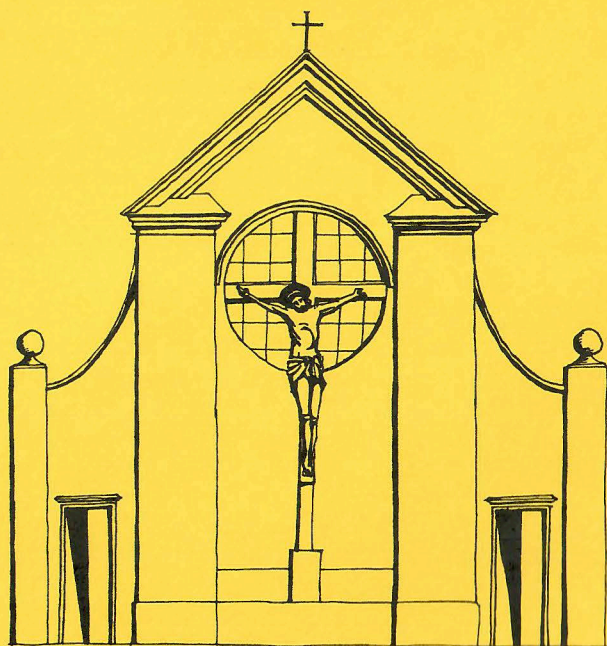


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## COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

Sister Catherine and I have recently returned from a most enjoyable, stimulating, and I trust fruitful, visit to our Brothers of the Society of St John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As many of you will be aware, the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God owes much to that Society, for Fr Hollings SSJE founded the Community in 1906. In the first decades of the Community, an SSJE Father served as advisor to the Community and especially to Mother Mary Frances, then Reverend Mother. One of the priests came to the Convent to celebrate Mass each day, as well as a lay Brother who served at the altar, and priests of the Society were the Sisters' confessors. There have been many bonds of friendship between our two Communities over the years, not only within the United Kingdom, but also across the Atlantic. We have learned with both sadness and joy of the recent death of Brother Paul Wessinger SSJE who, during his time as Chaplain at Bede House and on his visits to SLG, was a source of inspiration and support to many of us. There will be more about our visit to SSJE and an obituary for Brother Paul in the winter edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

Our pre-Lent retreat was conducted by Fr Eugene McCaffrey OCD, who took us into the works, teaching and times of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila. As a Carmelite, Fr Eugene is steeped in these two Saints, and he fed us a rich, yet digestible—and at times humorous—diet during the five days he was with us, and we felt we had travelled a long way and been greatly blessed in a short time. Jane Eastell maintains this focus on the Carmelite tradition: in her article, she reflects upon how we can link the idea of 'play' with prayer as we look at what St Teresa teaches us about prayer and spiritual life. In the winter edition of the *Chronicle* last year, I mentioned the Oblate Sisters' retreat which took place at Begbroke in November last year. 'The Spirit and Silence of Love', one of the talks given by Sister Christine at this retreat, is included in this edition.

During Lent we received visits from members of two emerging Christian communities. Readers of last summer's edition of the *Chronicle* may remember that I wrote about the 24-7 Prayer movement. We were delighted to welcome to Fairacres two members of this international movement and we hope that a few Sisters will be attending a 24-7 Prayer teaching day in the summer. For those with internet access, there is more information at [www.24-7prayer.com](http://www.24-7prayer.com). In September 2008, Sister Catherine participated in a five-day 'LifePrayer' event at Southwark Cathedral to celebrate the religious life. The event provided opportunities for the public to learn about the religious life, to meet real live nuns and monks, and to find teaching on prayer and spirituality and opportunities for worship. Through contacts made at Southwark, we have also made a link with a new community in Oxford. We were very glad to welcome the leader to Fairacres, and were blessed with another inspiring talk about a newly-formed group of Christians. The community is called mayBe and is, as it describes itself, 'a community following in the way of Jesus by prayer, action and blessing for a better world now' (see [www.mayBe.org.uk](http://www.mayBe.org.uk)).

There are emerging communities not only in the Diocese of Oxford, but throughout the country. Some of these are part of the 'Fresh Expressions of Church', an initiative of the Church of England and the Methodist Church which began in 2004. It is part of the vision of Archbishop Rowan Williams, whereby established and traditional congregations exist alongside the newly-formed communities, and rather different groups of Christians are able to form a 'mixed economy church'. It is hoped that some of these groups of Christians who are offering different forms of worship, together with different ways of expressing and exploring the Christian faith, may continue to attract people who are not yet linked with any Church.

These new contacts mentioned above are greatly welcomed by us, but we also value our long-established friendships with individuals and with traditional communities. Similarly, we value the teaching of our forebears in the faith, and their writings are the main source of our readings at Matins. Sister Susan became interested in St Augustine in this way, and an essay she wrote as part of a course she began while at St Isaac's in New Zealand is

included in the following pages. Sister Benedicta has published a new book (details can be found on page 52) on St Anselm of Canterbury in honour of the 900th anniversary of his death. This continues the theme of her first book, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*.

The last edition of this magazine included a letter from a reader, Janice Broun, about some of her experiences in Czechoslovakia before the fall of communism, and in particular information about the circulation of SLG publications in that country. She has written an article for this edition about the religious life in Eastern Europe under communism. We are also grateful to Dannie Newson for the two poems in this edition.

In mid May the Community participated in Oxfordshire Artweeks, when local artists share their creative work with others, often in their own homes. Our exhibition included drawings, paintings, sketches, photographs, carvings and needlecrafts and was shown in the front hall and two nearby rooms. The garden was open, and also the chapel towards the end of the afternoon. It was lovely to see so many visitors enjoying the work, and to make a number of new friends.

Fr David Barton has written a letter about the Community as he nears the end of his time as our Warden, and it follows these notes. Some readers will have met him in person at the Associates' retreats; some will have attended the Eucharist at Fairacres when he has celebrated and preached, and others won't have met him but will have read his contributions to the *Fairacres Chronicle*. The Community as a whole is immensely grateful to him for fulfilling this role so faithfully for eight years, for his friendship and support in what are challenging times for us and for most religious communities. It is difficult to single out those aspects for which we are most thankful, but as Reverend Mother, I have particularly valued his objectivity and his wisdom. I am very pleased to be able to tell you that his successor will be the Reverend Andrew Teal, currently Chaplain at Pembroke College and also on the staff at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, a theological college near Oxford. He will take up his responsibilities as Warden in August. Fr Andrew is

one of the many priests who celebrate and preach for us, and we look forward to his time as our Warden.

It is a while since we had a change in our numbers, but with regret we said goodbye on 29 January to Sister Raine of God, as she and we came to recognize that her journey now lay outside SLG, and we released her from her vows. We give thanks for her time with us and wish her well.

In March, some Leaders of Anglican Religious Communities met for a few hours in London for a session entitled, ‘The end of the Religious Life as we know it!’ The day came about in response to a sermon preached at Begbroke Priory, and the preacher, Lister Tonge, facilitated the meeting in March. A wide variety of topics was covered, and there was both honesty and concern, but also relief that we could share the challenges with other brothers and sisters in Christ. While acknowledging the riches of the traditions which we have inherited, it was noted that it is possible to die under the weight of the past. We asked ourselves a number of questions: What is the Holy Spirit asking of us? How do we read ‘the writing on the wall’? For most of us, the script is not easy to decipher. How do we pass on the riches we have received (our DNA, as it was named)? Will it be to new members of our own communities, or will this inheritance pass perhaps to members of newer communities, such as those mentioned on page 3. What training should our novitiates provide? The possibility of extending the already established pattern of shared formation, making particular use of certain expertise and learning within various communities to supplement teaching given within a community, was a subject to explore at further meetings. We acknowledged that when change takes place, there are two paths that any community can take: one leads to mission and life, and the other to maintenance and death. It is tempting to opt for the maintenance, as it may appear, at least initially, to be the easier route, but as people who have just celebrated the season of Paschaltide, we must seek to choose the ‘life’ option, for it is Life that Jesus offers us. Please pray for us, and we do for you.

With best wishes,

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

A LETTER FROM DAVID BARTON  
WARDEN OF THE COMMUNITY

DEAR FRIENDS,

Sister Avis Mary has asked me to write something about my time as Warden for this edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*. As many of you know, I come to the end of eight years in office in August. But as I write, August seems a distance away; too early to be objective.

There are, however, some things that can be said. The office of Warden of the Community is an extraordinarily privileged one, allowing someone who is not a monastic a glimpse into the centre of the Community's life. A monastery is a surprising place: more than people ever realize from the outside, it is small business—or rather a collection of small businesses. It must in some respects be managed like a medium-sized hotel. There are visitors to welcome and their comfort to be ensured. The midday meal must provide regularly for thirty to forty people, and there are the other meals as well. Behind all that is a whole structure of planning and management that requires time and effort. St Raphael's, the Community's own 'medical department', offers care to elderly and infirm Sisters. SLG Press keeps up a steady flow of publications. The buildings must be maintained, the garden planned and cultivated and its produce linked to the needs of the kitchen. Nowadays, with an increasing number of lay staff, a whole area of employment must be properly handled, with all that that implies in terms of conditions of service, human relations, clear procedures and accountability to outside bodies. And, crucially, there has to be effective financial management of the whole operation, so that the Community lives within its means. From the outside a monastery seems a tranquil place—and that is so. But do not underestimate what goes on below the surface.

Running through all of this is the heart of monastic life: the Community's prayer and worship. I have come to think of Fairacres as a powerhouse of prayer. The faithfulness of Sisters' intercession is striking. Fr Gilbert Shaw (Warden 1964-67) used to speak of monasteries as lighthouses, beacons in a dark world. It is a valuable

image, though I think I prefer another building metaphor. In a world that sometimes seems to be in a disturbing state of flux, a monastery is a place where foundations are dug deeply and securely into God. There is a continuous flow of people who come to renew their own depth in God in this place, and those of us who are linked to the Sisters know something of the support their life can be, as much as anything simply because they are there, faithfully, regularly, offering the round of worship and intercession—a group of people seeking to live out of the stable centre that is God.

The Warden stands close to Sisters as they make their vows, and to Oblate Sisters as they make their promises. Whenever I do that, I have an image of someone opening up a house, flinging wide all the doors and windows and throwing away all the keys and simply inviting the Spirit in—openly, vulnerably. It is an extraordinary act of courage and daring. That single, costly, personal act by each one gives the Community life. I like the story that Abbot Christopher Jamison tells of the reporter who once asked one of the Brothers at Worth whether he felt he had missed out by being a monk. The monk, who was seventy and had entered the novitiate at eighteen, responded quickly with a half smile, half growl: ‘Look here, I have woken up every day of every one of those years and freely chosen to be a monk.’ From the daily personal renewal of each Sister, the vitality of Community life spreads outwards.

And what of the future as, like so many religious orders, this Community is getting older and fewer people are coming forward to offer their lives in such a way? The short answer is that we don’t know. Certainly this way of life is in marked contrast to our consumer-oriented society, and its emphasis on community very different from the individualism that is now the norm. The difference was not quite as marked in the past, and so the step into the religious life is now so much greater. And perhaps we are in a period when the old structures are changing. It could be that the vowed life is re-expressing itself in small groups or in those who take up the hermit life. But it is too early to tell. We would certainly be poorer if these places of depth were no longer with us.

I personally draw comfort from two things. The first is that SLG is a living, vital monastic community. It not only remains utterly true to its calling, it goes to great trouble to review its life to ensure that it is alive and functioning effectively in this constantly changing world. I am reminded of St Paul, who speaks of how he works at keeping himself spiritually alert so that others may be saved. There is no resting on laurels in this place. I can only admire that from the sidelines and be grateful for it.

The other sign of hope lies in the wider family of SLG, in its Associates. The particular charisma of SLG lies in its mingling together of intercession and contemplation: 'In stillness nailed, to hold all time, all change, all circumstance, in and to Love's embrace.' Fr Gilbert's phrase stands as a kind of pointer towards a way of praying and subsequently of living in which we can all share. To hold ourselves and this troubled world before the mystery of God, and at the same time allow ourselves to be aware of God's extraordinary forgiveness and mercy, is a piece of 'work' that all of us can share in. I have come to see this as 'work', in the sense of a specific task, a liturgy, without which the Church and our world would be infinitely poorer. To be linked with this Community is to be called to share in that work, and to allow it to lead us to a deeper life in God. That so many of you are ready to do this is something for which I am daily thankful.

Thank you all for the support of your prayers and the warmth of your friendship. You will, I know, support my successor, Fr Andrew Teal, with your prayers as he takes up the role of Warden in the late summer. I know he will find it as challenging and as rewarding a role as I have done.

## THE SPIRIT OF SILENCE AND LOVE

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

RATHER DIFFIDENTLY, I begin this talk with a personal anecdote, but it taught me much about silence, so it may be helpful to others.

Many years ago, at some time during the winter, I spent a week of retreat at Bede House, our house in Kent which was sold in 2003. The house was organized as a lavra, with huts as hermitages, and Sisters living a common life in the main house. It was usual for a Sister staying in one of the huts to be given a radio and, as this was in the days when very few of us had radios for personal use, I had been looking forward to listening to the news at least, if not to one or two other programmes. However, there was no radio in my hut and, as there had recently been a change of Sister-in-Charge, I thought this must be a new policy, so did not feel brave enough to ask for one.

At first I was flummoxed—you were left almost undisturbed in retreat there. How was I to exist without contact with the outside world? How was I to pray if I did not know what was going on in the world? How could I live with myself without that stimulus? What if the world came to an end and I knew nothing about it? Help! There was nothing for it, I would have to do without and try to survive.

I then began to see that this might be a gift to be welcomed, or at least received with as much welcome as I could muster. Indeed, I read the report *Faith in the City*,<sup>1</sup> which had recently been published, a book which I would not otherwise have attempted. I also discovered a peace in the silence and solitude that has remained as a refreshing memory ever since. I look back on it as one of the best retreats I've ever had. I cannot claim to have had anything beyond my usual experience of God during that week. There was no great mystical insight given; indeed my reading placed me even more firmly in the world to which the Church ministers.

<sup>1</sup> *Faith in the City*, The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985.

There is a sequel to this anecdote. The following year I had a holiday at Bede House and was shown where the radios were stored for us to collect as we wished. The radios had been there the previous year, too! Someone had forgotten to tell me where they were kept.

The cultivation of a spirit of silence is lifelong, and our experience of it changes as we pray. There is much in the Community's Rule in the chapter on 'Silence' on what true silence is—covering 'all the levels of the conscious life'; and the exhortation is never to allow it to become a negative emptiness. The splendid outline of the levels of silence to which we are to attain, taken from the teaching of our former Warden, Fr Gilbert Shaw, is another way of desiring that all one's heart, mind, soul and strength should be God's. It is also a digest of how contemplative prayer grows in us.

It is in silence that the spirit will be trained to deepen recollection. ... But it should be remembered that silence must cover all the levels of the conscious life; there must be an outward silence of speech and movement, a silence of the mind for the overcoming of vain imaginations and distractions, and a silence of the soul in the surrender of the will to be still and know that God is God. ...

Rule, Chapter 12, Silence

The page on 'Silence' from the 'Way of Life', our more modern document which supplements the Rule, reminds us that we are more likely to meet our 'churning thoughts' than peace and calm. However, there are unexpected grace-filled moments in all our lives when we know we stand on the edge of the desert and hear the still small voice of God's immensity. Those moments keep us seeking and searching for the true God.

Although there may be key moments in which we are joyfully aware of this, the value of silence does not depend upon such moments. We can expect silence to reveal to us the restless churning of our thoughts, our obsessions, and that in us which stands most in need of healing. Here the challenge is to be truthful and humble, open to the Holy Spirit and willing to take every opportunity to turn around anger, false judgements and fears. ...

The Way of Life, Silence

Reading the early history of the people of Israel, we see that it was only in open spaces with no distractions that they could hear what God was saying to them. The desert was also the place of failure. As they discovered, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Calf<sup>2</sup> always live in close proximity in our lives. We know that God *is* and that we have the means of living with him, but we also know how easily we lose faith and are distracted from our true work and calling. But it is true, too, that in those moments of failure God is present and draws us into a greater understanding of holiness.

Silence and solitude go hand in hand in our vocation; many people are able to pray in silence with others quite happily, or they find that the Eucharist brings them to a place of inner stillness from which they can live their daily lives. Indeed that is so for us all to a greater or lesser extent. We always remain members of the Body of Christ, and our humanity requires social interaction. But contemplative prayer seems to inveigle us little by little into the desert. Our desire for God strips us of other desires; most agonisingly, it strips us of our most cherished ideas about ourselves, our faith, our self-importance. We can also expect temptation; as we remember at Compline, ‘our enemy, the devil, as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour’.<sup>3</sup> For those of us who pray, this is most likely to take the form of putting off prayer in favour of what Sister Faith SLG, who died in 1977, used to call ‘the lust to finish’; or excusing oneself because one is tired, feeling ill or overburdened by other matters. A good spiritual mentor will encourage us in disciplined habits of prayer, and help us to discern whether changes need to be made as to how we pray or how much time we give to it. The flame of desire must be carefully fed until we ‘become all fire’, as Abba Joseph said.<sup>4</sup>

The desert is a bleak place, and all deserts have their own character, as some of you already know. Some are so barren that it seems impossible that anything or anyone could live there. But plants and animals do, and we humans—being inventive and

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 32: 4.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph of Panephrisis.7, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: the Alphabetical Collection*, Cistercian Publications, trans. Benedicta Ward SLG.

resilient—have adapted to living in these conditions. Though the image of the sand dunes in the Sahara is probably most deeply ingrained in our iconic memory, most deserts are rocky places, hard on the feet, with winds that blow across them unhindered by trees or shrubs. If you are given a glimpse of the desert into which contemplative prayer draws you, it is usually with some degree of this bleakness in it.

How are we to enter that desert when we catch a glimpse of its vastness and know that this is the place where we are most likely to find God? With very little, travelling lightly-laden, far more lightly than health and safety guidelines would like. We cannot help but be burdened by ourselves, our good and bad experiences, our strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses especially will stand us in good stead, for we are entering territory where we need to learn a new way of being, to appropriate the new life offered in Christ.

As we travel further into our deserts, into the Dark Night of the Spirit as St John of the Cross terms it, very little, if anything, of what we think we know will be of use. We will need to cultivate a total dependence on God, which includes respect for the stony places and the landscape-changing winds. They can change what has hitherto been familiar within a few moments or hours. So it is with the work of the Holy Spirit in our life of prayer. What we thought we knew can be wiped out in a trice and a new inner landscape set before us to live in and explore. Each of us will have our own stony and wind-shaped places where we can no longer live comfortably, yet to find another place of shelter we must depend on the guidance of this Spirit, God's presence with us.

We may need to take little but ourselves, but we do need food for the journey. However, even for that we should not be burdened with much. A few words from Scripture, to which to nail our wandering thoughts, and the Eucharist will nourish us for most of the time. We do not need to take radios, mobile phones, or anything else that is likely to keep us joined to the world as the world wishes us to know it. Unfortunately, our minds and our human natures expect continual variety, and they believe they need it or will die without it. They also get *very* bored without lots of stimulation. That is one of the hazards and one of the great temptations of desert life.

The Old Men of the Desert called it *accidie*, and their usual answer when asked what to do about it was to recommend no change, just more of the same practice: ‘Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.’ This is more than a physical place; it is staying where we are, in prayer and contemplation, however uncomfortable or comfortable it may be. Until we have learned that God is all we need, we will continually convince ourselves that the grass and date palms at the nearest oasis are the cure for boredom, or for any other temptation.

There is a lot of meditation practice and ‘spirituality’—however you define that term—being taught these days by people of all faiths and none. We can, I believe, learn many useful techniques from them, as all of them begin with redirecting our humanity towards the divine, or at least towards the realization of the full potential of our humanity. We can learn to sit well, relax and be attentive to what is going on in our hearts or around us. But for Christians, another factor comes into play. We never pray, meditate, or travel in our desert without the example of Jesus, who has been there before us and who accompanies us there.

Without a lively relationship with Our Lord, we shall come to grief, nor are we likely to recognize when the enemy is tempting us to turn aside or to travel off course. Our Lord spoke only of the things of God; he refuted with Scripture the devil’s suggestions to him in the wilderness. It is a lesson to us never to engage directly with evil—look what happened to Eve! And even when speaking with recognized authorities, Jewish or Roman, Jesus has little to say except to direct them to Scripture. Indeed, before Pilate he was content not to justify himself, just to be, although he knew it would lead to his own death.

We travel with Christ, but we also travel with the whole Church. The final sentence of the chapter on ‘The Spirit of Love’ in our Rule reminds us:

While the spirit of silence serves to separate each individual life unto God, the spirit of love must ever be binding all together in God, that in the unity of the Spirit all may seek their perfection by holy charity.

Rule, Chapter 26, The Spirit of Love

God may call some of us into a degree of silence and solitude which in the eyes of the world is crazy and verging on mental ill-health. But for those of us who follow the call, there comes a perception of unity and of the Church as it could and should be. This is both unspeakably beautiful and unspeakably anguishing as we face the disunity. However, as we persevere in this seemingly unrewarding, boring prayer, sitting on a stone in our desert, we are given something else—just a pinch of the joyful life within the Godhead, the interweaving dance of the Trinity, which overflows into all creation. We could not humanly tolerate more than a pinch, but it is enough to keep us hungering for more.

I have spoken more than enough about something where, in the end, all speech fails. As Job finally realized:

I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ...

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>5</sup>

Like Job, we are reduced to total silence until we can respond in penitence to the greatness of the mystery in which we are asked to participate.

*This article was first given as a talk at the Oblate Sisters' Retreat in November 2008 at Begbroke Priory, Oxfordshire, the home of the Sisters of the Anglican Communities of St John the Baptist and of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd.*

<sup>5</sup> Job 42: 3, 5-6.

## THE INFLUENCE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

SISTER SUSAN SLG

*Catholic and Protestant theologians alike turn to Augustine to vindicate their theses; political theorists and historians of Western thought cannot with integrity exclude this saint from their syllabus, however secularized they might seek to become. ... There is indeed something very universal about this saint which ensures that he will endure.*<sup>1</sup>

THIS ASSESSMENT by Michael Marshal is a comprehensive and striking testimony to St Augustine, and yet we have to consider too his understanding of what we now call spirituality. In this also he has had lasting influence.

Augustine was born in a provincial town in North Africa in 354. After an education as a *rhetor* (teacher of oratory) in Rome and Milan, he was baptized a Christian in 387 and returned to Africa. Four years later he was ordained priest, and in 395 he was made Bishop of Hippo. He died in 430, just before Hippo fell to the Vandals.

He preached and wrote prolifically throughout his life, and it seems his long struggle with grace and free will, sin and predestination, and faith and reason are all debates which have continued and to which he made a powerful contribution. Much of his thought in these areas was sharpened in his battles with the Donatist movement and with Pelagius and his followers. Separate from these, though, are two works which tower over his other theological and philosophical writing: *De Trinitate* and *De Civitate Dei*. *De Trinitate* was the first great contribution by the Western Church to the Trinitarian debate, and *De Civitate Dei* is a massive work reflecting on the relation of the Church to the State, a subject which we can see, as we look around our present world, is as important today as it was then. However, not all of his teaching has had positive influence. Sometimes this is because his followers have taken up only a part of his thought, and this will account for some of

<sup>1</sup> M. Marshall, *The Restless Heart*, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 1987, p.148.

the later distortions of his teaching. On other occasions he let himself be pushed to an extreme position by controversy. It seems to be true as well that, though he renounced Manichean beliefs in the strongest terms, he remained influenced by their dualism, if unconsciously. However, an aspect of Augustine which will have made it difficult for his contemporaries as well as successors to say 'this is what Augustine taught', in any absolute sense, will have been the sheer greatness of his mind. He was always searching, changing and revising his opinions.

By the Middle Ages, Augustine came to be called the 'Doctor of Grace', which gives us some idea of how central and prevalent was his teaching on grace. It came into clearest prominence in his arguments with Pelagius and his followers. Basically, it seems that Augustine was convinced that men and women could do nothing good without the help of God's grace, while for Pelagius this appeared to deny humankind free will and to take away any moral responsibility for its actions and behaviour. This, however, is an over-simplification of Augustine's position. He did not deny men and women free will, but thought that they could only acquire it by grace:

Through the law we have knowledge of sin, through faith we are able to pray for grace to overcome sin, through grace we receive the healing of our soul from the disease of sin, and through this healing we receive at last real freedom of the will; then through this spiritual freedom we receive the love of righteousness, and through the love of righteousness the law does the work it was designed to do.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, free will is not our starting point for good conduct, but the penultimate step in a process of which grace is an early and necessary step. Nevertheless, this continued to be a source of controversy, and at the Reformation both sides appealed to Augustine.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 'De Spiritu et Littera 52' in E. Routley, *The Wisdom of the Fathers*, SCM Press, London, 1957, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> H. Chadwick, *Augustine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 2.

Closely connected to the issues of free will and grace are those of sin and predestination. In his *Confessions*, written during his first three years as a bishop, Augustine reflected on the whole span of his life, and in himself saw a human nature which did not correspond to the Creator's intentions. He concluded that human misery was perpetuated by social and individual egotism, that is by sin, and so men and women live in a state of ignorance and weakness of will, with the fear of death hanging over them. They need forgiveness of sin, and restoration under the love of God, and the promise of eternal life. He concluded that human beings are born in this state, in 'original sin', and the Church, by baptising infants, seemed to bear out this conviction.<sup>4</sup> He identified the core of this state as 'concupiscence', or the desire for anything which is not God, and it manifested itself in infants feeding at the breast,<sup>5</sup> as much as in adult sexual desire. It was a main element in his battle with Pelagius, and in the heat of the controversy he took it to its extreme, and perhaps logical, conclusion—predestination: a sizeable minority, he believed, are elected and destined to salvation; the rest must find their own way by merit. It was his study of St Paul which led him both to his strong doctrine of grace and, ultimately, to predestination: 'Who has made you different? What have you got that you did not receive? If you have received all this, why glory in it as if you had not been given it?'<sup>6</sup> And: 'Work out your salvation in fear and trembling: for it is God who works in you, both that you should wish and act a good will.'<sup>7</sup>

It was this doctrine of predestination and his strong sense of a human being's innate sin (inherited through the physical body) which more than anything opened him to the criticism of remaining a Manichee, for this was the basis of Manichaean teaching. An ambivalent attitude to the body and to sexuality has persisted in the Church until today, and some of this could perhaps be laid at Augustine's door. However, though celibate himself from the time

<sup>4</sup> P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, Faber & Faber, London, 2000, p. 387.

<sup>5</sup> *Confessions* 1.vii, 11, trans. H. Chadwick, Oxford University Press, London, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> I Cor. 4: 7. (P. Brown, *op. cit.* p. 147.)

<sup>7</sup> Phil. 2: 12-13. (P. Brown, *op. cit.* p. 148.)

of his conversion, he was also clear that celibacy or virginity were not of themselves a higher state than marriage; what mattered pre-eminently was charity.<sup>8</sup> Holiness was open to all.

The battle with the Donatist movement involved Augustine for most of his episcopacy. Chadwick discusses it within the larger context of 'Unity and division' and Augustine's thinking about the Church as the body of Christ.<sup>9</sup> This schism had its origin in the aftermath of the Diocletian persecution of 303. The split was between those who had compromised their faith (or were thought to have done so) and those who had not. Those who followed Donatus, a rival to the Catholic Bishop of Carthage, refused to allow the validity of any sacrament performed by a priest who had surrendered sacred books or vessels during the time of the persecution, or one who had been ordained by such a person. They also despised the Catholic community for its involvement with the imperial power, seeing it as a compromise with worldliness. In very basic terms it was, perhaps, a controversy about 'purity'. Augustine however did not believe that the weakness or sin of a minister invalidated a sacrament; the sacrament is Christ's, not the minister's, and salvation is the work of God, not of humankind

Among the Donatists were uneducated and violent men who resorted to atrocities in their attempt to overthrow the Catholics. The State moved in to curb this and to impose conformity with the Catholic Church. At first Augustine opposed this State intervention but then, as Chadwick says, 'unfortunately [he] saw how much good the government pressure was doing'<sup>10</sup> and produced a theoretical justification for the use of force.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that he also made it very clear that he opposed torture, slavery and capital punishment,<sup>12</sup> this support for state repression was taken up in the Middle Ages and used to justify the terrible measures taken against those considered to be heretics.

<sup>8</sup> Bernadino & Quasten (editors) *Patrology*, vol. 4, Christian Classics Inc., Maryland 1986, p. 403.

<sup>9</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.*, chapter 7, which is my source for much of this section.

<sup>10</sup> Chadwick, *ibid*, p.81.

<sup>11</sup> P. Brown, *op. cit.*, p.231.

<sup>12</sup> Ep.153.18, in Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

William Frend notes in his book *The Early Church* another negative consequence of Augustine's battle to suppress the Donatists. He suggests that Augustine failed to recognize the extent to which the movement represented native African Christianity, and by forcing its adherents to become Catholics through the Councils of 411 and 412, he fatally weakened, rather than strengthened, North Africa's hold on the faith; so that when Islam came with the Arab invasion two centuries later, the Christian faith was largely lost to North Africa.<sup>13</sup>

'Believe that you may understand.' This quotation from the old Roman version of Isaiah came to be one of the most well-known sayings of Augustine. As a Manichee and a Neo-Platonist he rejected faith in the name of reason, but as a Catholic he came to see that the relationship was not necessarily one of opposition but of collaboration. Chronologically, faith comes first but, having made the step of accepting the authority of Christ and the Church, reason becomes the more important. To anyone who wanted to understand without believing, he repeated his saying, *Crede ut intellegas* ('Believe that you may understand'), because understanding was a reward of faith. But he also wrote, *Intellectum valde ama* ('Love greatly in order to understand the content of faith'),<sup>14</sup> when he replied to a correspondent who wanted to rely on faith alone, for one is not able to believe without reason; no one in fact believes 'if he has not first thought it necessary to believe'.<sup>15</sup> Like other aspects of his teaching, this was taken up by the teachers of the medieval universities. It was a uniting of theology and philosophy, and we see it demonstrated both in the *City of God* and in *On the Trinity*.

In 410 Rome fell to the Vandals, and two years later Augustine began to write the *City of God*, 'a great and arduous work'. It is an immense work of Christian apology. He was challenged into writing it by the presence in Carthage of highly-educated refugees from Rome who had remained adherents of the old religion. The fall of Rome, therefore, was the indirect cause, not of the book itself, but

<sup>13</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1982, p. 204.

<sup>14</sup> Ep.120.3.13 in *Patrology* vol 4, 1986, p. 403.

<sup>15</sup> *De Praed. Sanc.* 2.5, *ibid.*, p. 403.

of the form given to it by Augustine: it became ‘a deliberate confrontation with paganism’<sup>16</sup>. His task, he says,

is to discuss, to the best of my power, the rise, the development and the destined end of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another.<sup>17</sup>

The two cities are Babylon and Jerusalem (or Rome and the Church). Their inhabitants are divided by their respective loves, the love of God or the love of self, but it is not a simple division: there can be good citizens in Babylon and only nominal Christians in Jerusalem. It was received with acclaim and has had lasting influence into our own time. Within his concern about the relation of the Church to the State are the issues of order, just war, and justice and peace—all current preoccupations. Augustine acknowledged that, because of men and women’s innate sinfulness, legal restraint was necessary, but only within limits; a society based on retaliation would not be a happy one. He granted that only a strong government could allow people to live in peace and without fear of social disorder, but the true foundation of peace is a justice which gives everyone their due. He believed that, though human nature is such that true peace and justice can only belong beyond this world,<sup>18</sup> we can and must strive for them in this life. Nevertheless, he accepted that war could be justified in the case of unjust aggression, and for values which Christians held dear.<sup>19</sup> It is a work about human history from creation to its final destiny, but, as Chadwick says, ultimately ‘the meaning of history (for Augustine) lies not in the flux of outward events, but in the hidden drama of sin and redemption’.<sup>20</sup>

Augustine’s *De Trinitate* was written, like the *Confessions*, in his middle years. Since Tertullian at the end of the second century,

<sup>16</sup> P. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>17</sup> *De Civ. Dei*, 11.1, in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> Enarr in Ps. 84: 10-17, *Nicene and Post Fathers of the Christian Church*, T. & T. Clark, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin Books, London, 1967, pp. 226-7.

the Church in the West had spoken of three persons in one substance, while the Eastern Church used the terms three *hypostases* in one being (*ousia*). Augustine was not happy with this language: for him it over-separated the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and diminished the oneness of the Godhead. He was also aware that pagans scoffed at the idea of Trinity: how could three be one? Starting from the human person as made in the image of God, he produced analogies to illustrate how three could exist in one: for instance, memory, understanding and will, or the lover, the beloved and the love. But these, he accepted, were not adequate in themselves to express God. Instead he proposed that the Trinity is one of relations. But what relates them? The answer Augustine gave is love. The Father is the fount of the Godhead, the Son exists internally in the Father but is begotten out of love for the world, and the Spirit ‘proceeds’ from both the Father and the Son, and is the expression of love between the Father and the Son; an idea which has come through into the worship, as well as the more theoretical theology, of today, as we can see in our hymns.<sup>21</sup> The ‘double procession’, which for Augustine was speculation, was later adopted into the creeds of the West and became one of the causes of division between the Churches of the East and West. In proposing it, Augustine was trying to safeguard the equality of the three relations; that is, if the Son is God equally with the Father, then the Spirit must equally proceed from him. And yet, while firmly holding the equality of the Father, Son and Spirit, he also believed that Christ was subordinate to the Father. As Neale remarks, the two must be held in ‘living tension’.<sup>22</sup>

The Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Father into the Son, and proceed from the Son to sanctify created beings; he proceeds simultaneously from both; although it is by the Father’s gift that he proceeds from the Son also, as from the Father himself’.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> cf. Seventeenth-century hymn, *O fons amoris Spiritus*, ‘As thou in bond of love dost join,/ the Father and the son,/so fill us all with mutual love/and knit our hearts in one’, which appears in hymn books today.

<sup>22</sup> J. Neale, *Augustine of Hippo* (unpublished), 1994, p. 18.9.

<sup>23</sup> *De Trinitate* 15.48 in H. Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 228.

In the end, Augustine believed that it was impossible to produce a complete definition of the Trinity. God is above and beyond human understanding and, as he says in a related context, ‘men have to use the most adequate language at their command in teaching so difficult a matter’.<sup>24</sup>

Augustine was a bishop of the Catholic Church, but he was also a *servus dei* (‘servant of God’), a monk. When he settled in Hippo he drew around him a circle of friends and like-minded men who lived a common (or shared) life in celibacy and simplicity. He wrote a Rule for this group and in so doing, he gave the Western Church its first monastic Rule; as such it has had great influence. Because it is concerned with basic principles rather than details of conduct, it is possible to adapt it for widely differing circumstances. Over the centuries it has been used by many groups; at first in conjunction with other Rules, but after the reform of the monastic life and the diocesan clergy between the ninth to the eleventh centuries, it was adopted by many as the sole source of guidance. There are at this time two women’s communities in the Church of England who use it as their inspiration. The Rule itself is moderate; it requires that Christ’s teaching be internalized; and it is ascetic only in the sense that life in community is a victory over self-seeking, or strives to become so. What the Rule asks is that attention should be directed to the building up of relationships of love. It is in fact a call to the Evangelical equality of all people, and as such is a protest against a society which was so clearly marked by possessiveness and power. I suggested in my introduction that Augustine had great influence in the area of spirituality. His Rule is one way in which we can see how he tried to live out what he taught. He concludes it with two exhortations: ‘Live in such a way that you spread abroad the life-giving aroma of Christ’ (II Cor. 2: 15), and: ‘Do not be weighed down like slaves straining under the law, but live as free men under grace’ (Rom. 6: 14-22).<sup>25</sup> His teaching was not just theory; it expressed his desire for God. Henry Chadwick sums up this aspect of Augustine’s life and work in these words:

<sup>24</sup> *De Trinitate* 15.47, *ibid.* p. 228.

<sup>25</sup> Rule 8.1, trans. R. Canning OSA, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1984, p. 24.

The aspirations of all Western mystics have never escaped his influence, above all because of the centrality of the love of God in his thinking. He first saw that love, which is a quest for personal happiness, necessarily implies some self-renunciation and the pain of being made what one is not.<sup>26</sup>

Or in Augustine's own words:

As the apostle Paul has said, 'all indeed run' on that race course, in those games, 'yet one wins the prize': the others depart beaten. True they all persevered in running, yet when one receives the prize, the others who laboured similarly retire. It is not like that on this course: let as many who run, persevere in running and they will all receive the prize: and whoever comes first waits so that he may be crowned with the last. For it is love not covetousness which makes this contest: all those who run love each other, and love itself is the race they run.<sup>27</sup>

It seems to me that here is the heart of the man. He understood human feeling and valued it positively. He was a pioneer in this respect and we are in debt to him. He also loved the Scriptures, reading them at every opportunity, and his homilies on St John's Gospel and his exposition of the Psalms are part of his spiritual legacy to the world. For the rest, and it is a very great deal, I have tried to show that he came to exercise a far-reaching influence both in his life-time and after his death, though according to Chadwick he was never happy to be regarded as an authority—in his mind, only Holy Scripture and the consensus of a Council could provide that. Nevertheless, he gave to the Western Church its first real attempt at a systematic theology, and people of all shades of belief have used his writings, both in agreement and disagreement. However one views him, there can be no doubt, as Bettenson says,

that Augustine is the greatest formative influence in the shaping of the thought and life of the Western Church; in fact the whole of medieval Christendom, we may say, would have been very different without him.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> H. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine Enarr. In Ps. 39 (40): 11 (my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Bettenson, *op. cit.* p. 26.

And if that is true of Christendom, it must also be true of the ‘world’, because the Church in the Middle Ages played a central part in politics and education, in fact in all the areas we consider to be secular today. Those of us who live in the so-called ‘Western’ cultures are heirs of that age.

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RELIGIOUS ORDERS UNDER COMMUNISM  
IN THE SOVIET BLOC  
JANICE BROWN

RELIGIOUS ORDERS did not entirely disappear in the eastern bloc under communism. Their status—and fate—varied from country to country, depending to a large extent on how they were regarded by their national parties, to which particular Church they belonged, and how much local support they could count on.

In predominantly Orthodox countries in the Balkans, monasticism was closely linked with the preservation of national cultures and was regarded as too conservative to appeal to the younger generation.

A bare minimum cohort of monks was required to supply candidates for bishoprics, men who could be groomed as agents by the police department specialising in religion, or at least trained to acquiesce in drastic restrictions on Church activity. Orthodox monasticism exercised a ministry of hospitality and had a considerable impact on the local community, but was not organised as orders, each with a specific purpose or social orientation, as were Catholic orders, which were regarded as a Vatican fifth column, as well as a privileged caste. Within the former Hapsburg Empire, monastic orders had been closely tied to the establishment, providing education for the privileged, for example, and they were often wealthy landowners—in Hungary the Church owned a quarter of the land—and so were anathema to Marxists. Massive confiscation led to the transfer of vast estates and valuable properties and sites which could be utilised for other purposes. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Evangelical deaconesses posed no threat to communism and proved indispensable in looking after the weak and despised sections of the population.

So as to concentrate on those countries whose orders were most persecuted, in particular Czechoslovakia (where I have most personal contacts), I shall first briefly pass over Poland, Yugoslavia and the GDR where, due to quite differing circumstances, Churches were allowed to retain considerable autonomy and maintain a fairly normal ecclesiastical life, and where orders survived intact and even flourished. They were still allowed to catechize and to have some access to medical and social work, and they were not excluded from academic and cultural life, running lively presses—in Yugoslavia even including dialogue with Marxism. One key advantage was that they were not cut off from contact with sister Churches in the free world.

The Polish Catholic Church proved so deeply entrenched and resisted initial anti-religious legislation so effectively that state limitations were drastically reduced. By 1987, with 30,000 nuns and thousands of priests in orders, it was the only European country with substantially more religious than pre-war, and it was even able to export surplus religious for mission in the Third World. Essentially, the religious represented a conservative faith employing modern

means. In Yugoslavia, faith communities benefited from its non-aligned status. Mother Teresa's order attracted courageous young women to work in the Third World and in Kosovo, ridden by blood feuds. Orthodox monasticism was altogether lower key, but unhappily it provided a reservoir for the cult of Serb victimhood, a tragic augur for the future. In these countries, any involvement of religious orders in politics could be hazardous, and several priests were imprisoned in connection with Solidarnosc resistance in Poland and with implied criticism of the state and promoting nationalism in Yugoslavia. There, Franciscans linked with Medjugorje fell foul of both the state and their bishops.

The GDR government never regarded religion or the witness of 5,000 Evangelical deaconesses and 2,500 Catholic nuns to the sick as presenting a threat. Its policy was opportunist, exploiting the dependence of its Churches on their western counterparts to undergird and finance their health and social services. Church institutions provided a tenth of hospitals and half the care for the handicapped, as well as old peoples' homes. There was no doubt which institutions people preferred, given the choice. State homes were grim, and some handicapped people felt so unwanted that they committed suicide. The main problem was the steady fall in deaconess vocations.

In Albania, some active Catholic orders worked among primitive northern mountain clans, and there were some Orthodox monasteries. Initially, persecution of religion was brutal, and from 1967 all religion was banned and draconic punishments, including death, meted out to any found practising their faith.

In Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania, thousands of religious were summarily evicted, many imprisoned, a few even murdered. Those orders which were permitted to carry on functioning were always kept under the watchful scrutiny of the specialist secret police. The rest were dispersed into their local communities. Everywhere, within orders and in civilian life, informers were rife; they inhibited relationships of trust and discouraged some evicted religious from exercising outreach ministries such as catechising children. We shall never know full details of how evicted religious coped with their new lives. What we have are reminiscences here and there from those who survived, or from those who befriended and

supported them or drew strength from their quiet personal witness. Some, torn from a closely-regulated community life, may have found it hard to cope. Many, however, were resourceful and tried to maintain contact with each other, living in twos and threes where possible, deeply respected by those who knew of them. Some of the less able were helped to support themselves by sewing or giving French lessons. Most were forced into secular employment, where some tried to carry on a surreptitious apostolate in hospitals and medical centres, visiting the sick and aged.

Bulgaria, on the other hand, had only a few hundred religious. Anti-religious propaganda and secularisation proved so effective that vocations all but died out. In the few Orthodox monasteries which still hosted tiny communities, like Rila, a tourist showplace, religious life fell to a very low ebb. Nuns in the small Catholic Church—there were around thirty in 1989—had a good reputation. After the initial wave of dire persecution, when some Carmelites were sent to hard labour in the notorious Belene island camp where many inmates perished, their small community re-assembled in Sofia. They quietly requisitioned the only part of the convent in Sofia still unoccupied—the balcony above the church where their old furniture was dumped; they built partitions and crammed themselves in there. One girl who wanted to join them in 1970, the daughter of a party functionary, was abducted and put under such pressure that she had to agree to marry. Another postulant for the Eastern Rite order, now Sister Maximiliana and sister to Bishop Hristo Proykov, travelled to Poland for Pope John Paul's triumphant return in 1979 and, in front of the cameras, pleaded with him, in tears, not to forget Bulgaria.

In contrast to Bulgaria, in Romania, which had escaped direct Ottoman rule and restrictions, Orthodox monasticism was deeply rooted, flourishing and popular, with around 10,000 in orders in 1945. The state suspected that monasteries were hives of political opposition, but could not close them completely. Between 1958 and 1962 all but the elderly were expelled, and half of the 200 monasteries closed. Their plight was all the more bitter because the Securitate suborned a bishop, Justin (Moiescu), who became patriarch in 1978, to implement these measures. Fr Gheorghe Calciu, whom I

met after his release after sixteen years in prison, was profoundly impressed by the monks and nuns he met. Many hid in the forests, except in winter when they had to seek shelter in monastery attics or in friends' houses. They kept strictly to their rules of life and prayer, and met surreptitiously where possible. Some nuns moved into mens' monasteries as cooks. Periodically, the Securitate launched intensive searches and arrests. Conditions in prisons were so appalling that many monks and nuns who survived would never speak about it. Some 'unauthorised' religious were interned in psychiatric hospitals, where at least two nuns died after drug 'treatment'.

Thanks to Patriarch Justinian (Marina), who died in 1977, the government was persuaded to allow monasteries to contribute to the local economy as collectives—but with a strict *numerus clausus* of 2,200—which left long waiting lists for vacancies. Nuns were exploited as cheap labour in what were virtually villages, with peasants and young aspirants working adjacent farmland. Besides providing hospitality for the many pilgrims, they had to fulfil state quotas on their farms or in crafts. Throughout the era, religious lived in perpetual fear of Securitate check-ups, intimidating some community members into becoming informers or into wandering around in plain clothes scrutinising visitors. Fr Gheorghe said that monasteries provided a vital haven for people who, though they had adopted a communist mentality, still needed to pray and confess, but dared not show themselves in their local church. However, individual religious who attracted too many spiritual children were liable to be banished to houses which were more remote. Some evicted monks managed to change course and become parish priests—which was not normal practice. As a lecturer at Bucharest seminary, before another five years in prison for preaching against atheism, Fr Gheorghe rated them far more highly than married priests, who tended to be overburdened with family cares. There was one village which provided one or two young men each year, ten in all. Fr Gheorghe was curious and went to meet their priest, a forty-year-old monk, utterly dedicated in his life for Christ. Amazingly in such conditions, Romanian monks continued to produce works of

outstanding scholarship and theology. In May 1989 young monks at Putna begged us to give them biros which would write.

Catholic orders in Romania were dissolved in 1948, apart from a handful of small houses which were forbidden to accept any more novices. This did not prevent vocations. Among the two-million-strong Eastern Rite Catholics, who were 're-integrated' into the Orthodox Church in 1948—when all its bishops and hundreds of 'recalcitrant' priests were thrown into prison—clandestine orders were well organised. Latin Rite religious (many of them ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania) tended to live in tiny groups, each under the direction of an individual priest whom they felt they could trust. Persecution actually dissolved the differences (and rivalry) between orders. Sisters felt much closer to the laity than ever before. Among an impoverished people, they found ample opportunities for surreptitious works of charity.

In Hungary, the 11,000 nuns and monks, who ran a third of the nation's schools and most of its charitable work, were suppressed. Only 260 were left to staff eight prestigious schools—to which even party members sent their children. By the 1980s less than a hundred monks and nuns were left, plus 700 survivors in special retirement homes. The effect of the removal of orders on a nation increasingly ridden by acute social ills, alcoholism, family breakdown and suicides in particular, was disastrous. By 1990, when orders were officially re-instated, around 500 people came forward to register fifty-nine orders. The atmosphere had not been conducive, but there were secret vocations. These people, together with some former religious like Piarist Gyorgy Bulányi, had been influential in base groups which sought to stem the moral collapse of society, revive real community life and promote traditional Catholic values. These represented real spiritual revival. Bulányi's controversial pacifist stance put his group, the Bush, at odds with his over-cautious hierarchy, which he justifiably accused of compromising his Church's interests when they were no longer in mortal danger.

In Czechoslovakia, orders suffered a particularly harsh fate. In 1950 they were abolished and 400 houses were shut. Of the 15,000 religious, 8,000 suffered an average of five years in internment camps, where even the penal code and sentences with a specific

termination did not apply. The death rate from overwork, malnutrition and disease was high. Superiors of orders were not released till 1968, when 8,264 religious, who had served a total of 42,763 years in prison, petitioned the Culture Minister for houses to be re-opened. The Prague Spring provided some respite, but was followed by another clampdown, with closures and refusal to allow orders legal recognition or to accept more novices or nuns to train as nurses; so superiors again protested in 1977, pointing out their utility value to the state. The government deliberately avoided entering into polemics with them, because it knew its position had no legal grounds. Some active sisters were allowed to look after priests, do menial work in old people's homes and public institutions for the physically and mentally handicapped—with those unfortunates no one else would care for—but were forbidden to speak of God to them. Nuns who took ordinary jobs were forbidden to live together and subjected to constant police harassment, though some ignored that injunction. Progressively, religious were removed from contact with normal society. Older nuns were shunted away into 'concentration' convents, remote from their home territory, under the iron rule of officials of the State Office for Religious Affairs.

In 1971 all orders were once again banned. This second round of suppression was also accentuated by the reaction of committed Church members and religious against Article 178, which reduced almost every normal religious activity, except worship in a church building, to a criminal offence. Thousands of committed Christians struggled to fill the gaps—often under the guidance of some of the 500 older priests and religious, who were forbidden, under pain of imprisonment, to say Mass—and became involved in the underground Church, whose press I described in my letter.<sup>1</sup> Vocations grew, both in religious families like the Radls, and among young folk disillusioned by Marxism, but there was a strict *numerus clausus* on entry to the two remaining, mediocre, seminaries, and brighter candidates were excluded. By 1989, one third of parishes were vacant. The banned orders, which most would-be priests joined because of the moral support they received, creamed off the

<sup>1</sup> See *Fairacres Chronicle*, 2008, vol. 41, no. 2.

seminary rejects. These were able to reach sections of society which no authorised priest could reach, students especially, but also drop-outs, juvenile delinquents, drug addicts, Roma, orphans, the hospitalized. Several hundred chronic invalids belonged to an order practising unceasing prayer.

Government reaction towards clandestine religious was pathological. In 1981, for instance, 140 police with vicious dogs descended on two convents, which were suspected of harbouring secret presses, to confiscate them, terrorising the nuns, three of whom died soon afterwards. In 1983, around 250 young Franciscans were arrested and only freed months later after protests from abroad, as the underground *Informace o Cirkvi (Church Information)* was smuggled out, publicising their plight and that of others serving several years in prison. The majority of underground religious were Slovak. Like Hungarians, the Czechs were deeply secularised; the Slovaks, who had lived in a more rural society, less so.

In a bleak Prague church hall in March 1990, Libor Ovečka, teacher in the Institute of Foreign Trade, Josef Splichal, cybernetics expert, and Tomas Radl, a building engineer who had been refused entry to medical school because of his family, told me about their Salesian vocations. (I add information from Tomas' father, Dr Vlada Radl.)

Colleagues asked them why they weren't married, but treated them with respect. 'We have good experience of plain clothes relations with the young', said Jozef. 'We don't have any other clothes—my Archbishop was surprised I had no clerical clothes!' They took young folk to the country—ostensibly for sports activities—to develop their religious consciousness. 'We have a lot of experience from the world of work. We have found many things which other countries are looking for. We not only had to teach others; we had to learn. We discovered that concepts of sacred and secular are not contradictory but co-relative.'

They had no idea how many of them there were, let alone in other popular orders like the Franciscans. (There were probably around 650 in orders.) Salesians were the only order which accepted women and lay-folk. Tomas had studied weekly for twelve years, together with the others, with the doyens of Czech theology, Otto

Mádr, and the late Josef Zvěřina, an ebullient character who was a close family friend, all secretly, even keeping it from Vlada, who was himself involved in providing secret seminars for young seekers. (When I first met Mádr, he warned me to speak quietly, and put his radio on. ‘Suspects’ were bugged.) Tomas had kept his ordination in Cardinal Jan Korec’s flat in Bratislava secret from his father for six months. One night the police, who had just arrested some drug addicts, found four of them praying in a wood. They admitted that they studied theology, apart from Tom who remained silent during interrogation, though they refused to name their teachers. It was only through a priest friend that Vlada, much later, learnt how after that Tomas had found a note left on the chimney of his grandmother’s house, where they used to meet: ‘It’ll be your turn to be burnt next time’. Tom would never speak about that dreadful experience.

Libor runs ‘Jabok’, where youngsters from poor or large families study the Bible, theology, teaching and social work, with help from Prague’s Protestant faculty. Jozef teaches theology at Ceske Budejovice seminary; Tomas, whom I found a very relaxed character, is superior of the flourishing youth centre there.

*(A second article will look at persecution in the Soviet Union, concentrating on Orthodox monasticism, and conclude by assessing some of the results of persecution on religious life since 1990.)*

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

JANICE BROWN, although at St Anne's College, Oxford, only came into contact with SLG and met Mother Mary Clare later, through her husband's membership of the Scottish-based religious community of the Company of the Servants of God, using Fairacres Publications at the retreats they promoted. Specialising in persecution of religion in communist states, working in close association with Keston, she wrote numerous articles, and a book entitled *Conscience and Captivity, Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988), and contributed to *Censorship: An International Encyclopedia* (1997). She currently reviews books for *Religion, State and Society*.

DANNIE NEWSON, a reader of the *Fairacres Chronicle* over a long period of time, has written poetry for more than fifty years.

JANE EASTELL is an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Bath and Wells and licensed as an Associate Priest to a church in the centre of Taunton. She is the Diocesan Adviser in Spirituality, as well as being active in the ministry of spiritual direction, and she is an Oblate Sister of the Community.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN is Vicar of St Stephen's, South Dulwich, London. He came to know the Community during his years as Vicar of Littlemore, Oxford (1997-2006), when he was a regular celebrant at Fairacres.

JOHN ARMSON, a Priest Associate of the Community since 1975, trained as a medic before ordination. He then mostly worked in theological education. He retired from being Precentor at Rochester Cathedral in 2001. After a couple of years in the Hengrave Ecumenical Community, he now lives by himself in Herefordshire.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER, a retired priest now living in Wells, served most of his ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church. His interest in and devotion to Bishop Andrewes stems largely from having been an undergraduate at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where Andrewes was once Master, and from being ordained in Southwark Cathedral, where Andrewes is buried.

## LENTEN HOMECOMING

The Word made flesh  
and Christ became,  
an outcast on His earth:  
He took a fragile, mortal frame  
from the Maid who gave Him birth:  
bloodied footprints  
in the sand  
show the way He trod;  
back through bitter passion  
to the broken heart of God.

Dannie Newson  
circa 1973

## LADY OF TENDERNESS

Lady of tenderness,  
pureness and graciousness,  
transform our being  
with touches of love;  
take all our waywardness,  
darkness and sinfulness,  
offered in sorrow  
to the life-bearing Dove.

So may we know Him,  
adore and revere Him,  
encouraged and taught  
by your Motherly love;  
Lady of tenderness,  
pureness and graciousness,  
lead us all home  
to Love's Kingdom above.

Dannie Newson  
written 8 September 2008  
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

## TERESA OF AVILA AND 'THE PLAY OF PRAYER'

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CAN A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY NUN be relevant today? Can such a person help us, not only to pray, but also to live? Through the analogy with play, I should like to consider how St Teresa of Avila is able to describe the path of prayer from the active to the contemplative; and I should also like to consider our notion of play today and its place in the life of prayer.

Our life of prayer and spirituality is, we know, about the whole of life; prayer is not just compartmentalized somewhere in a little box. The questions arise, therefore, as to where 'the play of prayer' takes us and how it affects our living. Teresa can speak to us not only about prayer but also about this living. To begin with, here are some lines from a poem of Teresa called 'Seeking God':<sup>1</sup>

*Soul you must seek yourself in Me  
And in yourself seek Me.*

And should by chance you do  
not know  
Where to find Me,  
Do not go here and there;  
But if you wish to find Me  
*In yourself seek Me.*

Outside yourself seek Me not,  
To find Me it will be  
Enough only to call Me,  
Then quickly I will come,  
*And in yourself seek Me.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All references to the writings of St Teresa are taken from *the Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC, USA, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> vol. 3, POETRY, 8, p.385, 'Seeking God', trans. Adrian J. Cooney, OCD.

Teresa was born in March 1515 and died in October 1581. She was made a Doctor of the Church in 1970, chiefly due to her teaching on prayer. She was a woman of great courage and determination. She had a deep and close spiritual relationship with that other great sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite mystic, John of the Cross, yet they appear so very different in their personality and their writings. John of the Cross is systematic in his writings and can seem almost austere; Teresa, on the other hand, appears anything but systematic. Her writing is very free—she jumps around all over the place—and is rather charming, but with no clear methodology. She frequently alludes to the fact that she knows nothing; that she is a ‘mere woman’. However, she was writing as someone who did not have access to theological learning—that was reserved for men—and also as someone who was regarded very suspiciously by the Inquisition. She was investigated on several occasions and had to tread very carefully, which may well explain her self-deprecatory remarks:

Since I don’t know what I am about to say, I cannot say it in an orderly way.<sup>3</sup>

I don’t find anything more appropriate to explain some spiritual experiences than water; and this is because I know little and have no helpful cleverness of mind.<sup>4</sup>

It was in the second part of her life that Teresa ‘woke up’ and become aware of her own personhood and godly potential. She was extremely self-aware; she knew her weaknesses and her struggles, and she wrote about them; all this makes her real and accessible to us. Here is someone who managed to emerge from the trivialities and comforts of life to find her true self and inner voice. It is so often the trivial, petty little things that ‘do us in’, that create the greatest obstacles to becoming our true selves, and Teresa knew this from personal experience.

Teresa wrote at the instigation of some of her spiritual directors and nuns, who wanted her to write down her wisdom on prayer. Her most famous writing is the *Interior Castle*, her last work, written

<sup>3</sup> *Way of Perfection*, Pr. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Interior Castle*, IV: 2, 2.

only a short while before her death. She wrote it very quickly, in the space of a few months, and those who saw her write it said that her face shone with great beauty as her pen flew across the page. It is regarded as a masterpiece and a classic text. It is this text to which I shall principally refer.

Richard Rohr (an American Franciscan writer) was quoted in the *Church Times* (25 January 2008) as saying, ‘Spirituality is when the inside of things is bigger than the outside. Really. That’s it.’ By the ‘inside of things’ he was referring to the inner life; by the ‘outside’ he meant the entrapments of life. Teresa of Avila would have agreed wholeheartedly with him—not that she would have used the term ‘spirituality’; she would have been familiar with the term ‘mystical theology’, for spirituality and theology were not separated, as now.

For Teresa, the whole of the spiritual life was seen in terms of prayer, and prayer for her was all about the inner life, turning inwards to discover wonders hitherto undreamt of. The ‘inside of things’ was for her a beautiful landscape; a garden with never-failing springs of water bubbling up; or a castle, a wondrous castle made out of diamonds and pure crystal. And this inner place of delights she would want us to know and to believe is just as real as—no, even more real than—our kitchen:

There is a secret place. A radiant sanctuary. As real as your own kitchen. More real than that. Constructed of the purest elements. Overflowing with ten thousand beautiful things.<sup>5</sup>

The trouble is, we often don’t realise this sanctuary is there, and if we do, we don’t realize how wonderful it is. And it is so easy to lose sight of this ‘inside of things’, and instead get ensnared by the entrapments of life. We often need to return to this inner life and the ‘inside of things’, to glimpse once more the beauty of this crystal castle, this diamond, and live again from this inner space—live a little more freely and fully from it. The question is: how? How to enter this inner-castle-reality? Shall we dare to dream dreams? Shall

5 Mirabai Starr’s ‘Introduction’ to the *Interior Castle*, Berkeley Publishing Group, USA, 2003.

we be bold enough? Shall we be humble enough? And shall we dare to play? From Starr again:

This magnificent refuge is inside you. Enter. Shatter the darkness that shrouds the doorway. Step around the poisonous vipers that slither at your feet, attempting to throw you off course. Be bold. Be humble. Put away the incense and forget the incantations they taught you. Ask no permission from the authorities. Slip away. Close your eyes and follow your breath to the still place that leads to the invisible path that leads you home. Listen. Softly, the One you love is calling. Listen.<sup>6</sup>

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I have called this article ‘Teresa of Avila and the Play of Prayer’, and play is not a term Teresa would have used in relation to prayer, so perhaps it is rather audacious of me to do so. But there is a connection. Teresa, very prayerful, was playful by nature. She encouraged dancing during recreation in her convents, and evidently at one point some nuns were trying to foster humility by refraining from saying anything clever or funny during recreation. She did not think much of these efforts, and wrote to the nuns, saying, ‘Daughters, we are stupid enough by nature; let us not try to be also stupid by grace!’

There is a known and accepted correlation between play and prayer. Play, with its apparent lack of direction, can be viewed as ‘wasting time’, and prayer has been likened to ‘wasting time’ with God. Herbert McCabe writes:

For a real absolute waste of time you have to go to prayer. ... It is an absolute waste of time, it is a sharing in the waste of time which is the interior life of the Godhead.<sup>7</sup>

It raises the question: do we waste time with God, or is prayer squeezed out by pressures and by the driven-ness of today’s society?

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Herbert McCabe OP, *God Still Matters*, Continuum Press, p.75.

Play, ‘wasting time’, is obviously associated with childhood and youth. One of the best definitions discovered comes from Erik Erikson, the social psychologist:

Of all the formulations of play, the briefest and best is to be found in Plato’s *Laws*. He sees the model of true playfulness in the need of all young creatures, animal and human, to leap. ... Thus, wherever playfulness prevails, there is always a surprising element, surpassing mere repetition or habituation, and at its best suggesting some virgin chance conquered, some divine leeway shared.<sup>8</sup>

Play therefore takes place within a framework, within given limits, but it also involves a letting go, an expansion into the unknown, a ‘leaping’, where exploration and creativity ‘happen’. True, there is risk, risk of falling into the stream one is trying to leap across! There is the risk of falling into chaos and failure, but if we dare to leap, as Erikson would suggest, surprising and divine potentialities are not far away. Play is one of those ‘time-wasting’ activities, where we are not sure of the outcome, or indeed if there will be any perceived outcome. But is ‘play’ all sweetness and light? There is a dark side too. The delight of playing ‘hide and seek’ can turn into the terror of not being found; the game ‘murder in the dark’ has terror in its very title.

What about God and play? Is there a theological dimension to playfulness: a ‘leaping’ in God’s very nature? Is there a ‘dark’ side to God’s playfulness? In the childhood game of hide and seek, the fun comes not only from hiding, but also from being found: the element of surprise is definitely an important part. ‘God is like someone hiding in a dark room who gives himself away by clearing his throat’, says Eckhart.<sup>9</sup> Truly, you are a God who hides himself,’ wrote Isaiah (45: 15), and perhaps God’s hiding ‘can become an act of playful teasing—a way of invitation to the place of surprised

<sup>8</sup> Erik Erikson, quoted in Gross, F. and Gross, T. *The Making of a Mystic, Seasons in the Life of St Teresa*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, Zondervan, USA, 2004, p. 116.

encounter'.<sup>10</sup> God is playful. This is not always cosy; play has an element of darkness, risk, surprise, and the 'darkness of God' can leave us truly in the dark. Within God is a rich tapestry of playfulness, mystery, darkness and light, inviting us to leap and share in the life of God.

Erikson has done some informative work concerning the play of girls and boys. During the late 1930s he conducted a study of pre-adolescent children at play, and found that when given a selection of toys to play with, girls tended to make scenes of enclosure, while boys tended to build towers.

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With this in mind, let us return to Teresa and prayer and to her *Interior Castle*, and look briefly at play in relation to her writing. I wonder whether the whole idea of this 'interior castle' emerges from the fact that she is playing as she sets out with pen and paper, with no idea of what she will build, what will emerge. She just starts and sees what happens. Here in this definitive work on prayer Teresa develops some beautiful images for the soul and for prayer, and through this imagery describes an interior journey to an interior place. But she did not know how to start; she did not have any clue. As she started, a divine creative leap happened:

Today while beseeching our Lord to speak for me because I wasn't able to think of anything to say nor did I know how to carry out this obedience, there came to my mind what I shall now speak about, that which will provide us with a basis to begin with. It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms. ...<sup>11</sup>

This castle has, as I said, many dwelling places: some up above, others down below, others to the sides; and in the centre and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Belden C. Lane: *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> *Interior Castle*, I: 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* I: 3.

This beauty, this interior enclosure, is within each and every one of us. This is the truth of who we are. She also describes sin as a covering over of the beauty.

In its centre Christ our Lord was shown to me. ... I was given understanding of what it is for a soul to be in mortal sin. [I think today we would say 'grave error'.] It amounts to clouding this mirror with mist and leaving it black; and thus this Lord cannot be revealed or seen even though He is always present giving us being.<sup>13</sup>

The beauty is lost, but is recovered by journeying within and exploring this castle space that she creates.

The soul is a crystal castle, and the journey we are to make is a journey to the centre where the king dwells, and the journey means passing through dwelling places or mansions. Teresa takes us from the outskirts to the seventh, the centre, where we are united to the Lord. She invites us to enter this magnificent castle of incomparable beauty—although of course it is already within us. And as we travel, we shall find ourselves delighted by the wonders of all we discover—but we shall also discover lizards and snakes and enter darkness and disorientating, harrowing times. This is the stuff of prayer, but surely also of the delight and terror of play.

Teresa is at play as she writes, playing with language, playing with images, creating new ideas. Playfulness is seen as she writes of poisonous snakes and vipers, mansions and castles. She writes of cocoons and butterflies, of springs and ever-flowing fountains of water. Her writing has something of the imagery of fairy stories, romantic princes and dragons. She knows what the Church would want her to say about prayer, but she tests the boundaries, leaps to create new worlds. Her thinking flows along free and unfettered lines, willing to explore and extend the language of prayer, especially when writing of the gift of mystical and contemplative prayer, where God takes over. She writes of silkworms feeding on mulberry trees, of the silkworm then spinning the silk to build the house wherein it will die, of butterflies and loathsome dung, of fire and water, of candles and wax. Teresa's writing is an act of play;

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, Ch. 40.

creative, risky, and also empowering, as she discovers her own voice and her own godly potential.

And with her bits of ‘lego’, with what she intuitively understands from God about prayer, she brings to birth the imagery of the castle, and is immediately creating enclosure. It is an enclosure which contains rather than excludes; contains incomparable beauty and the presence of God ever within us at the centre. One of the key features of this image is that a castle, by its very nature, is a space enclosed by firm boundaries; it has strong walls, thus providing a safe enclosure where the delight and unknowingness of play and prayer can occur. It is a very precious space and so it must be guarded and protected. The castle protects not only the God within but also the beauty of the soul, for the soul is precious in God’s sight, is jewel-like. We are to protect not only God, but also the delicate spiritual transformation processes that are occurring within. There is, therefore, the need for strong boundaries and containment. If we consider this in relation to play, then we know every game, every play, has its boundaries and its rules. The play of prayer requires, like play, its boundaries and determination.

It is fascinating to consider this correlation of the enclosure that Erikson noticed in girls’ play with Teresa’s concept of the soul in the *Interior Castle*. While a castle can be seen to be a masculine image of a fortified tower, Teresa constructs it from diamonds and crystal. She plays with masculine imagery and tunes it; it means that women as well as men can identify with the spatial image: the soul is both a fortress and an enclosure of great beauty. And in this beautiful place, Christ is at the centre, always giving us being. Teresa would have us be determined to enter the castle, and the way of entry is prayer. The door of prayer opens up into the mystery of God. It makes real the personal relationship with God present in the very depths of our interior castle. So, how to do it? How is our prayer to be a wasting time with God? What, for Teresa, is prayer? Is there play here?

As a nun, Teresa would have been steeped in liturgical prayer, and this, she would say, is a way to enter the castle. But it is not the only way. She would often use a book or a painting. Teresa actually offers us no systems—no meditation systems, no *lectio divina*, no

imaginative contemplation. In fact she admitted she could not do imaginative contemplation; it was not a form of prayer she used, or taught her nuns to use. She writes rather delightfully in her *Life*:

For the Lord did not give me a talent for intellectual meditation or for making use of the imagination. My imagination is so sluggish that however hard I tried to think of or picture Our Lord's human presence—and I tried very hard—I never succeeded.<sup>14</sup>

No, she says, let go of all that, and just turn your attention inwards. Her way of prayer is a model of simplicity: rein in your senses, let go of thoughts and feelings, let them pass by like ships on a river, get in touch with the Lord present and within and nurture that presence by simple reflections and affections. It is that simple:

I'm not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him. ... Well now, daughters, your Spouse never takes His eyes off you...Behold, He is not waiting for anything else, as He says to the bride, than that we look at Him. ... He so esteems our turning to look at Him that no diligence will be lacking on His part.<sup>15</sup>

The important thing in prayer is not to think much but to love much.<sup>16</sup>

This is the prayer of loving attention, of gaze and of allowing Christ's gaze to fall upon us. Teresa always urges gentleness on our part; there is to be no force used in quieting the mind, for indeed sometimes we can't and 'must just let the mill-clapper go clacking on'.<sup>17</sup> Through gazing, we find ourselves increasingly focussed on the One who is eternally within us and focussed on us. This is the prayer of enclosure; it is an interior prayer. The call to prayer that Teresa advocates is a call to waste time with God in the castle, and to surrender:

<sup>14</sup> *Life*: Ch. 4. 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Way of Perfection*, 26: 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Interior Castle*, IV: 1, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:1.

But one should leave the intellect go and surrender oneself into the arms of love ...<sup>18</sup>

This turning inwards into the arms of love is a great letting go, and it is risky. It is a risky thing to fall into the arms of the living God. And if God is a playful God, it presupposes that any letting go into God must involve a certain playfulness and a sharing of a 'divine leeway', a willingness to leap and not know where God will take us. Teresa's writings reveal that this was certainly her experience, particularly her experience of the journey to contemplative prayer and her ecstasies, levitations and visions.

Teresa always knew it was divine love calling her, as it calls us, but the results could be highly unpredictable. The story is recounted of how Teresa was one day taking her turn in the kitchen, when she was carried off into an ecstasy while still holding a frying pan in her hand. The nuns were alarmed—not at seeing her in ecstasy, for they had grown used to that, but because they feared she might spill the cooking oil, which was the last they had in the convent. This might make her seem super-spiritual rather than human, but there is also a very different story, of how her nuns found her one night in the pantry stuffing herself full of partridge. They were rather shocked. She looked at them and said, 'When I fast, I fast; when I eat partridge, I eat partridge!' She was very human, and clearly had a good appetite!

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Let us now look at the journey through the castle. Teresa would not want us to get preoccupied with our progress, for we roam around the mansions, and to be preoccupied with where we are would be taking ourselves far too seriously. We are just to keep focused on Christ, who has our good on his heart.

Outside the castle, all is dark and the land is crawling with snakes and other creatures, However, as the soul enters the castle, the atmosphere gradually changes and the darkness changes to light coming from a glow in the centre of the castle. It is a castle, yet Teresa plays with other images as well. They change: the dwelling

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, V: 3, 8.

places contain rooms but also gardens, fountains, labyrinths, mulberry trees, butterflies. The first three dwellings describe our own efforts of prayer—the active prayer, meditation, *lectio divina*, etc. But lizards have also entered, distracting and absorbing the soul with worldly honour, possessions, status, pride and our attachments. The lizards are those things that ‘do us in’, our inner demons, and Teresa encourages us to face these. Self-awareness is of paramount importance for her.

Terrible trials are suffered because we don’t understand ourselves, and that which isn’t bad at all, but good we think is a serious fault.<sup>19</sup>

She knows, too, how much we long for consolations in prayer, and she knows how easy it is to become distracted in prayer:

No sooner does our headache start than we stop [going to prayer]. We stay away one day because our head ached, another because it was just now aching, and three more so it won’t ache again.<sup>20</sup>

We may not all use the excuse of a headache, but we can all find more important things to do instead of praying!

By the third dwelling, people are living well-ordered Christian lives, and prayer is an integral part of that, yet, says Teresa, there is more. Let go of this stability, she says, move onwards, with the calling of the shepherd’s pipe drawing you. We are being called to enter true contemplative prayer. Although this is always a gift, she says we are to do what we can to prepare for it.

The fourth dwelling place is pivotal, and here prayer becomes more God’s activity and we become increasingly passive. We find that meditation, imaginative contemplation, gradually becomes harder, that we just cannot do it any more, that it does not work—but we know we have not abandoned God or prayer. Don’t worry, says Teresa; if this is happening, let God take over. For God is drawing the soul into an interior state of recollection. It is the beginning of contemplation.

<sup>19</sup> *Interior Castle*, IV: 1, 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Way of Perfection*, 1: 6.

Teresa distinguishes between these two ways of prayer by likening them to two troughs of water. One is filled through our efforts and through many channels and aqueducts. The other is filled from a spring and fills quickly easily by itself.

The water coming from the aqueducts is comparable, in my opinion, to the consolations I mentioned that are drawn from meditation. For we obtain them through thoughts, assisting ourselves and tiring the intellect. ...

With this other fount, the water comes from its own source which is God ... when He is pleased to grant some supernatural favour—He produces this delight with the greatest peace and quiet and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves. ... the delight fills everything; this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body. ... the whole exterior man enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness.<sup>21</sup>

We are passive, increasingly passive. The result is that the heart is expanded. There is an overflowing, an enlargement within. We are freer; there is a spaciousness growing, a release from narrowness and confinement to inclusion, freedom and embrace. This increases and deepens through the fifth and sixth mansions. The sixth mansion can be deeply unsettling. It is a Night of the Spirit, with external and internal trials. Courageous living is required and Teresa maintains that:

The best remedy is to engage in external works of charity and to hope in the mercy of God who never fails those who hope in Him.<sup>22</sup>

Pain and joy are experienced here equally. The sixth mansion contains delights and darkness as the certainties of God disappear. God is indeed at play in dark and mysterious ways.

In the seventh dwelling place, the union is completed. The union is as total as rain falling in a river.

The union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Interior Castle*, IV: 2, 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, VI: 1, 13.

The disturbances of the sixth dwelling disappear and there is a deep interior peace. Through surrender, the soul reaches its destination and finds its true resting place and true identity in union with Christ. We are taken to the wine cellar where love flows freely. The ego with its drives and compulsions has gone. Teresa writes:

There is a great detachment from everything and a desire to be always either alone or occupied in something that will benefit some soul. There are no interior trials or feelings of dryness, but the soul lives with a remembrance and tender love of our Lord.<sup>24</sup>

The Lord here still gives deep touches of his love, and reveals, in Teresa's words, 'the particular care God has in communicating with us and beseeching us to remain with him'.<sup>25</sup> Was it here, I wonder, that she wrote her famous bookmark prayer: 'Let nothing disturb thee, nothing affright thee. God alone sufficeth.'

Teresa calls us to let go, to leap, to play. The movement from vocal to contemplative prayer is playful: there is always a 'surprising element, surpassing mere repetition or habituation' in this prayer. There is a 'divine leeway shared', the element of the unknown, and risk. Our part is to let God come to us as God wills, and when God wills, and how God wills. We are to let go of images of God. Boundaries, together with measurable and quantifiable results, disappear. This letting go and being open to God's initiative is a place of deep vulnerability; it is risk-taking, and full of creative leaping! This can be unsettling, for it is a far cry from the predictability of vocal prayer. Contemplative prayer is always one of vulnerability and risk. Indeed the contemplative *life* is one of vulnerability and risk, in that actions, springing from union with God, will be risk-taking and have an element of surprise. In contemplative life and prayer, not only is the play of God being assented to, but we become partners participating in the playful creativity of God. It calls for courageous praying and courageous living.

This vulnerability, this contemplative prayer, is surely a yielding to the divine power that is always drawing us into the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* VII: 2, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* VII: 3, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* VII: 3, 9.

pattern of the Cross and Resurrection. As we are expanded into God, this is what will inevitably happen. This pattern is, of course, at the heart of the gospel paradox, that in losing our life we find it and in finding our life we lose it. The dance—and is not dance play?—of death is the dance of life. The Cross is transformative. Belden Lane in his book *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes* writes:

The fundamental rule of the divine game is this: ‘He who loses, wins’. The carefree playfulness and freedom of God are mysteries entered only on the far side of darkness and death.<sup>26</sup>

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And so we come to the outcome of play and prayer and prayer and play, and of the dying, and letting go into God. It is not just to give us raptures, or warm spiritual baths; the *Interior Castle* is not just a work about interiority. In fact, it is an attack on interiority for its own sake. No, the purpose of all of this, Teresa insists, is good works, always good works, but good works born from our true identity, our Godly potential, rather from the driven self. Resting in the infinity and eternity of God’s love leads to action within the world: ‘Let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so as to have the strength to serve.’<sup>27</sup>

Teresa takes the story of Mary and Martha entertaining Jesus in their home, to show how the contemplative and active are to be combined within us. She creatively merges Mary and Martha:

Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not to host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at His feet, provide Him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise Him always.<sup>28</sup>

For Teresa, contemplative prayer leading to union with God always leads to involvement with the world; it is never an escape.

<sup>26</sup> Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, p. 171 New York, Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> *Interior Castle*, VII: 4, 9 & 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* VII: 4, 12.

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And so to the present day, where contemplative prayer and the contemplative life are just as imperative in today's world and in today's Church as they were in Teresa's. The issues facing us are different from those facing her; there are five centuries separating us, with all that that implies. Sixteenth-century Spanish society was preoccupied with honour. I wonder what the badges of honour are in today's society. Is it to be busy? We face busyness all around us, and it almost seems to be something of which to be proud. Spain in Teresa's day faced religious and cultural changes; so do we, but different ones. Today we also face materialism, disorderedness, fragmentation and ecological crises. In a materialistic world we find our worth in achievements and things, rather than from the deep place within. Richard Rohr writes about the deep place within:

We don't go there to make ourselves holy; we wake our souls up.  
We're already united with God; the trouble is we don't believe it.  
... Contemplation means returning to this deep source.<sup>29</sup>

It is here that we live within the stillness of God, rather than within the chaos of the world. This is where we are to be, living within this truth, returning to its source again and again and again. From this place of stillness springs action; at this intersection Mary and Martha combine. Rowan Williams writes:

The nearer we are to God in stillness and emptiness, the nearer we are to the point of pure generative love from which the everlasting Word comes forth, and whose overflowing is the making of the world.<sup>30</sup>

The contemplative vocation is still important, for contemplation and the play of prayer lead to that still centre, lead to seeing things clearly for what they are, and it is this that can heal the disorderedness of sin. The ego with its drives becomes sidelined; it withers from neglect and is overshadowed. Our true self comes to life. This

<sup>29</sup> Richard Rohr, OFM, *Simplicity, The Art of Living*, p. 93, Crossroad Publishers, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila*, p. 161, Continuum, 2003.

is no individualism, though—that belongs to the false self—but we find our connectedness with all in God.

Teresa urges us to treasure our interior castle, guard it, and enter into it. She seeks the growth of the soul into its inherent beauty and spaciousness.

The things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious and large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine and the sun that shines in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practises prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner.<sup>31</sup>

Our human failings, psychological limitations, imperfections, will probably continue, but these only serve to deepen humility and we know that love’s transformative power is all. Teresa helps us to pray and live courageously and humbly and lovingly.

What I conclude with sisters is that we don’t build castles in the air. The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done.<sup>32</sup>

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Our challenge, therefore, is to live from the deep centre where we are truly human and where love flows freely. Turn within, says Teresa, to live without. ‘Waste time’ with God...

*This article is an edited form of a lecture given at Wells Cathedral during Lent, 2008.*

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

### **From Canterbury Press:**

*Word Made Flesh: Recovering a sense of the sacred through prayer*, John Main, 2009, £8.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-965-1.

*John Main: The Expanding Vision*, ed. by Laurence Freeman and Stephan Reynolds, 2009, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-943-9.

### **From New City Press:**

*Elizabeth of the Trinity: Always believe in Love*, edited by Marian T. Murphy OCD, 2009, £9.95. ISBN: 978-1-56548-313-2.

### **From Teresian Press:**

*Upon this Mountain: Prayer in the Carmelite Tradition*, Mary McCormack OCD, 2009, £4.00 approx. ISBN: 9780947916091.

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Although this book is not intended to serve as a manual for the pastoral care of the bereaved, it does offer some practical advice and support for those who find themselves called to 'be there' for someone who is experiencing bereavement, whether this forms part of a frequent ministry or happens from time to time.

JOHN PORTER is an Anglican priest who has retired to Northern France after nearly 45 years of active parochial ministry in England, mainly in the Diocese of Lichfield. He now gives occasional help to the Pas-de-Calais Anglican Chaplaincy and assists ecumenically in the local Roman Catholic parish. He is married with three sons, one of whom is an Anglican priest in the north of England.

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## BOOKS

*Creative Ideas for Pastoral Liturgy, Funeral, Thanksgiving and Memorial Services with CD-ROM*, Jan Brind and Tessa Wilkinson, Canterbury Press, 2008, £16.99. ISBN 978-1-85311-855-5.

This is a wide-ranging resource book for all whose task it is to preside at funerals, especially for those of us who do this frequently. Many ideas in this book are fresh and new. Engaging with these ideas will help to renew our pastoral approach to the taking of funerals and prevent a sense of staleness from creeping in.

The two authors and compilers provide model orders of services, both for funerals and for memorial and thanksgiving services, with substantial content such as Bible readings, prayers and non-biblical readings for services for people whose death occurred in different circumstances (young person, child, sudden accident, suicide, still-birth, death after dementia, etc.), as well as model orders that have dominant themes such as ‘journeying’, ‘despair and hope’, ‘valleys and mountains’, ‘chrysalis and butterfly’ and ‘water and spring’. There is a helpful emphasis on how to welcome children at funerals and how to make their contribution felt and heard—something that we as ministers of funeral liturgies should certainly encourage.

The book contains a CD-ROM that makes the use of these resources easy and encourages the cut-and-paste approach of much of recent *Common Worship* practice.

I was less convinced by the ‘how to make’ chapters of the book, which contained many creative ideas for making temporary (largely paper and cardboard) visual aids, such as paper frontals, service sheets, stoles, prayer stencils etc. In the not-so-skilled hands of the average parish priest these may have a potential to look tacky.

This is a book in the best tradition of creating and adapting liturgy for pastoral needs and circumstances. The use of these resources would need to be balanced against the need to retain all the orthodox Christian elements of a traditional funeral, which sometimes has a habit of being submerged in our pastoral concern for families at such sad and desperate times in their lives.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

*Hit the Ground Kneeling: Seeing leadership differently*, Stephen Cottrell, Church House Publishing, 2008, £7.99. ISBN 978-0-7151-4162-5.

As a Community, we have heard this book read in refectory at meal times and have frequently been riveted by it. This leads me to suggest that hearing the book read might be the best way to encounter it, making it a useful resource for meetings such as clergy gatherings, where there is the opportunity for input and shared reflection. The book is deceptively small—deceptive in that its size (81 pages of actual text) in no way reflects the depth of the content.

Stephen Cottrell is the Bishop of Reading in the Diocese of Oxford, and he first used some of the material at conferences and clergy chapters. He has a gift of stating the obvious in a way that sounds (and is) inspired, and indeed devotes a chapter to ‘stating the obvious’ as an attribute of good leadership.

I have found myself recognizing this advice with a wry smile:

When making decisions about change, it is ... important to find out who has the energy to implement something. ... There are plenty of proposals I agree with, but that does not necessarily mean I will have the energy or time to make them happen ... When someone says they agree to something it could mean, ‘Yes I agree, and I will give my life to making this happen.’ Alternatively, it could mean, ‘How much longer is this meeting going on? We’ve already discussed this for over an hour. ... let’s just make a decision. I agree.’ If too many people’s agreement is in the latter category, nothing much will ever happen (p. 57).

Helpful guidance for the new leader, who may well have to discover this from personal experience. Cottrell also asks, ‘What are you going to stop doing in order to implement this new suggestion?’ It is easy to launch into new plans, and a few years down the road to be overwhelmed by a sense of failure, because the plans are not carried through and the heap of things left undone grows and grows.

Cottrell urges us to stop, to pray, to listen, to enable others, to give space for things to happen around us. It is a message we need to hear, particularly because in leadership this is often so hard to do.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

*Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*,  
John R. Tyson, Edition Ruprecht, 2007, Euros 29.90.  
ISBN 978-3-7675-3052-2.

Preaching in Oconomowocin, Wisconsin, USA, I said that Charles Wesley had written 3000 hymns. 'He wrote 4000', a member of the congregation called out. We were both wrong. He wrote more than 9000. That anyone should do this is a marvel; that a man as busy and as constantly travelling as Charles Wesley should be little short of a miracle. John Tyson's biography links a tiny proportion of this vast number to events in Wesley's life. There are already numerous biographies of this great man, and if this one needs an excuse, it may be found in this correlation, which throws light on both life and writings.

Charles Wesley's name is associated, quite rightly, with Methodism. But it is important to make clear, as this book does, that in Wesley's time, Methodism was a *lay* movement *within* the Established Church—though both Charles, and his older brother John, were ordained Church of England clergy. As young men, the two were very close, but very different. John was the leader, the organizer, of quieter, more even temperament; Charles the more passionate, the quicker to speak his mind forcefully, something he often did, without fear or favour. Over the years, this led to a certain distance between the two brothers, though they never totally separated.

For instance, Charles believed emphatically that Methodist lay preachers should not usurp nor conflict with the ordained ministry of the Church of England. So when John ordained three men for ministry in North America, Charles was scandalised. (John pressed the pastoral argument in favour: the three were ordained to minister in North America where there was but one ordained Anglican priest to minister to the Methodists.) Charles in turn caused brother John pain by refusing to be buried in the crypt behind the New Chapel on City Road which John had prepared for the two of them. He is buried in his (Church of England) parish churchyard. Tyson sees this as his final insistence that the growing Methodist movement

must remain loyally within the Church of England, as Charles himself did.

Charles was a man of an intensity and immediacy in prayer. Tyson shows how particular occasions inspired him to turn his prayer into a poem. Many of these were prompted by a particular event or disagreement. Some he set some to music. These he might sing, line by line, to teach a congregation. Many were published. The result, as has often been appreciated, is accessible and popular spirituality and doctrine—most chiefly that salvation lay in God's gracious justification by faith, not works. This was Paul's gospel, and it was his (and brother John's). Perfection is not so much a *moral* concept as one of formation: the renewal within a person of the *imago Dei*. His hymns are profoundly biblical: a good exercise is to identify the multitude of scriptural references in them, line by line.

Tyson covers many pastoral and ecclesial issues which the brothers had to resolve, some of which still haunt the church. He describes the almost unbelievable energy of his subject: how Charles would sometimes preach three or even four times a day, travelling on horseback to as many different places (and these sermons were not seven minutes long!); how he would provoke tears of repentance (and sometimes stones of fury); how, when churches were barred to him, he would preach in churchyards, to congregations numbering hundreds, thousands and even tens of thousands.

Clearly, Charles' energy was immense. Constantly travelling, he composed his hymns on horseback, and on one occasion (Tyson reports) drove his horse through his host's garden, to his front door where, as the door was opened, he demanded pen and paper quickly to write down what was in his head. Then he greeted his host!

Sadly, in a book with this title, Tyson does not cover Charles' eucharistic hymns. This may be due to the way in which he has linked his selection to events on Charles' journeys. Or it may reflect the churchmanship of the author. (They are covered in *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, J. E. Rattenbury.)

Tyson writes of Charles' friendships, and of his marriage and children. It is a salutary reminder of conditions in the eighteenth

century that, of their eight children, only three survived infancy. (Charles himself was number eighteen out of nineteen, but only ten survived.)

Tyson has painted a readable and lively portrait of Charles. There are, however, occasional misprints and typographical infelicities here and there, which a good sub-editor ought to have sorted out. And the index doesn't always work.

JOHN ARMSON

*Before the King's Majesty: Lancelot Andrewes and His Writings*, edited by Raymond Chapman, Canterbury Press, 2008, £16.99. ISBN 978-85311-889-0.

We think of Shakespeare as an Elizabethan, even though some of his finest work was written and staged during the reign of James I. By contrast, we tend to think of Lancelot Andrewes as primarily Jacobean, even though he was ten years older than Shakespeare. It is true that he only became a bishop two years after the death of Elizabeth I, and James I, throughout his reign, commanded him to preach at court at all the great festivals (which must mean, incidentally, that he never preached in his cathedral on the very occasions when one would most expect a bishop to do so—yet he was considered an exemplary bishop). However, his theology and his devotional practice were already formed before James succeeded Elizabeth; he was one of those for whom the Elizabethan Settlement was no uneasy compromise, but was a genuine *via media* to which he gave whole-hearted allegiance. As such, he surely has much to say to contemporary Anglicans in danger of losing their way and forgetting what they stand for and what riches they inherit. With this in mind, Professor Chapman has made a selection, mainly from Andrewes' sermons, arranged by subject, with a brief introduction and a glossary of unfamiliar words. Latin quotations have been translated or omitted and spelling has been modernised, to make for easier reading. Read straight through from cover to cover, the result is slightly indigestible; this is really a book for dipping into, perhaps as part of one's preparation for communion, since Andrewes consistently saw preaching, not as an end in itself, but as directing

the hearers towards an encounter with the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

Greatly esteemed in his lifetime as a preacher, as often happens, he fell out of fashion after his death. John Aubrey, in his *Brief Lives*, says of him:

He had not that smooth way of oratory as now. It was a shrewd and severe animadversion of a Scottish lord who ... said that he was learned, but he did play with his text, as a jackanapes does, who takes up a thing and tosses and plays with it, and then he takes up another, and plays a little with it—'here's a pretty thing, and there's a pretty thing'.

It is not, in fact, a just criticism. Andrewes takes his text word by word and squeezes every drop of meaning out of it. It could be said of him, as was said of a later Anglican theologian, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns (1884-1937), that he would plunge into the Greek lexicon and come up with the Kingdom of Heaven. He does not display erudition for its own sake, but to illuminate the text, set it in context, and apply it to the conscience and the needs of his hearers. One can only marvel at the attention-span of a Jacobean congregation. Here we have only relatively brief extracts from sermons far longer than one would normally dare to preach nowadays; but they call for close, concentrated attention as step by step they build up a sustained argument, appealing as much to the mind as to the heart. There are few purple passages. The style is more colloquial than elevated: it is plain, workmanlike prose, only difficult because we are unfamiliar with seventeenth-century idiom.

Appended to the sermon extracts are a few passages from the *Preces Privatae* in the Brightman translation. In these we come closest, perhaps, to the heart of one of the most saintly of English bishops. If this small selection leads any reader to seek out the full text of the prayers, not only will that person understand better what made Andrewes such a compelling preacher, but it will undoubtedly deepen his or her own spiritual life.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

*The Oblate Life: A Handbook for Spiritual Formation*, The English Benedictine Congregation, ed. Gervase Holdaway OSB, 2008, £17.99. ISBN 978-1-85311-883-8

As one who has comparatively recently made a life commitment to the oblate life, I fell on this book as a manual that would open up the breadth of the promise and the depth of the commitment that I have made. I have not been disappointed. More than that—there is plenty here that is applicable to anyone who has a serious intention to follow a life of prayer.

It is a collection of themed essays from some thirty-five contributors, all of whom either live by *The Rule of St Benedict* or are steeped in the tradition, some as professed religious, many as oblates. (A book such as this would be incomplete without contributions from Archbishop Rowan and Esther de Waal.)

There are contributions from both sides of the Atlantic, and this handbook has been produced as a fruit of the first Oblates' World Congress in 2005, and in preparation for the second Congress this year.

*The Rule of St Benedict* forms a basis for many monastic communities and is tried and tested as a framework for the formation of a balanced and moderate Christian life. Its guidelines are clear and very comprehensive, though they probably take a lifetime to be fully absorbed and integrated.

In the Introduction, Dom Gervase Holdaway of Douai Abbey observes that this sharp rise in numbers is increasing in adverse proportion to the decline in numbers of professed religious, with the major part of the expansion having taken place since 1980—a spin-off, perhaps, of Vatican II and, more recently, TV programmes like 'The Monastery'. The number of Benedictine oblates worldwide is reckoned to be in excess of 25,000. Within SLG the number of nuns and oblates is almost equal.

Oblates, as the external face of a community, have a very valuable contribution to make in the Church and society. The publication of this book offers something of their own to those who are living as oblates and growing in their distinctive vocation and deepening their understanding and commitment.

More than half the book, Part One, attends to ‘The Benedictine World’, and considers this under four sub-headings: ‘The Benedictine Family’, ‘Discerning Your Call’, ‘The Foundations of an Oblate’s Life’ and ‘The Essentials of Benedictine Spirituality’. The value of the partnership with the community to which the oblate is attached, and to which they have been drawn at the outset, is recognized:

This handbook endeavours to help oblates live by the Rule of St Benedict, discover how that rule can help them to live fully the life to which Christ calls them, and how there can be mutual blessings for the vowed monastics living by the same rule within monastery walls.

Just as the vowed monastics know the benefit of their oblates’ companionship, so the oblates appreciate that of their, as it were, parent body.

‘Living the Oblate Life’ forms the second part of the book and considers ‘The Oblate in the World, the Church and the Home’, subdividing these to look at details. Two that particularly caught my attention were ‘Cyberspace, Community and the Oblate’ and the witness of the oblate in both the ‘Ecumenical and Inter Religious Dialogues’.

I had some difficulty in getting my mind round the idea of cyberspace as a desert. To me it seems a bewildering terrain full of time-wasting distractions. Perhaps that is a desert, though not the one I think the author had in mind! It is certainly a place to resort to discerningly and a place for exercising discipline. The author also sees it as a place where a new aspect of community can develop, providing new ways to make relationships with many who are outside one’s usual sphere.

I remember some years ago being quite shocked to hear that spiritual direction was offered by e-mail. It is good to see it as a much-valued resource (in some circumstances) for those who cannot meet face to face.

In the United States oblature is open to any Christian (and some Episcopalians are oblates of Roman Catholic monasteries). Interestingly, the contributors from there see it as an opportunity both for building Christian unity and for interfaith involvement. They find, perhaps, the most obvious connection with the Buddhist,

Hindu and Jain traditions which enjoy a monastic discipline of contemplative meditation.

‘The Oblate in the Home’ considers relationships: marriage and the single state, possessions, leisure, and the journey through illness, retirement, old age and death.

The final section is on ‘Resources for Oblates’ and offers practical information about (Benedictine) monasteries with oblate programmes, a comprehensive bibliography and list of websites, as well as a glossary of Benedictine terms.

Oblates have the opportunity, and the obligation, to communicate with a society hungry to know more about the treasures that are largely hidden behind monastery walls. This book will help them to fuller understanding of the tradition they represent and encourage them to be faithful to the promises they make and equip them for their Christian witness. And will encourage and equip them in faithful witness in accordance with the promises they make.

The volume looks like a companion to an Office Book, and the quality of the binding suggests that it is a handbook intended for regular reference and pondering and that it is made, like *The Rule of St Benedict*, for enduring use.

OBLATE SISTER GILL SLG

*Tantalus and the Pelican: Exploring Monastic Spirituality Today*, Nicholas Buxton, Continuum, 2009, £12.99.  
ISBN 978-1-84706-111-9.

In reading this book, I recognized two elements which may also be encountered in a short time of retreat experienced as having ‘gone well’: a given framework (the timetable and way of life of the retreat place, and, here, the structured reflective tone of the book); and real freedom to make one’s own connections and go off on one’s own train of thought and reflection. I can warmly commend the book as ‘spiritual reading’ in itself, as it is thoughtful, interesting, researched, well-written, original and accessible.

For me the immediate consequence was reflection on the topic of what is provided as reading material for guests in retreat houses

and convent and monastic guest houses. (I should say that the author, who has had much experience of staying at monasteries of different faiths in different continents, does not raise this question himself.) Unless there is access to the wider library of the house, what is made available in the guest accommodation can be something of an assemblage of what a community happens to have in the way of books; often useful duplicates, and—apart from the Bible and a book or two about a saint related to the Order in the guest's own room—there tends to be little proactive planning or, for obvious reasons, extra expenditure. I had a sudden desire to place a welcoming copy of this particular book in each unit of guest accommodation here at Fairacres!

What led to this train of thought? Nicholas Buxton, a minor canon of Ripon Cathedral, remains in monastic terms a 'layman', despite much experience of monasticism, despite wide reading in the monastic tradition, despite having toyed with the idea of a monastic vocation. It is helpful to have his reflections from this perspective, and much of what he says will resonate with those who come to stay as guests, whether on retreat or enquiring about the religious life. He attempts some re-interpretation of the monastic tradition for the twenty-first century, and this is welcome and necessary. We need fresh insights. He tries to show monasticism as a deeper engagement with the reality of being human, rather than escape from the world and from 'real life'.

Although the book does not attempt to be a work of scholarship, large portions of it are devoted to the early monastic tradition and Buxton's reflections on that tradition: the worlds of the Desert Fathers, St Antony, St Pachomius, Evagrius of Pontus, St John Cassian and St Benedict. For many, this will make more accessible reading than original texts such as the *Praktikos* or the *Eight Thoughts* of Evagrius. It is not lightweight, and provides an introduction to further possibilities of reading. As an introduction to monastic history, it is also a good book for a novitiate library.

After his many experiences, Buxton is realistic that monks and nuns are not perfect, or even particularly 'special'. He tells memorably of a stay with Buddhist monks who, to compensate for homesickness, took a feral goat from his mother and made him into

a pet, yet when he grew up and behaved as goats do, the monks tired of him and took him on a couple of long journeys to try to lose him. Like a tame dog, the goat came home again, once after three days, rather bedraggled and wagging his tail. Buxton was asked to be the driver on a lengthy car expedition to dispense with the goat, at which point he told the leader just what he thought of the monks!

The author does not divulge immediately his reason for selecting two mythological figures for the title of his book, *Tantalus and the Pelican*, yet it becomes clear in reading the book that for him they represent two fundamental spiritual realities. As Tantalus was confined to a pool, the waters of which he could not drink, overhung by grapes which he could not reach, so we experience the frustrations of not getting what we want in life and the disappointments of never being satisfied—the existential problem of being human, and the fundamental motivation for spiritual practice. Giving up everything to which we are attached is the necessary precondition for our freedom, as Jesus has revealed to us. The sacrifice of Jesus has often been symbolized by the image of the pelican, which was believed to revive its chicks with its own blood. Furthermore, and less well-known, the pelican has also symbolized the hermit monk, who renounces the world in order to live alone in the desert and seek God. Nicholas Buxton illustrates the pull between these two realities throughout the book, both in his own life and in the monastic way. By the end of the book (a ‘Postscript’ written on 10 February 2006), he has at last discovered his own vocation, to be a priest in the Church of England, and he gives some reflections on his sense of call.

I should mention that Buxton was one of the five men who lived alongside the Benedictine monks of Worth Abbey for some weeks for a television series broadcast in 2005, ‘The Monastery’. He does reflect upon this; his insights, not only with regard to the experience, but also about the modern phenomenon of ‘reality television’, are fascinating. He does not use the television series to help to sell the book, and does not make more of it than of other episodes in his life.

I hope some readers will feel moved to obtain the book and that they will then find it helpful, as I have done. It would be a good book to take away for retreat reading!

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

*Prayer: the Heart of the Gospels*, James McCaffrey OCD, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2008. ISBN 978-1-85607-612-8.

Simply put, this is an excellent book. Don't hesitate to read it.

In the Preface we are told that *Prayer: the Heart of the Gospels* is an exploration of the biblical foundations of the mystery of Christian prayer. In doing so, the riches of the gospels are discovered or rediscovered, and this is certainly true as one reads through the subsequent chapters. Prayer is approached and taught after the example of Jesus.

The book is set up simply, with a chapter for each gospel, an extra chapter on the Holy Spirit and an epilogue on Mary. Each chapter explores the evangelist's unique approach to prayer in reference to the central insight of the gospel; for example, in Mark, Jesus as the Suffering Messiah and what that teaches us about prayer in word and action. Each chapter also compares and contrasts the evangelist's approach with the other gospels. The chapter on the Holy Spirit focuses on John's insight into the role of the Holy Spirit and on the Paraclete passages.

The book addresses what the gospels teach us about prayer and what this prayer teaches us about Christian living. In this way the book shows us, through scripture, how each evangelist reveals his teaching on prayer and takes us well-prepared to the mystery of prayer, but leaves us to enter and explore the mystery on our own, as it should be.

The challenge of prayer is to turn from darkness to the Light, and we meet that Light revealed in Jesus in the gospels. The gospels teach not only about prayer and how to pray, but also to whom and why we pray. This book is a good grounding in that endeavour.

Fr McCaffrey writes, 'the whole purpose of what I have written is to help others—and myself—actually to pray'. He enables and encourages us to do this in the text. There is a Prologue with a short

introduction about *lectio divina*, a centuries-old monastic way of praying the scriptures. Fr McCaffrey makes this form of prayer, though monastic, accessible to all who want to read the scriptures prayerfully. He encourages us to do so by giving an example at the end of the chapters on each individual gospel which walks us through the process.

Preceding this guided *lectio divina* are several questions for reflection on the content of the chapter. It is worthwhile to pause and work, if only a little, with the questions posed at the end of the chapters. Engaging with both the questions and the *lectio divina* will further immerse you in the purpose of the book, making it more than an intellectual read. These questions and *lectio divina* exercises would be excellent for groups who might work through the book during Lent or Advent—or any time.

This book made me want to read the gospels and renew my prayer. What higher accolade can I offer?

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

*Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's Creation*, Sam Hamilton-Poore, Upper Room Books, Nashville, 2008, \$18.00. ISBN: 978-0-8358-9943-7.

The purpose of *Earth Gospel* is to provide a prayer-resource for Christians—Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox—who seek to connect or reconnect their love for God with a love for God's creation. It is a four-week cycle of morning, midday, and evening prayer—weaving together biblical themes, prayers, liturgy, hymn lyrics, poetry, and theological insights from across the globe and across the generations.

The book is beautifully illustrated with line-drawings from nature. Because of the number and variety of sources quoted, it is unlikely to make a profit financially, but the compiler and publisher are seeking to place into as many 'praying hands' as possible these materials which relate to the creation which God loves and which is so endangered.

## RETREATS 2009

There will be two retreats for Associates and other friends of the Community in 2009, one of five days and the other over a weekend.

### ***The Gospel of the Psalter***

Canon John Armson

22-26 July 2009

Llangasty Retreat House near Abergavenny, Gwent

John Armson, a Priest Associate of the Community, was a Canon of Rochester Cathedral and a member of Hengrave Ecumenical Community, and now lives by himself in a remote valley in Herefordshire. He is an experienced retreat leader.

Llangasty is the Diocesan Retreat House of the Swansea and Brecon Diocese, and is midway between Brecon and Abergavenny. This will be the third retreat held at Llangasty, and there are still a few places left.

### ***The Spirit of Love***

Sister Christine SLG

*with an introduction by*

Sister Margaret Theresa SLG

9-11 October 2009

Begbroke Priory, Oxfordshire

Sister Christine will explore contemplative prayer and its expression in the life of all associated with the Sisters of the Love of God.

*(This replaces the weekend retreat expected to take place at Edward King House, Lincoln, which is unfortunately still unavailable.)*

Begbroke Priory is approximately five miles north of Oxford and is the home of the Sisters of the Anglican Communities of St John the Baptist and of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Those wishing to join either of these retreats should write to:

Judith Lloyd Thomas, 32 Holcombe Drive,

Llandrindod Wells, LD1 6DN

Tel: 01597 823 020

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**Gifts of land, buildings shares and securities:** If you give us land, buildings, shares or securities, you can claim tax relief: the amount of relief you can claim is the value of the net benefit to the charity at the time you give or sell the assets to the charity, plus any incidental costs, less any disposal proceeds or other money you or a person connected with you receive in consequence of you giving or selling the qualifying investment to charity.

**Payroll Giving:** If your employer runs a payroll giving scheme, you can nominate SLG. A small fee is deducted from the gift for the service by the administering agency. It is easy and quick to administer for you and helps us by providing regular income.

**Legacies:** If you wish to remember SLG in your will, please make the bequest in favour of SLG Charitable Trust Limited. Bequests to charities are entirely free of inheritance and capital gains tax. There are two main ways. A **residuary legacy** gives SLG a proportion of your residual estate after debts and specific bequests and usually maintains its real value over time. A **pecuniary legacy** gives SLG a specific sum of money, but does not change with time or take into account the effects of inflation.

For further information or assistance, including suggested wording of legacies, contact the Charity Office at:

Convent of the Incarnation Fairacres  
Parker Street Oxford OX4 1TB  
email: [charityoffice@slg.org.uk](mailto:charityoffice@slg.org.uk)