of an onion can be like! We undergo the process of allowing the layers, the old self with its habits, old memories, expectations and goals to be peeled off one by one, finally revealing in our hearts the presence of God and the self

that we were created to be. Our part in the process is patience, perseverance and hope, and a sort of dogged trust that God knows what he is doing, that if we keep turning back to him he will work the transformation.

That gives us a key, turning. The idea of turning, turning back, is important in both our prayer and our lives—the idea of turning back to God. That is what repentance, *metanoia* in the Greek, is, literally a turning or change of mind. To go back to St Paul again:

You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desire; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4: 22-24)

That is a blueprint for the path of repentance; put off the old self and put on the new self, created to be righteous, a life-long process. It isn't just the negative side of putting off the old unhelpful habits, which can be a danger if we misunderstand the intention behind, say, giving things up for Lent. We are also seeking to put on the new self, gaining new habits and ways of being.

There are those moments of conversion which we can see were turning points in our lives, But there are countless moments in the day which can become turning points, when we have forgotten God and then remember, when we are praying and distractions come and we realize that we are distracted, drop the distraction and turn back again to God. Or there are the moments when we realize we are reacting to a situation from an old habit, instead of responding from a place of 'God-pointedness', and can catch ourselves at it and respond differently. Of course we will often fail, but mercy is there, and those moments of turning are important because they are moments of love, when we turn back to God and say 'at the heart of everything what I want is you'. It doesn't matter how many times we have to turn back because what matters is not how many times we are distracted or forgetful of God, but that we turn back to him, with each turning, each return, being an affirmation that that is where my desire is, with God and his glory.

I think we can see our lives of prayer, both our times of prayer and our lives as prayer-full people, in terms of turning, both developing the disposition of turning back to God whenever we have drifted away in a way that becomes habitual but never routine, and in terms of turning from what we are to what God desires us to be, lives of continual conversion, lives spent putting on the mind of Christ.

In prayer, whether it is public worship, personal prayer, and in our lives, what we have to do is to live prayer, by which I mean living in tune with God, seeking to be one will with him, realising that in God 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17: 28), or as St Paul says in

Galatians 'I no longer live but Christ lives in me' (2: 20). But for that to happen we have to be true to regular times of prayer. That will take discipline and commitment, and discernment about what works best for our own particular circumstances. It also means welcoming the times of silence and solitude, however brief they may be, allowing those times of silence and solitude to flow into the rest of our lives. As we pray we need some kind of anchor to help us return to God when we stray, something which anchors us in our intention to be still before God, so that when we drift the anchor tugs and we have something to catch hold of and something which expresses our desire for God. The important thing is to be firm but gentle, working by love rather than will-power. Distractions can be rather like ping-pong balls; swat them and they gain power and bounce all over the place; find a way of letting them go and turning back to God and they will stop bouncing and roll away into a corner.

And then there is the gradual conversion of ourselves as we turn to God, the life-long journey of becoming who we were created by God to be. Lent is of course an ideal time for considering this, for focussing our desire for deep and lasting conversion, with at its end our celebration of the Paschal mystery. Lent was in its beginnings a time for Catechumens learning the faith before being admitted by baptism to the Church, and penitents acknowledging and repenting of specific sins. We can join them in that journey of deepening faith and penitence, and as we renew our Baptismal Vows at the Easter Vigil be reminded once more of what was promised by or for us at our own Baptisms:

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

I submit to Christ.

*Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth,
and the life?*

I come to Christ. (Common Worship)

It is one of those things which are both now and not yet.; our Baptismal Promises stand firm and we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, but we also have to make real that fact in our lives. So as we heard from St Paul a little earlier, the path of conversion, of turning, means putting off our old selves, and putting on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. And the good news of the mercy of God is, as St James puts it 'Mercy triumphs over justice!' (James 2: 13), and that, as in the story of the Prodigal Son, God comes running to meet us as soon as he sees us in the distance. And that path of conversion becomes something that we are following in all areas of our lives, family, work, church and whatever, as we seek to align ourselves with God, with our growing understanding of

who He is and how that should affect our way of being, that God's mercy is something we can always rely on and that we are always turning back to. As our prayer deepens we become increasingly aware of our need for mercy as deeper levels of our being are revealed and brought into the light for healing, and as we realise that our belief in God affects every area of our life. But this isn't a cause for gloom but for joy and hope. It is at its root a growth in humility in its sense of a true realisation of who we are, which is neither thinking too highly of ourselves, or having an inferiority complex, which is itself a form of inverted pride. In fact we become more focussed on God than on self, and rather than a continual checking of ourselves against some sort of scale of how we are doing we refer ourselves, and our actions, thoughts and words to him through a near habitual response as we learn more deeply our nature as creatures and the glory and mercy of God. Fr Benson SSJE has an important comment to make about true humility;

Humility is not only ready to do anything for anyone, but is also ready to receive anything at other people's hands. Many people will humble themselves to do abasing actions, and will not humble themselves to receive little kindnesses. It is a great token of humility to receive kindnesses at all people's hands. Humility purges the soul from pride, but humility fills the soul with that best form of self-respect—never thinking about itself. Humility preserves from any sense of humiliation.

(Look to the Glory: A Richard Meux Benson Anthology; SSJE 1965, p.68.)

That, I think, gives us a picture of true humility; it gives a sense of freedom and joy in relation to God, the world and ourselves because it puts us into right relationship with them. We are in right relationship with God our loving Creator; with the world that he gave to us to meet our needs and for us to act as stewards over; and with ourselves as we see ourselves in light of our dependence on God and in relationship with others. We learn that our turning back to God is met with a ready response on his part, like the Father of the prodigal son, who is watching out for him while he is still a long way off.

And because one of our constant sources of anxiety can be over whether we are making progress, drawing nearer to God, I'd like to give the last word to Fr Benson, who had obviously met this problem and knew its solution:

Do not let yourself be discouraged because progress is not made faster, either in yourself or in others. Forget progress, and look to the very end of all—to Jesus at the right hand of God. With eyes firmly fixed on him, we shall not know much of progress until we find ourselves absorbed in him to whom we look.

(Ibid, p. 70)

DOROTHY SUTHERLAND

LINDALOU FRIESEN and SISTER ISABEL SLG

OUR COMMUNITY has for most of its hundred year history been strengthened and enriched by the membership of its Oblate Sisters. Many of these have led lives almost as obscure and unsung as those of the nuns living within the enclosure. All have contributed to the essential work of the Community by their faithfulness in prayer and intercession, their acts of generosity and compassion, and their often unconscious witness to the Gospel at home and at work. These are the basics of an Oblate's life commitment, but they do not begin to exhaust the variety of what each one brings to it.

Mother Rosemary mentioned in her Notes in the last Chronicle (Winter 2005) that two of us had the good fortune to spend some days with SSJE in Boston, and to combine that with a visit to Oblate Sister Dorothy of the Good Shepherd in Virginia, just four months before her death at the age of 95. Much of what follows has been written by a younger friend of Dorothy's, Lindalou Friesen, who is also a member of FLG and was a delightful hostess and guide to Sister Eve and me during our visit last year. Between us we shall try to give a thumbnail portrait of this unique person.

Lindalou relates that Dorothy Sutherland was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1910, the only child of parents of mixed English and Scottish descent. She decided to study journalism at University, but the business failures of her father and the need to settle his debts after his early death, obliged her to break off her studies and go to work full-time to support herself and her mother. Dorothy continued as a career journalist throughout her working life, specializing in health-related issues. She became editor of a well known nursing journal (the RN) and while working in the office of the Army Surgeon General wrote a book on 'What it Takes to Become a Successful Nurse and How to go about Becoming One'. After the United States entered World War II, this book together with her magazine editorials served as an effective recruiting tool for American nurses to join the Army Nurse Corps. In April 1943 she was deployed as a photo-journalist attached to the Surgeon General's office to North Africa, to document the activities of the ANC. She landed at Anzio Beach in Italy and followed the US troops as they fought their way north to Naples, Rome and on into France, sometimes lying flat, face down, to take photos of operations from under a tent flap. She later accompanied the troops and nurses into Southern Germany.

By an extraordinary coincidence, on 8 May 1945, VE Day, Dorothy had travelled to the concentration camp at Dachau to document the treatment provided by medical personnel of the US 7th Army for the

35,000 inmates who were still barely alive. In her vivid account of that day she recorded that word was received in mid-afternoon that fighting had ceased on all European fronts. And she describes how some of the inmates refused to believe it, some laughed hysterically, some began to sing national anthems, others wept, and so did she... In the fall of 1945, Dorothy returned to her office and resumed her old routine. During her war service she had prepared monthly editorials for the RN and published numerous articles for the *New York Times* and other newspapers and magazines. For her work she received a commendation for Meritorious Civilian Service from the War Department.

By 1949 Dorothy was working as a civil servant in Washington DC for the US department of Health Education and Welfare. Lindalou writes: 'My information about this phase of her life is scanty, but I do know that she continued her activities as a photo-journalist, particularly in the mountains of West Virginia, a deprived area of the US, dependent on the coal-mining industry, where the mountain people had limited access to health care. During the 1960s she made frequent visits to England, working at times closely with her friend Cecily Saunders who had founded the Hospice movement.

'By the time she retired from the civil service in 1972, Dorothy was head of a large office responsible for all publications of the health department. She then worked as a consultant until her mother's death in 1975, before moving to a new apartment and beginning to travel more frequently to England.'

It was some time in 1980 that the then Prioress at Fairacres, Sister Rachel Mary, received an impromptu visit from an elegant little American lady who announced that she wished to learn about prayer, and how to pray. She joined the Fellowship and a year later in September 1981, she asked to become an Oblate Sister. Somewhat taken aback by the suggestion that she was perhaps a bit on the elderly side for that, she humbly but firmly stood her ground and kept up regular visits to the Convent, eventually making Life Promises as an Oblate Sister in 1989. Thereafter, despite increasing arthritis, she continued to make the trans-Atlantic flight until the mid-1990s, filling the gaps with her remarkable letters. Even more memorable than Dorothy's steady perseverance was the vitality and sparkle of her temperament, her delight in discussing her favourite poets, thinkers, artists and spiritual writers, especially St Augustine and William of St Thierry, her wit and intellectual curiosity, her determination to respond with all her energy to this call to deepen her life of prayer. Finding the labyrinthine arrangements of our choir books a very direct challenge to her ideals she nevertheless declared, 'Sister, I'm not prepared just to muddle through!'

At home in Arlington VA Dorothy was a devoted member of the Episcopal Church. It was here in St George's parish that she met Lindalou who was to be her stalwart friend and a tower of strength and companionship until almost the last hour of her life. Her activities on behalf of the parish included leading the women's circle in biblical and spiritual study, and the more hidden work of spiritual direction for some younger women. There was undoubtedly a good deal more besides, but certainly when at Fairacres or Bede House, Dorothy spoke little of her past—her achievements, her travels, her disappointments, or even of her friendships and lifelong interests—and when she did, it was always with modesty and reserve, as if in the here and now of her spiritual quest, even the good things of life were of only marginal significance. Little as we got to know about that active and adventurous past of hers it was very moving to see someone who until her late sixties had been unable to spread her wings in any but the direction prescribed by circumstances (comparative poverty, family and other responsibilities) suddenly taking flight and soaring into a sphere of freedom where she was at home and joyously responsive to the things of the Spirit. Nor did Dorothy's professionalism as an editor diminish with her retirement. On her own initiative and with great skill she compiled from some forty-five issues of the *Fairacres Chronicle* a collection of Sister Jane's reflections as Reverend Mother, passages about life and prayer, both topical and timeless. The book was published in 1994 as *The Hidden Joy*, not many months before Sister Jane died, and is in a certain sense a memorial to them both as 'sharers in a common hope'.

BOOKS

The Cave of the Heart, Shirley du Boulay, Orbis Books 2005, £12:99.

Shirley du Boulay is an experienced writer, with four biographies as well as that wise and delightful book *The Road to Canterbury* to her credit. Her life of Bede Griffith, *Beyond the Darkness* was widely acclaimed for its insight into a key figure of twentieth century spirituality. With this book she returns to India, and to Griffith's predecessor at Shantivanam, Henri Le Saux whom we know as Swami Abhishiktananda. She gives us a remarkable study, sensitively written and carefully researched, within which Abhishiktananda emerges as someone of extraordinary authority, an inspiring though difficult figure, with more to offer our times than even those of us who have long admired him might have imagined.

In many ways it is a timely moment for this biography. There are still a number of people alive who knew Abhishiktananda well, on whose

memories the author has been able to draw—Murray Rogers and Raymond Panikkar among them. But in addition to this, there have been a growing number of evaluations of Abhishiktananda by a range of scholars in the years since his death. Interest in him has continued to grow. We have to be grateful that this mixture of personal record and thoughtful evaluation has come together in such an accessible way. It is no mean achievement, and this is likely to remain the standard biography and primary resource on Abhishiktananda for many years to come.

The most immediate and attractive aspect of this book is the strong flow of its narrative. It is often in the nature of biography that there are patches of necessary but dull material, pages to skim-read dutifully before the story resumes. Not so here. This is a hard book to put down. The early sections have fine descriptive passages of life in Saint Briac where Le Saux grew up, and of the monastery at Kergonan where he lived for twenty years. The picture of the close, warm, but inevitably limited horizons of Brittany, with its deeply pious brand of Catholicism, is vivid, and in marked contrast to the next section of the book, where, after his arrival in India, boundaries crumble and Abhishiktananda's life literally takes off. The contrast contributes to our understanding of him. This is of course skilful writing. But I have often thought that Abhishiktananda's life reads like the outline of an M. M. Kaye novel, from the wild Atlantic coasts of Brittany to the lush, tropical forests of Southern India, and from there to the sacred river Ganges and the snow clad peaks of the Himalayas. Du Boulay rightly captures something of this. It is an amazing story, as a story. But through the pace of her narrative she reveals something of the inner drive that compelled Abhishiktananda to make such a remarkable set of transitions. Le Saux had secretly nourished a vocation to live and work in India for ten years before he ever spoke of it. Only six years after his profession he had begun to read all he could about India. Finally in 1944 he asked permission of his abbot to go there. The objections from the authorities were strong and understandable. By this time Le Saux was a significant figure in the monastery, having overseen its restoration after the disruptions of war. His gifts were practical as well as spiritual. It says much for the strength of this inner call that he spent the next four years patiently overcoming the obstacles, finally sailing for India in 1948.

Le Saux's project was to set up a monastic settlement that would be closely modelled on a traditional Indian Ashram. To do this he joined Fr Monchanin, a scholarly, deeply spiritual man, who had spent many years in India and was also eager to advance such a project. Whatever the future of that might have been under their joint leadership, it is clear that very soon after their beginning together Abhishiktananda found himself caught up by the discovery of another level to his vocation to India. Visiting Ramana Maharshi, an outstanding Advaitan saint, and then staying on the

sacred Mountain of Aranachula, he was unexpectedly shattered: 'a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened up a mighty abyss.' Advaita, the longing for the 'not two', non duality, began to tug at him, hard. The book makes clear how ill prepared he was for this. He understood little of Hinduism, and was not even sure if his growing interest in it was the right pursuit for a Christian monk. He appears to have launched himself into the most profound levels of prayer with little or no guidance. It is as if he can do no other, driven by something beyond his control. His tenacity during this period in holding to a call he barely understood and found deeply painful, and his strong inner awareness, are remarkable. Finally, he discovered a genuine guide in Sri Gnanananda. 'When he speaks to you', he wrote to a friend, 'it is as if what he says was coming out of your own heart.' The inner conflicts as he tried to reconcile the advaitic path with Christianity still remained, but something was settled. It was his path, the one he must tread. A spiritual crisis that had lasted from 1949 to 1965 seemed at last to have eased.

All of this time Abhishikatananda was engaged with Monchanin in the project at Shantivanam. Quite what Monchanin thought of his partner's plunge into the depths of Hinduism is not clear. His forbearance was remarkable. The book makes clear the respect the two had for each other, and how much they held in common despite many differences. They jointly nurtured the project from 1948 to Monchanin's death in 1957. After that Abhishikatananda continued alone until 1968. But despite his loyalty to the place, an ashram was no longer the vision at the forefront of Abhishikatananda's mind. Besides, he could never offer it that all important ingredient of stability. It is a measure of the strength of the inner life into which he had been pulled that this Benedictine of twenty years should be no longer able to offer so crucial a monastic virtue. But the enterprise was not all failure. Shantivanam's importance under Abhishikatananda lies in the space it offered him and others for the exploration of dialogue between faiths. It is hard to grasp how bold this was at the time, so used are we to the recognition of other faiths. At the time it was unheard of that Christians should meet with those of other faiths for discussion based on beliefs. Shantivanam was an official, recognized monastic settlement of the church, and to it Abhishikatananda began to invite people of other faiths for prayer and joint study of the sacred scriptures. It mattered to them and to him that this was somehow part of 'the church'. These later developed into larger meetings under different leadership, but the seed was sown at Shantivanam.

During these years Abhishikatananda travelled, always third class, to be one with the poor. Few other missionaries, let alone Europeans, would do such a thing. Reading of this period of his life I am reminded of the holy men and women who walked the pilgrim routes of medieval Europe, or the

itinerants of Orthodox Russia in the nineteenth century. There are those in whom the Spirit's presence is so strong that ceaseless pilgrimage is the only outlet, driven before a wind that blows where it wills. In a moving Preface Raymond Panikkar describes his old friend as 'God intoxicated'. He was tuned to depths that were hardly bearable, yet he longed for more. Pilgrimage was an inevitable outcome.

In the same preface Panikkar comments on the agony his old friend's 'double belonging' caused him. He, with an Indian father and Spanish mother, (and, one should add, a well endowed and most supple mind) was never so troubled. Panikkar's latest book *Christophany* is, in many ways, the theological commentary on the experiences that this *Life* records. And he is right: 'double belonging' is a false problem. Reality and rationality are not the same. And yet, Abhishiktananda, like so many of us, was deeply conditioned by his childhood, brought up to believe that salvation was only to be found in the Church, that the beliefs of other faiths were idolatrous. To change was, *is*, painful. And he was always acutely sensitive to the Church and its hierarchy, aware of how slow it was to move—as it still is. Reading of his struggles as he comes to terms with the dual identity of Christian and Hindu, I am reminded that not much has changed, even if interfaith dialogue is currently much in vogue. The old dualisms still exist, in us and in the church, admittedly in more sophisticated forms, but dualisms none the less. There are resistances that seem to be woven deep into the structure, and those who urge dialogue often nurse bruises from the church which Abhishiktananda might recognize. In that respect it is Abhishiktananda who knows the territory and not Panikkar, and we can be grateful for his courage and perseverance at holding the two identities together. Finally they do come together, in his life.

And always, with Abhishiktananda, the agonies and the doubts were serving another purpose as well. The anxieties he carried about the reconciliation of the two faiths he loved, as well as his own lack of self-confidence, were all drawn into the central work of his ever deepening journey into God. 'The call to total stripping', he wrote on Anranachula. Yet he could never do what Hindu *sunyassi* did and own nothing, let everything go. He could not abandon his books, or the urge he felt to write. In part they were his umbilical links to the church, as close to him as the air he breathed. But he could not be like the *sadhus*, simply because he was a twentieth-century European, carrying the complex baggage we Europeans seem destined to carry, the legacy of our terrible history, our individualism, the foolhardy belief in our superiority. Abhishiktananda knew he could never shake all that off or ignore it. The way of Advaita had to embrace all that. It could not be otherwise. And this is his real gift to posterity: he recorded the journey as a westerner like us. I often wonder what we would make of him if the Diaries had never been found. Into them

he poured so much that he could not share, his lack of self-confidence, his anxieties about the church and his double belonging, his self-concern, his rigorous self-criticism. It is easy to read them and come away with the impression of a man who is self-obsessed, struggling with something beyond him. But that is to misread, on two counts. First, because those who knew him, particularly after 1965, sensed an extraordinary radiance about him. It was frequently commented on. He was someone unusually in touch with his depths. The diaries were his way of achieving emptiness. But, secondly, such a misreading is also to misread our own lives. Those who attempt to move deeper in prayer can surely recognize the bewilderment, the times of uncertainty, anxiety, the worry that it is all in vain. Abhishiktananda instinctively knew that that too was to be redeemed, gathered into God. The diaries are his way of gathering up all the loose fragments

And it has to be recorded that it was not always a struggle. There are many times when Abhishiktananda simply sings. He once gave Murray Rogers, who still, daily, celebrates the Mass Abhishiktananda gave to him, a beautiful song which he said was 'an old Tamil ballad I found'. No one else has 'found' it, and the presumption is that he wrote it himself. The diaries frequently burst into song, and the late Judson Trapnell identified many other mystical verses hidden within the text. They are like clear water bubbling up from the hidden depths. In the final years of his life the joy that was never really far from the surface, despite the inner conflicts, more and more fills him until, finally, the essence of all things bursts to the surface.

And here I must express my only reserve, not about this book, but about the fact that we know so much of these last, profound experiences. There are moments of the spirit so deep that they should remain hidden for all time. Biographers have to work with the material that they find, and Du Boulay could not ignore the evidence that was available to her. But there is something odd in the fact that Marc Chaduc, Abhishiktananda's young French disciple, who threw some of the material from the Diary into the Ganges to keep it from inquisitive eyes, and himself sought absolute privacy after Abhishiktananda's death, should nonetheless record so sensitive and intimate an experience and pass it to others. I could wish we did not know as many details as are told us here, though the material itself is carefully handled. Abhishiktananda had longed to cut through the 'final distinction between he who seeks and that which is sought'. But for him experience, of itself, was never the final goal. What mattered was returning with the message, the taking up of ordinary life, 'without any exterior manifestation, whether of word or of silence'. Alas, it was all more than his body, weakened by years of harsh living, could carry. In the bazaar at Rishikesh, on the banks of the Ganges, he collapsed with a heart attack, in

response to an overwhelming experience of God. He was never fully to recover. But his joy in those last months, and his utter simplicity are sufficient witness. His message, in letters to friends (he never seemed to stop writing) was simple: 'One is awake, and that is all. What I discover above all in Christ is his "I AM". I find his real mystery shining in every awakening man.' Those who saw him saw someone 'totally transparent to the inner mystery..... The joy and peace which came from him reduced one to silence, an amazing silence.' His last diary entry was: 'A brilliance, a light, a glory... envelopes everything. A sense of *beyond*, of the Beyond ...' He died on 7 December 1973, a giant of the Spirit.

DAVID BARTON

The Divine Drama—the Old Testament as Literature, by John Dancy, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 2001. ISBN 0718829875, £19.99.

Ancient Christian Commentaries on Scripture, general editor, Thomas C. Oden, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, USA, (volumes published and still forthcoming).

These publications reflect a significant change in perception of and approach towards the text of the Bible. In the first title, Professor John Dancy draws on his long and distinguished experience as a Christian educator to give the fruits of a lifetime's reflection on the Old Testament as religious literature. His aim 'is to help restore the Old Testament to the reading list of the general educated public'. As he says, few today 'except scholars and believers read it for pleasure'. It is no longer possible to study it at A-level in school, and the general level of ignorance and unfamiliarity among clergy and laity alike is reflected in much indifferent preaching and writing within the life of the Church. Yet it remains a fact that the gospels and the rest of the New Testament cannot be understood without a lively knowledge of the text of the Old Testament, as it was read and heard by the earliest generations of Jewish Christians. It is, of course, indispensable for any serious understanding of Judaism and Islam. For those still privileged to hear it read in the course of the Divine Office, there is a need for a comprehensive introduction that will whet the appetite and inform the mind. This, Professor Dancy has succeeded in achieving in his remarkable and substantial volume.

He has set about his task by fearlessly making a selection of key texts that to his mind encapsulate the wisdom and message of the Old Testament: 30% from the main text and 15% from the Apocrypha. The principle criterion is readability, so literary appreciation is to the fore,

supported by well-chosen passages of historical and theological importance. While his sympathies lie with the beauty of the Authorised Version, he has 'chosen for each passage the translation which on balance seems most appropriate'. His selections constitute a very readable and fluent overview of the dramatic sweep of the Old Testament and the majesty of its poetry and thought. The aim of his commentary is to make the passages 'more readable'. These comments are well researched and brief but eclectic, being intended to provide the necessary historical or religious background and also 'to observe those excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader' (quoting Dryden). Professor Dancy observes: 'Each age has its own preferred literary patterns. My own experience in teaching the Old Testament leads me to think that the pattern currently preferred, at any rate by the young, is the dramatic, particularly the tragic, doubtless because it best reflects the ambiguity of contemporary life and thought.'

The book is introduced by some very lucid and informed discussion of the Hebrew language and story-telling traditions, the shape of its poetry and its use of image and myth. There is also a brief outline of the archaeological and historical background, and explanation of how names are used in the Old Testament. There is also a perceptive introduction to the Psalms and some valuable appendices at the end. This is a scholarly yet accessible book that will be of real value to anyone preaching or teaching about the Old Testament. It should also serve as a constant companion for more private reading of Scripture and prayerful reflection upon its meaning.

The series 'Ancient Commentaries on Scripture' constitutes a major project being masterminded by Inter-Varsity Press in America. Most of the planned volumes are now published in a handsome hardcover format at around £30.00 each. Each volume presents a meticulous selection of commentary by the Church Fathers on each book of the Bible. By using computer searches, texts have been collated from far and wide throughout the patristic period up to the time of Bede in the West and John of Damascus in the East. So, for example, it has proved possible to generate a commentary on St Mark's gospel where none ever actually existed as such in the time of the Fathers, although they often commented on its precise text in their sermons and writings. Each section comprises the text of the Bible followed by a brief summary of the main lines of patristic comment. Then there are a number of appropriate citations to interpret verses in the text, and each is minutely referenced to either printed editions or computer sources for the patristic texts.

The aim is to make the full richness of biblical exegesis during the first 700 years of Christianity readily available to modern Christians, experts and others. This is a serious academic undertaking with significant

ecumenical support across the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches. Its aim is: ‘the revitalization of Christian teaching based on classical Christian exegesis, the intensified study of Scripture by lay persons who wish to think with the early Church about the canonical text, and the stimulation of Christian historical, biblical, theological and pastoral scholars towards further inquiry into scriptural interpretation by ancient Christian writers.’ The commentary is ‘dedicated to allowing ancient Christian exegetes to speak for themselves’, refraining from ‘the temptation to fixate endlessly upon contemporary criticism’. The whole thrust of the project is openly critical of the speculative academic reductionism that has paralysed the minds of many Christians in their approach to the Bible for too many years. It is the considered judgement of the editors that ‘the preached word in our time has remained largely bereft of previously influential patristic inspiration ... There is an emerging awareness among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox laity that vital biblical preaching and spiritual formation need deeper grounding, beyond the scope of the historical-critical orientations that have governed biblical studies in our day.’ The models for this commentary are the Jewish Talmud and Midrash and also the medieval *glossa ordinaria*: these present the text of Scripture in an ordered framework, containing the best of traditional exegesis and interpretation and seeking to do full justice to the text as containing the Word of God in all its richness and mystery.

DOUGLAS DALES

In Every Corner Sing, by Timothy Biles, Canterbury Press, 2006, £9.99.

When I saw this *Diary of a Country Vicar* (previously published privately in 1999 under the title *Church Wardens I Have Buried*) I was intrigued. As a country vicar myself, I wondered how Canon Biles managed. I dipped into the book and discovered that it was also a very good read. A more thorough reading often made me nod in agreement.

The Beaminster Area Team has many differences from our benefice in Norfolk and yet the essentials of rural ministry are the same. I am sure that the pastoral approach that Canon Biles shows so clearly in this book is the best way to minister in the countryside where the church still plays an important part in the local community. Canon Biles’ life is very full with its constant round of visits, funerals, services, and the writing and preparation work that is the lot of the parson. During the period covered by this diary he also had to cope with the illness of his assistant clergy which meant more help was required from the retired.

The life of a vicar is far from simple! One little quote expresses it all for me: ‘This Lent has not gone according to plan—but what does go

according to plan? Very little in my life! A business man has to keep to his plans, that is his job; a parish priest has to respond to others' needs, that is his job. And no one can plan for that. All those efficient people who want to make the church more like business don't understand this.' (p. 199). I, too, am concerned for the future of rural ministry in a church which sometimes seems to assume that all church life is like that of a successful urban congregation or even a successful business. Rural ministry, in the old style, is very much alive and well and this needs to be recognized.

It was interesting to see from the blurb on the back cover that this book is a set text on ministerial training courses. I am glad about that. I would have liked to read it before I started my own ministry here in Norfolk. There are many passages that I marked for further thought and action. But it needs to be read more widely. It would be a great eye-opener for many a person in the pew in similar parishes throughout the country.

Having said that, I cannot say that I agree with everything that Canon Biles says. Part of the joy of the book is that he expresses strong opinions on a wide variety of subjects. In doing so he puts his finger on a number of places where the church scores what he terms 'own goals' through ineptitude. We are told that his contributions to the Salisbury Diocese *Sarum Link* are sometimes controversial. I can understand that. This book is the same, and is all the more valuable for his honesty and clarity of vision.

Apart from his reflections on parish and local church life, Canon Biles includes comments on life in the Church in Sudan arising from his diocese's links with that area of Africa. We also hear delightful stories of life with his young godsons.

I can thoroughly recommend *In Every Corner Sing* to all who would like to have a snapshot of rural ministry in the Church of England today—its joys and sorrows, its stresses and triumphs. I will want to dip into it again to feel encouraged in my own ministry and the sense that it is all so very worth while.

ANDREW THOMSON

Andrew Thomson is Rector of a rural multi-parish benefice in Norfolk and a Priest Associate of SLG

Liturgy and Architecture for a Pilgrim People, Peter Doll, Affirming Catholicism, London 2005, ISBN 0-9550052-0-5, 52 pp £3.50.

Peter Doll is concerned here to subject some of our current presuppositions about the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy to critical examination. He speaks of the Liturgical Movement having 'come to a halt' (p 18); is this, he asks, 'the triumph of sound scholarship' or 'a dead end'? (ibid) He is not the only one to be asking similar sorts of questions. Within the Catholic Church not a few voices are being raised in favour of orientated (i.e. eastward-facing) celebration of the liturgy. What sort of common ground, then, might there be? Doll founds his argument on a concise examination of the concept of sacred space, dealing with this both in the scriptures and in the early centuries, through the writings of various Fathers and through architectural evidence. From this he identifies three focal points in the church building: the ambo (in C of E-speak, let us say lectern) for the liturgy of the word, the altar for the Eucharistic liturgy, and a 'transcendent focus, looking to the east for the eternal advent of the Lord himself'. This, of course, 'cannot be seen' (p 31), although, one would add, the great apse mosaics of the ancient basilicas try pretty hard to make it visible. These three foci point to 'a dynamic pilgrimage' (ibid) and it is in the centrality of the concept of the pilgrim people that Doll finds himself (and, he adds, *Common Worship*) at one with the Second Vatican Council's insights about the Church militant here in earth.

If this is the principle, what are the problems? Three may be identified. First, the re-ordering of the vast majority of our churches in the last fifty years has worked on what Doll terms the community church model, priest and people gathered around the altar usually in greater proximity than previously. Whilst this has its strengths, it 'emphasises only one dimension of the building', (p 24) and tends to exclude the looking forward and beyond which Christian expectation should arouse in a congregation. Significantly, he points out, the great centralised churches like Hagia Sophia in Constantinople nonetheless had the altar firmly in the eastern part of the building. Secondly, granted our inheritance of church buildings, our present re-orderings fight often all too obviously against the structure which contains them. Altars vie for prominence, with older disused ones not infrequently triumphing over their younger siblings (one large London church, not many years ago, had no less than four altars on its east-west axis). Thirdly, whilst re-ordering may have replaced pews with chairs, and even angled them, yet the people remain pretty firmly immobile in the place where they always were. How does that demonstrate 'dynamic pilgrimage'?

So what is the solution? Here Doll appeals to the interest in Oriental and more particularly the Syrian liturgy and its associated buildings which

was shown by some seventeenth and eighteenth-century Anglican writers. In these cases the positioning of the clergy for the earlier part of the Eucharist is rather more among the people, before the priests move to the (orientated) altar to complete the sacrifice, the people turning at this point to face east. From such a model Doll derives some comfort even for the existence (now almost extinct) of three-decker pulpits: his question ‘what is (it) after all, other than a modern version of the Syrian *bema*, a place providing seating for the clergy and for the proclamation of the Word in the midst of the people?’ (p 35) has to be taken as both rhetorical and tongue-in-cheek. But he goes further, for what pilgrimage suggests to him is the desirability of Anglicans again literally ‘drawing near with faith’, coming to stand before the altar in the chancel for the liturgy of the Eucharist. Priest and people would face each other for the word; and face east together for the sacrament. Outworkings of this could be that the clergy’s seats might be at the west end of the church, that the people might sit collegially, facing each other north-south, before moving en bloc to the sanctuary; and indeed Doll refers to his own experience, in a Victorian building, of beginning the liturgy with the sprinkling of holy water at a west-end font. In such a service, undoubtedly, the congregation would be much less obviously a fixed audience and more clearly a pilgrim people.

Such ideas are not wholly new; the liturgy at Bede House had quite a lot of that shape years ago, and George Guiver CR argued for this sort of movement in respect of celebration of the Office in his book *Company of Voices*. Whilst admitting to a degree of personal sympathy with Doll’s argument, I raise some queries. First, we do not possess, relatively, many buildings that have the sort of collegiate shape that Doll would most prefer: the medieval ones do not have it, many of the seventeenth/eighteenth-century ones were remodelled and extended by the Victorians, and the new Victorian churches largely hearkened back to medieval models. Despite what Doll says, I could fear a new holocaust of choir stalls and altar rails (let alone a proliferation of three-decker pulpits!) as chancels are cleared out to make standing space for all. Our way of celebrating the liturgy could still be ‘arguing’ with our buildings. Secondly, what size and sort of congregation are we anticipating here? A priest of my acquaintance put it succinctly: ‘I haven’t room for two hundred standing in the chancel’—and that is his size of congregation, who do fit into the nave pews. And how will this form of arrangement deal with the late arrivals, those who come and go at various points in the liturgy, those who wish to sit at the back and watch tentatively, but who could suddenly find themselves all alone as everyone else disappears eastwards? Thirdly, what does the musical tradition suggest? In the West, the proper of the mass is largely processional: the introit covers the entry of the clergy, the alleluia covers the gospel procession, the offertory covers the

necessary movement at the procession of the gifts, but it is the communion antiphon which marks the procession of the people as they approach to receive the sacrament. Some musical insight from Syria would have been a useful addition to Doll's argument. Fourthly, whilst he is rightly concerned with what we do in the building, it would be good to have some further thought on how this relates to our being pilgrims 'in the joyful expectation of the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ' on ordinary weekdays, and even in our actually getting to the church building.

My suspicion is, in fact, that the sort of celebration of the liturgy here commended would work rather better on a weekday in a chapel with a known and committed congregation than on a Sunday with the variety and unpredictability which that day's worship can (and should) throw up. The fundamental problem is that given to the apostles by the Lord: to keep together on communal pilgrimage to the kingdom those who walk eagerly in the front and those who lag cautiously in the rear.

JOHN SCOTT

In Company with Christ: Through Lent, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter to Pentecost, Benedicta Ward, SPCK, £7.99, 84 pp. ISBN 0281057249.

Several generations of novices, both of this community and others, have benefited from Sr Benedicta's wide liturgical knowledge and her capacity to make sense to newcomers of rather bewildering monastic practices. In this small book the fruit of her learning is made available to a more general public. It does not stop at a description of ceremonies nor just pointing to the sources from which they arose, but in a profound way and deceptively simple prose shows us how we can use the liturgies of Holy Week for our own spiritual benefit in following Christ.

The core of this book is three lectures given in Canterbury Cathedral during Holy Week 2004. They are a study of the sources, particularly of *The Monastic Agreement* and *The Travels of Egeria*, which place the processions of Holy Week in their historical context. We are taken into the continuity of worship from early times as she explains the origins of the Palm Sunday procession, the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, and the Lighting of the New Fire and blessing of the Paschal Candle at the Easter Vigil. We are vividly reminded that these are 'crowd scenes'. When we participate in them we should expect to be taken into something bigger than ourselves which will renew our life in Christ because he is with us on the way. All our liturgical life is a way of accompanying Christ.

But this Holy Week journey has its preparation in the forty days of Lent and its fulfilment at Pentecost fifty days afterwards. The chapters introducing and following the three central ones are equally exciting and rich in sources. We are reminded that Lent is a going forth, a procession into the wilderness, to meet God face to face. In the desert tradition of Palestine the monks literally left their monasteries at the beginning of Lent to live in as complete a dependency as possible on the mercy of God. This began with a ceremonial blessing, which was absorbed into western monasticism in various forms. The procession into the wilderness was solitary and silent, but ‘people were eager for Lent, and saw it as a way of processing in heart towards God; and ... silence was needed as well as company’ (p. 16).

In large part the last chapter is a reflection on the institution of the Eucharist, because from Pentecost it is the primary way of pilgrimage to and in Christ within the whole body of the Church. As Sr Benedicta points out, the great processions of Holy Week are ‘re-enacted in Christian churches also in the daily procession to the altar’ (p. 70).

This is a book to use both for building up knowledge of our liturgical heritage, and for deepening our own spiritual understanding of how to travel with Christ. Sr Benedicta sums up the task and the goal thus:

God is always for us, and while we recognise the seriousness of the undertaking of being in company with Christ, this does not diminish the glory and joy of the end, or prevent it from being reflected in the delights of the way itself. In any way of walking with the Lord there has to be an element, however small, of wanting somehow to go away from the old dead self and towards a fullness of life; and this has its own hardships, but the basic orientation of walking with Christ lies in a joyful sense of going out freely in good company with a shared aim, and the aim and the reward of the way is to find that place which is most of all home. (p. 74)

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

Religious Vows, the Sermon on the Mount and Christian Living, Bonnie B. Thurston, Liturgical Press: Collegeville Minnesota, £9.95.

This book, originally written for Religious of the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom in the Province of Great Britain and Ireland, provides a challenging read. Bonnie Thurston begins with a deeply thought out bible study on the Sermon on the Mount which she applies both to the Religious Vows and to the life of Christians in general. She begins with a chapter on the Beatitudes, in which she explores the radical demand of total commitment which Jesus makes of his followers. To live the truth of the Beatitudes is to live in a way that is counter to the usual values of the world but in tune with the Kingdom of God. She continues with chapters

on the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, seen in terms of detachment, charity and humility. In this way she is able both to point to the deeper meaning of the Vows, and their application to Christians in any circumstance. Along the way we are encouraged to reflect deeply on the meaning of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon of the Mount, and we are reminded that the Sermon on the Mount leads us to a life of radical commitment to Jesus affecting every area of our lives. For those in the religious life, the vows are intended to be a means by which the individual life is redirected towards a radical commitment to God, and those not bound by vows can still see in them a way in which they can learn to direct their lives to God. Thurston says that her aim in the three chapters on the vows is to:

...highlight the particular aspect of spiritual maturity that particular vows in religious life were intended to nurture, the spiritual goal towards which they orientate us, the kingdom or Gospel value they lift up. (p32)

A final chapter applies the Vows to marriage, adding two other traditional monastic practices, stability and hospitality. Each chapter ends with questions for further thought. Thurston emphasises that whatever the state of life of a Christian:

The task of Christian maturity is to grow into greater and greater freedom in Christ, to choose life and the great Giver of Life whose generosity is unbounded.

Bonnie Thurston shows the way in which reflection on the Sermon on the Mount can lead us all towards that Christian maturity; this is what makes it such a challenging read. As the author shows, to live truly by the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount will lead us to a way of life which is characterised by Gospel values and single-hearted commitment to God.

SISTER CLARE SLG

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Art of God: The Making of Christians and the Meaning of Worship, Christopher Irvine, SPCK 2005, £14.99.

Wisdom from the Monastery: The Rule of St Benedict for everyday life, Patrick Barry, Richard Yeo, Kathleen Norris and others, Canterbury Press, 2005, £8.99.

The Church Times Book of 100 Best Prayers, Introduced by Sister Wendy Beckett, compiled and edited by Rachel Boulding, Canterbury Press, 2006, £12.99.

Four Ways One Goal, Christian Journeying Illustrated by the Histories of Iulia de Beausobre, Dag Hammaerskjöld, Martin Luther King and Angelo Roncalli, David Goodacre, Leighton Counselling Services, 2006, £11.99.

Means of Grace, Hope of Glory, 500 hundred years of Anglican thought, compiled by Raymond Chapman, Canterbury Press, 2005, £16.99.

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