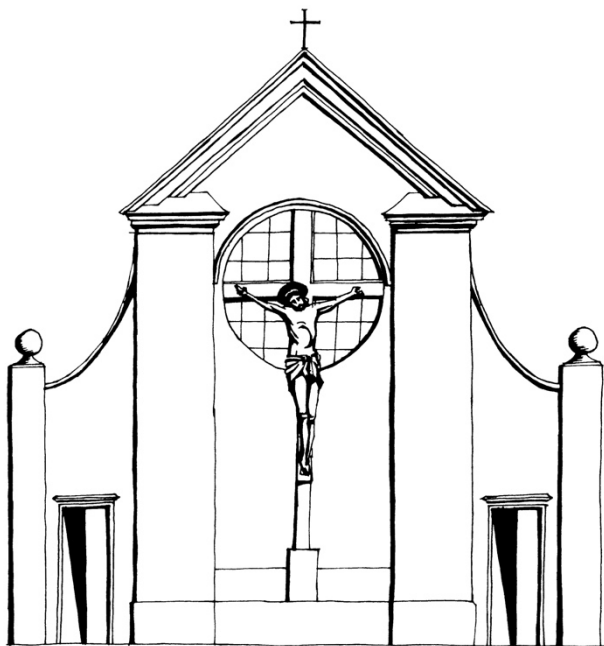


F A I R A C R E S
C H R O N I C L E



SUMMER 2010
Vol. 43 No. 1

£ 2.00

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COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

We are ‘back in the green season’! By this I mean the liturgical green season of Trinitytide, or ‘Ordinary Time of the Year’. After the purple of Advent and Lent, the gold and white of Christmas and Paschaltide, and the red of Holy Week and Pentecost, it is green which dominates the liturgical colours during the next few months. For some of us, that is a huge relief, not because of a lack of appreciation for the events celebrating and commemorating Our Lord’s earthly life, but because the liturgical observances during ‘the seasons’ are a little more complicated, necessitating more books or at least more ribbons and markers. For others, the seasons give a much-welcomed impetus to both corporate worship and solitary prayer. When the call to prayer is strong, it is relatively easy to be faithful to prayer time; when it is faint and weak and when we have little awareness of God’s presence, and sometimes the evil one is distracting and challenging us, our faithfulness will be tested. It is advisable to establish patterns or ‘norms’ of prayer, such as days, times, and place, for the patterns themselves can help us through arid times when the desire is weak. The word ‘pattern’ may bring to mind prayer formulas which are valued by many who pray. But as we continue along our pilgrim journey, we may find that their usefulness diminishes, and they may even fall away. They are often replaced by a greater sense of freedom in the times spent consciously with the Living God. As human relationships mature, we often experience increasing freedom within them, and this is often mirrored in the life of prayer. Our Rule describes prayer as ‘the growth of personal relationship between God and the one who prays’.

I find the description of the relationship between God and Moses one which is both helpful and vivid; it both highlights the freedom and speaks of the intimacy of prayer:

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.¹

¹ Exod. 33: 11.

But sometimes that intimacy wanes or seems absent and our relationship with God appears stuck—perhaps even sterile. At such times, it may help to remember that prayer is not primarily something that *we* do, but rather God’s work in us. As St Paul writes:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.²

As Mother Mary Clare wrote in *Learning to Pray*:

The first lesson we have to learn about prayer ... is that it is God’s activity in us and not a self-activated process of our own.³

When we are struggling, those who have gone before us are often a source of inspiration: Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsemane, the first Christians in the New Testament and those whose holiness has been recognised with the title ‘saint’. One such Carmelite nun is the subject of John Scott’s article in this edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, ‘St Thérèse of Lisieux: Who is my Neighbour?’ St Thérèse struggled much with prayer. Those with whom we live can also be a great source of inspiration for our prayer, especially their faithfulness over many years. On Ascension Day this year, we celebrated Sister Isabel’s golden jubilee of Profession. On St Andrew’s Day last November, we celebrated the golden jubilees of Sisters Mary Margaret and Benedicta, and the homily preached by Sister Rosemary on that occasion is included on page 6. Another article relating to the Carmelite tradition in this edition is by Fr Eugene McCaffrey OCD, ‘Carmel: A Lover’s Quest’, which outlines some basic features of Carmelite spirituality. Love is also the theme of the poem by Christine Ballard which follows: ‘You set my Heart A-beating’.

Sometimes the needs of others become a focus and inspiration for prayer. Although we are just half-way through 2010, there seem to have been a large number of natural disasters this year. One of the first was the earthquake in Haiti on 12 January. We have been praying particularly for that country, as a community with which we

² Rom. 8: 26.

³ *Learning to Pray*, Mother Mary Clare, SLG Press, 2nd ed. 2006, p. 5.

have links, the Society of St Margaret in Boston, has a mission house in Port-au-Prince. Thankfully, none of the Sisters was killed or injured on 12 January, but like so many, they lost their home. Sisters Marie Margaret and Kethia live in tents, like many other Haitians, in the refugee camp at College St Pierre and they minister both in and from the camp. Some of the other buildings in which the Sisters carry out their ministries were destroyed, as was Holy Trinity Cathedral (the Episcopal cathedral), with its beautiful mosaics. Haiti has largely disappeared from the news, but if, like us, you are interested in what is happening, please see the Sisters' website (www.ssmbos.com). There is much that is humbling and for which to give thanks, as well as much for intercession, especially as the rainy season approaches and so many are living in tents.

Sabbaticals are recognised as beneficial, as well as offering particular opportunities for prayer, study and exploration which are not usually possible when working. One of our Priest Associates, Andy Delmege, spent part of his sabbatical walking the *Camino* to Santiago de Compostella, and we include 'The Walking Becomes the Praying' on page 37. We have recently made available some extra accommodation for long term guests/sabbaticals. This is in the house at the entrance to the drive, in 2 Parker Street. It has similar cooking facilities to the bungalows, is self catering, and is available for minimum stays of one month. For more details and booking, please contact the Prioress, Sister Catherine, at prioress@slg.org.uk or by post or by telephone on 01865 258151. The Guest Sister continues to deal with all enquiries about staying for shorter times with the Community, and the contact details are unchanged and as on the back cover. For more information, you might also like to refer to our website (www.slg.org.uk). Some of you kindly bring us gifts of flowers when you visit and we usually place them in Chapel to enjoy; unfortunately Madonna lilies, though beautiful and delightful, are increasingly affecting some Sisters who have allergies, so perhaps we might ask you not to bring or send us those?

There is much encouragement in many work situations and areas of life to engage in strategic planning. This is often a useful exercise, but it is also advisable to complement and balance this with living in the present, and Jane Eastell's article, 'Thomas

Merton and the Present Moment' is very timely. One aspect of life which is certain, but over which we have little control, is death. Sister Avis Mary has written about death in a Christian and monastic context in an article entitled 'Ashes to Ashes' after attending the funeral of a Sister at the Berlin Carmel. I mentioned above the earthquake in Haiti. Sister Avis Mary was detained in Berlin by another natural event, but one which has not caused loss of life or injury: the ash cloud from the volcano in Iceland. This has caused considerable disruption, and in some cases economic hardship, to people's lives. As I write this, oil continues to spill into the Gulf of Mexico and ecosystems and the livelihoods of many have been destroyed or are threatened. There are many situations and individuals about which to pray in our times of intercession.

We have enjoyed visits from some younger guests this year. A young lady from America was with us for ten weeks and for one week was joined by a friend. In February some pupils from a local secondary school visited, and in April over twenty Cub Scouts came, bringing some very searching questions. In June we have had visits from Companions and Oblate Sisters. One Oblate Sister, Mary Hannah of the Holy Trinity, made Annual Promises on 21 January.

After a noticeable absence of April showers and a very dry May, we have been blessed with some welcome showers, which have come just in time to swell the soft fruit, plums and apples. The garden at present is a very rich feast for the eyes, and the lawn, which was showing signs of thirst, is also looking pleasantly green. The greenness has returned to the garden, and the liturgy.

With all good wishes,

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

SEEKING A HOME

The lectern, or podium, which has been used in Refectory, is seeking a new home. If you can provide it with a home, please let us know. It is quite solid, made of dark wood, and measures:

height: 122 cm.

width: 61 cm.

depth: 85 cm.

CELEBRATING THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF PROFESSION

of

Sister Mary Margaret of the Holy Cross

and

Sister Benedicta of Jesus SLG

A homily preached on the Feast of St Andrew, 30 November 2009

SISTER ROSEMARY SLG

‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’¹

STRANGE THINGS happen in this chapel, though what I am going to describe may be more familiar than strange to you: we are celebrating the Eucharist, the priest is at the altar and suddenly he or she is speaking entirely without spin or artistry, just the words. Not only that, these words are about what is good. What a combination! What a contrast to the wash of words and opinions, contradictions and half-truths which usually swirl around and within us, and how compelling and refreshing, in this often wicked world of ours, to hear of what is good, sweet, strong and reliable. To trust that. ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ I think those words were like that, that is how they must have sounded to Andrew—and perhaps he was as astounded and grateful and elated as I was a few weeks ago when I realized, during the Eucharist, what was happening, what can happen and does happen more often than I am usually awake enough to realize.

Words straightly spoken and telling of good things are a precious gift; and this gospel of the call of St Andrew is a gift to us

¹ Matt. 4: 19.

today as we celebrate with Sister Benedicta and Sister Mary Margaret their fifty years in Profession as Sisters of the Love of God. For, before all else, the religious life is a calling, initiated by God and dependent upon him every step of the way.

We live by the call of God. It is not because he has called us, but because he is calling us; and we need to hear that voice speaking in us constantly, and with increasing power.

Fr Benson SSJE²

Fr Benson stresses that the call is not something which comes just once at the beginning. At the beginning we are likely to know very little about what is drawing us, what is asked of us, but as we follow we learn, and ‘the drawing of this Love, the voice of this Calling’³ keeps on and keeps moving us on. At the beginning Andrew can hardly have known where those first steps would lead. Perhaps he expected to follow just for a short time and then to return to his nets; or perhaps he did not expect anything, just knew that a great change was upon him and nothing would ever be the same again; never expected that he would, with Peter, be fishing again in the same waters just a few years on. To follow is often just to take the next step, and then go on taking a step at a time. Think how often that word echoes through the gospels, and of other calls just as particular and just as much in the midst of particular lives and circumstances: to blind Bartimaeus, ‘Take heart, he is calling you’; to Mary after the death of Lazarus, ‘The master is here and is calling for you’; to Peter in response to his fearful, ‘Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you upon the water’ and Jesus said, ‘Come’.

The call as it is first heard is a call to come to Christ and to follow him. As the gospel is preached with hindsight after the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, this becomes the call to ‘take up your cross’—‘to take up your cross *daily*’—‘and follow him’. There is no following without the One whom we follow, and there is no

² The first Superior of the Society of St John the Evangelist, instructions to SSJE in the 1870s, published as *The Religious Vocation*, Richard Meux Benson, A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1939 (p. 48).

³ From *The Cloud of Unknowing*, used by T.S.Eliot in *Four Quartets*.

knowledge of him without knowledge of the cross, even in those first steps.

I once dreamt that I was present at the original opening of a canal like the Panama Canal or Suez Canal. It was a wonderful moment, two seas were joined as never before, new worlds of communication were opened, everyone present was exhilarated by it. But at the very same moment I realized with dismay that two continents were severed as never before; a precious link, a narrow bridge of land was broken. It's an imperfect image, but it has often stood me in good stead when reflecting on the effects of our actions, and it goes some way towards illustrating how the cross was present even in that first call to the disciples. They left their nets, there was a break, a movement away as well as towards, and in some sense a loss—however much that loss was made good later in lands, goods, houses, brother and sisters, 'not without persecutions'. That simultaneous movement, towards and away from, gaining momentum and deepening as the disciple perseveres in following, gives point to Fr Benson's stress on the continuing call of God, for there is a necessary tension in a consecrated life, as we are stretched and challenged by discipleship, by increased knowledge born of prayer, and simply *must* rely on God:

We must go on, then, really relying upon this power, really feeling its strain, really doing our utmost, really feeling that it is beyond ourselves, and yet going on without fear, for 'we know whom we have believed' (II Tim. 1: 12).⁴

There is no other way, however much we may fantasize about avoiding the cross or accommodating the cross to our taste or imagined capacity for heroism. At Profession, or at other moments in the solitude of our hearts, standing before the Lord, we have breathed the prayer, '... whom I have loved, whom I have longed for, whom I have always desired'. And that prayer of desire is not far from the prayer that tradition put on the lips of St Andrew at the end of his life when he knew that his fate was to be crucifixion: 'O goodly cross, so long desired and now made ready for my eager

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

spirit'.⁵ The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the eloquent and effective sign of Love at work in the places where love, it seems to our eyes, just cannot be—but is most needed. In the cross we are grasped by this undefeatable Love, and being so grasped, at some place of deep desiring, we are drawn too to the likeness of the cross as it is found in our own lives. Because, as our Rule puts it, daily dying to self, 'is the necessary condition of that risen life in which the Professed are called to dwell with Christ'.

Think for a moment of St Andrew's cross, x-shaped, unlike the cross of Christ. So it is with us in our daily slantwise cross-bearing and dyings. We are not on Jesus' cross but in the spaces, the gaps, which remain until the age to come when Love's reign will be complete. We are not on Jesus' cross—yet at the centre, at the still point, the point of intersection, it is, nevertheless, the same as his. This is what following our Lord Jesus Christ entails.

'Follow me, and *I will make you fish for people.*' With this call comes a promise of transformation: God promises to work on us, to be at work within us, and we shall be changed. And the joke is that despite the movement *away* from what has been, we shall still be ourselves; we shall be even more ourselves, more significantly fishermen (historians, or translators, say, or a scribe, a secretary) than before. But it will be all his work. The secret is that we are to become more and more like the One we are following, and in him have an effect on those around us. Like St Andrew, we are not called for ourselves alone but for others, however this is expressed. St Andrew was an apostle, and a martyr, and a missionary. By contrast we may feel ourselves to be nothing at all, but day by day here in chapel we allow ourselves to be a voice in the praying Church and, as we yield to that in the hidden and searching ways of solitary prayer and community living, God will make us 'love at the heart of the Church'⁶ for the sake of all his dear humankind and his astonishing creation.

⁵ *Monastic Diurnal*, first antiphon at Lauds.

⁶ cf. St Thérèse in *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, Washington, 1996, p.194.

Maybe we will see all that more clearly with hindsight as we look back from the other side of the consummation which is death. Meanwhile surely we can know ourselves to be pupils in a school of desire wanting more and more ‘until the perfect day’. The rule for those who follow is not to spend much time, if any, looking at their feet, but to look to the End, the glory that shall be when God’s purposes are fulfilled. The end is not yet, even after fifty years, but with a shift of perspective born of hope and longing it breaks in on us even now.

Sisters, as you consider your call,⁷ may the Holy Spirit bring to your remembrance words of Jesus spoken throughout your lives, in all their circumstances, especially in your lives in Profession in this Community. Perhaps at the time you were not able to hear them, or bear them, or could not really understand. But there were also, I am sure, words that you heard clearly, and that you have clung to. And God has been faithful. We give thanks with and for you, and for those who have been for you wise friends and guides, Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers in Christ. Perhaps sometimes it has seemed that the Community has failed you, or that you have failed the Community—but how many more times, many more than seventy times seven times, have we all prayed the Lord’s Prayer, forgiving and asking to be forgiven?

We give thanks for all that you have brought into the Community’s offering over so many years, and for the call that we share.

*Remember, O Lord, what you have wrought in us
and not what we deserve,
and as you are calling us to your service,
make us worthy of our calling.*

⁷ cf. I Cor. 1: 26.

CARMEL: A LOVER'S QUEST

EUGENE McCAFFREY OCD

This inaugural lecture for the Carmelite Institute in Malta was given in October 2008 and is reproduced with kind permission of the author and of the editors of Teresa and Mount Carmel, the reviews of Carmelite spirituality published by the Discalced Carmelites of the Maltese and Anglo-Irish Provinces respectively.¹

A Love Story

The title of this article is taken from the opening verse of one of the best-known poems of John of the Cross, 'The Dark Night':

So dark the night! At rest
and hushed my house, I went with no one knowing
upon a lover's quest...²

I believe that the story of Carmel is essentially a love story and, like every love story, it involves a journey of the heart, a journey that will ultimately be fulfilled only in the possession of the Beloved. We are made to seek and to search for our heart's desire—a restless pursuit that is best described, in John's words, as 'a lover's quest'.

When I was invited to speak on this historic occasion of the establishment of the new Carmelite Institute of Malta, I asked myself if there is a central message, a recurring theme, which it might radiate like a beacon of light, to a world hungry and thirsty for the wisdom and spirituality of Carmel. In other words: is there one central and distinctive experience that captures the essence of Carmelite spirituality? No doubt, there are many possibilities, depending on one's approach and personal preference. Several

¹ See *Teresa: Rivista Enciclopedica ta' Spiritwalità*, vol. 5/4, Oct.-Dec. 2008; *Mount Carmel*, vol. 58/1, Jan.-Mar. 2010, pp. 9-18.

² Trans. by Marjorie Flower OCD in *Centred on Love: The Poems of Saint John of the Cross*, Varroville, NSW: The Carmelite Nuns, 1983, p. 9.

come to mind automatically: the eremitical tradition, set as it is at the very heart of the *Rule* of St Albert; prayer and contemplation; silence; desert spirituality; and, of course, the whole Marian tradition beautifully expressed in the medieval saying: *Totus Marianus est Carmelus* ('Carmel belongs totally to Mary'). All of these are part of the great heritage of Carmel and will no doubt be covered in courses and lectures in the Institute over the coming years. All are part, but what is at the centre?

A Transforming Light

The renowned theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks about 'one central idea': a core insight by which saints often live their lives, an insight that gathers their deepest spiritual experience into an organic whole. Every aspect of their spirituality in one way or another reflects or radiates this insight, whether it be the poverty of Francis, the compassion of Vincent de Paul or the 'Little Way' of Thérèse. Balthasar calls it a *white light*, in itself invisible, yet when broken by a rain cloud reflects, in their full beauty, all the colours of the rainbow. It is the same, I think, with any spiritual family or religious Order: the richness of its spirituality is reflected in various colours and in many different shades, but there is one central light that contains all of them and binds them into an organic unity.

I think it is important for us to look for this 'core insight', something unique and special at the very heart of our way of life that transfigures Carmelite spirituality, something that gives it its dynamic and universal appeal. For me, this is best expressed, not in the words of a Carmelite writer, but in the classic saying of Augustine: 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'³ This, of course, is a truth fundamental to all human activity and endeavour, but in the Carmelite tradition it takes on a unique and distinctive focus: not only are *our* hearts restless, but the heart of God is *equally so*. The lover's quest is twofold, a mutual yearning in which God and the human soul are both, and at the same time, pursuer and

³ *'Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te'*, in *Confessions*, St Augustine, Book I, Chapter 1.

pursued. ‘It should be known’, John of the Cross reminds us, ‘that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more’.⁴ The Carmelite tradition, says John Welch O Carm, could be understood as an 800-year commentary on The Song of Songs: ‘The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.’⁵ ‘Carmelites tell many stories’, he comments, ‘but the story of the lover restlessly awaiting the approach of the Beloved emerges as a common theme’—it is the story of those who set out thinking they were ‘seeking an elusive God’, yet ‘returned from their search with the conviction that God had been pursuing them all along in love’.⁶

A Song of Love

Poetry is the language that best explores the inner life of the soul. One of the greatest poems in the Carmelite treasury is John of the Cross’ ‘Spiritual Canticle’. It is a song of love, a dialogue between the lover and the Beloved, the soul and Christ. It brings us to the very heart of what the lover’s quest is all about. The tender words, the evocative images, the rich symbols all speak about the transformation of desire—presence and absence, discovery and loss, joy and pain:

Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag
after wounding me;
I went out calling you, but you were gone.⁷

The wounding of love is central to the lover’s search. It is the reason for the setting out in the first place. The journey begins, in John’s haunting words, ‘fired with love’s urgent longings’.⁸ It is the

⁴ *Living Flame of Love*, Complete Works of St John of the Cross, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 3: 28.

⁵ *Song of Songs*, St John of the Cross, 2: 8.

⁶ *Seasons of the Heart: The Spiritual Dynamic of the Carmelite Life*, John Welch O Carm, Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 2001, p. 11.

⁷ *Spiritual Canticle*^B, St John of the Cross, stanza 1.

⁸ *Dark Night of the Soul*, St John of the Cross, stanza 1.

same *living flame of love* that both wounds and cleanses; by one and the same movement, the soul is purified and transformed. The power of John's poetry is to draw us into his experience and find echoes, however small, within the limited geography of our own restless search. We are drawn into the dialogue between the bride and the bridegroom, privileged to overhear the song of love. As we listen, new vistas open up, our hearts too are enkindled, and we are aware of the beauty and the almost infinite possibilities open to us. John tells us that our soul is 'a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God',⁹ and he says: 'One human thought alone is worth more than the entire world, hence God alone is worthy of it'.¹⁰

'In Allegiance to Jesus Christ'

For John, and for every Carmelite saint, this love has a face, a name and a story. In fact, it is their story, the story of a heart lured by love, ravished by desire. John Welch writes: 'The story of the Beloved coming toward the lover to lure her heart into a deep union is the archetypal story Carmelites have rehearsed time and time again.'¹¹ For them, the gospel call was never simply an invitation to follow a way of life or an insight; it was an invitation to follow *Someone who had taken possession of their lives*, a passionate and all-absorbing love for Jesus—friend, lover, spouse and bridegroom. 'Ah, don't you see', Elizabeth of the Trinity once wrote, 'that when a heart has been taken captive by Christ, it must then give itself wholly? ... I love him passionately and in loving him, I am transformed in him'.¹² St Paul calls it 'the great mystery':¹³ the mystery of the love of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ 'who loved me and gave himself for me';¹⁴ a love that overwhelmed him, giving meaning and a sense of urgency to every aspect of Paul's life. I believe it is the same burning love that transfigures every Carmelite saint—a

⁹ *I Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St John of the Cross, 9: 1.

¹⁰ *Sayings of Light and Love*, St John of the Cross, 35.

¹¹ *Seasons of the Heart*, John Welch, pp. 23-4.

¹² *Letters* 130, Elizabeth of the Trinity.

¹³ cf. Eph. 3: 3.

¹⁴ Gal. 2: 20.

personal and passionate love for Christ, a dream and an ideal already contained in the gracious invitation of the *Rule* itself: ‘to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and serve him zealously with a pure heart and a good conscience’.¹⁵

Carmelite spirituality is essentially incarnational, with Christ as model, mediator and goal. Referring to the Carmelite *Rule*, Redemptus Valabek O Carm writes: ‘Saint Albert immediately seizes on the essential: religious are *not* in the first place bound to a well-described, scheduled way of life, but they are bound to a person: Christ Jesus. In fact, the Rule is pervaded by this presence of the person of Christ both in word and in sacrament.’¹⁶ This, comments Donald Buggert O Carm, provides ‘the underlying hermeneutic’ of the *Rule* and ‘its interpretive key’.¹⁷

More and more I have been struck by the overwhelming, burning love for Christ that characterises every saint of Carmel. The name of Jesus, Teresa says, was never far from the lips of St Paul;¹⁸ the same could be said of Teresa herself and all her friends. For Teresa ‘the Good Jesus’, as she loved to call him, was her constant friend and companion, ‘the one through whom all blessings come’,¹⁹ the beginning, middle and end of her journey in prayer and in love.

‘Jesus is My Only Love!’

It would be easy to fill this article with quotations, stories and examples from the life of any of our saints about their unique and special love-relationship with Jesus. However, I think it is sufficient to let one speak for all. Thérèse of the Child Jesus built her whole life and teaching around the reality of love. The pages of her autobiography explode with her triumphant discovery: ‘I have found my place in the Church ... in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I

¹⁵ *Rule of St Albert*, para. 2.

¹⁶ Quoted in *The Christocentrism of the Carmelite Charism*, Donald Buggert O Carm, Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 1999, p. 15.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ cf. *Life of St Teresa*, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 22: 7.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

shall be *Love*.²⁰ ‘The science of Love, ah yes’, she said to her sister Marie, ‘... I desire only this science’.²¹ The name of Jesus occurs almost twice on every page of Thérèse’s writings! Here, we are not speaking about a general interest, but a fascination and an obsession. Hers is a tender and beautiful love-story, born of the reckless foolishness of an enamoured heart; how else explain such an audacious aspiration: ‘I have no other desire except *to love* Jesus unto folly’?²² This was the secret dream of her youth and the constant and abiding driving force of her life. She carved on the lintel of her cell door in Lisieux: ‘Jesus is my only love!’ It would be hard to find a more accurate summary of her teaching and her message. The greatest tribute love can make is to desire to become like the one we love. Thérèse’s shortest and simplest desire was for her heart to be like the heart of Jesus.²³

The most graphic sentence in the scriptures to express the good news of the gospel is St John’s cryptic phrase, ‘God is love’; and yet Thérèse, out of over 1000 quotations, never uses it! The answer is simple: her love was more immediate and personal; the whole focus of her love was incarnational. For Thérèse, *Jesus is Love*. He is: ‘My only Love’.²⁴ In the closing pages of her autobiography, she admits that her love for Jesus, her Spouse and Only Friend, is like an ocean with no shore to put bounds to it, something she herself can hardly fathom: ‘Your Love has gone before me, and it has grown with me, and now it is an abyss whose depths I cannot fathom’.²⁵

The Fire in the Heart

Carmelite spirituality has, to some extent, become identified with the teaching of John of the Cross on the dark night. Yet, as

²⁰ *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1996, p.194.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 187-8.

²² *ibid.*, p. 178.

²³ cf. *Letters* 87; 145, St Thérèse of Lisieux.

²⁴ *Poems* 36: 2, St Thérèse of Lisieux.

²⁵ *Story of a Soul*, p. 256.

Noel Dermot O'Donoghue OCD rightly observes: '*nada* for John means both nothing (its literal sense) and everything, for it denotes precisely the space into which everything, that is to say the divine intimacy, can flow'.²⁶ There is in the Christian tradition a mysticism of the light, just as there is a mysticism of the dark, and the story of the lover's search is contained within each of them. The quest is not simply a 'search for nothing', as is so often said; quite the opposite: it is a 'search for everything'. The face of the Beloved is not beyond the darkness but within it. Christ is both light and darkness; he is our companion in the darkness. The journey is not a movement away from darkness, but a discovery that, even as we walk in darkness, we are still in the light. There is a light within the darkness, or more accurately, as John calls it, a *fire*: a fire burning in the heart, that beckons and calls from lover to lover. 'The darkness extinguishes the light but it does not extinguish the fire, and this fire becomes in fact the light of the soul by which it is safely guided.'²⁷ The light, the fire and the call of love are one; they are, at the same time, the guiding and illuminating dynamic of the journey. The voice of the lover is heard in the innermost depths—heart speaks to heart. Love has its own language and speaks its own words, whether in darkness or in light.

The Icon of Love

Love, Thérèse believed, is like a wild torrent that carries everything in its path²⁸—a path, she knew only too well, that leads ultimately to Calvary. The cross is the strange paradox at the heart of the Christian gospel—'a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks'.²⁹ It is central to the Carmelite way, from the first tentative steps of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St John of the Cross to the innermost depths of *The Interior Castle* of St Teresa. 'I would not consider any spirituality worthwhile that wants to ... run

²⁶ *Lovelier than the Dawn*, Noel Dermot O'Donoghue OCD, Carmelite Centre of Spirituality, Dublin, 1984, p. 8.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁸ cf. *Story of a Soul*, p. 254.

²⁹ I Cor. 1: 23.

from the imitation of Christ. ... Christ is the way and ... this way is a death to our natural selves ... he is our model and light'.³⁰ 'He who seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ.'³¹ It is impossible to separate the mystery of the cross from the mystery of God's love. 'Christ did not come to explain suffering or take it away', wrote the French poet Paul Claudel, 'but to fill it with his presence'. It is this presence of the Beloved that gives the cross its meaning. The radiance of God's love is found not only on the heights of Tabor but also on the hill of Calvary. The cross is the icon of this love. As John once said: 'I looked at your cross, O Christ, and I read there the song of your Love.' The search for the Beloved is a search to share his suffering so as to enter more deeply into the mystery of his love. It is not a matter of 'being in love', but of transformation into the Beloved. Christ's love is a redemptive love, a love that reaches out to embrace all suffering, all pain and all brokenness. To die of love is not to die of ecstasy, Thérèse reminds us.³² Christ died a 'death of love', even though it was in excruciating pain and dereliction of spirit. The true lover can be satisfied with nothing less than to share in his suffering for the redemption of the world.

There is no other way to explain the heroic quality of the lives of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Titus Brandsma, Edith Stein—their joy in suffering and their total surrender in darkness—except as an expression of their burning, passionate love for Jesus and their longing to be transformed into his image and likeness.

Spousal Love

One of the constant themes of Carmelite writing is that of spousal love, and it is central to the search for the Beloved. All the tenderness and beauty of love is expressed in this very special relationship. There is no title more honoured, no privilege more

³⁰ II *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 7: 8-9.

³¹ *Sayings of Light and Love*, 102.

³² cf. *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations*, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1977, p. 73.

desired, than to be the spouse of Christ. ‘Bridegroom’, ‘bride’, ‘spouse’ are not used in a symbolic way: they are real and literal because they express all the passion of the lover’s quest, the ardent longing of the heart.

It is ‘desire’ that quickens the quest and the longing. ‘I have flames within me’,³³ Thérèse admits, adding that she wants to inflame others with Jesus’ love. The restlessness of the human heart of which Augustine speaks is a divine gift; we are programmed to seek and yearn for our heart’s desire. We are called to a love greater than anything we can think of or imagine. The challenge, as Elizabeth of the Trinity has reminded us, is: ‘let yourself be loved’.³⁴

Transformation

Perhaps the lover’s search is more accurately expressed by the metaphor of *transformation* than by the image of journey. In the latter stages of their writings, Teresa and John both turn to more creative and dynamic metaphors to express their experience: the image of ascent and of watering the garden give way to that of the chrysalis and the butterfly, the living flame of love and the lamps of fire. The *via transformativa* needs to express the inner dynamic in terms of rebirth, growth and the living spirit.

In his book *The Transformation of Desire*, Diarmuid O’Murchu takes up the idea of the lover’s quest and places it in a wider context that is both cosmic and universal. ‘Born from mystery’, he writes, ‘we are programmed for mystery. It could not be otherwise in a creation which itself flourishes on mystery. The restlessness comprises the pain and ecstasy of every act of birth. Birthing forth new possibilities, invoking the dark night of disillusionment and death, is our life’s work.’³⁵

³³ *Poems* 25: 2, St Thérèse of Lisieux.

³⁴ Words of Elizabeth of the Trinity, also the title of a book about Elizabeth by Eugene McCaffrey, Teresian Press, 2008.

³⁵ *The Transformation of Desire*, Diarmuid O’Murchu, Orbis Books, New York, 2007, p. 180.

The lover's quest is, I believe, at the core of the Carmelite charism. It is a journey every Carmelite is called to make; for this, we need make no apologies. 'Our spirituality is not about heroic asceticism', John Welch tells us; 'it is about God's all-conquering love, a love that has touched every heart and made it ache; otherwise we would not be here'.³⁶

I have no doubt that the new Carmelite Institute will speak this message to all who come, helping them to hear this song of love and encouraging them to set out, enkindled with love and yearnings—'upon a lover's quest'.

YOU SET MY HEART A-BEATING

You set my heart a-beating,
a-beating, Lord, for thee;
A place where you are waiting
a-waiting there for me.
You taught me where my heart is;
I never thought to find
Your love for me a-waiting
within my heart and mind.

I never knew of love like this;
you taught me how to see
The love that you have given,
so free, and tenderly.

CHRISTINE BALLARD

³⁶ *Seasons of the Heart*, John Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 32.

THOMAS MERTON AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

JANE EASTELL

IN THE AUTUMN of 2008, an exhibition of sculpture was held at Queen's College, a school in Taunton near where I live. I often go past there, and each time I did so that autumn, I thought that I must go in and take a look. Finally I did so, and found the sculptures on the front lawns. There was quite a mix: a rather splendid life-sized metallic giraffe (if you like that kind of thing!), big ceramic globes to hold candles, two owls, some ceramic shells, a deer. My attention was caught by a vertical post in a corner under a beech tree. It was made of green slate—a lovely muted sage green—and was about six feet high, four inches wide and three inches deep, and beautifully fashioned, with simple clean lines. It was called 'Standing Stone'. I was arrested by its simplicity, its quiet beauty. At the top was a word written vertically, again beautifully fashioned; the word was 'here'. On the reverse side of the stone, also at the top, was the word 'now'. These words stopped me in my tracks: 'here', 'now'.

I was reminded of a few lines from T. S. Eliot's poem 'Little Gidding': 'Quick now, here, now, always—a condition of complete simplicity'.¹ It was a timely reminder, as I realized the clutter going around in my mind was signalling that I was anything but in the 'here and now'. I was also reminded of words by the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton (1915-68): 'It might be a good thing to open our eyes and see.' The trees had begun their display of autumn glory, and I thought too of these words of his:

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying him. ... The more a tree is like itself, the more it is like him. ... This particular tree will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the earth and raising its branches

¹ *Little Gidding*, T. S. Eliot, *The Penguin Book of English Verse*; ed. John Hayward, 1956.

into the air and the light in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did or will do.²

Merton said that we humans give glory to God by being all we are meant to be; we just tend to find this a bit more complicated than trees do!

Thomas Merton's life was relatively short, but it had far-reaching consequences, and many people still find his writings very helpful for their own spiritual journey. At the age of twenty-two he converted to Roman Catholicism. He felt increasingly called to the monastic life, and to the austere silent life of prayer as a Cistercian monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, and he finally lived as a hermit in a bungalow in the grounds of the Abbey. Although he had seemingly withdrawn from the world, no-one could have been more involved with it.

Merton was aware of the 'here and now' and of the necessity of attending to the present and living in the sacrament of the present moment. He was aware of the divine significance of the particular, of what is before us in the 'here and now'. For him, whatever is before us takes on the mystery of revelation:

As we go about the world, everything we meet and everything we see and hear and touch ... plants in us ... something ... of heaven.³

It is good and praiseworthy to look at some real created thing and feel and appreciate its reality. Just let the reality of what is real sink into you ... for through real things we can reach him who is infinitely real.⁴

I am sure that I am not the only one who sometimes finds it hard to be in the 'here and now'. We can live in the past, or in the future, and miss the present—but of course the present is, in the end, all we have. It is interesting that the word 'present' means 'here', 'now', and it also means 'gift'. The past has gone; the future we may never have; but we do have the present of the present moment. So often we miss it, we miss the moment; and it means that we can

² *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton, Burns & Oates, 1962, p. 23.

³ *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ Letter to Sister A. 21 May 1953, *School of Charity*, p. 61; quoted in *A Seven Day Journey with Thomas Merton*, Esther de Waal, Eagle Publications, 1992.

miss the moment of grace and divine glory happening before our very eyes. That moment before the Standing Stone was one of those moments of grace.

Merton reminds me of the Desert Fathers of the early Church, who fled to the desert to escape a Church which they felt was becoming compromised by worldly power. From their desert solitude and apparent powerlessness, they could see, and were able to challenge the political and economic powers of society. Merton belongs to that desert tradition. I want to quote a few words of his that I find both powerful and deeply moving:

It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers and sisters. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection, and filled with reverence for the solitude of others. Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers and sisters for what they are, not for what they say.⁵

In solitude Merton could see, with love and compassion. He could see the concerns and injustices in the ‘here and now’ of his world. A few months before his death in 1968 he wrote:

I am against war, against violence, for violence will not really change anything, merely transfer power from one set of bullheaded authorities to another. ... You cannot claim to be for Christ and espouse a political cause that implies callous indifference to the needs of millions of human beings and even co-operates in their destruction.⁶

Merton’s words still speak to us today. Has anything changed? Don’t we still see a world weary of might against might, and don’t we long for a world where people are open, wide open, to one another; where there is the possibility of dialogue with those who differ, rather than the politics of fear?

Merton spent many years living in solitude in a hermitage in the grounds of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Here he would

⁵ *The Sign of Jonas*, Thomas Merton, Burns & Oates, 1953, p. 261.

⁶ Midsummer Letter, Thomas Merton, 1968, quoted in papers presented at the Second Conference of the Thomas Merton Society, 1998.

pray; here he would sit and delight in the landscape before his eyes, taking time to see it, to be in the ‘here and now’:

There is nothing left for me but to live fully and completely in the present, praying when I pray and writing and praying when I write and worrying about nothing but the will and glory of God and finding these as best I can in the sacrament of the present moment.

Those words seem to go to the heart of what it is to be fully open and free before God. He was someone who learned to be open to the present: ‘open’ and ‘wide open’ are among his favourite expressions. Here is an example of his attentiveness to the present:

The rain has stopped. The afternoon sun slants through the pine trees: and how those useless needles smell in the clean air!

A dandelion, long out of season, has pushed itself into bloom between the smashed leaves of last summer’s day lilies. The valley resounds with the totally uninformative talk of creeks and wild water.

Then the quails begin their sweet whistling in the wet bushes. Their noise is absolutely useless, and so is the delight I take in it. There is nothing I would rather hear, not because it is better than other noises, but because it is the voice of the present moment, the present festival.⁷

Merton writes that all the moments of our past have brought us to now, to this present moment. But to be present to the real in the ‘here and now’ requires an emptying; it is, as T. S. Eliot says, ‘a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything.’⁸ To be fully present means to let go. So often the clutter and all the tasks that need to be done take over. And if we let go of these and cease our outward activities and our ‘to do’ lists, we become aware of the noise within, the mind chattering away. Having a simple word like ‘God’ or ‘love’, or a simple sentence or phrase like ‘for God alone my soul in silence waits’ can help to still the mind. We do not meditate on the word or phrase, but let it hover, so that the mind is gradually stilled. When the mind starts chattering again, we

⁷ *Raids on the Unspeakable*, Thomas Merton, New Dimensions, 1964, p. 23.

⁸ *Little Gidding*, T. S. Eliot.

return to the word or phrase, and let other thoughts drop away. It can also help to gaze upon a picture or a candle.

It takes time and space to unravel ourselves from the tensions of the day, as Merton knew:

There should be at least a room, or some corner where no one will find you and disturb you or notice you. You should be able to untether yourself from the world and set yourself free, loosing all the fine strings and strands of tension that bind you, by sight, by sound, by thought, to the presence of other men.⁹

If we do take time to untether ourselves, to let go of tensions, anxieties, fears, we can touch the holy truth that abides deep within. We can be in the ‘here and now’, and be open to all that is. This can be costly, for true openness refuses the comfort of fantasy and memory, in order to ‘be’ where we really are, and thus come to the simplicity of God:

No matter how simple discourse may be, it is never simple enough.
No matter how simple thought may be, it is never simple enough.
No matter how simple love may be, it is never simple enough.
The only thing left is the simplicity of the soul in God, or, better, the simplicity of God.¹⁰

A further article, entitled ‘Thomas Merton and the Spirituality of the Desert’, will appear in the next edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

⁹ *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 63.

¹⁰ *The Sign of Jonas*, p. 212.

ST THERESE OF LISIEUX: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

*Extracts from a talk given at the Church of
Our Lady, Help of Christians, Folkestone on 12 November 2009*

JOHN SCOTT

WHO IS my neighbour?¹ In prayer, surely, the whole world. In Carmel, the sisters, the whole community, as St Teresa of Avila, the great reformer of Carmel in sixteenth-century Spain, says. She speaks of there being three things necessary: love for each other; detachment from all created things; and true humility, of which she notes, ‘it is the most important of the three and embraces all the rest’. Thus:

There is nothing, however annoying, that cannot easily be borne by those who love each other, and anything which causes annoyance must be quite exceptional.

Yet Teresa sees also the snares of the devil, as she calls them, around this business of love:

One result of it is that all the nuns do not love each other equally: some injury done to a friend is resented; a nun desires to have something to give to her friend or tries to make time for talking to her, and often her object in doing this is to tell her how fond she is of her, and other irrelevant things, rather than how much she loves God.²

‘In an instant Jesus ... accomplished the work I had not been able to do in ten years.’

On 9 April 1888 the fifteen-year-old Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux, an heir to this tradition. She will learn, practice and teach there her ‘Little Way’, that unobtrusive and compelling following of Christ through every event of life. To be sure, her sisters in Carmel

¹ Luke 10: 29.

² *Way of Perfection*, Complete Works of St Teresa of Jesus, trans. E. Allison Peers, Ch. 4, pp. 16-17.

were her ‘neighbours’, constantly, often painfully present. Yet Thérèse brought with her nearer neighbours. Two brothers and sisters had died in infancy and she knew, according to the Church’s teaching, that they were in heaven, where they attracted her attention and prayers. And a greater ‘neighbour’ was with them, Christ’s own Mother, who had smiled on Thérèse and brought healing during a severe and problematic illness when she was ten years old. The foundation of the Little Way can be described as spiritual childhood, where total confidence and trust come naturally. We shall see how, as an adult, Thérèse fought to express this; but it was always in awareness of the Virgin Mary’s unfailing prayer and care.

Before entering Carmel, however, the hitherto sensitive and indulged child again experienced grace. At Christmas 1886 Thérèse is fourteen, still prone to crying at the slightest opportunity, and apparently good for nothing domestically. Anticipating the family practice of putting presents in slippers in front of the fire, Thérèse overhears her father expressing relief that this will not have to happen again another year. The tears begin, but she holds them back, and returns to the room in simple joy as the family begins its celebration. So, as she says:

I had the happiness ... of receiving the strong and powerful God ...
a little miracle. In an instant Jesus, content with my good will,
accomplished the work I had not been able to do in ten years.³

Bishop Guy Gaucher rightly sees this as a return to herself. When very young she had not been, as he puts it, ‘weepy, dreamy and weak-willed’,⁴ and now she had passed through a number of childhood and adolescent trials. Some of these had been a direct result of her faith—she went through a period of extreme scrupulosity—and others would have affected any child in the same circumstances; as, for example, the death of her mother and the departure in turn from home (for the Carmelite convent, admittedly) of her sisters Pauline and Marie, each of whom had offered herself as a surrogate mother to Thérèse.

³ Quoted in *The Spiritual Journey of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, Guy Gaucher, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987, p. 61.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 62.

'I answer by smiling.'

For Thérèse now, 'armed for war' as she puts it, her smile will become one of the most powerful weapons in her armoury. For this we have to look back on an incident three years earlier, when Thérèse had been acutely and rather inexplicably ill. She tells us of her despairing prayer to Our Lady, whose statue was in her sick room:

Her face expressed an ineffable goodness and tenderness, but what went right to the depths of my soul was the Blessed Virgin's ravishing smile. Then all my pain vanished.⁵

As Ida Görres notes with regard to the smile of Thérèse, 'Her smile hid her as smoothly and as impenetrably as any visor'. The best judgement is that given by one of the sisters as Thérèse lay dying:

I cannot understand why so much fuss is made about Sister Thérèse. She has done nothing remarkable; we do not see her practising virtue; and it cannot even be said that she is a really good nun.⁶

There is no reason to think that this comment arose from spite; rather, it comes from a failure to perceive the extent to which Thérèse had lived out the command of the great Teresa, that humility embraces and enables the mutual love to which the sisters of Carmel are called. The point about humility is that it is never consciously declaring itself; it reflects the *kenosis* of the Son of God, the self-emptying of Jesus which we see in the Incarnation. Thus there was hard work being done:

The soaring bliss of [Thérèse's] relationship with God, her one-time sunny disposition, that radiance she had possessed as a young girl before her entry [into Carmel], was no more. ... What she had was the result of conscious and inflexible exercise. ... One nun relates that during the period of [her father] Louis Martin's illness [Thérèse's] older sisters were always downcast, and held aloof from the others a great deal, in order to discuss their sorrows

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶ *cf. ibid.*, p. 194.

with one another. Thérèse alone sat and laughed with the others as usual; but sometimes while she did so, big tears rolled down her cheeks without her seeming to notice. And Sister Marie, speaking of the same period, remarks that Thérèse seemed so strong that it occurred to no one to worry about her or console her.⁷

Thérèse herself notes that:

When I have great pain, or disagreeable things happen to me, I answer by smiling. At first I did not always succeed, but now it has become a habit which I am glad to have acquired.⁸

We are given a verse of her composition which seeks to express something of this:

For him I love I wish my smile to shine;
Though he to try me hides his face from me,
For him I wait, though night and pain be mine:
This is my heaven, this my felicity.⁹

God is good, he is 'le bon Dieu'. This is the heart of her faith, and the response to that goodness must be lived out with complete consistency, whatever the circumstances. Thérèse taught the novices that it would be a contradiction for them to bear the burden of convent life wretchedly, with visible effort, after they had solemnly declared on the day of their Profession that they were accepting the Rule in full freedom of the will:

God, who loves us, is sorry enough that he has to try us on earth—even without our constantly informing him how hard it is for us; therefore we should not let it be noticed that we notice it. Out of *tact* we ought not to complain about heat and cold, not dry our perspiration and rub our chilled hands. Or if we do, then we must do it secretly, to make it clear that we are not reproaching God for our discomfort.¹⁰

If this is how the sisters are to appear before God, then it is no different from the patience which they will display before each

⁷ *The Hidden Face*, Ida Görres, Burns & Oates, 1959, pp. 307-8.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 308.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 308.

other. One of the best-known stories about Thérèse is that of the Carmelite of whom Thérèse says that she ‘managed to irritate me in everything that she did’. And so: ‘I set myself to treat her as if I loved her best of all’. Who is my neighbour? In this case, the one to whom Thérèse was careful to show attention, sitting next to her at recreation, engaging in conversation at the appropriate times.

When tempted to answer her sharply I hastened to give her a friendly smile, and talk about something else ... but when the devil made a particularly violent attack, if I could slip away without letting her suspect my inward struggle, I would run away from the battle *like a deserter*.¹¹

That in itself is illuminating about Thérèse’s way and tactics, but what follows in the story adds a new level of interest. The entire house considered the relationship between the two to be a genuine intimate friendship, for all its incongruity. Her sister Marie gradually grew jealous. ‘After all, I brought her up’, Marie said sadly to Pauline, ‘and now she likes this sister, of all persons, whom I find so repugnant, better than me’. So one day Marie reproached Thérèse, suggesting that blood relationship was also a gift of God to be honoured. Thérèse, we are told, replied with nothing but an amused little smile—her smile, that over-all covering of God’s love. Her sister Céline (who regarded Thérèse as a model) was thunderstruck when one day this case was confided to her by Thérèse as a means of encouraging her to similar self-conquest:

It was absolutely a revelation to me, for she had such control of herself that not a jot of her effort was betrayed. ... I had always thought this sister was her best friend.¹²

‘I can only be fortified by truth.’

In her dealings with her Carmelite sisters Thérèse demonstrates an acute sense of balance, which can only have been achieved by constant watchfulness and by experience. Self-watchfulness precluded self-consciousness and self-awareness. Thérèse is not an example of

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 243.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 244.

that form of self-effacing which could pass for humility: she certainly had opinions, and was not afraid to express them when necessary. Thus, some time before her death, she was in conversation with the Prioress who, in line with older practice, greatly feared what might follow from adopting the newer practice of daily holy communion. ‘Mother’, she said, ‘when I am in heaven I’ll make you change your mind’.¹³ This, we are told, happened: after her death, the chaplain moved to giving communion daily, and the Prioress found great happiness in it. And this comes from the one who is also recorded as saying that it causes God a little grief when a sister murmurs a little about what the Prioress says, and much grief when she murmurs much, even if only in her heart!

St Teresa’s Constitutions did not allow for three sisters from one family to be together in one Carmel. This was broken at Lisieux, but that meant that Thérèse could not have been admitted to full voting choir status; yet she in fact now volunteered to stay in the novitiate, with all its restrictions, so as to care there for two novices given to her by her sister, currently Prioress. In the subsequent election for that post, the former Prioress, after seven ballots, was returned to office and chose, as she was entitled, also to be novice mistress, but selected Thérèse to perform some of the duties as assistant. If ever there were a task requiring tact, this was it, with Thérèse, herself technically a novice, exercising scarcely-existent authority, sandwiched between a somewhat volatile Prioress and five women, four older than herself, one of them her cousin, and one of them yet another of her own sisters. As Thérèse was to remark, ‘There are some I have to take by the scruff of the neck, and others by the tip of their wings’.¹⁴ But: ‘If I’m not loved, that’s just too bad! I tell the whole truth and if anyone does not want to know it, let her not come looking for me.’¹⁵

¹³ *Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face: Oeuvres Complètes*, Cerf/DDB 2001, *Derniers Entretiens* (Soeur Marie du Sacré-Coeur) Juillet, p. 1182.

¹⁴ *The Spiritual Journey*, p. 157.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 156.

That sense of balance derives from something greater, a conviction of radical equality. The Lisieux Carmel was overburdened with members of the Martin clan. Overall numbers exceeded St Teresa's specified thirteen, but four sisters and a cousin were still a heavy weighting, and family issues could easily come to predominate. Members of the family lived just down the road and were constantly coming to visit; and feeling in the Carmel was not helped by the attitude of the Prioress, who was completely unscrupulous about using the convent as a guest house for her own family and the sisters as servants for them. Against this Thérèse fought with her customary vigilant discretion. In her last months, something of family feeling returned, as Mother Agnes (Pauline) was freed to spend much of her time with Thérèse. At times the relationship between this sister who had acted as surrogate mother and Thérèse is re-kindled. But at the same time, Thérèse's deep realism comes through. When her sister and second surrogate mother Marie comes to her and speaks of Our Lord and the angels coming in beauty come to take her, Thérèse says:

None of these pictures do me any good, I can only be fortified by truth. That's why I have never wanted visions. On earth we can't see heaven or the angels as they are. I'd prefer to wait till after death.¹⁶

When Mother Agnes shares a confidence with her, Thérèse responds, one might say, professionally:

A Prioress should always let it seem that she is not suffering. It does so much good and gives strength to one's position to say nothing of one's troubles! For example we should avoid saying, 'You have troubles and difficulties; so have I, and more besides, etc.'¹⁷

'He launched me full sail on the waves of confidence and love.'

Ultimately, equality can only spring from our being loved equally as children of God, and it is here that Thérèse again manages to

¹⁶ *Derniers Entretiens* in *op. cit.*, Le Carnet Jaune, 5 Août Numéro 4, p. 1078.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Numéro 10, p. 1079.

overcome the spirit of her times. We have the notes she made as an eleven-year-old preparing for first holy communion; and they are not, we must say, very encouraging. Death, judgment, the tortures of hell and sacrilegious reception of holy communion are the subjects of the instructions given. Two retreats the following year seem to have followed the same dismal pattern. When she was thirteen, the priest gave just one address at the autumn retreat, but his replacement apparently followed strictly the same curriculum. This dread of retreat time seems to have stayed with Thérèse. At her postulancy retreat three years later, she writes of being ‘deprived of all consolation—in darkness ... Jesus is not doing much to keep the conversation going!’¹⁸ although she concludes that: ‘I believe Jesus’ work during this retreat has been to detach me from all that is not himself.’¹⁹ Thérèse had wept at a phrase used in a homily: ‘No one knows if they are worthy of love or of hate.’²⁰ She was being torn between what she heard and what God had already taught her in the deepest level of her heart.

Her sister Pauline reported that she looked pale and drawn at the approach of the community retreat of 1891; but the preacher was a God-send. The Franciscan Provincial who had been booked could not come, so his Franciscan brother, Fr Alexis Prou, noted for missions in factories, came instead. For Thérèse he was the right man; he spoke of the love and mercy of God and, in one spiritual interview, established and confirmed her life.

My soul was like a book which the priest read better than I did. He launched me full sail on the waves of confidence and love which held such an attraction for me, but upon which I had not dared to venture. He told me that my faults did not offend God, and, taking God’s place as he did, he told me in his name that God was very pleased with me.²¹

That was, literally, enough. For whatever reason, but certainly going beyond her authority, the Prioress refused to let Thérèse speak to

¹⁸ *The Spiritual Journey*, p. 97.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 117.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 118.

Fr Alexis a second time. Hard though this was for her, she obeyed. Indeed she never saw him again, but she did not need to; his work was done. Thérèse's learning of God's love (and her liberation from any constricting view of Christ's heart) perhaps finds its most powerful expression in her great assertion that:

If I had committed all possible crimes I would always have the same confident trust [in God] because I know very well that this multitude of sins is nothing more than a drop of water in a blazing furnace.²²

There is a name for what Thérèse had discovered, received: 'liberty of spirit'. An eighteenth-century French Jesuit priest, Jean Grou, wrote thus:

Whatever is the conduct of God towards them; whether he tries them or whether he consoles them; whether he draws near to them, or whether he appears to abandon them, the real fixed state of their soul is always the same. They are raised above all the vicissitudes of the spiritual life; the surface of their soul may be troubled, but the inner depths enjoy the greatest peace. Their liberty with regard to God consists in this: that willing everything that God wills, without inclining to one side or the other, without any thought of their own interest, they have given their consent beforehand to all that can happen to them; they have lost their choice in that of God.²³

There is more along these lines, but Père Grou seems to have given us, about eighty years in advance, a rather accurate description of Thérèse. Especially striking is the last phrase, 'they have lost their choice in the choice of God'. God has made his own choice of neighbours, of us all; and so those who lose their power of choice in God's are able to point us most clearly towards our neighbours. It is interesting to note that, shortly after the retreat given by Fr Alexis, the Carmel suffered the death of its foundress, Mother Geneviève. Thérèse describes her as: 'a saint who had become holy by the practice of the ordinary hidden virtues', and adds that:

²² cf. *ibid.*, p. 196.

²³ *Manual for Interior Souls*, Jean Grou, Burns & Oates, 1948, Ch 7, p. 44.

Jesus was living in her and making her act and speak. That kind of sanctity seems to me to be the most authentic, the holiest, and it is what I desire because it is free from any illusion.²⁴

Thérèse has picked up here on what Père Grou had seen and taught. Some time later, Thérèse dreamt that Mother Geneviève three times said to her: ‘To you, I leave my heart’.²⁵

‘I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.’

Statues of St Thérèse generally show her with a bunch of roses, the petals of which she will shower down. It is a symbol that derives from the words inscribed on the cross marking where she was first buried: ‘I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth.’²⁶ Or, as she remarked from her deathbed: ‘God will have to do my will in heaven, because I have never done my own will on earth.’²⁷

To understand this we need to turn to the Letter to the Hebrews, the eleventh chapter of which deals with faith: ‘the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’.²⁸ Its author gives us a lengthy account of how faith drives the scriptural story forward—Cain and Abel, Abraham, Moses, then Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel—‘time would fail me’, he says, to tell of them all and many others and what they achieved and suffered. Thirty-eight verses lead up to perhaps the greatest anti-climax of Scripture:

And all these, though well-attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.²⁹

Now if this is true of all the saints of the Old Testament (and Carmelites count that great Old Testament saint, Elijah, as their remote founder), is it not all the more true of those whom we more commonly

²⁴ *The Spiritual Journey*, p. 119.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *Thérèse et Lisieux*, Descouvemont/Loose, Cerf 1991, illustrated on p. 310.

²⁷ *The Spiritual Journey*, p. 197.

²⁸ Heb. 11: 1 (RSV).

²⁹ Heb. 11: 39-40 (RSV).

call saints? They are still not made perfect 'apart from us'. This is a tremendous thought: that heaven is incomplete without us. The Lord tells us that knowing when the end of things will be is beyond our knowledge; yet the simple fact of our being brings us into that 'apart from us'. Can we then understand, in the light of this doctrine from the Letter to the Hebrews, Thérèse's desire, not so much to rest peacefully in heaven as to be active on earth? In any case, we do well to see in Thérèse this burning heart for all the world to come into the kingdom of God. A recent Carmelite writer puts it thus:

[For her] the motherhood of souls carried more pain and care and ultimate glory than ever could ordinary motherhood of human children destined to die in the fullness of time, however well cared for ... [for her and her Carmelite forebears] soul-motherhood and –fatherhood opened up beyond time and mortality to eternity and immortality, giving every least decision, every least action another dimension, endless day, endless night.³⁰

St Thérèse, pray for us!

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³⁰ *Adventures in Prayer: Reflection on St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross and St Therese of Lisieux*, Noel Dermot O'Donoghue OCD, Burns & Oates, 2006, p. 162.

THE WALKING BECOMES THE PRAYING

ANDY DELMEGE

The Road to Santiago

AS PART OF a recent Sabbatical, I spent September and October 2009 on pilgrimage in Spain, walking around 650 miles from Valencia to Santiago de Compostela.¹ Santiago has been one of the most important pilgrim destinations since the tomb of the Apostle James the Great was discovered there early in the ninth century. Walking the *Camino*, or 'Way', to Santiago is becoming increasingly popular (although nowhere near as popular as it was in the Middle Ages). Well over 100,000 people walk it each year, mostly on the *Camino Frances* from Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees. Interestingly, many who walk are not Christians.

I decided to take a much quieter route, the *Camino de Levante*, which goes from Valencia, via Albacete, Toledo and Avila to Zamora, before skirting the border with Portugal and on to Santiago. I decided on this route because I wanted the opportunity for solitude; so that I could encounter Spain rather than pilgrim infrastructure; and so I could visit some of the sites associated with the Carmelite Mystics.

My pilgrimage developed into three parts. The first was three weeks walking solo from Valencia to Toledo. This included nine days walking in a more or less straight line through the empty flatness of La Mancha, which many will know from the book *Don Quixote*. At Toledo I was met by two friends who were on holiday. By this time I needed company, so I spent five days with them, walking a little and then going by car to Avila and Segovia. I then

¹ More information, reflection and photographs of my pilgrimage can be found on my blog: <http://pilgrimpace.wordpress.com>

Information on pilgrimage to Santiago is available from the Confraternity of St James, 27 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NY, <http://www.csj.org.uk>

got the train to Zamora and walked again from there. This was a more relaxed walk, with less mileage each day, and the company of pilgrims on the route from Seville. I was able to spend a few days on retreat with the Cistercians at Oseira, and reached Santiago in time for my family who had come to meet me. If my calculations are correct, I walked around 650 miles. I usually walked around fifteen miles a day, with my longest day being twenty-seven miles. When possible, I stayed the night in *albergues*, or pilgrim hostels. When these were not available, I used bed and breakfast or cheap hotels. I carried a rucksack weighing around twenty-five pounds.

Many people ask me why I walked. This is a very difficult question. Pilgrimage is something that runs very deep for me. Some people have spoken about pilgrimage in terms of vocation, of being called, and this certainly makes sense to me. On a more mundane level, I wanted to get a break; to face the physical, mental and spiritual challenges of a pilgrimage; to have some time and space; and to visit Spain.

Walking the *Camino* was one of the best things I have done, and also one of the hardest. As well as an adventure, it has deepened my prayer and my relationship with God. I am grateful for this opportunity to share some of it.

A Communion of Friendship and Gratitude

The first week of the pilgrimage was extremely hard. A combination of heat, unfamiliar food and anxiety about whether I was up to it meant I would have run home if I could have done it without anyone noticing. I was thrown back on God, on my inner resources, and on the love and support of those at home and the people who live along the way.

I kept in touch with people at home through my blog and mobile phone. I found a very strong sense of connection with people at home who wanted to share as much as possible in the pilgrimage. One friend wrote, 'On Tuesday I walked the 2 miles back from the garage at 7.30 am, and felt that I was walking with you, although we were many miles apart.' When I got home, I found that a giant map of Spain had grown around the walls of my parish church, with my

route marked on it. In some sense I was walking for those who were unable to go on pilgrimage. I find it very moving to reflect on this.

Going away enabled me to see with new eyes just how much I am part of a web of love and communion. Going into solitude—I was the only pilgrim on the route for the first three weeks, and my Spanish is not yet good enough for deep conversations—made me realise how much a part of a loving community I am. Stepping aside from ‘ordinary life’ enabled me to be truly thankful for the things I already have.

The Spanish people I encountered along the Way were kind and generous. On a long solitary day in the Valencian hill country, I saw four people, harvesting melons in a field in the distance. One called me over and gave me a watermelon for breakfast. Towards the end of an afternoon of scorching heat, I passed a farming co-operative for people with learning disabilities. The manager asked if I were a pilgrim, told me to wait, and reappeared with a bottle of cold water. When I went to pay for my morning coffee and refresco in a bar, the owner refused my money, ‘because you are a pilgrim’. The pilgrimage goes very deep in the Spanish soul, and there was a great respect for it and desire to help me.

Friendships deepened and new ones were made. One day in October I walked the thirteen miles from Campoberceros to Laza with José Carlos, a pilgrim from Brazil. I did not know José Carlos before the pilgrimage. We met after Zamora, found we were very comfortable in one another’s company, became good friends and walked together for two or three weeks (not least because whenever we parted, we found we caught up again by accident). José Carlos taught me a lot, not least giving me the gift of slowing down and taking things at a much more measured pace. We arrived in Laza in the early afternoon, found the *albergue*, had a meal and then siesta. When we woke, there was a wonderful *Camino* evening. Two French pilgrims arrived. We went to Mass for the Feast of Santa Teresa of Avila. Then we went to buy bread for the French, who were leaving before dawn. We could not find the bakery. A man stopped his car, got out, banged on a door and summoned the old woman inside to open her bakery, ‘because there are pilgrims who

need bread'. Then dinner. Over an excellent meal of paella, chicken and chips, salad, bread, wine, ice cream and coffee (and all for nine euros), we had laughter and conversation in a basic mixture of Spanish and French about the very deepest things of God and humanity. This was gift. In the morning, the French pilgrims had gone.

Walking and Praying

On the *Camino* my praying became entwined with my walking. While I walked, I tried to pray. Sometimes the praying was determined by my physical state. When I was feeling strong and the landscape was beautiful it was easy to overflow with joy and praise. (Those who remember my singing voice from Bede House Chapel, the House that the Community used to have in Kent, will be glad that this was in remote and lonely places!) At other times I measured out the miles in intercession. On long days when I had walked twenty miles, had another couple of hours to go and it was too hot for anything, the most I could do was offer up the suffering (and at times, even this was too much; on a few occasions I fell asleep while walking). Friends kindly sent me exercises connecting prayer with breathing. I know that many pilgrims use them, but I did not find them right for me.

What I gradually discovered was that the walking became the praying. Alan Ecclestone describes the pilgrimages of Charles Péguy to Chartres:

A pilgrimage gets to the holy place at last but what gives it its part in prayer is the slamming down of one's feet to complete the journey while praying the while for all its features.²

In putting one foot in front of another, in the tiredness, in the blisters, in the being-at-one with myself, the landscape and God, in the quietening of the mind; in all this, walking, pilgrimage itself, became prayer.

² *A Staircase for Silence*, Alan Ecclestone, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977, p. 13.

The simple goodness of walking and praying the *Camino* was a falling more deeply into God. The walking became a deeper loving. The incarnated-ness of pilgrim prayer, coming out of kilometre after kilometre, mile after mile, of effort, is tested because the *Camino* is also a School of Charity. I have already written of how generous the people living along the Way were. One important thing for me was to learn to receive it. It can be more testing to learn to live with other pilgrims. Busy *albergues* can be challenge. Everyone is crowded into a simple dormitory with some showers, facilities for hand-washing clothes, and maybe a kitchen. Everyone is tired. Most people want to get an early night. Some people snore. Some people get up to prepare for walking at four in the morning. Dealing with this is an exercise in the practical love that comes out of praying. It is also part of learning basic pilgrim attitudes. These seem to me to revolve around gratitude; to be grateful for the love and care expressed in so many ways, while accepting the difficulties and discomforts with grace.

Another key aspect of praying and prayerful attitudes that came out of the pilgrimage was trust. Going off to another country to undertake a challenge that was greater than anything I had done before was a risk. I had to learn to trust myself and my abilities, to trust others (and also to discern when it was right not to trust others), and to trust God. This could be seen, for example, in finding accommodation each night. At home I know that I will always be sheltered and comfortable. On the *Camino* I did not know where I would spend the next night. As I walked, I relaxed and the anxiety about whether I would get a bed slipped away. This is an attitude I must work to keep now.

Walking with the Cross

One of the themes weaving through the pilgrimage was the cross. Spain has many crosses, some marking the way. The sight of a cross would remind me of why I was there, that I was responding to a deep call, that I was travelling deeper into the Grace and Love of God. A friend had made me a small cross to hold. It was also comfortable to hold the tau that was on a cord around my neck as I

walked. Feeling it in my palm was a way of praying. I was also reminded of the cross when I thought about the weight I carried, because my rucksack was made by Crux (the Latin word for ‘cross’). As I walked I was given much to ponder about the Passion and Death and Resurrection of Christ.

The walking was also a constant reminder of the reality of the cross in the world. When I go for a walk on a day off here, I am able to choose where I go. I often head off for favourite and beautiful hills in Shropshire or the Cotswolds. The *Camino* is different because it takes you from your start to Santiago via the centres of population. It is a walk through the world where the suffering of Christ, particularly in the least of his brothers and sisters, is very visible. Every town I walked through in southern and central Spain was covered in fascist and anti-fascist graffiti which formed a running debate, in particular on the presence of Muslim immigrants. This led me to ponder some of the less comfortable aspects of the *Camino*, not least that St James ceases being the simple fisherman or the pilgrim and becomes Matamoros, the Warrior slaying the Moors in the Reconquest of Spain. The *Camino* brought deep connection with the world and its troubles, not escape from them.

This was also apparent in walking through the environment. Walking through enormous industrial zones, by village rubbish heaps, or picking my way through vast construction sites was a sharp reminder that suffering happens to the earth as well as to God and God’s children. The cross was there in what was beautiful, as on the day entering Galicia when the vapour trails of aircraft made crosses in the sky, leaving beauty and despoliation mingling in the heavens.

It was important to engage prayerfully with this suffering. It was a reminder that the Pilgrimage, which can be viewed as a mirror of the journey of faith, is an ever-deepening participation in the Incarnation, an ever-increasing commitment to the Kingdom of God. Somehow, the suffering undertaken on the Road to Santiago was a participation in the Passion, a communion with the suffering of so many brothers and sisters and of the created order. The Pilgrimage became very much a lived commitment to Hope. Having

walked it, I can understand why Gerard Hughes calls his excellent account of a pilgrimage *Walk to Jerusalem: In Search of Peace*.³ The *Camino* gave me a great deal to ponder about what the little people can do, about the power of that one, small, broken body, nailed to the cross.

Arriving and Beginning

On Sunday 25 October we left the *albergue* at O Outriera, eleven miles from Santiago, in the early morning and set as fast a pace as we could for Santiago. We walked through eucalyptus forests and into agricultural land. Suddenly, four or five miles away we saw the three towers of Santiago Cathedral shining in milky sunshine. We celebrated with shouts and songs—and chocolate. Spurred on, we fought our way through the runners of the Santiago Marathon, and arrived at the Cathedral just before the Pilgrim Mass. The Cathedral was full and noisy. I had too many tears to sing. Mass ended with the *Botafumeiro*, the enormous thurible that takes eight men to operate, swinging as high as it could go.

After Mass, a visit to the Pilgrim Office to get my Compostela, the Latin certificate proving I had made the pilgrimage. In the quiet of the next morning, again to the Cathedral to hug the statue of St James above the altar and to pray a thank you and a commitment before his relics in the Crypt. And then the Pilgrim Mass again, this time to hear myself named among the pilgrims who had arrived the previous day.

Now I am home. Some of the Pilgrimage disappears into memory. Some stays with me as I reflect and am changed by the experience. Some of it is in the future. Despite saying every day of the walk that I would never do it again, I am planning to walk the sixty-mile *Camino Ingles* from A Coruna with my daughter next year. And is it possible now to dream dreams about the next Sabbatical?

³ *Walk to Jerusalem: In Search of Peace*, Gerard W Hughes, Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1993.

‘ASHES TO ASHES’

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

‘BRITISH AIRSPACE is closed!’ said the stranger sitting next to me at lunch when she realised that I was English. Observing that I was weighing up whether she really looked the type of person to be telling me tall stories—and I was in fact thinking it unlikely that she was speaking in jest—she added: ‘That isn’t a joke.’ But I was also thinking that the United Kingdom does not close its airspace—or at least, prior to this day, 15 April 2010, it didn’t! My companion then said that she had just heard the news on the radio that a volcano in Iceland had erupted, that there was a great cloud of ash drifting southwards towards Germany, and that the United Kingdom and some of the Scandinavian countries had closed their airspace.

Although it sounded like a fairytale, we were less than a mile away from one of the two Berlin airports, Tegel, and I realised that the burial which we had just attended had been quieter than might have been expected: there must have been fewer planes landing and taking off. A quick Internet search on my behalf confirmed her story, and of course such reports have since become almost commonplace.

I was in Berlin for two nights and had just attended the requiem and burial of one of the Sisters at the Carmel there. We were all having a meal back at the convent after returning from the cemetery. The burial had taken place with no sense of rush or of needing to conclude by any fixed time, and the three hundred people who had been present at the requiem had filed past the grave, casting in flowers and earth and sprinkling the coffin with holy water, no doubt with the familiar words ‘earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes’ very much in mind.

A cloud of volcanic ash, the ashes of individual mortality—of Sister Nicola’s dying—and, not just on this day, not just now, there was another connection with ashes. The Carmel Regina Martyrum in Berlin had been founded in 1982 from the Carmel of the Precious Blood at Dachau, as a continuation and new interpretation of the founding vision for Dachau. The intention had been to provide a praying presence in places where there had in the past been

unspeakable suffering, being there for all who had suffered, for those who still suffered, for those searching for God and for answers. The Berlin Carmel is located next to the Memorial Church of Maria Regina Martyrum, built near the former place of execution at Plötzensee in 1963 and commemorating the victims of National Socialism, including those executed as members of the resistance movement. The Dachau Carmel adjoins the former concentration camp in that place. Both Carmels have, therefore, a direct connection with the effects of tyrannical violence during the time of Nazi rule, with ashes from the concentration camps and from other violent deaths. I was reminded of this at the burial, for the Jesuits' burial plot is next to the Sisters' graves. Fr Alfred Delp SJ, who was executed at Plötzensee on 2 February 1945, is commemorated there, as he also is in the crypt of the Memorial Church, although it is not known where his ashes were scattered.

Sister Nicola is the third Sister who has died since the foundation, the first being Sister Gemma (Prioress 1982-90) who died in 1990. Sister Gemma had said in 1982:

A Carmel should be an interface where the search for God and experience of God meets human need, and vice versa. The capacity to let oneself be affected by what is important to the Church and to human beings, and not just in the abstract but in a very real way, is essential for life lived as a call to Carmel.

Living contact with the Church in the place, together with the possibility of exchange with people who seek orientation and the aid of intercessory prayer, are pre-conditions for that. We must be able to be reached and we must find ways of sharing what is, and should be, central to our life. Help with prayer is urgently sought by many.¹

By courtesy of the ash cloud, which kept most airports in Western Europe closed for a number of days, I was to have not two, but ten, nights in Berlin. This turned my visit from a quick trip to be present in solidarity for a few hours at the funeral into something very different, where we all had space and time to share and spread out this and other experiences together.

¹ From an interview given to Josef Sudbrack in Munich.

Sister Nicola, cantrix at the Carmel and a gifted musician, had died on Holy Saturday evening, 3 April, after a long illness. It was a funeral where the keynote seemed to me to be a great sense of peace, the sense that, despite sadness and loss, something had come to completion. The sermon was preached by Fr Lutz Nehk who, as well as having responsibilities in radio and television and being chaplain of a local school, has duties in connection with the Church of Maria Regina Martyrum and the Sisters at the Carmel. It was a fine sermon, not only because it was exactly right for the occasion, but also because it gives much food for thought about faithful Christian witness and sacrificial love, and about death in a Christian and monastic context. It also reflects the vocation of all the Sisters. First he referred to the fact that Nicola had died not long before the Easter Vigil had taken place, then he went on to speak of her gifts:

‘We shall sing “Alleluia”!’ said Sister Nicola to one of her Sisters in Carmel. And *how* we sang it at this Easter Vigil, on the morning of the Resurrection! We down here, and she up there, in the choir of angels and saints, arrived in time to celebrate the Night of Nights. Rehearsals? She really didn’t need them; for she had, after all, rehearsed and sung here for as long as she could; and therefore no place with the singers at the back either; no, she will have stood right at the front. Up there in the front row, she sang ‘Alleluia’ with us.

Nicola had made her Solemn Profession in Dachau at the Easter Vigil on 14 April 1974. Her dying took place, therefore, not only in prospect of the approaching celebration of the Resurrection and of Christ’s victory over death, but also in prospect of the anniversary of her Life Vows; this juxtaposition was referred to in the sermon:

Easter Night was Sister Nicola’s night. It was the night of her lifelong ‘Yes’, of her Solemn Profession. ... The first service which the Church celebrated after her death on Holy Saturday was the Liturgy of the Resurrection. ‘O blessed Night’, in which her lifelong ‘Yes’ was completed. It is finished; it is done: after a long journey, after a life ‘acquainted with infirmity’,² a life in which joy was never lacking, and in which her keen

² Isa. 53: 3.

sense of humour remained to the end. ‘She looks so beautiful’, the Sisters said of their dead Sister. ‘She looks so beautiful’—a triumph over the grim face of death. Who has the last laugh here? Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?

The text introducing the hymn in the Letter to the Philippians, ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’,³ was quoted at the beginning of the notice letting people know of Sister Nicola’s death; it was also printed on the little card given out at her Profession many years ago. Born near Lucerne in Switzerland, Priska Fischer had adopted the name ‘Nicola’ after the Swiss saint, Brother Nikolaus von Flüe, and she also took the dedication ‘of the Incarnation’:

[This] text from the Letter to the Philippians ... speaks/sings of this revealing of Christ: of the One who was before all time (divine); of the One who came in the course of time (human); of the One who passed into glory (royal). ... The name ‘Sister Nicola of the Incarnation’ ... derived its agenda from these verses: ‘He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself ... being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.’⁴

Fr Nehk, going on to speak of that identification with Christ to which all Christians are called, did so in the context of the vocation of the Carmelites in Berlin, and at Dachau, where Nicola had also spent many years of her life, and he reflected upon her unique vocation to leave her beautiful native Switzerland to pray for reconciliation in these places:

With her dedication, she took it upon herself to see and honour his being in human form especially in those who were brought low, those who were tortured, those who were put to death, and to revere in them an ongoing presence of the Servant of God, Jesus Christ—can one, after the end of Nazi rule, do that anywhere else than in a place where the greatest crimes in the history of humanity to date were committed?

³ Phil. 2: 5.

⁴ Phil. 2: 6-8.

Priska Fischer from neutral Switzerland took sides. In the land of the perpetrators, she remembered the victims, witnessed to the mercy of God, prayed and pleaded for reconciliation, that all human beings may be able to live with their fellow human beings. No Swiss mountains and meadows. At the edge of Dachau Concentration Camp, near the Plötzensee Prison in a Memorial Church which reflects the cold of a prison cell: these are the places where she proclaimed the Incarnation of God.

There was reflection upon the text, ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (or, in its German translation, ‘Hold fast to that which you know from Jesus Christ’), which had meant so much to Nicola:

What is meant ... is not the acquisition of something which can be learned and called forth, as in a religious education class or during theological study. [It] is about knowledge gained from experience, sung experience of God. ... The Liturgy is the place where experience of faith is transmitted—in praise and proclamation. That which we pray, we believe. The Liturgy was for Sister Nicola the way to create a space for experience of faith and to praise and proclaim the mighty deeds of God.

‘What will dying be like?’ said Sister Nicola to the Prioress a few days before her death, and continued: ‘I have the impression that it isn’t a break [in the sense of a rupture or severing]. We are carried across.’ And again later: ‘It isn’t a break.’⁵ Fr Nehk said:

Words of Sister Nicola in the face of death ... as if she were already certain that all that comes is a seamless continuation of all that those of us here can already have and share of the experience of God. It isn’t a break—between Easter Night here and Easter Night up there. Where in the Liturgy shall we again and again be close to Sister Nicola? At the commemoration of the departed. And where in the Liturgy will Sister Nicola be close to us? Always when we, with the choirs of angels and saints, sing: ‘Holy, holy, holy’.

Published with the agreement of the Sisters in Berlin and Fr Lutz Nehk.

⁵ ‚Wie wird das mit dem Sterben sein? Ich habe den Eindruck, es ist kein Bruch; wir werden hinüber getragen.‘ And again later: ‚Es ist kein Bruch.‘

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JOHN SCOTT, formerly Chaplain at Bede House, assists with editing in the Communications Department of the Diocese of Westminster.

DAVID BARTON was Warden of the Community 2001-9.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN is Vicar of St Stephen's, South Dulwich London and first encountered the Community when he became Vicar of Littlemore, Oxford in 1997.

DOUGLAS DALES is Chaplain of Marlborough College and a Priest Associate of the Community.

NEW FROM SLG PRESS

LEARN TO BE AT PEACE

The Practice of Stillness

Andrew Norman

‘Learn to be at peace, and thousands around you will find salvation.’ Drawing the title of this book from the well-known words of the Russian saint, Seraphim of Sarov, Dr Andrew Norman has a simple, yet urgent, message: learn the practice of stillness and develop a contemplative awareness in all things—stop and listen for what really matters.

Andrew Norman is an Anglican parish priest. He wrote these reflections during a time of convalescence following a brain haemorrhage—a dramatic event which caused him to slow down and reflect. He invites the reader to share his experience of learning to be at peace, and to appreciate fully the beauty and wonder of the world. If we cultivate a disciplined life of prayer, this will shape our existence and give us strength in difficult times.

The author draws on the tradition of prayer over the centuries, quoting from some of the great teachers, including the Desert Fathers, St John Cassian and John Main. He considers the obstacles to stillness, and points us towards techniques which can help us in our spiritual lives, including use of the rosary and the Enneagram. The book was serialised in the *Church Times* in April 2010.

Andrew Norman is Rector of St Nicolas Church, Guildford, Surrey, and the author of *Silence in God*, published by SPCK.

Fairacres Publications 158 £4.00 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0178-8

FROM HOLY WEEK TO EASTER

Following the God who is going before

George Pattison

Professor George Pattison takes the reader on a reflective journey through Holy Week to Easter, considering the events which were to

change humankind's understanding of the purposes and holiness of God. As the author says in the Introduction, he does not seek 'to instruct, to define or to exhort, but rather to invite the reader to a closer reflection of his or her own involvement with the story'. The words of Jesus form a mirror in which we can see ourselves and our desires magnified and clarified.

This book had its origin in a series of sermons and addresses given at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford in 2007. It offers original and refreshing insights into the timeless themes of hope, love, prophecy, the natural world, friendship, betrayal and death.

George Pattison is Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford and a Canon of Christ Church, and he was Dean of King's College, Cambridge 1991-2001. His publications include examination of the works of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger; he has also written about the technological society and the relationship between theology and culture.

Fairacres Publications 159 £4.00 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0179-5

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

The Scandal of the Cross

John W. Rogerson

In these theological reflections on the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ, John Rogerson takes as his theme some central paradoxes of the Christian faith. Jesus was put to death publicly by crucifixion which, according to traditional Jewish teaching, was a scandal and an affront to God. Yet a Roman centurion present was able to exclaim in awe, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'

This short, yet powerful, book evokes a deep response. The author invites us to ponder a number of instances where strength was manifested in weakness, not only for Jesus—in Gethsemane, at his Trial and on the Cross—but also for those two pillars of the early Church, Peter and Paul, as they too wrestled with 'the Scandal of the Cross'.

John W. Rogerson is Canon Emeritus of Sheffield Cathedral and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Sheffield University. Born in 1935 and an Anglican priest for many years, he is a leading Old Testament scholar. His interests include the use of the Bible in social, moral, political and environmental issues, and Semitic languages.

Fairacres Publications 160 £4.00 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0180-1

AUGUSTINE BAKER

Frontiers of the Spirit

Victor de Waal

David Augustine Baker (1575-1641) was a Welshman, born in Abergavenny. A lawyer, and later a Benedictine monk and priest, Baker was an individualist throughout his life. He lived in a number of boundary situations—geographical, linguistic, cultural, religious—and often crossed frontiers. He encouraged Christians to make their home on the borderlands between this world and the next. There was no move to canonise him as a saint, but his own Order gave him the title of ‘Venerable’.

This book is an introduction to Augustine Baker’s life and teaching and, through the use of extracts from *Holy Wisdom* and other writings, his own voice is heard directly. His teaching that spiritual direction, reading and prayer are of help to us on the journey towards the ‘vision of God’ is as pertinent in the twenty-first century as it was in his own times.

Victor de Waal, born in 1929, was Dean of Canterbury 1976-86 and for ten years Chaplain to the Sisters of the Sacred Cross at Tymawr in Monmouthshire. He now lives in London and works with asylum seekers.

Fairacres Publications 161 £4.00 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0181-8

All of these books are available from SLG Press. Please do not send money now – an invoice will be sent with the books. See also p. 67.

BOOK REVIEWS

St John of the Cross, Peter M. Tyler, Continuum Books, 2010. Paperback £14.99, ISBN: 978-0-8264-7561-9; Hardback £45.00, ISBN: 978-0-8264-7560-2.

Peter Mark Tyler is Senior Lecturer and Programme Director of Pastoral Theology at St Mary's University College, Twickenham, and a psychotherapist; his doctoral work combined his interest in mystical theology with his interest in psychology and philosophy. St John of the Cross is particularly significant for him, and he regularly leads pilgrimage retreats to Spain. Judging by the quality of this book, I think that we shall be hearing considerably more of him.

With 154 pages of text and 20 pages of acknowledgements, bibliography and index, this is not a long book. I can, however, strongly recommend it, both to those wishing to find a way to begin to study the works of St John of the Cross and to those already familiar with them. Fr James McCaffrey OCD, Editor of *Mount Carmel*, is quoted on the back cover as saying that the book is 'a treasure-house of resources from which to draw guidance for further research'.

The author uses the combination of his understanding of mystical and pastoral theology and of psychology to help the reader towards a better understanding of his subject. Books attempting to give a 'psychological interpretation' of John tend to be gimmicky and unsuccessful; this is not one of those. It is well-written, beautifully produced and—although not to be taken at a great pace because of the density of thought—very readable.

In the Introduction, Peter Tyler says:

My aim will be to rescue John from some of the stereotypes to which he has succumbed and reveal how his extraordinarily subtle approach to the Christian life utilises psychological, philosophical, theological and aesthetic approaches in a unique synthesis (p. 3).

In my view he succeeds in this aim. The first of the seven chapters which follow is largely biographical, depicting not only John's life

but also the times in which he lived, very different from our own. Its title is derived from W. H. Auden's description in a review of Gerard Brenan's biography of John of the Cross in 1973 of John as 'An Odd Person in an Odd Country at an Odd Time'. The author looks at 'John the Theologian' in Chapter 2 and explores John's understanding with regard to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity and Mary. The author believes that John's theology begins with a wound: 'Where have you hidden, my love, and left me moaning?'¹ The response is to go out and seek this *Deus absconditus* ('hidden God'), since 'for John, the goal of human life is to return to the heart of God in the ecstasy of union' (p. 58). The author is equally at home with the subject of Chapter 3, 'John the Mystic', where he explores the centuries of tradition which John inherited, relating this to John himself.

Chapter 4, 'John the Psychologist', invites consideration of John's concept of the 'dark night', his treatment of depression and assertion of need for empathy, particularly at critical stages on the way, and his approach to human sexuality and sensuality. In Chapter 5 we meet 'John the Artist', the aesthete, the man who sketched, the poet. Careful consideration is given in Chapter 6, 'John and Interfaith Dialogue', to what John might have to say now to Islam and Buddhism. Chapter 7, the last and shortest, is given over to 'John for Today: Pastoral Theologian and Spiritual Director'. In the present day, when so much emphasis is placed on the undoubted benefit of a spiritual director (by whatever title), we may note that 'the ultimate aim of the director ... for John is to lead the soul to greater "solitude, tranquillity and freedom of spirit"'² (p. 150).

John of the Cross now takes his rightful place in Continuum's 'Outstanding Christian Thinkers' series, along with Karl Barth, Denys the Areopagite, Anselm of Canterbury, Edith Stein, Erasmus and many others.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

¹ *Spiritual Canticle* (CB), St John of the Cross, I 7: 9 (author's translation).

² *Living Flame of Love*, 3: 46.

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

Holiness For All is a book not only to be read but to be assimilated for, as the author tells us, ‘holiness is the fundamental vocation of all the baptized’. St Paul exhorts us to imitation—to imitate him, to imitate the elders, that is, those more advanced in holiness than ourselves. Father Aloysius Rego has chosen a superb example for us to imitate in St Thérèse, for St Thérèse has fashioned a way to holiness accessible to us all, not just for the spiritual elite. She encourages us with the ‘invincible weapons of love and confidence’. St Thérèse’s spirituality, her way of holiness, was born of her own personal struggle to give herself to God. She teaches us from her own knowledge—knowledge born out of experience—and she only teaches what is possible for everyone, the ‘little souls’ she so often refers to. That’s you and me.

The book is set up thematically, with chapters on ‘Significant Relationships and Events’ [in St Thérèse’s life], ‘The Writings’, ‘The Scriptures’, ‘Spirituality of the Little Way’, ‘Prayer’, ‘The Merciful Love of God’, and ‘Truth’. For St Thérèse ‘our holiness depends on how we grow in our relationship with God’, and these chapters explore that relationship from different vantage points. I found the chapter on ‘Truth’ particularly moving and challenging.

This is not a magic handbook...step 1, step 2, step 3, and you’re holy... rather it is sound teaching from a reliable teacher on how to cooperate with God’s grace working in us individually. ‘While an important principle of Thérèse’s spirituality is ‘ALL is grace!’, this must be understood properly. What it means, at least for Thérèse, is not that we should do nothing and God everything, but that there is no proportion between our genuine, little, stumbling efforts at conversion—our cooperation with God—and the transformation that God finally brings about’ (p. 43). *Holiness For All* encourages us and guides us to change our life ways, so that our life is brought more closely in line with God. The book contains generous quotes from St Thérèse’s writings, allowing her to speak and teach us herself. Fr Rego is in the background of this book, orchestrating it

beautifully, but letting St Thérèse do the ‘performing’. We find she is a saint for inspiration as well as imitation.

This book is about holiness first and St Thérèse second. You do not need to know a lot or anything about St Thérèse to plumb the rich depths of this book. And if you are devoted to St Thérèse, as I am, this is another book for your collection, one that takes you deeper into God led by the sure hand of our Saint. Here St Thérèse will get us started or keep us going on the road to holiness.

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

SLG Press has some copies of *Holiness For All: Themes from St Thérèse of Lisieux* available at £7.00 per copy. Please do not send money now – an invoice will be sent with the books.

Elizabeth of the Trinity: Always Believe in Love, edited by Marian T. Murphy OCD, New City Press, 2009, £9.95.

ISBN: 978-1-56548-313-2.

Elizabeth of the Trinity invites us to dwell with the Triune God in our innermost depths. There, in the silence of faith and recollection we discover the secret of lasting happiness, letting ourselves be loved by the God of light, love and life (p. 24).

These words by the editor of this book, Sister Marian Teresa Murphy, Carmelite of St Joseph’s Monastery in Liverpool, sum up the essence of the spirituality and theology of one of the best-loved saints of Carmel. Sister Marian Teresa has selected from, and in most cases re-translated, the writings of Elizabeth and brought them together in this new book with an introduction.

The book is pleasingly presented, with a number of pictures of Elizabeth and a helpful Introduction, Chronology and Bibliography, together with words of explanation throughout the text. Her main writings are all to be found in the book—selections from the Letters, and Poems, the Prayer to the Trinity, ‘Heaven in Faith’ and ‘The Last Retreat of the “Praise of Glory”’.

The editor of the book wrote her MA dissertation on Elizabeth of the Trinity at Maryvale Institute, Birmingham, and is currently writing a book on the life and spirituality of Elizabeth of the Trinity. That efforts are being made, not only to re-present the writings of Elizabeth in a modern format, but also to comment upon her spiritual teaching, is greatly to be welcomed, particularly coming as they do from a present-day Carmelite.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Etty Hillesum: Essential Writings, selected & introduced by Annemarie S. Kidder, Orbis Books (via Alban Books), £11.99.

ISBN: 978-1-57075-838-6.

It is hard to know quite how to begin a review of this book. Etty Hillesum is remarkable, though it took forty years for her writings to be published, and it has taken another twenty for her to be more widely known. What she left was a diary and a collection of letters, which fill no more than a small book and cover a mere two-year period up to 1941, ending with her death in Auschwitz. But in that small space of time she moves from being someone with no religious understanding or experience to a woman of extraordinary spiritual stature, who speaks with a unique and authentic voice.

Etty lived through the worst of times, a Jew in Holland experiencing the ever-tightening net that finally, and as she knew, purposefully, drew her and her family to the gas chambers. Yet this book sings with joy and affirmation of life, spilling over with the love that Etty discovered in herself and which she longs to give to everyone. To read her is to sense the immense possibilities of our transformation and change from within, and to see clearly how the only way in which our troubled world can be changed is by calling others to the same inner awakening.

Etty's unfolding experience has much to say to us, but there are two aspects of her insights that should make us ponder long and hard. The first is her witness to the already-there inwardness of the Divine presence. Etty had no background experience of religious practice. She never seems to have entered a church or a synagogue.

She came from a determinedly secular Jewish family. Her one influence was a remarkable, though unorthodox, psychotherapist called Spear, who encouraged her to read the bible and to pray. From this personal practice she makes a discovery. In August 1941 she writes, 'There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stones block the well, and God is buried underneath. He must be dug out again.' Teaching herself to return to that place, again and again, she finds the dynamic of her transformation irresistible. The diary is the record of her startled witness to the process. She is 'the girl who could not kneel' who has to learn how to pray. But by the summer of 1942 it is as if the 'well' of her early experience is the totality of her life. Amid the horrors of her prison camp every moment is gifted. She looks on the soldiers with compassion, and has learned to live each moment, even the worst, to the full, accepting it all, just as it is. And she records it with self-effacing clarity.

But along with that is an understanding of God that has nothing to do with power. It is so radically expressed that it is startling to read at first. Recording the terrible nature of the times, she writes of God: 'You cannot help us, but we must help you, and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last.' Always for Etty, God is weak, and must be helped, kept safe in the hands of those who understand him. Within the diaries that understanding is all of a piece with the life-changing power of the centre, and, more than anything in her writings, should make us ask questions about our own concepts of God. Is it that as individuals we are always—and uncritically— attracted by power? And have we been so nurtured by a Church with a history of power that we cannot think of God outside the images of (heavenly) armies and thrones (symbolic of course)? After reading Etty it is a question that does not go away easily, and there are no simple answers.

The diaries themselves are very approachable. But this is a good selection of what one might call the essence of Etty, and Annemarie Kidder's introduction and commentary is sparing and intelligent. Broadly the book follows the timeframe of Etty's last years, and the format makes it an ideal book for reading over a period of a few

weeks—by far the best way for such rich material. As someone said, it ‘needs to be read in small doses, repeatedly’.

DAVID BARTON

Franz Jägerstätter: Letters and Writings from Prison, edited by Erna Putz, Orbis Books (via Alban Books), 2009, £16.99.

ISBN: 978-1-57075-826-3.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is known for his theological writings and influence and for giving his life for the sake of conscience towards the end of the Second World War. In comparison, Franz Jägerstätter, an inmate at Tegel Prison in Berlin in 1943 with Bonhoeffer, is almost unknown in the English-speaking world. This recently-published English translation is to be welcomed as a way of giving him recognition. The sub-title implies that the documents in this book were all written in prison, but the letters, and the notebooks in which Franz wrote down his reflections on the faith and on the political situation, date not only from the time of his imprisonment but also from earlier times. There are in addition letters from his wife, Franziska.

Franz Jägerstätter was born on 20 May 1907 in the Austrian village of St Radegund, which is on the river Inn, north of Salzburg, near the border with Germany. He married Franziska in 1936, and three daughters were born between 1937 and 1940. Franz, always an anti-Nazi, had a powerful and determining dream in January 1938, in which he saw a ‘wonderful train’, particularly attractive to children, coming around a mountain, and heard a voice saying, ‘This train is going to hell.’ Called up into the army in June 1940, he was permitted to return to his farm after a few days, since farmers were much needed. When summoned to return in February 1943, he reported, but only in order to refuse to serve, having become convinced over the years that he could not in conscience do so. He was arrested immediately, imprisoned for some months, tried, and on 9 August 1943 executed by guillotine at Brandenburg-Görden Prison. After the war, his ashes were taken to St Radegund, which has become a place of pilgrimage. Franziska Jägerstätter, born in 1913, has survived into extreme old age. In the years

following the death of Franz, she and their children endured many difficulties. As well as the heavy work on the farm and, for instance, being denied clothing coupons, they were shunned in their village.

As I read this book, I was reminded of a saying attributed to Tertullian: *sanguis martyrurum, semen Christianorum* ('the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians'), or as a later version has it, 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Holy Church'. This short maxim³ expresses a fundamental Christian truth, that those who witness to the truth in every age particularly preserve and hand down the faith to those of us not called upon to make such great sacrifices: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'⁴

The book was published in German in 2007, the year of Franz Jägerstätter's beatification by Pope Benedict XVI at Linz in Austria, the place where the process had been initiated ten years previously. Franziska and sixty family members were present, many of whom were descendants of Franz and his wife. The most comprehensive study prior to this book was *In Solitary Witness: The Life and Death of Franz Jägerstätter* by Gordon C. Zahn (1964). Soon after the publication of Zahn's book, Bishop Thomas D. Roberts contributed the story of Franz to the Vatican II discussion on conscience, which was part of the process of drafting *Gaudium et Spes, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965).

Franz, who had received no more than an elementary education, continued to educate himself through reading, believing that not doing so leads to not being able to think for oneself and thus to becoming 'playground balls that others will kick around'.⁵ He believed that the goal of earthly life is the homeland in heaven, and that:

³ A conflation of *semen est sanguis Christianorum, Apologeticum* 50.13, and other writings by Tertullian, on martyrdom.

⁴ John 12: 24.

⁵ Letter to his godson, Franz Huber on completing formal education, 1935, p. 146.

if we want to reach our goal, we must become heroes of faith. ... Even if terrifying days come over us, if we believers are pressed down with the burden of suffering, then we shall recall that God invites none of us to carry a cross that is too difficult for us to bear.⁶

This is no superficial book; indeed, the difficulty experienced in picking out some particular aspects for this review is perhaps due in part to the sense that we venture onto holy ground, namely the deeply-held faith and beliefs of a good man. The obvious words to quote to give a flavour of the book are those most often used, taken from what Franz wrote down on the day of his execution:

Now I'll write down a few words as they come to me from my heart. Although I am writing them with my hands in chains, this is still much better than if my will were in chains. God sometimes shows his power, which he wishes to give to human beings, to those who love him and do not place earthly matters ahead of eternal ones. Not prison, not chains, and not even death are capable of separating people from the love of God, of robbing them of their faith and free will.⁷ God's power is invincible. ... They always want to prick my conscience concerning my responsibilities for my wife and children. ... Is someone permitted to lie in taking an oath just because he has a wife and children?⁸

Franz of course suffered greatly through knowing what suffering his decision would bring upon his family; yet conscience had to win. He counselled them by letter:

Become a family that loves one another and forgives one another, then come what will. Readily forgive everyone, including me if you undergo suffering because of me.⁹

I warmly commend this book, which explores subjects as diverse as resistance to the régime by ordinary people in Nazi-controlled territories; the suffering of the people in those countries (after all, even if Franz had not been executed, there was still the misery of war, and he might, for example, have died at Stalingrad);

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷ cf. Rom. 8: 31-39.

⁸ 'Text no. 88', 9 Aug. 1943, p. 243.

⁹ Letter to Franziska, 1 Mar. 1943, p. 82.

primacy of conscience and the issues involved when the lives and well-being of the person concerned and of family and friends are at stake; and the growth of an individual soul into the likeness of Christ through prayer, practice of virtue, sustained study and reflection upon the faith and issues of the day.

The book is very readable, both in its own right, and also at a scholarly level, with 36 preliminary pages of introduction and overview and 252 pages of text. The English of the translation reads well and the translator has supplied many helpful notes throughout the text, explaining, for instance, events and dates. The writers of the introductory pages have done an excellent job of commentary. I hope that anyone wishing to know more will be able to obtain the book; it will not disappoint.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

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

Many readers will already know Ann Lewin's poetry and the many prose works which have grown out of her work as a retreat leader. For me her poems have been a new and delightful discovery. The first I found and recognised as a common experience was 'Disclosure' which compares the presence of God with the elusive kingfisher: 'No visible sign, only the / Knowledge that he's been there, / And may come again.' How true!

This enlarged edition of *Watching for the Kingfisher*, first published by Inspire in 2004, contains many more subjects on which the author has brought prayerful reflection to bear, and which speak to 'all sorts and conditions'. There is a moving series of poems entitled 'Mothercare' giving insights into living with and caring for her aged mother as she nears death; and a multitude with liturgical and biblical themes which cover all aspects of the Christian year. As well, she presents us with an approach to Christian living which is turned towards finding the saving presence of Jesus in all that we do or are.

This is a book well worth having as a help towards entering into prayer, especially in those times when it ‘is like watching for the /Kingfisher. All you can do is / Be where he is likely to appear, and / Wait’.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

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

How many of us remember that the beginning of a new millennium also introduced the Millennium Development Goals, agreed to by the member states of the United Nations? By 2015 we are meant to have achieved a better life in the areas of health, education and sustainable development, for everyone on this earth. The goals are being pursued, though often in ways that are not recognised as coming within the aims of this programme. There is immense global concern for the environment, though it is hard not to fall into cynical thoughts that it is just to enhance the lives of those of us who already have more than we need. The more hopeful signs are raising awareness of the crying need for affordable retroviral drugs to treat HIV/AIDS in developing countries, and attempts to meet the lack of them. At the end of last year there was an Africa-wide programme to give free polio vaccinations to children. And an article in the April 2010 issue of *Prospect*, ‘Twenty Years’ Hard Labour’ reported on the appalling state of maternity care and infant mortality in Sierra Leone, due in great part to the misappropriation of aid donated for this purpose.

Lifting Women's Voices has been especially commissioned by the Anglican Communion to add the prayers, poems and liturgies of Anglican women to the debates and efforts of churches, governments and non-governmental organizations to implement the Development Goals. It is good to know that all royalties from sales of this book will be shared between the International Anglican Women’s network and Episcopal Relief and Development, in support of programmes that benefit women and girls in particular.

Many of the writings express the pain and agony of women caught in situations and societies where their voices go virtually unheard. But there are also several chapters with contributions from many of the same women rejoicing in what God has done for us.

It is difficult to pick out any one section or prayer that speaks more loudly than another. Rather than implying mediocrity, this says much for the skills of the editorial team. The book has many uses: for personal intercession; a resource for texts to incorporate into liturgies for justice and peace; as the basis for services for the Women's Day of Prayer.

Any activity to improve the life of another must arise out of a compassionate heart and be underpinned by prayer. This book gives a wealth of material both to encourage the flagging intercessor and to support those who are involved more closely in relieving suffering.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

Living Jesus, John Pritchard, SPCK, 2010, £9.99.

ISBN: 978-0-281-06040-5.

This is a book attempting to make Jesus accessible to our contemporary culture. The reader is not only helped to understand who Jesus was, but s/he is also invited to enter into a relationship with him, a relationship that has life-changing potential. It is an attractively-written book and draws on well-edited extracts from such major figures as Tom Wright, Tim Radcliffe and Rowan Williams, as well as contemporary journalists and writers. Unlike other evangelical books on Jesus, it does not rely on authentication from within scripture, but on the witness of countless Christians and observers of the Christian scene who help the reader to make sense of Jesus' identity and effect. This is not a book dealing with the essential enigma that Jesus presents to scholars and believers confronted by his harsh sayings, the discrepancies of the synoptic problem and the distortions of tradition and culture. Pritchard rightly believes that Jesus, despite all the difficulties, is still the pivotal figure of human history and relevant to every individual's life if they care to befriend him. I have enjoyed reading this account, and I will lend the book to

one of my thoughtful adult baptism candidates who is longing to find out more about who Jesus really was.

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

The Way of the Spirit: Reflections on Life in God, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra [Mount Athos], Indiktos, Athens, 2009. ISBN: 978-960-518-339-4.

This remarkable book distils much of the finest teaching that Father Aimilianos gave to his monastic community of Simonopetra, and to the large convent at Ormylia, in whose care he now lives. It also contains addresses to other church gatherings in Greece over many years; it has been lovingly and carefully edited, and superbly printed also. The editor, Father Maximos, who is an American monk at Simonopetra, has provided judicious patristic extracts in the footnotes to support and deepen the abbot's teaching.

Father Aimilianos was born in 1934, and as a young priest and theologian he attracted a following of like-minded men and women, some of whom later joined him in renewing one of the monasteries at Meteora. As a young monk and priest he had a profound vision of the light of God, which enfolded him during the Divine Liturgy. 'Henceforth every Divine Liturgy, prepared for by a long vigil, was a sublime experience of God's glory.' His charisma was to be able to attract others to this contemplative worship and to deepen their life in Christ. These addresses are just the tip of the iceberg of a remarkable ministry of teaching and spiritual formation, not least among young people.

Early in the 1970s tourism was making such inroads at Meteora, where the monasteries perch on high and inaccessible rocks, that contemplative monastic life was becoming impossible. So Elder Aimilianos and his companions responded to a call to revitalise the ageing monastery of Simonopetra, itself perched on a vast rock nearly one thousand feet above the sea on the Holy Mountain. On 26 November 1973, Elder Aimilianos was elected abbot of the monastery. This proved to be one of the hidden spiritual turning points in the renewal of monastic life on Mount Athos. In 1974, his community of nuns migrated to recreate the monastery of Ormylia

in Chalkidiki, across the water from the Holy Mountain itself, nearer Thessaloniki. In 1995, Elder Aimilianos began to fall ill, however, and in 2000 retired from active supervision of the monasteries.

Throughout his abbacy, he proved a true spiritual elder to his flock: 'like an overflowing spring, the elder ceaselessly poured himself out to his disciples, offering his words to them with all the magnificent prodigality of divine love'. He kindled many vocations to the priesthood and the monastic life, and his spiritual influence was, and is, felt far from the Holy Mountain. In the words of the present abbot, in his preface to this book: 'Elder Aimilianos was our guide, teacher, and father in Christ, and remains so to this day. We lived with him for many years, travelling together in the way of the Spirit. The discourses collected in this volume give expression to his personal experience of God, which was always real, living and dynamic. We believe that they will fill you with joyful hope.'

To visit the monastery today is a unique spiritual privilege: its worship is deeply musical and contemplative, and its hospitality abounds in love. As you step out of church and walk round the balcony high above the sea, the profile of the Holy Mountain itself stands before you, plunging down into the sea, with snow in its gullies and bathed in evening light. Beneath you there is a ravine full of rushing water; and tucked out of view is the cave where St Simonos was asked by Christ and our Our Lady, the Theotokos, to build his monastery on the pinnacle where it stands today.

DOUGLAS DALES

A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural memory, communication and being human, J. W. Rogerson, SPCK, 2009, £16.99.

ISBN: 9-780-281-05875-4.

Readers interested in serious Old Testament study may like to know of this latest book from the author of Fairacres Publication 160, *Strength in Weakness: The Scandal of the Cross*. Written by an internationally-respected biblical scholar, this is a thoughtful and thorough theological work, as the title and the publisher also suggest.

The author takes many Old Testament texts, teasing out their meaning and significance, and their implications for the modern reader. He shows how texts written for a distant society, with different social, religious and cultural traditions, can still shed light upon moral issues today. We are, for instance, encouraged to ask what the Old Testament can say to us concerning global issues which confront us, and how, aided by Scripture, we might engage with them.

EDITOR

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press:

For All That Has Been, Thanks: Growing a Sense of Gratitude, Rowan Williams and Joan Chittister OSB, 2010, £14.99.

ISBN: 978-1-84825-017-8.

Lift High the Cross: Anglo-Catholics and the Congress Movement, John Gunstone, 2010, £25.00. ISBN: 978-1-85311-817-3.

From Oxford University Press:

The Oxford Book of Christmas Organ Music, compiled by Robert Gower, 1995, £16.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-375124-8.

REVISED EDITIONS OF FAIRACRES PUBLICATIONS

No. 002 ALONENESS NOT LONELINESS

Mother Mary Clare SLG £0.50 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0182-5

No. 162 OUT OF THE DEPTHS: *Encountering Depression*

Gonville ffrench-Beytagh £4.00 ISBN: 978-0-7283-0183-2

These books are both available from SLG Press. Please do not send money now. An invoice will be sent with the books. See also p. 52.

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