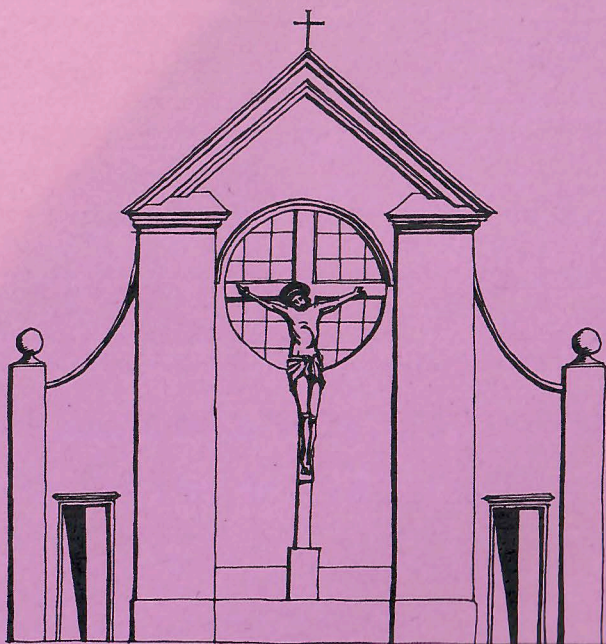


F A I R A C R E S
C H R O N I C L E



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CONTENTS

Community Notes	3
A Letter from the Warden of the Community	
Andrew Teal	7
Advent Waiting	
Sarah Coakley	9
The Paradox of Advent	
David Barton	10
Mary, Image of the Church	
Geoffrey Rowell	13
Associates	14
Ministry in Northern Ireland during ‘the Troubles’	
Niall Bayly	15
The House of God, the Gate of Heaven: A Reflection on Carmel	
Sister Stephanie-Thérèse SLG	22
‘Illustrious Alban, Fruitful Britain’s Child’	
Douglas Dales	25
The Door of Ministry	
Sister Raphael SLG	28
Religious in the Years after the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc	
Janice Broun	32
Overture to Knowing Catherine of Siena	
Sister Catherine CSC	34
In Memoriam	
Father Gregory CSWG	
Sister Clare-Louise SLG	41
Father Paul at Bede House	
Sister Isabel SLG	42
About Our Contributors	46
Ben de la Mare	48
Books	49
Douglas Dales John Scott John Armson	
Sister Clare-Louise SLG Bernhard Schünemann	
Fr Thomas Seville CR Sister Stephanie-Thérèse SLG	
Books Received	67

COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

At the beginning of the last Community Notes, I mentioned that this edition would include something about the visit which Sister Catherine and I made to our Brothers of the Society of St John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was a first visit to the United States for both of us and the first time that I had experienced a long-haul flight. Despite my forebodings about flying, the journeys were good and the schedule which the Brothers had arranged for us made it a very fruitful and worthwhile trip.

Both Cambridge and Boston have many historic and beautiful places. We visited the Old North Church in Boston and saw the tower from which either one or two lanterns were hung to indicate whether the British were approaching from land or sea, and the statue of Paul Revere on his famous ride. These memorials of eighteenth-century struggles highlighted for me the bravery of some who struggle in the twenty-first century: Christians in Iraq, Albania or China, the people of Tibet, and individuals such as Aung San Suu Kyi. I sensed the spirit of determination and the quest for justice which inspired the American Revolution, and these visits were a prompt to pray for those who feel oppressed in our own day.

We walked among the beautiful buildings of Harvard and along the Charles River. The door of the Monastery Church opens on to Memorial Drive, a busy dual carriageway which runs along the bank of the river. As in Oxford, there are joggers on the riverbank, rowers on the water, and cars not far away. We noticed the greater width of the roads in the U.S., even in the cities, as well as the courtesy of the drivers when we (usually me) forgot that traffic drives on the other side of the road. There was generally a sense of more geographical space, and the lack of it in these islands is something which surely contributes to some of the tensions in which we live in many parts of the U.K.

Harvard University is within walking distance of the monastery and many people live nearby. Some neighbours, as well as students

and staff from Harvard and other educational institutions, join the Brothers for worship. At the Sunday morning and Tuesday evening Eucharists, there were few empty seats in their sizeable Church.

While we very much enjoyed the beauty, culture and history of this part of Massachusetts, the main reason for our visit was to share in the life of the Brothers, through participating in worship and through conversations. We were grateful for our many conversations with the Brothers, particularly on the subjects of Sabbath-keeping, formation within and beyond the Novitiate, and decision-making. When we visited the Sisters of St Margaret in Boston, we again had valuable conversations around these areas. It was a particular joy to join the Sisters for worship in their relatively new Chapel, which is on the first floor and gives lovely views into nearby trees. Three of our Sisters began their Religious Life as members of the Society of St Margaret in Boston and it was very good to meet Sisters whose names we had heard and to visit the Convent there.

While in Cambridge we were especially glad to visit Br Paul Wessinger in hospital, just a few days before he died. Br Paul had been a close friend of SLG for many years, as had Fr Gregory CSWG, who died in August. Appreciations of then both appear in this *Chronicle*. This edition also includes a tribute to Fr Ben de la Mare, a friend of both SLG Press and the Community.

On 1 November we celebrated the Feast of All Saints, and during that month we have kept the feast days of some individual saints. In the early Church, as the opening verses of many of the New Testament Epistles illustrate, Christians referred to each other as ‘saints’. But this custom changed, and the term was reserved for those who were ‘officially’ recognized as having suffered martyrdom or lived particularly virtuous lives. For many Christians, the saints are close friends. This seems to have been Charles Wesley’s position, for one of his hymns, written in 1759, begins:

Let saints on earth in concert sing
With those whose work is done;
For all the servants of our King
In earth and heaven are one.

St Andrew is celebrated at the end of November, and his feast day was a particularly joyous day here, as we joined Sister Mary Margaret and Sister Benedicta in giving thanks for their fifty years

in Profession, and Sister Barbara June celebrated her fortieth Anniversary of Profession. This edition includes a sermon given on the feast day of St Alban, and an article introducing the works of St Catherine of Siena. Since its founding, our Community has valued the saints of the Carmelite Order, and a few of us were very privileged to be in the presence of and to venerate the relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux when they visited Oxford in October. We planned our visits individually, and later discovered that there was an SLG Sister with the relics for most of their time in Oxford. The writings, prayer and way of life of Carmel continue to be a source of inspiration for us; Sister Stephanie-Thérèse's reflection on Carmelite spirituality expresses some of our indebtedness to this tradition. Our Oblate Sisters, who also draw deeply on the Carmelite tradition, have been looking at the subject of ministry this year and Sister Raphael's talk on this subject is included in this edition.

On the Feast of St Matthew our Visitor, Bishop Michael Lewis, came for the Blessing of our new Warden, Fr Andrew Teal, and Fr Andrew introduces himself to Readers in the letter which follows these Notes.

Christians under persecution have been mentioned above; Janice Broun has contributed two articles in previous editions of the *Fairacres Chronicle* about Religious in the Soviet Bloc, and a further short contribution appears in the following pages, describing the situation after its collapse—another example of how people have faithfully continued to follow Christ in very difficult circumstances. The Christians of Northern Ireland have witnessed bravely to their faith throughout many years and perplexing situations, and Niall Bayly writes about some of his experiences of ministering in those circumstances.

As some of you are aware, we have been discussing the design of, and experimenting with, possible new Community crosses. During our recent retreat week, we laid aside the bronze crosses which Sisters in Life Profession have worn since 1939, and received new wooden ones. Both ceremonies were moving, perhaps even poignant and mysterious. Our Warden, Fr Andrew Teal, blessed the crosses and gave each Sister her new cross with the words, 'Receive the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the token of your lifelong stability.' These words echoed those spoken by the Bishop when we

received the bronze crosses at Life Profession. The timing of this change has coincided with our exploration of the Community's history, decade by decade.

There are a few more changes to mention. Sister Cynthia moved into residential care, about two miles from Fairacres, a few weeks after her 90th birthday. And Sister Esther Mary celebrated her 90th birthday in July. Two Oblate Sisters have made Life Promises in recent months, Louise of the Transfiguration on 31 August and Susan Mary of the Peace of God on Advent Sunday. Many of our guests were acquainted with our British Blue cat Bella; she frequently walked into Chapel, through the Sanctuary and into the Visitors' Chapel, where she would ask for the door to be opened. She died in early August, having had the distinction of residing at three SLG Houses, Bede House, Boxmoor, and finally Fairacres. Since then, the steps outside the Visitors' Chapel have been improved and a ramp added.

For many years Sister Edmée has been studying the Song of Songs, and after much hard work a book, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, has come to fruition and was published on 26 November (p. 67). Oblate Sister Georgina has also written a book, *Following the Silence*, and a review is included in this edition (p. 54).

Included near the beginning are three articles for Advent, written by Sarah Coakley, David Barton and Bishop Geoffrey Rowell. I will close with the opening of another Charles Wesley hymn:

Lo! he comes with clouds descending.

May the peace of the Incarnation descend upon us all.

The Sisters join me in wishing you all a very happy and blessed Christmas.

With best wishes,

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

A LETTER FROM THE WARDEN OF THE COMMUNITY
ANDREW TEAL

We asked the new Warden of the Community to write about himself for our readers, which he did in the Summer.

DEAR READERS OF THE FAIRACRES CHRONICLE,

I was ordained twenty-one years ago to a curacy in Wednesbury in the Black Country, not far from Birmingham, and then became Team Vicar on the Manor Estate in Sheffield (where I was also in charge of ordinands from Cuddesdon on three or six month placements). It was here that Rachel and I were married in 1993, and the place where our daughter, Chiara, was born in 1995.

We moved to a market town and village in the Sheffield Diocese, Tickhill with Stainton, where I was also Warden of Readers for the Diocese of Sheffield, and where our son, Luke, was born in 1999. Whilst there, Bishop Jack Nicholls sent me to Lourdes with the Catholic Diocese of Hallam in 2002, which was an extraordinary experience, and which led to my ‘swimming the Tiber’ and travelling for a while in full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church, whilst I was Head of Theology and Pastoral Studies at Plater College in Oxford. However, it became clear to me pretty soon that, whilst the divisions of the Church were painful, not exercising priesthood was not right either, and that the Roman obedience, whilst beautiful in so many ways, was neither more valid, nor more wounded, than the Anglican communion. Bishop Jack arranged for me to be relicensed (over a meal in ‘The Quad’ on Oxford High Street!)

But, despite the odd journey, I seem to have ended up where I belong, doing what I’m meant to be doing, and have never been happier. I became Chaplain of Pembroke College, Oxford, and lecturer and tutor at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, a theological college near Oxford. Responsibilities at Pembroke have expanded: I became Stipendiary Lecturer in 2006 and then a Fellow a year later. I will keep these responsibilities, but have laid aside most of my duties at Cuddesdon (except a little lecturing in Patristics).

So, the journey moves on (for the Community at Fairacres and for me), and, for as long as God wills, we will journey together further into Christ's mercy. We depend upon his tenderness, his honing and renewing: he has a purpose in this new stage of the journey; the challenge is not to lose sight of that, when things seem unclear or problematic, or when direction or personalities do not naturally connect. I trust that our destiny is only arrived at, in God's good time, by pushing out boldly in our adventure into the Mystery of Christ and to discover him in one another from day to day.

As I was pondering all that may lie ahead, and how to be open to all that that might mean, the Feast of St Peter and St Paul sprang to mind. Here two images—keys and sword—are two apparently contradictory signs, representing the two very different apostles, Peter and Paul. The sword strikes out, cuts through restrictions, sets free radically; the keys conserve, protect and preserve the deposit. Both, in different ways, can protect the vulnerable, and both, if used unwisely, can cause damage and hurt. So the Church has to weigh up whether it is wisest, at any particular moment, to strike out and burst forth, or to conserve what is given and be cautious lest everything be lost in assenting to the fashions of the moment. The early Church needed *both* Peter *and* Paul; we need constantly to reassess the wisdom of what we are to do in any situation—and no 'off the peg' prescription will necessarily be of help; we can't inoculate ourselves to render discernment unnecessary.

I commit myself to travelling together, and being a part of the process of attending closely to God, to this Community, to the needs of the Church and the pains of creation, in discerning together how we may remain close to Christ, and close to the wounds and sins of the world. So please pray for me and for the Community, especially over the next few months, and be assured of my daily prayers. I very much look forward to meeting people and getting to know all those to whom the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God is important.

With my love and prayers,

ANDREW TEAL

ADVENT WAITING

SARAH COAKLEY

ADVENT IS a time of waiting, but waiting for what? Sometimes one feels that one's whole life is spent waiting in one way or another: waiting to grow up, waiting to leave home, waiting to find a job, waiting to fall in love, waiting to have children, waiting to have enough money to go on a decent holiday, waiting to get over a long illness or a bereavement, waiting just to feel a bit better, and finally waiting to die. Is waiting for Christ's 'appearance' in Advent like that?

Yes and no. Yes, because somewhere deep in us is a wellspring of desire that seems to motivate all the other nagging wants we have and that only Christ can fill; so that all the restlessness we feel in the other longings is underneath a terrible yearning for the One 'in whom all our desires are satisfied': the human face of God. But no, too, because this waiting isn't like the endlessly disappointed gratification of the other longings: he is always on offer, always pressing on us from unexpected quarters, but—as Jesus puts it intriguingly—always too 'coming at an unexpected hour'.

Advent, then, isn't just waiting (in the ordinary sense) for Christmas. It's a preparation of a different order: an invitation to look at all our 'waitings' and wonder at what desire finally propels them all.

If it is truly Christ that we long for, then he is already standing at the door. Our task, and prayer, is to welcome him, to invite him in.

This short article first appeared in the weekly newsletter of Littlemore Church, Oxford. Reproduced with permission.

THE PARADOX OF ADVENT

DAVID BARTON

ADVENT PRESENTS US with a paradox. It is about the immanent judgement of God, the God before whom no-one can stand; and yet, it would seem that if we do dare somehow to stand, we are overwhelmed by a miracle we never expected.

The presiding figure of Advent is John the Baptist, whose preaching is an echo of the great eighth-century prophets. ‘You brood of vipers’, he proclaims to his hearers, ‘who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ... Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees.’¹ That was the God John saw and felt, and whom he wanted his hearers to see and feel and be troubled by. It sufficiently troubled someone who comes to see me that the other day she asked, hopefully, if Christianity had not supplanted such a view, because of Jesus putting in front of us, not a God of wrath, but a God of love.

Think, however, about love. Can any fallen human being really face the prospect of standing in front of the holiness of God? If we have any perception of the love of God, however small, we can also begin to grasp that each of us is held within the purposes of God. How many of us can truly say that we have walked the path God puts before us and never strayed? The truth hurts. And perhaps there are times when it needs to hurt, for our own good. Just occasionally we find ourselves in the presence of someone really holy, and for a brief moment get a glimpse of the truth, about ourselves and about humanity. In such a moment we are judged, and humbled, and perhaps even begin to understand the possibilities of forgiveness.

See John the Baptist in that context, and you begin to grasp the paradox. His language was the language of apocalypse, and yet the one to whom he pointed did not come on clouds of thunder, but stood on the bank of the River Jordan, indistinguishable among the

¹ Matt. 3: 7-10.

crowds. John had the eye to see it, and he shrank in unworthiness. It reminds us of the Book of Revelation where, after all the fire and thunder, the throne is revealed and we expect, at the very least, a mighty, roaring Lion. But it is not that. It is the gentlest of creatures, the Lamb.

We can move a bit closer into all this with one of Jesus' parables, also about an axe laid to the root of a tree. A fig tree fails to yield any fruit, so the owner orders his gardener to cut it down—why should it be wasting the soil? But the gardener intercedes: let it alone for a year until I have manured it and dug it round. If it then bears fruit, well and good; if not, we cut it down (cf. Luke 13: 6-9).

Manure is pungent stuff—the kind of product we do not want to handle. It is essentially animal (our) mess, of which we do not like to be reminded. This is a parable, so think of it as our daily experience of constantly recurring faults and inattention to God, and the ways we are disrupted by the faults of others. We are never free from either, and there seems to be little we can do to improve the situation. We often prefer to gloss over the matter. But the parable points to the consequences of doing that, and it also reminds us that, despite its smell, manure is rich in nutrients and of great value for the growth of plants. So, does Jesus mean that the same is true of our moral and emotional mess?

In the middle of Advent, on 14 December, we celebrate the festival of another John, John of the Cross. This John writes out the experience of discovering the profound truth of God's love in the fiercest of conflicts. With no warning, he was summarily arrested, taken from Avila to Toledo and locked in a room in a tower, with no idea when the ordeal would end. (It lasted for nine months, as it turned out.) And, most painfully, all this was at the hands of his brothers in community. He was essentially the victim of the dysfunction of his Order in that troubled period, and perhaps also of his own too-trusting nature. He was an easier target than the powerful Teresa. Everything was, as it were, heaped on him like a lorry-load of manure. A dark room barely small enough to stand in, little access to air, dirty clothing, meagre food, no understanding of what was happening, with only snatches of conversation heard through the door: how might you or I emerge from this? Fearful, vengeful, broken? John of the Cross came out of this terrible place

with the first twenty-three verses of the ‘Spiritual Cantic’, one of the greatest songs of the Christian Church, composed in his head. And over the next few years he went on to write of the life of the spirit in a way that is still fresh and of infinite value, and shapes the Carmelite way. That dark period was the mine from which he seemed to dig gold.

Night, the dark night; the reality of our collective culpability, our own foolishness, and the certainty of judgment because of it: if we dare to face these things, such a night becomes a journey of faith. Our faults and those of others, human dysfunction and the emotional hole we sometimes drop into: all of this needs to be accepted for what it is. And through it all—despite it all—we need to go on trusting in God, even though God may not be visible to us. It may indeed be a long and dark night. But what comes over us at the end is mystery, in strange and humble guise—like the man standing in the crowd on the banks of the Jordan, indistinguishable from the rest, who was God. There is pain and beauty, terror and new birth; not in sequence, but in the difficult, jumbled, messy way of any birth. Perhaps all real growth into God is like that. John teaches us to accept it all, just as it is, without pointing the finger or falling into despair. But it is not our acceptance that changes things. Rather, it is as if our acceptance and trust touch the heart of God, who alone is able to give us life. And God does not fail to reach out to us. That is the heart of the paradox, which the other John of Advent reveals to us:

Dark of the night, my guide,
fairer by far than dawn when stars grow dim!
Night that has unified
the Lover and the Bride,
transforming the Beloved into him.²

² *Centred on Love: The Poems of St John of the Cross*, trans. Marjorie Flower OCD, published Varroville Carmel, Australia, 1983.

MARY, IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

GEOFFREY ROWELL

ST LUKE tells us at the end of his story of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem that his mother Mary ‘kept all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (Luke 2: 19). This is what as Christians we do year by year, as, in the familiar words of Bishop Phillips Brooks’ much loved Christmas hymn, ‘the dark night wakes, the Glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more.’ The Greek word which St Luke uses to speak of Mary’s deep and reflective meditation is *symballo*, from which we get our word ‘symbol’. Mary both keeps and holds on to the amazing and overwhelming reality of God’s action and presence in and through her motherhood, and imaginatively reflects upon it, going deeper and deeper into the meaning of what this birth, and this child of which she is so intimately a part, is about. She ‘ponders in her *heart*’, and the heart in the Bible is not primarily the place of feeling, but of willing and of choosing. Her deep reflection is to shape her life, and brings her to the foot of the Cross, and to be part of the worshipping and expectant community, as Luke tells us in Acts, awaiting the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The angel had said to Mary in the moment of annunciation that ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’ and therefore the child she was to bear would be called ‘the Son of God’. And so Mary became, in the words of another ancient Christian hymn, ‘the gate of Heaven’s High Lord, the door through which the Light has poured’. When Jacob, in the ancient story in Genesis, lay down in a desert place and dreamed of a ladder set between heaven and earth with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it, he woke up exclaiming, ‘This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’ If this was true of the place of Jacob’s dream, even more is it true of the Mother of the Lord, and Christian devotion has not hesitated to speak of Mary as the temple of God, the ark of the covenant, and the gate of heaven.

Mary, the ‘Christ-bearer’, reflected deeply and imaginatively on what Jesus meant, and she has been seen as an image, a picture of the Church, which likewise reflects on and lives out the meaning of the God who so comes among us.

The great movements of renewal in Christian history have come about through a return to what the Scriptures tell us. We have to realize over and over again how great and how overwhelming is the reality of God’s love which always comes down to the lowest part of our need, as it came in Mary’s child at Bethlehem.

An extract from the 2008 Christmas Message to the Diocese in Europe from the Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe. Reproduced with permission.

ASSOCIATES

NEW

COMPANION

Janet Aidin Companion, March 2009

FELLOWSHIP OF THE LOVE OF GOD

Julia Tompson, October 2009

Bronwyn Curnow, October 2009

MINISTRY IN NORTHERN IRELAND DURING 'THE TROUBLES'

NIALL BAYLY

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about Northern Ireland and its Troubles, but of its inhabitants less may be known or understood. Therefore it may be helpful to offer at the outset from personal reminiscences a description based upon early formative impressions, which, as the years passed, have been confirmed, and have endured.

Having been born and reared in different parts of the South of Ireland (The Republic) including Dublin, I had been largely unfamiliar with Northern Ireland and its people. That was to change when, leaving school and considering a career in agriculture but without farming experience, it was arranged that I should live and work on a farm. A recently-married, warm-hearted couple accepted me to live with them on their dairy farm about ten miles west of Belfast, and made me feel very much at home.

During fourteen months with them, I gained not only useful and practical farming experience, but also, through them, and their connections of cousins, neighbours and friends, increased understanding of their natures and characters, and of their concerns, convictions and values. As it happened, they were Presbyterian, possibly having inherited from Scottish or English forebears, amongst others, defining characteristics and qualities which, mingled with those of indigenous Irish during centuries, combined to make them—the Northern Irish people as a whole—the rather distinctive people they are today: genuinely friendly, direct and principled. They can be occasionally reserved, as occasion may demand, are conscientious and industrious. They are endowed with an infectious sense of humour and wit. Naturally they can be serious about essential and important matters, for example, holding to traditional and cherished appreciation of family values, relationships and loyalty.

If church people, as many in Northern Ireland are, they are diligent in their attention to, and participation within, congregation and community. They tend to take seriously the Church's teachings, not least, and significantly, as they have been challenged throughout

troubled times, about the value and sanctity of human life, including, for example, the commandments against killing and murder. That sincerely and soundly imbued beliefs such as these may sometimes have influenced responses to violence appears to be corroborated in conclusions of research carried out by Henry Patterson, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster, and published on 3 April 2009 in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*; of which, later.

First, let us look at a typical example of how calculated and heartless killing came to so many homes of all persuasions, particularly in remote areas, as told in a poignant letter (from which I quote) published in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* on 13 March 2009, from Sammy Heenan of Dromara, County Down:

On 3 May 1985, as a twelve-year-old boy and an only child in our home, I was wakened at 7.00 a.m. to the sound of gunshots. I went out to find my father lying dead. We lived deep in the Dromara Hills and had no phone, so I had to run to a neighbour's house half a mile away to raise the alarm.

The IRA [Irish Republican Army] claimed my father's murder. He was not a member of the security forces, just a Protestant victim, an innocent man. The morning in question my father was forced to his knees and shot twice in the head from a distance of six inches.

My local Church of Ireland parish was a great support to me after my father's murder.

Professor Patterson has been conducting a special research project on border Protestants in County Fermanagh. He told the *Gazette* that the Church's influence, in terms of Christian teaching and promoting Christian values, was an important moderating influence during the Troubles. He said: 'One thing that strikes me, particularly in Fermanagh, is the lack of tit-for-tat retaliation. There's very, very little of that.' The response to violence in Fermanagh had been 'very restrained', he said, and added, 'I think the Church plays a role. People's religious values play a role. Some of the people I've talked to have said this, in terms of the sanctity of human life, respect for law and order and issues like that.' Professor Patterson said that, because the Church of Ireland was the largest Protestant denomination in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, it had a particularly important role.

He said that there had been a tradition in border areas, and in particular in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, of service in the security forces. Because many of those who served in this way did so on a part-time basis, it 'made them easy targets, and right from the beginning the IRA picked on them and targeted them'. In addition to his comments, the authors of a Church of Ireland project earlier in 2008 referred to the border Protestants' distrust of some Roman Catholic neighbours; but also they spoke of acts of great kindness by their Roman Catholic fellow countrymen during the height of the Troubles, when murders were routine.

During the Troubles Roman Catholic church leaders have been forthright in their dissociation from, and condemnation of, the IRA and of the actions and atrocities carried out by them.

Returning now to those earlier farming days: after further experience elsewhere in Northern Ireland and in England, changing circumstances led, by a circuitous route including university and theological college, to ordination in June 1965 at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. I was ordained to serve in what was considered (as I had sought) a robust training ground for the ministry: a populous parish in the Shankill area of Belfast. Some three years later, a meeting with the Reverend Joseph ('Joe') Parker, Senior Chaplain at the Missions to Seamen in Belfast Port, led, at his invitation, to my joining him for a while as assistant within a most stimulating ministry amongst seafarers. It meant working with and getting to know him and his wife Dorothy and their three children, including their middle child Stephen, and enjoying their hospitality, as neighbours. Little did we know, during those happy times, that a 'ghostly enemy' (to quote an evening hymn) would not refrain from plunging them and many others, on a later day, into the valley of the shadow of death, with terrible consequences.

After a further curacy in a North Belfast suburban parish, I was appointed incumbent of Christ Church near the centre of Belfast, where the handsome late-Georgian church had been much damaged as the result of a number of bombings by the IRA of a government building across the road.

Concurrently with the parish, which had reduced numbers, my Bishop appointed me Church of Ireland chaplain at one of Belfast's two main teaching hospitals. Combining a parochial ministry with

the frequent demands of the hospital may have been challenging, but also opened broader avenues of ministry, including being part of a cordial inter-denominational hospital chaplaincy team, within which we were often confronted by the impact of the Troubles upon patients and staff. It can be observed in passing that the Troubles may have acted as a catalyst rather than a hindrance in encouraging good ecumenical relations, leaving a present-day harmonious legacy throughout the Province.

One of the worst years of violence was 1972. I had been three days into a cycling holiday in Scotland when on Friday 21 July—‘Bloody Friday’, as it came to be called since—the IRA planted a number of car bombs in various parts of Belfast.

Before lunch-time that day at home, off Cavehill Road in North Belfast, Dorothy Parker had been sitting with her younger son, fourteen-year-old Stephen, listening to music and chatting. Stephen was a lively, talented lad with a splendid outgoing sense of fun. He had learned to play the French horn at school, as well as being a student at the City of Belfast School of Music and a member of its orchestra.

It was after lunch when the IRA placed a car bomb outside a row of shops a short distance from the Parkers’ home. Stephen, who had been working for the summer as messenger boy, noticed a car of which he was suspicious, and began running from shop to shop, alerting others. As he ran past the car, it exploded. Because the bombs were widespread, confusion and traffic chaos added to difficulties.

Nothing of Stephen could be found, partly because relief agencies like fire and ambulance services had been disrupted. Joe Parker, scouring the city, eventually found in a mortuary the body of his son that evening. He identified him by a joke device found in a trouser pocket, with which he had been amusing his parents the previous evening.

Later, his father returned to the spot on the pavement where his son had died earlier that afternoon. He prayed, and pledged whatever response, in God’s Name, might be open to him, and to his family. On hearing the news in Scotland the next morning, I returned as soon as possible.

When the announcements of their son's death were published, his parents suggested that, instead of flowers, donations to the School of Music orchestra would be appreciated. From a considerable response was established an annual Stephen Parker Memorial Award, which for almost four decades has been valued as a practical and prestigious incentive. Each year the trustees of the Award meet, and, with tutors, we choose a worthy recipient from their recommended player-nominees. Despite, and perhaps because of, their loss, the Parker's response unfolded further.

With a few other members of bereaved families who had suffered grievously also, they created a trust, 'Witness for Peace', which they expanded to include a few other trustees, of whom I became one, who were appreciative and supportive of their aims.

It was also agreed that one half of the trustees should be Roman Catholic, and the other half members of other Christian denominations. An introductory leaflet set out their aims:

Like many others in Northern Ireland the sponsors of 'Witness for Peace' have been through their own form of Gethsemane. We have come together now in an attempt to try and save others from sharing the same senseless tragedy. ...

'Witness for Peace' ... sponsors humbly acknowledge that were it not for the help and grace of God we could not have withstood. However severe the pain and anguish we found light in our darkness and a path to follow. This path is the basis of 'Witness for Peace'. Sharing our experiences, we were all agreed that what God can do for a few, with their co-operation in faith, he can do for all. ...

Our society needs to be liberated, to be set free from, among other things, the suspicions, hatreds and prejudices which, exaggerated and amplified, have bedevilled us for so many years.

A lapel badge, which could be worn as a visual reminder, was produced and described:

The black outer circle represents the darkness in which we are engulfed. In the centre of a white square the cross stands boldly upright; alongside there is a question, 'What Price Peace?'

Witness for Peace had a fundamental two-fold aim, besides a number of others:

Immediate: The liberation of people from entrenched positions.
and:

Long term: The consolidation of peace by supporting those working for reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

Towards these, two main projects were developed:

[1] A 'Time to Remember': an annual Service of Penitence and Re-dedication to Peace, held at Belfast City Hall in November. The services were led by representatives and leaders of the main Churches, Protestants and Roman Catholic, at which, on the lawn there, crosses were laid for each person who had died because of the Troubles. The first service was held on 3 November 1972, a few months after Stephen's death, and the last was held in 1984.

[2] An award, if possible each year, in cash, to an individual or group who were working to promote peace and reconciliation.

The award went in 1975 to the Corrymeela Community, founded in 1965 by the Reverend Dr Ray Davey. This community has been a powerful influence for improved relations throughout the years, and had sustained their encouragement of the Parkers and their creation of Witness for Peace, as had other like-minded groups.

The Parkers were disheartened when, in late 1974, due to lack of sufficient support, including that which might have made it possible for Joe Parker to continue his ministry in Northern Ireland, with his commitment to Witness for Peace, they moved to Vancouver in Canada. Here the Missions to Seamen had offered him the position of chaplain, which, nevertheless, he carried out with his customary dedication until retirement.

Before their departure, many of us representing various aspects of Northern Ireland society signed the following letter, published in the Dublin national newspaper, *The Irish Times*:

A SAD DEPARTURE

Sir,

We feel compelled to join in acknowledging the debt we all owe to the untiring effort and example of Rev. Joseph Parker in his work in 'Witness for Peace'. In this we believe that we speak for many people and feel that the determination and persistence of Rev. Parker, in the light of his own deep personal suffering, remind us all of the price exacted by violence.

Rev. Parker says he is leaving Ireland 'a sad and lonely man' and we take this to mean he believes his efforts have been unsuccessful. There is, of course, much evidence to support this view, but against that, he has stirred the conscience of many, and heightened for us our awareness of the evils of violence.

We wish Rev. Parker, Mrs. Parker and their family, peace and the hope of happiness in the future they have chosen.

In the 1980s, recognizing that there were increasing limits, practical and circumstantial, to how we could carry on our commitment, the trustees and Corrymeela entered into discussions. The outcome of this was an agreement that the pursuance of the aims of Witness for Peace, and the means, would be best served by integration within Corrymeela and its excellent organisation.

On Friday 16 March 1990 a public meeting at Queen's University of Belfast was held to mark the coming together. At that meeting a Dialogue was held entitled, fittingly, 'Better Together', between two distinguished partners in ecumenism: Bishop David Sheppard, Anglican Bishop, and Archbishop Derek Worlock, Catholic Archbishop, both of Liverpool.

The following words appeared on the programme of the meeting:

This Dialogue is to express the gratitude and thanks of a great number of people for the work of Witness for Peace from 1973-88.

It is also to acknowledge the Corrymeela Community's appreciation for the trust and confidence of Witness for Peace in passing on their resources and goodwill to Corrymeela in 1988.

I conclude with the final verse of a hymn I wrote just after the Parkers' tragedy in 1972, and which at their wish was submitted to the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, which kindly published it: a prayerful offering on the hope which may be found amidst our sense of fragility in adversity:

May Love Triumphant here combine
With weak, but faithful wills;
And in true glory thus refine
Those souls beset by ills.

THE HOUSE OF GOD, THE GATE OF HEAVEN
A REFLECTION ON CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

WHAT IS CARMEL? For me, Carmel is a place, Carmel is a way of life, Carmel is a life of love.

Carmel is a place

Carmel is the cell, a desert where I stand naked before God and before myself. It is a furnace to refine, the embrace of a lover, a place to weep and dance, a place of so much more. 'Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.'¹ For me, Carmel is the cell.

Carmel is a garden, as seen in our large beautiful garden and orchard behind the rabbit warren of buildings that is the convent. In the garden I can walk, sit, work, dig or pray, alone or with another. Mostly I watch the garden from the cell window, the coming and going of the seasons, the dawn and close of the day, the rain and sun, the growing and dying—all the rhythms of life. Just by watching all the subtleties of change and stability in the garden, I learn from

¹ Hos 2: 14.

Carmel about the dying and living in the spiritual life. ‘And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things ... and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.’² For me, Carmel is a garden.

Carmel is a place of places. Places where she provides me with opportunities to see, hear, love and sometimes confront the Christ who is my neighbour, who is my sister. We pray with each other *as one* in chapel; we eat and listen to the reading together in the refectory; we meet together for the more business-like aspects of our life in the chapter house, whether for the often mundane nuts and bolts of daily life, or the very deep and important matters pertaining to the governing of our life and worship; and finally, we gather together in the common room for recreation and to enjoy one another. ‘And when I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.’³ For me, Carmel is a place of places.

Carmel is a way of life

Carmel is a way of silence that takes us deep within and far without. For me, it is the hardest of her disciplines and one of her chief privileges. It is a way that prepares me, well, for everything—work, prayer, loving God, and loving others. Silence gives me the opportunity and encouragement to quieten both my speech and my movement, as well as my mind and all its distractions, and to quieten the soul. I find in silence a place of stillness: a place to be still and know that God is God. ‘The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.’⁴ For me, Carmel is silence.

Carmel is a way of prayer, and through the horarium she protects my prayer life. There are the Office and the Eucharist, and those times set apart solely for prayer. And then all the in-between time, when the whole of life is made prayer. I marvel at the challenge, the opportunity! Carmel’s prayer is hidden from the world, though it so deepens the experience of the world that nothing is excluded from her enclosure. In Carmel I embrace the world. ‘Rejoice always, pray

² Isa. 58: 11.

³ John 14: 3.

⁴ Hab. 2: 20.

without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.’⁵ For me, Carmel is prayer.

Carmel is a life bound by the vows—of poverty, chastity and obedience—bound in order to be set free. I live simply in the vows, discerning want from need, ordering the passions aright, and learning to pray the prayer of Gethsemane, ‘Thy will be done.’ It is a life-long endeavour, without end and never accomplished, but I try. ‘Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.’⁶ For me, Carmel is a life lived under the vows.

Carmel is a life of love

Carmel is a life of love, the first love being God: his love for us and ours for him. It is the overflow of this love which encompasses my neighbour, my sisters, and the world. Carmel is a way of life wherein I learn Christ’s bidding, ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.’⁷

In Carmel I have a place, an opportunity, to learn this selfless love, for love is what I am given and all I am asked to give. In the tangibles and intangibles of her way, Carmel encourages me to persevere and to love with abandon. It is only because of love that I am able to live in community; that we can love together, pray together, work together, *be* together. ‘Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and whoever loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God; for God is love.’⁸ For me, Carmel is love.

* * *

I find that Carmel is many things, but what does it all mean? Can they be distilled? Can the threads be woven together? Can the many be one? Yes, I believe they can, but I do not have the words to express it well, so I turn to Jacob for help: ‘How awesome is this

⁵ 1 Thess. 5: 16-18.

⁶ Rev. 2: 10.

⁷ John 15: 12.

⁸ 1 John 4: 7-8.

place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’⁹

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‘ILLUSTRIOUS ALBAN, FRUITFUL BRITAIN’S CHILD’

DOUGLAS DALES

ST ALBAN was probably the first saint of these islands of whom I became aware, when as a small child I used to go to St Albans with my mother to visit the couple who had sheltered her as an evacuee during part of the war. Exploring the remains of the Roman city, and climbing the hill to the great abbey church, with its haunting frescoes and battered shrine, gave to Bede’s account a vividness that resonates in the memory.

Bede derived his account from the Gallic church, which treasured the memory of Alban among its martyrs; one of its early bishops, St Germanus, visited the shrine in the fifth century. Bede also knew the more fabulous account by the British writer, Gildas, but chose to omit it, beyond an interesting mention of others murdered at that time by the Roman authorities, Aaron and Julius, perhaps Jewish Christian merchants living in Caerleon in South Wales. He placed the martyrdom in the time of Diocletian, but it was probably earlier, perhaps under Severus early in the third century. Bede is seldom generous to the British Christians who preceded the Church of his own people, the Anglo-Saxons, but he recorded faithfully how miracles still occurred at the shrine of St Alban, whose cult had survived the invasions and settlement of his people:

⁹ Gen. 28: 17.

Here when peaceful Christian times returned, a church of wonderful workmanship was built, a worthy memorial of his martyrdom.

In the middle ages, St Alban's Abbey became a foremost Benedictine house, having been re-founded during the monastic renewal of the tenth century.

The English Church is unusual in having few martyrs among its foundations; indeed it is interesting that Bede and those after him appropriated St Alban from this much earlier era. There are four foundation martyrs whom we remember: Alban, Boniface (murdered as a missionary in Frisia), King Edward of East Anglia and Archbishop Alphege of Canterbury (both victims of the Vikings). This marks us out from most continental Churches. If we set aside the later martyrs of the Reformation, Protestant and Catholic, and the more controversial figures of Becket and King Charles I, we are thin on martyrs; though this is not true of the wider Anglican Communion.

Yet to visit any ancient church in Rome is to be reminded that most of these were founded on the martyrdom of early Christians. The very shape of a typical Roman basilica embodies this, with its *confessio* surmounted by the altar over the place of the burial of the martyr, in imitation of the vision in the Apocalypse, where the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the tenacity of their witness lie under the altar of God in heaven.¹ So we must cherish the martyrs who lie under the altar of our own Church in England—remembering that all of these four antedate the Great Schism and so are revered by Orthodox as well as Catholic and Anglican Christians—for ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church’.

St Alban's story is a simple testimony to the power of example. According to Bede's source, he sheltered a fugitive, discovered that he was a Christian priest, and was converted by his example:

When Alban saw this man occupied day and night in continual vigils and prayers, divine grace suddenly shone upon him and he learned to imitate his guest's faith and devotion.

¹ Rev. 6: 9.

When they came to arrest the priest, Alban went in his stead, disguised in his priest's cloak. It would appear that he was a person of some standing in the Roman city of Verulanium and his action caused deep embarrassment to the magistrates. They tortured him, but failed to break his spirit; so they beheaded him on the hill outside the city, where later his shrine would be built: 'Its natural beauty had long fitted it as a place to be hallowed by the blood of a blessed martyr.' Death became the gateway to Paradise, a place of water springing up to eternal life.

St Alban was, and is, a saint shared with the Church on the continent, which mediated the Christian faith—first to the Romano-Britons and then to the Anglo-Saxons. Some of his relics lie in one of the Romanesque churches of Cologne, St Pantaleon. It is a melancholy experience for an English person to visit that city, which we did so much to destroy, and this church did not escape unscathed. We visited the church with friends from Latvia and Russia, one of them an outstanding icon painter. Suddenly an elderly nun emerged, clutching a pitcher of water for baptism and greeted us with a wonderful smile. She thought that I came from somewhere in Germany, or else Denmark. When I protested that I was English, she was astonished and then delighted: 'You have come at last!' She had witnessed it all. Then the priest appeared and explained everything in fluent English. He led me to the wonderful casket in Limoges enamel from the twelfth century which contains the relics of St Alban. It had been damaged by the bombing, but restored. In one corner, lost enamel panels had been replaced with modern replicas portraying the Royal Air Force planes bombing the city. 'This is our history, you know,' he said, 'yours and mine'. I recalled the words of Bishop George Bell, now inscribed before the altar dedicated to his memory in Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford:

No nation, no church, no individual, is guiltless. Without repentance and without forgiveness, there can be no regeneration (Christmas broadcast to Germany, 23 December 1945).

So, in the presence of the martyr, there was reconciliation, fulfilling the prophetic words of the Christian poet, Venantius Fortunatus, and cited by Bede at the beginning of his account: '*Albanum, egregium fecunda Britannia profert*: Illustrious Alban, fruitful Britain's child'.

Let us make our own a prayer from the Anglo-Saxon Church, commemorating St Alban:

Be ready to hear us, O Lord God Almighty,
and as you willed St Alban your martyr and his companions
to suffer in the same storm of affliction
in order to be adorned with the crown of martyrdom,
so may we with fitting devotion commemorate their sufferings,
and sense the heavenly protection of their life with you.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Preached as a sermon at Fairacres on the Feast of St Alban,
22 June 2009.*

THE DOOR OF MINISTRY

SISTER RAPHAEL SLG

A talk given to the Oblate Sisters on 3 October 2009 at Fairacres

LET US BEGIN with a prayer for ministry:

Lord Jesus Christ, to this end I pray,
by your Mercy, help me to be worthy of my calling,
by your Power, help me to fulfil my good resolves,
by your Grace, help me to accomplish works of faith,
that your Name may be glorified. Amen.

In response to some questions to you, it became clear that the various forms of ministry in which Oblate Sisters are involved, within and outside the parish, can be divided into three groups: armchair or home ministry, church-oriented ministry, and voluntary ministry outside the Church. In opening our ‘Door of Ministry’ today, we shall be concentrating on aspects of ministry and prayer, on the Mary, rather than the Martha, side of ministry—though each needs the other.

Let us continue with a sentence from your Oblates’ Rule on Reconciliation:

There is in true contemplation an urgency to love God for himself, and also a desire that all should be drawn to respond to his mercy, and accept the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ.

and then Psalm 81: 13:

O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!

‘O that my people would listen to me’: isn’t that what God must be saying again and again, in the here and now of the twenty-first century? O that my people would listen to me, instead of rushing about doing this and that, sometimes stopping to pray, to implore me to do the things that they think are the answer to their (or their friends’, or indeed to the world’s) problems. O that my people would listen to me.

O that we would, that we would say with the Psalmist in Psalm 62: 1:

For God alone my soul in silence waits, from him comes my salvation.

‘For God alone my soul in silence waits’, for my hope is in him. Just to stop being busy and be still and wait upon God in the silence, ready to listen, hear and respond: this is what our vocation is asking of us. So it is important that we have a space, a place that is ours for prayer. Here in the convent we each have our cell, but you have to find your time and space at home: your place, your place of solitude, where you can be still and wait upon God, listen and be led by God the Holy Spirit. There he may ask a lot of us, but we know that it is God who will give us the strength we need to do his work.

Fr Gilbert Shaw (Warden of the Community 1964-7), talking in 1963 about prayer in the cell, says:

Part of your whole life is prayer in the cell but it is not separate from the rest of life. We want to watch that the spirit does develop our prayer, and we need to recall ourselves when we find ourselves naturally drifting into a state of ‘blah’. Yet, we have to recognise that just waiting is an important part of prayer.

And Fr Lucius Cary SSJE (Chaplain General of the Community 1914-50) said in 1928:

Each should rise and make ready to receive the spiritual gifts which God may be pleased to give by fastening the whole spirit of

contemplation in the silence and solitude of the cell. But this solitude must be set over against the rich fellowship of the common life. It is a perfecting of balance, an adjustment between the social and silent life.

It all sounds so simple and straightforward, but how often do we get in the way—by our attitudes, lack of abandonment to God, and all the many distractions with which we have to do battle—before we are still and quiet, ready to wait upon God?

Fr George Congreve (1835-1918), another of the Cowley Fathers, said somewhere:

What was a closed door of mystery,
prayer finds to be an open way to God.

So, as you enter your place of prayer with the door closed, there you not only intercede, but also wait upon God in the stillness and silence. We probably all have our own particular way, or secret ladder, to God: be it an icon, a picture, a lighted candle, or a favourite quotation from the psalms, a phrase or just one word. It doesn't matter so much *which* way, as that we *go* that way and *wait upon* God in contemplation. Let us always remember that this is a gift from God and give thanks for it.

St John of the Cross teaches us:

Seek in reading and thou shalt find in meditation; knock in prayer and it shall be opened to thee in contemplation.ⁱ

It *is* there for the seeking, and it is our responsibility to seek it, and having found it, to use it. Our response, that free response of love, is to be still and quiet and concentrate our whole energy in contemplation, as we learn to overcome the many things that can distract us.

Here's something else from Fr Gilbert to ponder:

It is as the self-predominance of the Thou and the insignificance of the self importance of the ego is more completely realised that the activity of the creature in its knocking on the door of the Divine Mystery is thrown back on the emptiness of self, so that it should know that in and through its own acts it can do nothing

ⁱ *The Complete Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. E. Allison Peers, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1935, *Spiritual Sentences and Maxims, Points of Love* 64, vol. III, p. 257.

except to express and to be that which God may give, even to the extent that its prayer is not its act, but that which God may give. If that is so and is the truth of contemplative prayer, it must effect and act through the whole life, body soul and spirit, the whole being.

In the Book of the prophet Baruch we read:

If you had walked in God's ways you would have lived in peace forever. Learn where understanding, strength and insight are to be found. Then you will know where to find a long and full life, light to guide you, and peace.ⁱⁱ

Those who were taught Catechism at school or church will have learnt the Commandments in full—probably with very little understanding at the time, but they will have stayed in the memory as a yardstick for living. We have over the last century lost a sense of awe and wonder, lost a sense of the mystery of God, as we try reason all things. 'Enlightenment' is a term used to describe this cultural rejection of tradition and mystery or trust, the rejection of accepting things in faith. Today there is a need to know the why, when, how, where; to rationalise everything; to know the answer; to be in charge. Since God is Omnipotent, Almighty, All-powerful, a God of Love, this desire to know and to be in control cannot be fulfilled by human energy. Ours it is to listen, to hear, to obey, if we truly desire 'to grow in faith and holiness and become members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven', as the Catechism puts it.

Many people today are constantly struggling for power, for everything to be bigger and better (if it really is), which often leads to unhappiness and sense of loss. There is nothing to hold on to, to sustain people in difficult times. They are lost. Lost, maybe, but not forgotten by God; for, as we believe, he holds everyone in his Love, no matter what their response or lack of it.

We know this. We know the value of prayer. We know how it can sustain us. We know that God is always there helping us, if we are willing to be helped. So we continue in prayer for reconciliation in the many difficult and unhappy situations brought to our notice within the parish and further afield.

ⁱⁱ Baruch 3: 13-14.

How much of this is obvious to others—obvious enough for them to want to know about and share our faith, about God, about Jesus our Saviour, about the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us?

In your ministry as Oblate Sisters, there is the Mary and the Martha dimension. Today I have been speaking about the ‘Mary part’, that quiet reflective side, the more solitary side of life, when you step aside from all the busyness of life in order to be still and listen to God, to let go and let God. In this time we may hold before God the concerns that are on our hearts, for God’s Love encompasses all. From this contemplative side comes the desire for, the strength to do, and the joy in the doing of, those ‘Martha things’ that fill our days.

Almighty God, who sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church: open our hearts to the riches of his grace, that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

RELIGIOUS IN THE YEARS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET BLOC

JANICE BROWN

AFTER COMMUNIST RÉGIMES collapsed, religious orders were everywhere rehabilitated and were able to recommence their former spheres of vocation. Where suppressed orders had previously constituted an integral sphere of religious life, they initially experienced a boom in vocations. In central Europe clandestine orders had attracted the pick of candidates for the priesthood and, because of the dire shortage of priests, members often found themselves under pressure from bishops to fill in as parish clergy. When Vlada Radl took me to visit deeply-secularised north Bohemia in 1990, he maintained that, because the environment was so discouraging that lonely priests often broke down, it was essential that priests in religious orders be allowed to work in small groups, so as to give each other mutual support. Even ten years later, his son Tom, head of Ceske Budevojice’s youth centre, complained

to me that he was often unable to celebrate Sunday mass there for his community and the kids who came from all over the city. On the other hand, Romanian and Russian Orthodox orders saw an influx which included frankly unsuitable candidates, completely unprepared for the sacrificial discipline of monastic life, some even unbalanced. Monasteries often became strongholds of rampant conservatism. Also, too many nuns were again exploited as unpaid domestics to wait on monks.

Catholic communities had to come to terms with the upheaval and often radical adjustments their western counterparts had made after Vatican Two. New, often different, priorities in charitable outreach, mission and educational work had to be worked out. Some outstanding religious, like Lithuanian Nirole Sadunaite, who served six years in prison and exile for her activities in the underground Church, are still active. Nirole radiates resourcefulness, faith and humour. On the other hand, in the face of retrenchment within the Catholic Church, some of the religious I met prefer to do their own thing. Slovak Salesian Anton Srholec, veteran of uranium mines, runs an unofficial refuge for out-of-work men in Bratislava and is critical of a Church which addresses problems people don't have, but doesn't address their real problems. Libor Ovecka's 'Jabok' institute has to rely on Prague's Evangelical Faculty, and state funds.

A major problem, which demanded an exorbitant share of their time, slender funds and energy was the reclamation of former properties, which, after being put to a variety of uses, some of them unspeakable, were often dilapidated or completely unsuited to the reduced numbers returning to them, and they had to seek lay help. Frequently, where buildings had been used for philanthropic purposes or conversely had been appropriated by the communist mafia for profit, Churches encountered a blank wall. The Hungarian and Slovak governments made reasonable provision for restitution, but particularly in the former Soviet Union, Catholic Lithuania and the Czech Republic, where property restitution applied to individuals, not communities, and officials in charge of religion often still have a communist mindset, acrimonious disputes continued for years.

Long-term persecution and secularisation has alienated many people from the Churches and after the first flush of enthusiasm the number of vocations has subsided—even in Poland.

However, religious, particularly from Poland and Slovakia, have played an indispensable role in re-establishing the Catholic presence in the former Soviet Union, Belarus, Bulgaria and Albania, where their Church had barely survived and there had been no formal theological formation for decades. Sadly, in Russia they have come up against hostility on the part of the Orthodox Church, which has questioned the right of the Catholic Church to re-establish its former dioceses, and there and in Belarus, priests and religious have encountered restrictions which limit their effectiveness, such as demands for visa renewal every three months in Russia and expulsion of some who were particularly active in social work from Belarus.

In the former Yugoslavia, religious shared their communities' appalling suffering, the dislocation of war, and even martyrdom. The Catholic presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina is in danger of disappearing in the face of increasing Islamization, and emigration to Croatia continues. Serbian Orthodox communities in Kosovo's historic monasteries live in fear of their lives in random attacks from vengeful Albanians.

My next article, to appear in a forthcoming edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, will examine the survival and renewal of Russian monasticism.

OVERTURE TO KNOWING CATHERINE OF SIENA

SISTER CATHERINE CSC

THIS ARTICLE is written to celebrate the completion of the translation of Catherine of Siena's Letters into English. This is primarily the work of Suzanne Noffke OP, a member of the Racine Community of Dominicans in the Diocese of Milwaukee, USA. *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* in four volumes are available from the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.¹

¹ *Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. 2000, ISBN: 978-0-86698-244-2; vol 2, 2001, ISBN: 978-0-86698-245-0; vol. 3,

Suzanne Noffke, an internationally recognized Catherinian scholar, writer and lecturer, had previously published English translations of Catherine of Siena's *The Dialogue* and *Prayers*,² as well as numerous articles and a book of essays on Catherine's life and thought.

Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, both proclaimed Doctors of the Church in 1970, were joined by Thérèse of Lisieux in 1997, the only women to date. In Roman Catholicism, a Doctor of the Church is a theologian from whose teachings the whole Church is held to derive great advantage and to whom eminent learning and great sanctity have been attributed. This honour is given very rarely, only posthumously and after canonisation, and is made by proclamation of the Pope or of an ecumenical council.

Catherine's Life

Caterina di Giacomo di Benincasa was born in Siena on 25 March 1347, a twin, the twenty-fourth of twenty-five children. Her father was a wool dyer of comfortable means. She held her own in this bustling family by her personality and strength of character. The Dominican church overshadowed her home. From childhood she prayed, received the sacraments and listened to sermons, and knew the Dominican friars, with their particular vocation to preach the gospel. As a teenager she decided not to marry, and at eighteen dedicated her life to God as a *Mantellata*, this being a group of women, assumed to be widows, and affiliated to the Order of St Dominic. They were habited, but lived in their own homes, giving themselves in service to the poor and sick, under the direction of a prioress, and ultimately the Dominican friars.

Then followed three years when Catherine lived at home, a secluded life, wrestling with all the difficulties of prayer, and developing a close relationship with Jesus, to whom she used to speak as one friend to another. At the age of twenty-one, she felt

2007, ISBN: 978-0-86698-377-8; vol. 4, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-86698-403-4.
<http://www.asu.edu/clas/acmrs/publications/mrts/italy.html>

² Classics of Western Spirituality Series, Paulist Press, 1980, ISBN: 9780809122332; and *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, 2nd ed., iUniverse.com, 2001, ISBN: 9780595180608. (First published by Paulist Press, 1983.)

called: ‘You are now to plunge boldly into public activity with but one thought in mind, the salvation of souls.’ As a result, she reluctantly left her solitary life. Catherine embraced the activities of the *Mantellata*, often nursing those whom no one else would. As her reputation spread, a devoted group of friends and followers gathered round her.

Her strenuous and risk-filled work led to illness, and Catherine nearly died, but regained consciousness and health—almost against her will. Filled with a new sense of purpose, she set to preach the word of God, and sought to heal the divisions of both the Church and society. The result was beyond all expectations. Crowds of people flocked to hear her. Aged twenty-seven in 1374, when Siena was ravaged by a plague so dangerous that all who could leave the city did, Catherine and her group of friends stayed to nurse the sick and to bury the dead. When they survived the plague, Catherine’s reputation spread across Italy. She started to travel to other cities and used the opportunity to try to bring peace and concord between them.

Catherine worked tirelessly to heal the deep division in the Church caused by the Pope residing in Avignon, and later rival claims to the papacy. Catherine suffered hugely because of the schism, and for the last eighteen months of her life in Rome, threw all her energies into peace-making, and the restoration of the unity of the Church. The strain proved too much. She had a stroke and lay ill for several weeks before she died on 29 April 1380, aged thirty-three.

Catherine died with her work an apparent failure, the Church more divided than ever. Her reputation and writings were attacked by those who resented her popularity. Her influence beyond the grave spread, as Raimondo da Capua, the Dominican friar who had been her friend, confessor and guide, became her first and foremost biographer, writing the *Legend*.

Catherine was canonized in 1461 by Pope Pius II, and her patronage includes Siena, Rome, Italy, Europe, fire fighters, nurses and people ridiculed for their piety.

Catherine's Writings

Letters, The Dialogue and Prayers

Catherine was the first woman to write—and be published—in any of the Italian dialects. Her writing can be divided into three categories, each different in origin, orientation and way of writing. Her letters stretch over the greatest period of time and were first begun around 1370. Catherine used letter-writing as a means of reaching out, advising, and influencing others, possibly modelling herself upon Paul the Apostle. Approximately 385 of her letters (most of them from 1374 until her death in 1380) have been discovered. These are mainly in the hand of several scribes and are addressed to remarkably diverse people—popes, cardinals and bishops, royalty and public officials, family and friends, and disciples, monks, nuns and pious laity, and an assortment of others, including allies and opponents, a mercenary captain, and political prisoners. The letters bear interest because her activity extended beyond the normal feminine bounds of her time and her status in Church and society. Considered as literature, they rank Catherine among the great Italian letter writers of the fourteenth century.

Catherine's letters give us insight into her character, growth and relationship with others, whilst *The Dialogue* is more a compendium of her theological teaching. Probably dictated between December 1377 and October 1378, its destiny was entrusted to Raimondo da Capua. Catherine simply called it 'my book', but it was later named *The Dialogue* because it took the form of a conversation between Catherine and God. God is most often addressed as 'father' and she as 'daughter'. *The Dialogue* is perhaps not best read initially cover to cover. Catherine's manner of writing is vivid and vigorous, and in places verbose, often with long trailing sentences. At its completion it was one unbroken narrative, to be divided into 167 chapters in ten tracts later by her followers. Suzanne Noffke's English translation comes from the 1968 text of Giuliana Cavallini. Cavallini's work was produced by the comparison of manuscripts, as there is no completely original text.

Twenty-six of Catherine's prayers are available as a collection, all from the last four years of her life, and mainly the final seventeen months. They were mostly transcribed by those who wrote for her, Catherine having prayed them aloud. Other prayers

are to be found in narratives of her life, these possibly recorded from notes or from memory. She was said to have burst into prayer in the midst of dictating a letter or her book. Suzanne Noffke, in the introduction to her English translation of the *Prayers*, writes of the now accepted ‘canon’ of twenty-six prayers being first published by Giuliana Cavallini.³ This was the first critical edition to incorporate available evidence from parallel Italian and Latin texts. The result is what is considered to be the closest approximation to the prayers as Catherine prayed them. Coming from the end of her life, these prayers are perhaps a more mature expression of her spirituality.

Catherine today and tomorrow

Catherine continues to be studied and to inspire the life of the faithful. Recently she has been adopted as patron by those exploring the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. Some would claim from passages in her biography that she had a vocation to the priesthood. Catherine of Siena Virtual College offers courses that aim to empower women to unmask the roots of gender discrimination in their lives, in society and religion and to acquire the analytical competencies necessary to examine the issues that affect lives and change the world for the better. The Society of St Catherine of Siena is committed to the renewal of the intellectual apostolate in the Roman Catholic Church. The Society has an association with the English Province of the Order of Preachers.

Catherine is heard through her writings and through what continues to be spoken and written about her. Catherine’s often-quoted passage (from the last chapter, 167, of the *Dialogue*): ‘You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea: The more I enter you, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you’ encourages us all on our journey into the love of our triune God. May we share her passion for the truth and compassion for humanity.

To let Catherine have the last word, an extract from Chapter 153 of *The Dialogue*, on Divine Providence:

O eternal Father! O fiery abyss of charity! O eternal beauty, O eternal wisdom, O eternal goodness, O eternal mercy! O hope and

³ *Le Orazioni di Caterina da Siena*, Cantagalli, Siena, 1978. A more popularised edition was published in 1993 with the same title and publisher.

refuge of sinners! O immeasurable generosity! O eternal, infinite Good! O mad lover! And you have need of your creature? It seems so to me, for you act as if you could not live without her, in spite of the fact that you are Life itself, and everything has life from you and nothing can have life without you. Why then are you so mad? Because you have fallen in love with what you have made! You are pleased and delighted over her within yourself, as if you were drunk [with desire] for her salvation. She runs away from you and you go looking for her. She strays and you draw closer to her. You clothed yourself in our humanity, and nearer than that you could not have come.

And what shall I say? I will stutter, ‘A-a,’ because there is nothing else I know how to say. Finite language cannot express the emotion of the soul who longs for you infinitely. I think I could echo Paul’s words. The tongue cannot speak nor the ear hear nor the eye see nor the heart imagine what I have seen! ‘What have you seen?’ ‘I have seen the hidden things of God!’ And I—what do I say? I have nothing to add from these clumsy emotions [of mine]. I say only, my soul, that you have tasted and seen the abyss of supreme eternal providence.

FURTHER READING

Catherine of Siena: Selected spiritual writings, Mary O’Driscoll OP, New City Press, 2nd ed., 2006, ISBN: 978-1565482357.

would be a good introduction. This anthology contains introductions, and then extracts from Catherine’s *Letters*, *Prayers* and *The Dialogue*. These are preceded by an introduction to Catherine’s life, theology and style and language.

The Life of St. Catherine of Siena, Blessed Raymond of Capua, TAN Books, 2003, ISBN: 0-89555-761-4.

gives an intimate first-hand description of most of Catherine’s life, being an English translation of the *Legend*, Raymond, the Dominican friar at Siena, followed Thomas della Fonte as Catherine’s confessor and guide. Thomas supplied many reminiscences that were then incorporated into the life that Raymond was to compose. Raymond’s biography is of its time, and he perhaps neglects the woman, as he portrays the saint.

Catherine of Siena: Vision Through a Distant Eye, Suzanne Noffke, 2nd ed., www.iUniverse.com, 2006, ISBN: 978-0595391103.

expertly puts together essays that make Catherine's life relevant today. This is a must for visiting sites associated with Catherine's life in Siena and beyond; it includes bus numbers and opening times. It also contains a bibliography of all the author has been able to discover that has been published in English on Catherine. This is extensive and well-organised, and is invaluable for following a particular aspect; say, Catherine's ascetism or Catherine in art.

Catherine's actual 'writings' are possibly best read: *Prayers, The Dialogue* and *Letters*, bearing in mind that the complete *Letters* runs to four volumes.

OTHER BOOKS RECENTLY AVAILABLE INCLUDE:

The Road to Siena: The Essential Biography of St Catherine, Edmund G. Gardner, Paraclete Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-5572-5621-8. (First published in 1907 as *Saint Catherine of Siena: A study in the Religion, Literature and history of the Fourteenth Century in Italy*.)

This is one of the most scholarly works in English from a historical point of view.

Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature and the Signs of Others, Jane Tylus, University of Chicago Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-2268-2128-3.

The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena, F. Thomas Luongo, Cornell University Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4395-4.

IN MEMORIAM

FATHER GREGORY CSWG

A month or so before his death on 12 August, I was privileged to be able to spend some time sitting with Fr Gregory of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God in his cell at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Crawley Down, West Sussex. We said very little, since he was beyond the stage of much speaking, but there was a sense of real peacefulness and prayer. When I got up to leave, Fr Gregory said, 'Well, God bless, my dear', and I left with a sense of having received a real blessing. The Brother who took me in to see him commented on the fact that Fr Gregory had spent the last forty-eight years at the monastery 'just getting on with it', and said that many people in today's world would find that a real puzzle. Forty-eight years of life, spent in a monastery at the far end of a winding road through some woods, faithfully living the monastic round of prayer, Office, Eucharist, manual work and community living.

Of course there was also the more active pastoral side of Fr Gregory's life: Superior of his Community between 1973 and 2008, he was a wise and well-loved spiritual guide to many, and an important voice among Anglican religious communities. Between 1968 and 1977 he gave regular conferences to the Community here at Fairacres, and he continued as a confessor and spiritual guide to a number of Sisters right up until the fall which marked the final stages of his illness. Fr Gregory had a deep concern for the unity of the Church and had firmly-held and deeply thought-out beliefs over such issues as the ordination of women. But all of this flowed from his commitment as a priest and monk.

In the formative years of his monastic life, Fr Gregory knew, and was profoundly influenced by, Fr Gilbert Shaw (Warden of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God 1964-7), and in his own teaching and spiritual guidance, he passed on what he had

learned from Fr Gilbert and from his own reading and study of the writings within the Great Tradition of the Church which had been so important to Fr Gilbert. He was obviously, and deeply, a man of prayer, firm and gentle, both disciplined and able to enjoy the gifts of life. In his later years he seemed to mellow, as the years of prayer and monastic discipline bore fruit in an increasing openness to the Spirit.

At Fr Gregory's funeral, the current Superior, Fr Colin CSWG, quoted from the CSWG Rule on enclosure:

The monastic enclosure should become a still centre in the heart of the world, where the Community is always waiting on God and invoking his Holy Spirit, so as to embrace the whole world in its life of prayer and obedience to his will.¹

Fr Colin went on to say that this phrase described the person Fr Gregory was, and I would add that it describes also the person he was always gently guiding others to be. His life flowed from his prayer, and his prayer was always deeply rooted in God. May he rest in peace, and rise in glory.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

FATHER PAUL AT BEDE HOUSE

In 1969 the Superior of the Society of St John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts. received a request from the Bede House Trust and from Mother Mary Clare SLG to 'loan' Fr Paul Wessinger SSJE to be Warden of Bede House, following the resignation of Fr David Shapland. (The Community had started this venture in 1967 and was to remain at Bede House until 2003.) The request was granted, and in January 1970 Father Paul, as we then knew him, became Warden of the little eremitical foundation in the Weald of Kent. He already had a long-standing relationship with the Sisters of the Love of God, and a close rapport with Sister Jocelyn Mary, the Sister in Charge at Bede House.

¹ CSWG Rule, Chapter 3: 5.

Having frequented convents on the continent, as well as in US and UK, Fr Paul was practised in receiving curtseys from nuns and engaging with them through grilles. But by 1970, in the wake of Vatican II, much of the received code of behaviour governing the converse of nuns and priests had been quietly moth-balled. At Bede House Fr Paul was an integral and congenial component of the cenobitic dimension of the life. As well as presiding at the Eucharist, preaching, ministering to the Sisters and their guests, he gardened, drove people to and from the station, helped with the shopping, baked enormous German yeast cakes, and for a time shared his washing-up duty with the young American ordinand who spent a sort of unofficial pre-postulancy at the 'skete' (the word which best describes the character of Bede House in those days) before entering the SSJE Novitiate in Oxford. In these and other activities Paul was as much at home in the common life as he was in his solitary hut: unmistakably a priest and a religious, but evidently lacking in any prescriptive or organising impulses. He would confer freely with 'Little Sister Boss', but the decisions were left to her. Sensitive always to the nuances of our two communities, whose Rules retained a strong family likeness, he was most himself when praying the Divine Office in chapel, where he never allowed his masculine voice to overwhelm the little choir. Indeed he seemed entirely free of a desire to dominate; being two and a half heads taller than any of us, he hardly needed to. While he was responsive to the teaching of Fr Gilbert Shaw, whose influence was paramount in SLG at that period, the recurrent keynotes of his sermons echoed Fr Benson's 'Rise Up', 'Look to the Glory!', 'Love one another'.²

His brief did not extend to the direction of the two SLG foundation hermits, who were under the care of Mother Mary Clare and Fr Donald Allchin, successors of Fr Gilbert Shaw in all things eremitical. Whether he minded about this or not, it did give him a delicious liberty to deploy his sense of fun, lovingly, at their expense. Usually silent when washing up, he would sometimes wipe his hands on his apron and, twirling his girdle ends into loops,

² Richard Meux Benson (1824-1915) was a founder member and the first Superior of SSJE, which began in 1865.

recount in a sepulchral whisper his latest encounter with ‘Hermit A’, the one who supervised his gardening, or with ‘Hermit B’ in the disputed area of the washing line, ending always with a guffaw of laughter before returning to the sink.

On autumn mornings after Lauds, Fr Paul could be seen striding across the lawn to inspect the dwarf cyclamens clustering at the roots of the lime trees, and he would often bring back a bunch of freesias from his visits to London or Oxford. Indeed, his love of flowers was a distinct aspect of the humility, so movingly evoked by Brother Curtis in his funeral oration (16 June 2009), as a grace freely bestowed by God, a birthright rather than a virtue strenuously cultivated. As a small boy, we learned, he would sometimes walk to school, choosing to spend the money provided for his tram fare on flowers for his teacher. One day the teacher met his mother in town and mentioned this chivalrous trait in Paul. His mother, of course, had questions to ask and Paul had to own up. Again, there is more than childish charm in the picture of a small boy in Oregon, standing on the shore of the Pacific at sunset, and when he was sure there was no one else about, singing ‘Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear’. ‘The child is father to the man’ and in Paul’s case, as in everyone’s, that free gift of grace had to be vigilantly guarded against the assaults of the evil one, and constantly renewed in prayer and penitence, as the child within him strove and faltered, started again, agonized and prevailed, and grew into the holy and humble man of God so many have recognized and loved.

One afternoon we entertained some (mostly Irish) Sisters, from the nearby convent of a large Roman Catholic international congregation. During the conversation over tea, the range of Fr Paul’s ecumenical knowledge and experience became apparent. Afterwards in the garden I was approached by one of the sisters, who asked me tentatively if Fr Paul was ‘in valid orders’, as she knew some Anglican priests weren’t (*sic*). I gave a carefully unhelpful answer: ‘Well, he is in Anglican orders, and I don’t know what that might mean for you today, since, as you know, Pope Leo XIII pronounced Anglican Orders to be utterly null and void. Why not have a word with Fr Paul about it?’ There was a moment’s

pause before she rejoined emphatically: ‘Oh Sister, I am *perfectly* sure that *Fr Paul* is in valid orders!’

His great love for France sometimes took him there to visit monasteries and Carmelite houses where he had many friends and to renew contacts with Catholic parishes. Occasional letters written from there (and also from America) earned him the additional title of Father Dots, owing to the punctiliar style of his handwriting which waited to be deciphered on his return, with an armful of French books for his mealtime reading.

Early in 1972 Fr Paul tendered his resignation, having been recalled by his Community. It was already clear for what purpose, and we came to see that, as well as being rich in blessing for Bede House, his time there had been one of hidden preparation for taking up the office of Superior, and particularly, perhaps, for the development of Emery House.

Sister Eve and I had the unexpected joy of renewing our bonds with Brother Paul—something which needed few words—when in 2005 we shared with all his brethren and a host of friends in celebrating his sixtieth anniversary of ordination. As he reflected in his homily, (with the familiar blend of earnest gravity and pauline twinkle) on his early years as a Cowley Father, a mysterious kinship with the Beloved Disciple seemed to shine through, and again towards evening as he stumped off to his cell—‘immortal diamond’.

SISTER ISABEL SLG

This article will also appear in Cowley, the magazine of the Society of St John the Evangelist.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

SARAH COAKLEY is Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, and was previously Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity, Harvard University. She has known the Community for many years; her close childhood friends were grandchildren of Fr Gilbert Shaw. Later she was Tutorial Fellow in Theology at Oriel College, Oxford (1991-3), and she was ordained priest at Littlemore Church in 2001, where she did summer duty as a non-stipendiary assistant priest 2000-7.

DAVID BARTON was Warden of the Community 2001-9.

BISHOP GEOFFREY ROWELL is Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe and a Priest Associate of the Community. He got to know the Community during the years in which he was Chaplain at Keble College, Oxford (1971-94).

NIALL BAYLY has been a subscriber to the *Fairacres Chronicle* since 1976. He obtained his Master's degree and the Divinity Testimonium from Trinity College, Dublin, and was ordained in the Diocese of Connor (Church of Ireland) in 1965. He has carried out varied ministries in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he is currently (Honorary) Minister for Pastoral Care at May Street Presbyterian Church.

DOUGLAS DALES has been Chaplain of Marlborough College since 1984. He has published many books of history and theology, and he has strong ecumenical and monastic connections with Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran churches. He is married with three grown-up children and has been a Priest Associate since 1978.

JANICE BROWN, a reader of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, got to know the Community through her husband. Specialising in persecution of religion in communist states, working in close association with Keston, she has written 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*.

SISTER CATHERINE CSC was received as a novice of the Sisters of the Church on the Feast of Catherine of Siena 1988. She leads retreats, sometimes based on her Saint, and has a ministry among deaf people in London. Currently an assistant Provincial of CSC, she appreciates friendship with SLG.

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.

THOMAS SEVILLE CR is a member of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield. He is a part-time lecturer at the College of the Resurrection, the theological college originally founded by the Community, and teaches Ecclesiology.

JOHN SCOTT, formerly Chaplain at Bede House, now reads books at home in Folkestone and periodically at large elsewhere.

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

BEN DE LA MARE

SLG PRESS records with sadness the death on 29 October 2009 of Ben de la Mare (born Benedick James Hobart de la Mare on 11 September 1938), after a succession of strokes, which had dogged him for some years. Many readers will remember the article he wrote about his own experience, both practical and spiritual, of having a stroke, which was published in the Winter 2005 *Fairacres Chronicle*. He had indicated to the Editor earlier this year that he hoped to write a follow-up for the current edition—but it was not to be.

Ben's relationship with the Community was fostered in a number of ways over the years. The most extensive connection was through the cell group headed by Robert Runcie, later Archbishop of Canterbury, to which both Ben and Sister Jane SLG belonged for many years.

As well as being a dedicated parish priest, Ben was a classicist and he loved the craft of words. He particularly loved the works of T. S. Eliot, George Herbert and John Clare. He was the grandson of the poet Walter de la Mare, and, as he himself put it, he was also 'a publisher's son', his father having been prominent at Faber & Faber, at a high point in the company's history as a publisher of poetry.

Just before his 70th birthday, it was a particular joy to him to achieve, again as he put it himself, his 'own ISBN', when SLG Press published *From Perfection to the Elixir* (2008). This essay is a scholarly and sensitive examination of the spiritual journey and conversion reflected in George Herbert's development and revision of the poem 'Perfection' to become the final version, 'The Elixir'. The poem, best known in the hymn version 'Teach me my God and King', was sung at his funeral on 6 November. His hope to write and publish other works remained unfulfilled due to his failing health.

From Perfection to The Elixir: How George Herbert fashioned a famous poem (Fairacres Publication 153) by Ben de la Mare is available from SLG Press at £3.00 plus shipping costs. Please do not send money with your order, as an invoice will be sent with books when despatched. ISBN: 978-0-7283-0172-6.

BOOKS

Anselm of Canterbury: His Life and Legacy, Sister Benedicta Ward SLG, SPCK, 2009, £12.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06104-4.

This is probably the best introduction in English available today to the spiritual significance of St Anselm. But it is much more than an introduction: it is a distillation of many years of thought and prayer on this subject, rooted in diligent scholarship and an affinity to the original texts. This book carries a great deal of learning and perception with a lightness of touch. It is also a valuable exposition of many important facets of medieval Christian thought and belief and so it is of wider significance than its notable subject.

St Anselm (1033-1109) was one of the most distinguished and attractive of saints, one of the great Archbishops of Canterbury, revered still as a Christian philosopher. But in this work, the author examines rightly the delineaments of his spiritual life, his beliefs, and their expression in his theology and in his prayers. These prayers exercised a great influence in his generation, and for many centuries thereafter. Many of his writings reflect his friendships, and this strand of his life is well examined in this book. His most famous work, the *Proslogion*, in which he sets forth a demonstration arising from his own prayers that has come to be called the ontological argument for the existence of God, is a perfect example of this inner marriage of penitence, friendship and the desire for truth—*faith seeking understanding*, as St Anselm put it, following the example of St Augustine before him.

His love for his friends extended to the saints, and perhaps one of the best parts of this book is the discussion of how St Anselm related to the saints. He wrote, ‘If it is friendship that delights you, they will love God more than themselves, and each other as themselves’ (p. 35). The author brings out the parallel between his approach to the saints and his approach as a monk towards Scripture, which echoed the earlier teaching of Claudius of Turin, (who lived in the ninth century and was a notable Carolingian biblical scholar):

‘Blessed are the eyes that see the divine Spirit through the letter’s veil’ (p. 36). This intellectual perception and belief was the foundation of the Benedictine tradition of *lectio divina* in which St Anselm was steeped. Sister Benedicta writes of this: ‘This theme of glory communicated through the word of the Scriptures to the believing heart provided the basis for prayer and devotion’ (p.36). The pages of Scripture, like the lives of the saints, were windows into an eternal world, moulded indeed by the impulse of the Spirit according to the pattern of the life of Christ crucified and risen. Both were for St Anselm diaphanous diaphragms through which the reality of God and his Word might be sensed with the heart and the mind united in penitence and silence.

The discussion of his prayers is masterly and concludes in this way: ‘There was a realism about Anselm, a lack of sentimentality, which marks him out from those who looked for miracles in his life and other saintly figures who were his contemporaries. As with so much else ... Anselm was both of his age and above and beyond it’ (p. 48).

This observation ushers in a very perceptive discussion of St Anselm’s attitude towards the relics of saints. There is no doubt that nothing marks the gulf more between medieval Christianity and modern Western Protestant Christianity—and modern secular society too—than the question of relics. Even in Catholicism and Orthodoxy today there is a gap between modern veneration and the all-pervasive atmosphere surrounding relics that was a hallmark of the Middle Ages. St Anselm himself was no sceptic; but on the hand he was not devotee either, as appears in the remarkable biography written of him by his chaplain at Canterbury, Eadmer. This biography is one of the most outstanding and approachable lives of any medieval saint, remarkably ‘modern’ in so many respects, being well-researched and documented, and also immediate. It gives a vivid and memorable picture of St Anselm. Sister Benedicta concludes about Anselm that, ‘He saw both the relic and the saint not as something valued for itself but as part of the way to heaven for himself and all humankind’ (p. 71).

The book proceeds to describe the low-key way in which Anselm came to be venerated as a saint, first at Canterbury and

Chester, and then elsewhere. He was held in high regard by English contemporaries and successors such as John of Salisbury and Thomas à Becket. He was also revered on the continent as an outstanding Christian bishop and teacher. Finally in 1720 he was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Clement XI. The penultimate chapter of the book deals with the strange tale of St Anselm's relics at Canterbury, before and after the Reformation; a matter perhaps of more antiquarian interest in some respects, although it seems very likely that they still repose within the lovely Romanesque side chapel in the part of the cathedral that dates from his time, and which is now adorned with a fine altar in marble from his birthplace, Aosta in Italy.

The final chapter of this book explores further the matter of relics and their spiritual significance, then and now. It draws important conclusions about the sea-change of attitude that occurred at the Reformation towards the Bible, the Eucharist and the relics of saints, and indeed towards saints themselves. No longer would the host represent the whole Christ, or the word of the Bible be regarded as an epitome of divine truth revealed in Christ; likewise a fragment of a saint could no longer embody the real and eternal presence of the person from whom it came. This shift of perception, if it is indeed a true perception, is with us still in the West. As the author shows so wisely, this has important implications for our understanding of death, and also of the reality of the resurrection of the human person. In her comparison at the end between Bede and St Anselm, the author draws some very important conclusions about what actually constitutes a saint. She reminds the reader that Dante placed St Anselm alongside St John Chrysostom in heaven.

To the modern Western mind, Christian and non-Christian, saints' relics undoubtedly constitute a real barrier to penetrating the medieval Christian mind. How are relics to be received, let alone venerated, even if their historical provenance can be established as genuine, which in most cases they cannot? How can divine gifts of healing and reconciliation flow through such channels, as they clearly do in other parts of Christendom, even today? One way of reacting is to regard them as part of the charisma of the Church's

tradition, means of divine grace mediated by the Holy Spirit ‘who blows where he wills.’ Another approach is to regard the material object as sanctified by the devotion showed to it within the worshipping life and penitential discipline of the Church. Perhaps it is appropriate and better to regard the material relic as a loving sign of the saint’s personal reality, once upon earth, but now enfolded within the eternal life of heaven. In this way the relic is meta-historical, partaking in the truth that it signifies and so becoming a part of that truth and a means of God’s grace. For it is certainly not the cult of relics that is important, but their life-giving fruits.

In the case of St Anselm, however, he remains in dialogue with any who care to read his writings, his letters and his prayers. Indeed, as this author has shown on more than one occasion, his prayers are the best way into the spirit of his Christian faith, while his theological writings tower over most others in their clarity and power of argument. But it is in his letters, and in his ‘Life’ written by Eadmer, that Anselm shines forth as a great friend who can still speak across the ages and transform lives, calling us to the love of learning and the desire for God.

DOUGLAS DALES

SLG Press has a limited number of copies of Anselm of Canterbury: His Life and Legacy for sale at £13.00 per copy plus shipping costs. Please do not send money with your order, as an invoice will be sent with books when despatched.

Upon This Mountain: Prayer in the Carmelite Tradition, Mary McCormack OCD, Teresian Press, 2009, £4.00.
ISBN: 978-0-947916-09-1.

Having been told how good this book is before I read it, I came to it with great expectations. And I wasn’t disappointed. This book is not a how-to manual propounding a method of prayer; it is more of a celebration of prayer, and more specifically prayer in the Carmelite

tradition. Let this book be a wake-up call for us all, that we too can know God intimately if only we go out to meet him in prayer, to begin the ascent, for as St John of the Cross says:

Upon this mountain there dwells
only the honour and glory of God.

This book explores the Carmelite tradition of contemplative prayer mainly from the viewpoints of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century reformers of the Carmelite order and masters of prayer. This tradition has something to offer to both the beginner and the one well travelled down the path of prayer, and it is just one way of prayer among many that all lead to the ‘honour and glory of God’.

The teaching of both St Teresa and St John of the Cross on prayer is explained simply and is easily understood and inspiring. We learn from their experience, not from a prescribed discipline of prayer. The essence of St Teresa’s prayer is ‘being with, looking at, sharing, loving and being loved’. Her teaching is ‘not to think much but to love much’. St John of the Cross touches on some of the more difficult aspects of prayer that we encounter. Mary McCormack does not skirt around these difficulties, but at the same time gives us this very encouraging quotation from St John of the Cross: ‘We are plunged into darkness, not because the light is not shining, but because its brilliance blinds us.’

There is a chapter on the importance of self-awareness in prayer, letting ourselves be who we are then and there. This is the beginning of stillness—first taking in who we are, and then taking in our surroundings, grounding ourselves in the truth that is, in stillness, in the prayer that is received and not done.

The last chapter is called ‘The Apostolate of Contemplation’. It starts with the premise that all prayer is apostolic, and explains this is true as prayer develops into contemplation, how the word of God can be announced in silence. Contemplative prayer is more than ‘simply ... pursuing a deeper spiritual life, seeking a closer relationship with God’. As St Teresa says, ‘the whole purpose of prayer is that we may have strength to serve those around us’.

This book is small, both in dimensions and number of pages, but it is not small on content. Because of its brevity it can easily be read through in one sitting; however, slowing down and taking time to absorb the chapters is highly recommended. There is much wisdom here, born out of Mary McCormack's personal experience and knowledge. Don't skim past it.

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

Following the Silence: A Contemplative Journey, Georgina Alexander, Gracewing, 2009, £6.99. ISBN: 978-0-85244-492-4.

The journey of each person into God is unique; at the same time the experience of each individual sheds light on the path for each person who seeks to pray. In this book Georgina Alexander, who is an Oblate Sister of the Community, describes her personal journey of prayer, and in so doing offers insights on the path of Christian prayer and living from which all her readers can benefit.

The author has had to juggle the call to a deep life of prayer with the demands and responsibilities of a busy spouse and mother. Her commitment and response to her call have led her into deep places of prayer. Along the way she has been faithful to reading and study and has sought the advice of wise guides. She shares the fruits of this study as she recounts the story of her journey of prayer. The result is an account which is both deeply personal and illustrative of the stages of prayer as experienced by most of those who commit themselves seriously to a life of prayer in the midst of the concerns of daily life.

Georgina Alexander believes that it is important for us to 'accept our vocation in faith and obedience just as we are, wherever we are, whatever our outward circumstances' (p. 11). This is indeed wise and encouraging advice, though it is challenging too; we no longer have the excuse of waiting for a better opportunity! Prayer may be difficult when one is balancing the demands of work and family, and the author is aware of this from her own experience of being a 'hermit in community', but her story is an encouragement

that accepting the situation one is in as part of the way, rather than as an obstacle, opens doors to deeper prayer. Her journey has included the experience of the Dark Night described by St John of the Cross, and here again she is able to offer wise advice about what is going on in this seemingly inexplicable experience.

The author makes it clear that the journey described is her own, and that each person's journey is unique. This isn't a blue-print for the life of everyone who prays. She is also clear, however, that by describing her own very particular journey she is shedding light on principles which are true universally. At the beginning of her spiritual journey, Georgina Alexander found very few people with whom she could talk about her experiences; my hope is that, by bravely sharing her journey, she may provide encouragement to others who feel called to a life of prayer in the world.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

The Labour of Obedience: The Benedictines of Pershore, Nashdom and Elmore, Petà Dunstan, Canterbury Press, 2009, £21.99.
ISBN: 978-1-85311-974-3.

This book is the history of a community, and whilst three monasticised buildings have been the home of that community's life, yet the story begins and ends elsewhere. The opening phrase, 'It was a sensation ...' reminds us that the life begun at Pershore was the barely-salvaged wreckage of the Caldey Island Anglican Benedictines, who had largely, and sensationally, become Catholics in 1913. The final twenty pages combine an account of how the community came to move to Elmore with more general observations about Benedictine life, ethos and its place within the Church of England; and it should be added that the (literal) handful of mostly elderly monks have now decided to move from on from Elmore, not least so as to be more certain of sacramental provision.

Petà Dunstan makes it clear that Pershore would not have come into existence without strong clerical and lay pressure. After the Caldey conversions, Anglo-Catholics felt the need to justify their

position and claims. There might be communities of men at Cowley and Mirfield, but the existence of a 'proper' Benedictine community would be a powerful statement. The problem was that there was left over, so to speak, one monk in solemn vows and the somewhat withdrawn and confusingly erudite oblate Fr Denys Prideaux, who together had to form a community from whatever new aspirants might appear. The conversion to Catholicism of the former within a year or so left Prideaux in charge as 'warden'. It could only be a temporary solution. With the ending of the First World War and the arrival of some more experienced men, Prideaux came, and was pushed, to see that only by being fully professed himself could the necessary authority and leadership be provided. As Dunstan also notes, 'Being an abbot would certainly give him greater recognition and status, and he was not averse to wearing a mitre.'

Prideaux's weakness lay partly in his increasing age; he was in his fifties and wanted to get things done. It is difficult to exculpate him wholly from charges of exaggeration, if not fantasy: *inter alia*, numbers and status of monks were routinely overstated, the Bishop of Worcester was so deliberately misunderstood as to be ignored, and an 'unscheduled meeting on a railway platform' with the Bishop of Oxford was presented as solemn diocesan approval of the community's constitutions. None of this was necessarily new for Anglo-Catholics wishing to progress; Abbot Denys, however, staked his Benedictine claim to legitimacy on having the approval of the diocesan bishop for the foundation of the monastery. If that approval were not entirely forthcoming as he might wish, then it would still need to be publicised as having come forth. It was in this slightly feckless spirit that the community came to purchase (with wholly insufficient funds) the house known as Nashdom. It is easy, in the light of the lists of those who came, were professed, and then left, to judge that the Abbot encouraged premature professions. Yet bodies were needed. Nashdom was not, in his understanding, to stand solitary; and in 1923 two monks were sent out to Ghana, Prideaux justifying this historically as the truer way of evangelisation, 'propagating by cloisters'. Eight years later the monks had left; good work had been done, but it had been insufficiently resourced and vocations had in those years been lost.

If Dunstan characterises Prideaux as a deep lover of the Church of England ‘despite his continual complaints’, and as one who foresaw how Benedictine community life could properly fit within its structure, it has to be noted that from the beginnings at Pershore (continuing Caldey practice) the community’s liturgy was wholly Roman and in Latin. Unsurprisingly Nashdom was noted for this, both in its own right and in the influence it had on the women’s communities for whom the monks acted as chaplains, directors or wardens. Dunstan sees the community as having become increasingly Anglo-Papalist. Of Abbot Martin, who succeeded Abbot Denys, she notes that ‘[he] laid so much stress on outward forms and the need never to deviate from the Roman way of doing things’, although she sees in this, ‘a profound sharing—not, as his critics would have it, a slavish mimicry’. The community’s spirituality was reflecting and responding to those desires on many sides for the unity of Christians, and to an awareness that the many obstacles were of the sort that might only be cast out by prayer—shared Catholic prayer.

From the 1930s through to the 1950s (despite the evacuations and disruptions of the Second World War) the community continued and grew modestly, whilst attaining greater national celebrity through several of its members—Doms Anselm Hughes in musicology, Gregory Dix in liturgy and general controversy (!) and Bernard Clements at All Saints, Margaret Street. Perhaps Peter Anson’s 1955 comment in *The Call of the Cloister* sums Nashdom up at this period: ‘It is such a *normal* kind of Benedictine monastery.’ Stability seemed to have descended. In 1941 there were the first professions at St Gregory’s Priory in the United States, and although transfusions of life were needed later in the decade and from Gregory Dix in 1950/51, the foundation has survived.

Inevitably, perhaps, the most painful chapter of the book is that which deals with the implications and aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Much of the liturgical style of the Church of England (certainly until recently) has been influenced by reformed Roman style. For a community such as Nashdom, the changes could not be other than disorientating; thus, as Dunstan notes, in the late 1970s, ‘it was now ten years since the revision of the Divine Office had begun and no end seemed in sight’. Changes in liturgy, in

perception of hierarchy, in modes of relationship—all taxed individuals to the uttermost and tempted to individualism. Some persevered in quiet holiness, some perhaps in sadness; superiors found their burdens of office intolerable or offered themselves in hope of what remained unseen. It is right that Dunstan praises Abbot Godfrey for enabling the community to come sufficiently to one mind that the move could be made from Nashdom to Elmore when Godfrey was himself in his early eighties. One might claim, however, that it was the end of the former story when Abbot Basil, then a layman, offered himself for ordination in 2002 and came to the altar believing that he was bound to use a rite authorized by the Church of England. Whilst Dunstan clearly believes that Abbot Denys' vision and understanding of Benedictine life in the Church of England was ultimately the more perceptive, she offers no comment as to what he might have thought of the new liturgical era; she notes, simply, that 'this was a momentous change'.

The story has, of course, aspects that are both entertaining and hair-raising. Of Abbot Denys it is noted that 'he thought a mysterious action called "putting the dinner on" was done first thing in the morning. He assumed the cook was then free for several hours for other tasks—until another mysterious operation, known as "taking the dinner off", was performed just before the meal was served'. Of the community's corporate worship one monk observed that it had, during his lifetime, taken place in a bedroom (Pershore), a ballroom (Nashdom) and a dining room (Elmore); he was relieved when a proper (and worthy) oratory was at last built there.

Those who may wish to read further could usefully go back to Peter Anson's *Call of the Cloister* (SPCK, 1955, quoted above)—in many ways it seems to come from a different universe. A more recent volume, Michael Yelton's *Anglican Papalism: An Illustrated History 1900-1960* (Canterbury Press, 2005), will shed much additional light on Pershore and Nashdom and some of the monks of the community. During the gestation of this review Pope Benedict XVI has announced an Apostolic Constitution providing for the reception into the Roman Catholic Church of Anglicans who wish to profess the Catholic faith and to continue to worship using as yet undefined 'worthy elements of Anglican patrimony'. Whilst it remains to be

seen what number of people in which places may take up this offer, the history of this Benedictine community can only leave us wondering at the interaction between the aspirations of Christians and the merciful providence of God. Dunstan is right, in her final pages, to draw attention again to the life of prayer that has been lived out. If her book deals much in personalities and politics, it is only because those personalities were drawn to offer themselves, however inadequately, day after day, and hour by hour of the Divine Office, to God.

JOHN SCOTT

Law and Revelation: Richard Hooker and His Writings, edited by Raymond Chapman, Canterbury Press, 2009, £18.99.
ISBN: 978-1-85311-991-0.

The revival of scholarly interest in Richard Hooker (1554-1600) continues apace, distancing itself from the widespread view of him as the father of Anglicanism, preaching Canterbury, while his opponent preached Geneva and the like.¹ Much of that view we owe to Izaak Walton's biography of 1662, masterly written, but unreliable. Hooker remains unread by most Anglicans now, and this is a loss.

This is why a welcome should be extended to Raymond Chapman's selection of Hooker's writings. Most of Hooker is to be found in the great *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*; all the extracts here come from this. There is nothing from the early sermons or from the fragments found in Trinity Library, Dublin from the end of his life. In some ways that is to be regretted, for the sermons have an English which is easier than much of the *Laws*, and the pungency of the comments in the fragments—drafts of a response to an attack on his theology—show a side to Hooker which is certainly present in the *Laws*, but is not how we like to think of him.

¹ This was the so-called 'Battle of the Pulpit' at the Temple Church, London, 1589-91, when Richard Hooker as Master of the Temple preached a sermon each Sunday morning and his deputy, Walter Travers, then preached in the afternoon, contradicting him.

This is a selection, but to many it will present a hill to climb, rather than a river to walk along; more the Pennines than a towpath to Iffley. This is due to the matter of the language. Hooker's English is that of the latter years of the Queen Elizabeth I. It can be sonorous, balanced, witty; all these things. It is a Latinate English, and that has been out of fashion for a century or more. It does not make for easy perusal in our day. However, the Pennines repay stout walking; so does Hooker.

Why? Hooker comes at a juncture in the story of the Church of England when certain of her members were pushing at the edges of the Reformed character which she had taken on since the sad end of Mary's reign. Some were wishing to change in a more Reformed direction; others in a way which was less in the van of the Reformed tradition. Both originated from the same camp, as it were, and one can trace shifts in Hooker's positions (on justification, on grace, on the person of Christ, on the sacraments, on reason) which are no longer typical of Reformed divinity. As Chapman notes, though Hooker 'cannot be claimed as the creator of the Anglican *via media* [middle way], he lays a good foundation for it' (p. 89). Any reflection which takes the Anglican Church seriously needs to take to heart something of Hooker's approach, and to take it more seriously than many modern commentators have done. (It is easy to take Hooker as a pennant on the standard one fancies the Church needs.) The temper of his presentation, which has been much appreciated, may have had a rhetorical purpose, but the argument in defence of reason and wisdom over against passion in one's own conviction, his devotion to Scripture and the Liturgy in the name of the Word, his openness to the wider Christian train of thought and reflection, the primacy of the social aspect of our salvation, the active role of the sacraments, though argued to different matters, touch us still.

Chapman provides us with a varied feast, with comments, many helpful, but not all of which are without a particular slant. (He is a leading advocate of the Liturgy which Hooker devotes half of the *Laws* to defending, the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1559.) I might have chosen other passages, but it is not an easy task to select from a writer who argues to points by induction, by building up or by

slipping in a qualification, which meets his opponent only to take him captive. A famous example would be Hooker's treatment of Scripture in Book II. There we find the famous remark, included here, 'that the absolute perfection of Scripture is seen by relation unto that end whereto it tendeth' (II viii 5, p. 60). For Hooker, Christians participate in Christ through each other and through the Word in sacrament and reading of Scripture, and to Christ it is that Scripture 'tendeth'. However difficult the great section on Christ in Book V is supposed to be (it isn't), I wonder whether more would have been a help, to understand that there is no support for the fundamentalist, whether of liberal or of protestant tendency, in Hooker.

Hooker died in his forties, of a chill, his thought still in process. One of the casualties of his reputation and his style is that it is easy to think of the *Laws* as final thoughts; there is reason to lament what might have been contributed, had he lived as long as his almost direct contemporary, Lancelot Andrewes (d. 1626).

FR THOMAS SEVILLE CR

Between Heaven and Charing Cross: Finding a Way to Faith, Martin Warner, Continuum Books (Mowbray), 2009, £9.99.
ISBN: 978-1-84706-538-4.

This lively book started out as a series of retreat addresses for ordinands and clergy. But Warner's sympathies go beyond those boundaries. He writes as someone excited by his subject, in a popular manner, and for that reason will be accessible by someone who might not readily pick up a book by a priest. But priest he is: formerly Administrator of the Shrine at Walsingham and now Canon Treasurer at St Paul's Cathedral in London.

If his original audience was domestic, his target now certainly includes those on the edge of, or searching for, faith. He writes, 'If people who had no experience of Church discovered in church an invitation to seriousness about what they would wish to be ... we could make progress towards a restoration of the practice of belief and trust in God' (p. 127). Amen to that. And he offers some seriousness. But his book cannot be described as dull.

If the inner frame which holds his thoughts together is the prayers a priest says while vesting for the Eucharist, his ‘hunch’ is ‘that street life and the sanctuary of God are intimates’ (p. 4). And that is what lies behind the structure of this book. But this structure is not confining: his chapters explore many images and ideas, mostly without any immediately obvious connection to those sacristy prayers! Indeed, his writing often proceeds by association rather than logic—which is how many hearts work anyway. Biblical texts clearly mean a lot to him, and lead him off into new areas of thought and reflection. But poetry and paintings stimulate his thinking no less. Indeed, sometimes a particular poem or painting is explored in great detail—more than a retreat address might warrant. (But perhaps these reflections have become more filled out once the addresses became a book.)

Martin Warner writes as a catholic Christian who believes in humanity. He understands the weaknesses of the flesh as well as its glory, and takes such issues in his stride, addressing them in a pastorally creative way. His poetic heroes are people who have suffered: the down-and-out Francis Thompson for instance (who provided the title of the book); the derelict Lord Marchmain of *Brideshead Revisited*; the war poem by the bereaved Leo Marks, ‘The life that I have / Is all that I have ...’ He understands that some people have Down’s syndrome, and are no less lovely for that. But he’s not soppy. Indeed, he delves into deep waters and implicitly holds out challenges for faith and the deepening of discipleship for both believers and searchers.

Although he is a Canon Treasurer, he comes over neither as introvert nor miser. Indeed, one gets the impression that he would be at ease buying a round of drinks in a pub near the Cathedral, chatting with a sceptical audience of young adults—and that *they* would buy *him* the next drink!

I was touched to read on p. 3 that ‘it was the ordering of godly worship in Rochester Cathedral’ that fostered his vocation. May he now do the same for others in the godly ordering at St Paul’s.

JOHN ARMSON

REVIEW ARTICLE

God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, Allen Lane (Penguin), 2009, £25. ISBN: 9780713999020.

This article is based on the book *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World*, written by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, and also on a seminar at the London School of Economics with the authors of this book, economists, sociologists and students.

This is not a book that many readers of the *Fairacres Chronicle* will naturally turn to for enlightenment or spiritual reading. It is nevertheless an important book, the contents of which need to be noted, and I suspect that the central argument and many of the issues raised by its two authors will be with us for some years to come. The two authors work full time for *The Economist* magazine: John Micklethwait, a Roman Catholic, is its editor; and Adrian Wooldridge is its America Correspondent, and he is an atheist.

The provocative title ‘God is back’ should really be expanded to: ‘God, who makes a difference in our lives, a God who can improve my life, is back; and not only is he back, he is back at the heart of public life and discourse.’ The authors are describing this as a phenomenon on a global scale, but they reserve judgement on whether they think that this is a good thing.

The central argument of this book flies in the face of over 200 years of western cultural orthodoxy, namely that God and religious practice have a tendency to decline, or at least fade away into the private realm, as economic and educational standards improve. This book challenges the intellectual consensus that the need for religious practice decreases, the more ‘modern’ a society becomes; a conviction that is deeply rooted in western thought.

The beginning of this trend is often said to be the Reformation, the effect of which was a first stage in the privatisation of religion. The Enlightenment and its subsequent emphasis on a scientific

world view have often been regarded as the second nail in the coffin of the idea that God can really make a significant difference, either in the public sphere, or even in the private lives of believers. Hegel saw the Christian faith as a stage in civilisation that would in time be superseded by anthropology and humanism. Feuerbach, Marx, and finally Freud, with their description of religious faith as a palliative for a society that is not yet mature, or of religion as neurosis, added their influential and not yet fully discredited views into the intellectual mix. But it was the sociologist and political economist, Max Weber, who described the phenomenon that has become so dominant in our own perception of faith and its decline: the better educated, the more affluent, the more economically secure, the more ‘modern’, a society becomes, the more we will find a decline of interest in religion. In our own time, and in our own country, we are still wedded to this idea that the Church is in decline and faith is retreating from the public realm, which is partly myth and partly self-fulfilling prophecy. The authors’ main claim is that this Weber paradigm is essentially flawed, and totally untrue for most parts of the world.

As an aside, one might mention here that the increasingly intemperate attacks on religion and faith in public life by aggressive secularists, such as Peter Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Evan Harris MP, are an expression of frustration by those with a secularist agenda, a frustration with the contemporary reality that the Max Weber orthodoxy seems to have come unstuck; and closer examination of recent history seems to suggest that God as a phenomenon in public life—in many affluent societies as well as in those achieving new levels of affluence—is far from fading away.

Historically speaking, the authors claim, this is nothing new. Secular constructs of statehood have on the whole been rejected by its citizens over the last hundred years. One thinks here of the short-lived experiment of Nazism, or the rather more persistent atheistic régimes under Soviet Communism. And even the more benevolent secular constitutions of newly formed countries such as India and Turkey have, on the whole, been superseded by religiously-sympathetic,

| or even religiously-minded, governments as these countries have become more wealthy and self-assured in their economic position.

At the heart of this book is a long description and analysis of the state of religion in the most modern and most affluent country on this earth, the USA. It is the most obvious example where increasing wealth, security and sophistication have not led to decrease in an appetite for a presence of God in public and private life and business. Many of us will be familiar with the constantly changing but profoundly alive religious scene in America. New churches, including so-called mega-churches, are constantly forming and re-forming themselves. Many provide meaning, and sometimes even a social service, in a largely sub-urban-materialistic, but sometimes also urban-and-deprived, cultural setting. Christianity, especially in its pluralist forms of expression, appears to be alive and well in the USA, and politicians, nurtured in an environment of a carefully neutral constitution as far as religion is concerned, on the whole wear their religious convictions on their sleeves.

The book also sketches out the situation in other countries: countries such as Korea which have recently become affluent; or others which are still aspiring to joining the ‘first world’, such as China. China appears to have the fastest-growing Christian population in the world, and on current trends will soon be the largest Christian nation in the world. It is the emerging middle classes—professionals such as doctors, lawyers, business people, scientists and teachers—who seem to be first in the queue to join the Calvinist-leaning house-church movement, encouraged in its growth by bureaucratically-applied government limits on numbers meeting in individual homes. The situation in Africa is different, and yet a similar trend of growth can be detected. Christianity, with its pluralist flexibility, is even outstripping Islam in the speed with which it is spreading. In South America, Christian revival is strongly fuelled by Pentecostalist experientialism from the USA. It seems that the spread of capitalism also brings in its wake a yearning for meaning and real content.

The authors believe that similar trends are present in most European countries, but that the situation in Europe is somewhat

distorted by mainstream Churches being in one sense or another ‘established’: unhealthily linked to, and dependent on, the State, either formally or financially. As one might expect from authors who are committed to *The Economist*, they believe that Churches and ‘faith’ in general need a free market to flourish and grow.

The book does not restrict its investigation to the Christian faith and Christian faith communities, though predominantly that is the focus of most of its content. The chapters on Islam and other religions are not as well-researched as the rest of the book. The claim of the authors here is that resurgence of fundamentalism is not part of what they are describing (namely, ‘God is back’). Islamic revival is, in their view, in fact hampered by Saudi money, which prevents Islam from being as flexible and adaptable to modernism as Christianity in its pluralist forms of expression and theologies.

‘God is back’ is provocative in its claim, and very international in its scope. There are now more religious lobby organisations at the United Nations than ever in its entire, and rather progressive and secular, history; for most of its history, only the Roman Catholic Church was formally represented. Our authors point us to the phenomenon, whether we like it or not, that wherever humanity achieves more freedom or more security and affluence, either in groups or as individuals, it chooses God over against atheism. As an Anglican parish priest, I found much of this book uncomfortable, and yet it helps me to understand the sea-change that has even reached most churches in England: we are not managers of decline; we are not in retreat from the public sphere; we may even have reached a point of growth, and those who report otherwise seem to be peddling a ‘Weberish myth’. We must just hope that we have the spiritual humility and strength not to stand in the way of this renewed interest in God.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press / Norwich Books:

Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to Change the World, edited by Abigail Nelson, Jeanne Person, Jenny Te Paa, Margaret Rose, 2009, £17.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-968-2.

Can Words Express Our Wonder? Preaching in the Church Today, Rosalind Brown, 2009, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-969-9.

Vision Upon Vision: Process of Change and Renewal in Christian Worship, George Guiver, 2009, £21.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-992-7.

An Altar in the World: Finding the Sacred Beneath Our Feet, Barbara Brown Taylor, 2009, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-990-3.

Watching for the Kingfisher: Poems and Prayers, Ann Lewin, new enlarged edition, 2009, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-989-7.

From Dartman, Longman and Todd (via Norwich Books):

Faith in the Fool: Risk and Delight in the Christian Adventure, Angela Ashwin, 2009, £12.95. ISBN: 978-0-232-52770-4.

From Orbis Books (via Alban Books):

Franz Jägerstätter: Letters and Writings from Prison, edited by Erna Putz, 2009, £16.99. ISBN: 978-1-57075-826-3.

From Oxford University Press:

The Song of Songs and the Eros of God: A Study in Biblical Intertextuality, Edmée Kingsmill SLG, 2009, £70.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-957724-8.

From St Paul's Publishing:

Prayers from Cradle to Grave, Llewellyn Cumings, 2007, £2.99. ISBN: 978-0-85439-726-6.

From Teresian Press:

Holiness for All: Themes from St Thérèse of Lisieux, Aloysius Rego OCD, 2009, £7. ISBN: 978-0-947916-10-7.

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

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