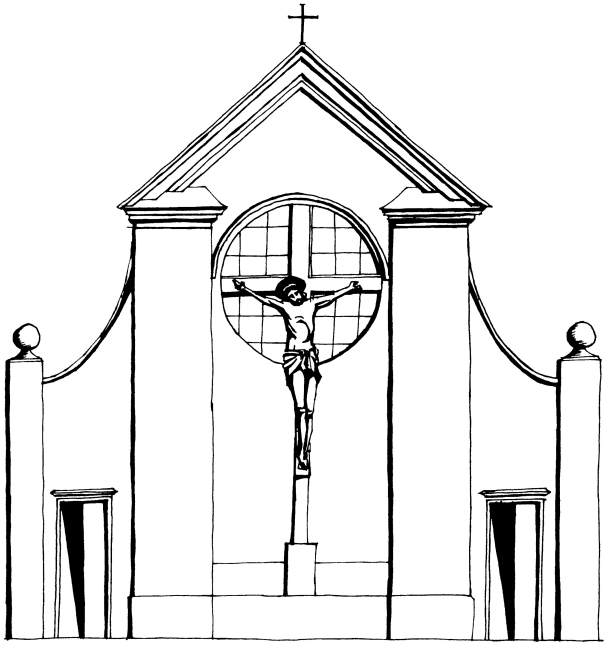
FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



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COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

Our Sister Esther Mary of the Epiphany died very peacefully, and a little unexpectedly, on 19 August 2010. The previous evening there had been no sign that her life on this earth was about to draw to a close. But in the early hours of the next morning, a carer, who was living with us for a couple of weeks, heard sounds indicating something was amiss. Sister agreed to a doctor being called, but she died before he arrived, and she changed so quickly that it was difficult to know which prayer was appropriate to the moment. She passed away at about 4.45 a.m. in her own bed, with a few Sisters and the carer with her. Our Rule says that our 'offering continues until it is consummated in death'. There was a strong sense of consummation at Sister's passing, and these words of St Paul seem very appropriate: 'Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.'[1]

Sister Esther Mary had experienced increasing pain and frailty, deteriorating eyesight and sometimes depression in recent years. But she battled bravely on, and having suffered much in her last months, the apparent ease with which she died was a joy to witness. She heard her Lord calling and simply went forth. Both as Companion Guardian and as Mother Mary Clare's carer and assistant, she was known to many people, and it was lovely that a goodly number of family and friends were able to join us for her funeral. We delayed the funeral until after our week of retreat, and until most Sisters had returned from holidays. Sister Stephanie-Thérèse gave the homily at the funeral, and this is included in this edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

We were touched by the warm appreciations of those who wrote after Sister Esther Mary's death. One person wrote of her that 'there were the firm but compassionate blue eyes, the palpable strength of character', although she actually had 'very human struggles with herself and her life, as we all do'. Sister had prepared for death with regard to possessions and left virtually nothing for us to sort after she died—a tangible way of living out the vow of poverty she had taken

[1] I Cor. 13: 12.

so many years previously. A few days before her death, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mark Birch preached about Our Lady's dying, and on dying generally, and this homily is included in the following pages.

I have mentioned above our retreat week. This was a very blessed time, and we were very glad to welcome Brother Curtis SSJE to Fairacres once again, this time to lead our retreat. We were, and continue to be, most grateful for his retreat addresses (on the theme of 'All My Fresh Springs Are In You'), for the time which he gave to individual Sisters, and for his presence among us.

In July and August, the cells over the Refectory became known as 'the orthopaedic unit'! One Sister had scheduled surgery, but two others suffered accidents. On visiting the hospital for a follow-up appointment, one casualty was asked: 'What are you doing at the convent, Sister? We had one of you here yesterday and today there are two more…' Thankfully, those Sisters are making a good recovery.

Before the accidents, on the Feast of St Benedict, we welcomed the Benedictine monks and nuns from Broad Marston Manor (formerly from Burford) for worship, dinner and recreation. Abbot Stuart celebrated the Eucharist and Brother Thomas preached; his homily on call and vocation is included in this *Chronicle*. The Community has now moved to their new monastery at Mucknell near Worcester. If you have Internet access you might like to visit their website at www.mucknellabbey.org.uk

A few weeks later we welcomed two other Benedictine Sisters to Fairacres: the Roman Catholic Sisters from Holy Trinity Monastery, East Hendred, near Wantage. Like SLG, they are involved in the sphere of publishing, and it was through this shared 'interest' that we made their acquaintance. Earlier in the year, three from Fairacres visited East Hendred and received helpful advice about Press computer equipment. On their visit to us, we received some very encouraging comments about the new SLG Press website; you will see a little more about the progress of this project on page 8. A particular way in which the Sisters are able to welcome guests to their monastery is by offering a variety of material online, which can be viewed at www.benedictinenuns.org.uk Although part of their visit to us was

work-orientated, we were able to enjoy some recreation together, and to see and 'play with' an iPod—a new experience for most of SLG.

In recent months we have had visits from three other groups. In September members of the 24-7 prayer community 'Reconcile' in Reading came for a day of meetings; in November some students from Keble College, Oxford came for a quiet day; and thirdly, we received a group for an inter-Novitiate study day. For a number of years, novitiates in the Oxford area have linked up for study, mutual support and exchange. Communities from further afield have joined gradually, and this time there were ten Novices and Postulants, plus three members of Fresh Expressions communities. The Anglican Novice Guardians and Leaders have agreed that, with many communities having very small novitiates and sometimes just one in training, it would be helpful to extend this pattern and include some residential times each year. The closer working together of the more established communities with the new and emerging communities is, I believe, a very encouraging and prophetic development of recent years. New things are happening: we continue our prayer for newcomers to SLG, and we invite you to join us in this. We continue to work on our community life with the help of an experienced 'outsider'. The religious life in other parts of the world is subject to very different challenges, and this edition includes an article about the religious life in Russia under the title 'Orthodox Monastic Revival in Russia: An Overview', a further contribution from Janice Broun.

Also included is another contribution from Jane Eastell, 'Thomas Merton and the Spirituality of the Desert', which looks at Merton's teaching on silence and solitude and shows that these are particularly important ingredients for us all in the Advent season. The subject of silence has been the theme of a recent BBC2 series, 'The Big Silence', in which five people with little or no previous experience of retreats volunteered to participate firstly in a weekend at Worth Abbey and then in an eight-day guided silent retreat at St Beuno's Ignatian Spirituality Centre in North Wales. Their experiences and struggles were very recognisable; and the challenge for them, as for all of us, is to integrate silence and prayer into our daily lives. Yes, the structures of community life provide help which others do not have, but we too are subject to temptations and experience struggles, and so we can empathise with those participating in the TV series and those

whom we encounter day by day. Following on from the TV series, a very accessible booklet, *Growing into Silence* by Paul Nicholson SJ, has recently been published.

Further items in this *Chronicle* with an Advent theme are: 'The Christ Child: God's Hiding Place' by our Warden, Fr Andrew Teal, and two Advent poems by Dannie Newson. Another poem, in the form of a prayer, is from Jane Wenlock and has the title 'A Psalm'. The contribution by David Barton on 'Forgiveness' could also help us in our Advent preparation.

January this year saw the beginning not only of a new calendar year, but also of a new decade, which meant that the Bavarian town of Oberammergau would be enacting its Passion Play during the summer. Bernhard Schünemann contributes an article about the Play and the experience of being able to see it. I mentioned in the Winter *Chronicle* 2009 that Sister Edmée's book, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, had been published. Among the book reviews is a review of Sister's book by the Old Testament scholar, Ellen Davis. We are grateful to all contributors and to those who contribute to our community life by their ministry to us, by their prayer, friendship, and support in many different ways.

Silence has been mentioned above. There is generally much activity and a seeming lack of silence amidst the rejoicing in most of the world during the latter part of Advent and on Christmas Day itself. But there is a place for silence also. Well-known Christmas carols reflect both aspects:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!

Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright.

Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the new-born King!

Sing, choirs of Angels, sing in exultation.

We wish all our readers a very happy and blessed Christmas, and hope that you will experience both the joy and the awed silence of the Incarnation.

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

THE CHRIST CHILD: GOD'S HIDING PLACE

A THOUGHT FOR GAUDETE SUNDAY

ANDREW TEAL

SOMETIMES we see in the chapel at Fairacres a hint of sunlight on the statue of Our Lady, with her open arms ready to pick up her Son, pointing towards him in the Sacrament on the altar; and ready, too, to assist us as we stumble. This is a more mature Mary than is the statue of Mary and the Christ Child at the Benedictine Abbey of Ampleforth in Yorkshire. The Ampleforth statue shows Mary as a very real-looking young woman, an exhausted mother, holding out the child for the beholder to take. This is a wonderful invitation to our ultimate destiny: 'Will you receive and bear Christ, who will anoint and transform everything about you forever?' It is also, more obviously: 'Do you want to hold the baby?' or even an exhausted, 'Please can't you take him for a while?'

That invitation to 'hold the baby' strikes me as a way in to celebrating the third Sunday in Advent—'Gaudete' Sunday, with its pink liturgical colour. Though similar to 'Laetare' Sunday in Lent, it is distinctive. It reminds us that this season, so lenten in many ways, is not, after all, a penitential season, but a nudge for us to get ready to receive the baby. Our preparation should not be a spiritual vendetta on our tired, if sinful, soul. It is a call to put other things down to be able to hold the baby, making sure that our smeared lives and hands are not too greasy, so that we drop him; or that our arms are not too full of other clutter, so that we cannot take him when we need to, or when Mary needs us to. This season, and especially Gaudete Sunday, calls us aside. 'He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love',[1] the prophet says. He will cast his extended arms around your neck and know that he is home. And you will know that you are home forever. *Gaudeamus igitur* ('therefore let us rejoice')!

Yet Jesus often seems far from our experience. God seems, at least on the surface, to hide rather well. If God loves us so, then why the distance? There are many explanations and arguments, but the

[1] Zeph. 3: 17.

Ampleforth statue seems to silence them all. John Hick may write stunningly about theodicy needing an 'epistemic distance', but the statue, the artistic image, seems to sum it up better. We have to wait until we stumble upon God—unexpectedly, as a young, unmarried mother asks us to hold her baby. Then, as he holds onto us, we know the shock of finding and of being found. We suddenly get a glimpse of the transcendent; we suddenly 'get it', without the din of words. It is not so much that God avoids us, but that we try to avoid this sort of tender scrutiny. A moment of encounter reminds us that God had to hide, so that we might be found.

Let us rejoice, therefore, because now is the fullness of time. At Christmas we see that God's hiding place was changed for ever; that God came to hide in a little country town, to hide in a manger, to hide in humanity. Monsignor Ronald Knox, with his romantic language, points us beautifully to Bethlehem:

> Not quite so silently but he betrayed himself; just a movement among the stars, just the brush of angels' wings, was enough to raise the hue and cry among a few searchers, shepherd-folk with their keen ears, stargazers with their sharp eyes. And so the hunt started afresh: Tell us, where is he born, the King of the Jews? The question, repeated to one passer-by after another, begins to sound like the chorus of some children's game. What, this tumble-down house in a back-street, this draughty cellar underneath it—it's no good looking in there! He wouldn't hide in a place like that! And then the door opens, and a [young exhausted girl] stands there, a finger pressed to her lips; our Mother, come out to help in the search. 'Yes, he's in there; but come in quietly; he's asleep.' The God who does not dwell in temples made with hands, asleep in there! The God who neither sleeps nor slumbers, watching over Israel, in there asleep! [2]

Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende. (And after this our exile, show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.)[3] Jesus, the blessed fruit of Mary's womb, is held out for us, even in our exile. Let us lay aside all else, and cling to him. Then the strict injunctions of John the Baptist heard during Advent

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[2] Philip Caraman SJ, ed., *The Pastoral Sermons of Ronald A. Knox*, Burnes & Oates 1964, pp. 360-1.

[3] From the Anthem to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salve Regina* ('Hail, holy Queen').

will not be needed. We shall heed them, and many more, out of love alone. This will be the loving embrace that will kindle in us the fire of love, and fit us for heaven.

Do we want to hold the baby? Are our hands free to take him?

OUR NEW WEBSITE

There has been much activity within SLG Press over the last few months! We are designing a new website which will enable, for those who wish this, online purchases of our publications and online subscriptions to the *Fairacres Chronicle*. There will also be more information about ourselves, and some free content.

We had hoped to be able to report that we were up and running with this, but we are not quite ready to go live yet. Do keep checking our existing web address at:

www.slgpress.co.uk

as we hope our new website will appear quite soon.

You may also be aware that the Community has its own website at:

www.slg.org.uk

REQUIEM FOR A SISTER

SISTER ESTHER MARY OF THE EPIPHANY SLG

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

My first memory of you: a petite Sister
collecting two blue enamel dishes
from the kitchen at dinner time.
I was a new postulant
and you were taking care of Mother Mary Clare.
Our paths crossed a few years later
when I was put in St Raphael's as a Novice.
It was the time of the great move
from old St Raphael's to new.
In the midst of considerable upheaval and chaos
you were capable and caring, unflappable,
but it wasn't until seven years ago
when we began to meet each Saturday
for an hour of coffee and conversation
that I really began to know you.

You were born July 2nd, 1919,
in Spridlington, Lincolnshire,
the last of five children with four older brothers,
but a pampered baby sister—not you!
You began to train as a nurse
but like so many of your generation
polio struck.
Recovered, but not strong enough for nursing,
you continued training as a pharmacist.
Straight after the war
on one of the first boats over
you went to India to be a missionary.
While there you joined the Sisterhood of the Epiphany
who ministered in Barisal and Jobalpur,
in what was then East Bengal,
a country of water and roads
where travelling became a real adventure

especially in the rainy season.
Once you valiantly evicted a dangerous snake
from the convent chapel with sticks
as if it were a liturgical interlude.
Before final vows you left the Sisterhood,
the contemplative life calling you.
Returning to England, you came to Fairacres,
to a wide open welcome from Mother Mary Clare.
Your search was over—
or just beginning!

Most of your time in Community was spent
in the infirmary.
Your training and compassionate nature
had much to give in that place.
You gave yourself generously
caring one-on-one for Mother Mary Clare
and later Sister Jane.
Small things, too, we remember
like the hand cream you made for our chilblains.

You were the garden sister
and how you loved the garden!
In your last few weeks I would push you
round the drive and pathways.
It was your game to announce
where we were—
by the crucifix,
the Press,
going through the beech hedge.
Your sense of place was uncanny.

You looked after the Companions
for many years,
forging friendships that lasted
well beyond your tenure of office.
And your woodcarving benefited them,
as you carved the crosses
given to both the Companions and Priest Associates.

I did not learn your story, you know,
until after you died.

You resolutely would not talk about the past,
even though I asked many a leading question
wanting to be regaled with your adventures in India.
Just recently I asked
if you thought about India and the past now.
You simply said, no.

So what did we talk about
on those Saturday afternoons?
We talked where we were,
and even though very limited
in the common life
by your blindness and immobility,
you were keenly interested
in what was going on.
So we talked mostly about Community,
you desired to know what was afoot.
Most of all
you were interested in the Sisters,
who was on holiday or visiting family
or at a conference,
when Sisters weren't well,
and on and on.
You regularly surprised me when you
knew more of what was happening than I did,
fruits of the afternoon teas with Sisters
which you so anticipated and enjoyed,
often telling me on Saturday
who you had seen that week.

If you were sometimes critical of the rest of us,
you always saved the harshest criticism for yourself.
Do you remember the time you said something
particularly damning,
an outrageous put down of yourself—
and I totally agreed with you?
The stunned silence,
the laughter.
But we wouldn't leave it there.
No matter how outrageous the criticism,

there was always a kernel of truth
that we would seek and explore.
And there find a place of repentance,
a place of becoming.

We often spoke of prayer
sharing our efforts and insights.
You had creative ways of praying for the Sisters—
by department, by cell, by house—
and even your anxiety,
which you struggled with all your life,
became a place of intercession.
You missed the corporate office
when you were no longer able to attend,
but you had a tape of a Little Office
that you absolutely cherished
made for you by a Sister—
your Lauds every morning.
At regular intervals the two of us would decide
that we hadn't a clue what prayer was,
or even if we were doing it!
We would laugh,
the mystery was too big,
but never too big to stop trying.

Your adventurous spirit
found its way into the enclosed life.
Still there was much scope
for your personality.
Through the years all your heart's faithful attention
remained on your calling,
in health and in sickness—
the polio and the pain,
the blindness and the immobility.
You had given yourself to God as a Sister,
and there was no sense of abandoning that
just because of the increasing disabilities.
Yes, you bemoaned the fact
you could do so little,
that the drugs muddled your brain—

and you would slap your head
as if you might rattle your thoughts into place—
despite it all
through it all
you strove to remain faithful.

If I had to describe you,
the Sister I have come to know over seven years,
I would chose the word
desire
desiring to love your Sisters more
desiring to engage with Community
desiring to explore things
to grow
to pray
to seek God more and more.

At each stage of our life in Community
we are asked
'what do you desire?'
and we begin our answer with
'I desire the mercy of God.'
Your last words, quietly whispered,
'Oh God help me.'
Were you in your own simple way
expressing this very same sentiment?

We talked about death
the Saturday before you died.
'I won't make winter', you said factually.
You wanted three things:
to die at Fairacres
to die with Sisters about you
to die peacefully.

'Are you ready?' I asked.
'Yes', you replied.
Simple, unadorned
as all your answers were.

FORGIVENESS

DAVID BARTON

WHY IS IT often so hard to think and talk about forgiveness? It is, of course, at the heart of our experience as Christians. But the awareness of it, the understanding of its working in us, and above all the ability to find words for its meaning to us—all these things are elusive. I remember the joy, in my early twenties, of hearing the words, 'Your sins are forgiven', and the discovery of the possibility of living beyond all the things that troubled my mind. I doubt if I am alone in that sort of experience. But so often over the years since then, laying hold of that forgiveness, at the deeper levels of myself, has seemed to elude me. My wrongs, the things I have done and the things wrongly done to me, are deeply part of me. They actually make up the person that I am. And so many things persist that I would rather did not persist. I am more the product of my history than I would like to be.

Yet, perhaps, searching for the depths of forgiveness is actually part of the deal, because Christian forgiveness is absolutely not 'forgive and forget'. That view is very far from the Gospel. Another attitude, very close to that one, can end up implying that Christian forgiveness is a matter of God agreeing to put things on one side—a kind of suspending of judgement. Some bits of scripture come close to implying that.[1] But the hard truth is that forgiveness is about remembering, and the need to remember, tough though it might be. There are some things we should never forget—what we do with them is another matter. Forgetting is a path that leads towards emptiness and a shallow life, and that is not the life to which Jesus calls us.

As always, looking at the words of Jesus brings clarity. The two Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin,[2] with their images of the shepherd and the woman, are deeply familiar to us. These are

[1] e.g. I Tim. 1.
[2] Luke 15: 1-10.

images of God, who does not wait for us but searches, trekking out into the wilds, lighting lamps and looking into the darkest corners to find us in our waywardness. The shepherd image is, given the history of Israel, an expected one. But to use the image of a woman for God must have been startling to the first hearers: God, a woman! And a peasant woman at that, because she must light a lamp to see what she is doing (as so often with the poor, then and now, her simple house has no windows). The images act as a pair, the first to alert us, the second to startle, showing us that God will stop at nothing to seek us out and embrace us, will take any guise to find us. And wrongdoing in these stories takes second place to the wonder of God's forgiveness and love. No lectures about not doing it again. Just joy.

But there is also something provocative about these two stories. Ancient shepherds would not have done what that shepherd did—risk losing the whole flock for one lamb. And it is ridiculously extravagant to have a party with the neighbours to celebrate the discovery of either a sheep or a small coin! The longer we stay with these two parables, the more it becomes clear that Jesus is telling a pair of deliberately exaggerated stories to point a finger to our unbelief and our resistance. We simply do not believe that there could be such extravagant joy in heaven over our repentance.

To understand forgiveness, we must be ready to enter into the risky territory of faith, and dare to believe that God loves and accepts us. We must be ready to step into a new dimension, the world that is beyond our ever-reasoning mind and to live, moment by moment, in the profound, mysterious truth that the whole universe resonates when we turn towards God. We learn forgiveness not by thinking about it, but by living it, and being in it. Then, little by little, we see things differently. Forgiveness is not the end of something (a problem, an attitude, or whatever), but the start of something: the beginning of a relationship which slowly but surely draws us into the depths and wonder of God.

However, there is a small difference between these parables which is worth pondering further. When the shepherd brings home the lamb, he says, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep *which was lost*.' But when the woman calls in her neighbours, she says,

'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin *that I had lost*.'[3] That change of phrase to 'that *I* had lost' suggests that she takes responsibility for the loss. If this is Jesus speaking of God, then that shift opens up a whole world of mystery and understanding: God takes responsibility for the suffering and pain and wrongdoing of which we are all part.

There is a wonderful passage in Simone Weil's *Waiting on God* where she speaks of creation, and God's gift of freedom to us in creation, and God's readiness to shoulder the inevitable consequences of that freedom, on account of what we would do with it. So, she says, 'creation is abandonment': God freeing us in love, knowing that, in the end, it would mean the abandonment of the cross. Christ abandoned on the cross is God abandoned on the cross, in an act of extraordinary self-surrender, longing for the return of creation to wholeness. It is as if the pain of the cross has always been in the heart of God—the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. That mystery is at the heart of what we as Christians mean by forgiveness. I am forgiven by One who loves me and calls me into a relationship, who sees me as I really am, and despite all that, continues to accept and love me—and who, amazingly, says: 'I am part of this too.'

When I have heard and begun to grasp a small part of this mystery, then it is possible for me to reach beyond the limitations of my past and find myself grounded in a new future. Then the hurts and wounds I have given and received become quite different: they do indeed remain, but become stepping stones into the mystery of love, part of a long journey into the heart of God, in whom joy and pain are woven together into a glorious whole.

[3] My italics (in both cases).

ADVENT POEMS

DANNIE NEWSON

ADVENT

He comes,
the long-expected King;
He comes,
lift up your hearts and sing;
He comes,
that we may take our place,
in the waiting halls of grace;
He comes,
He ever comes.

VIRGIN VENTURE

She ventures forth alone,
a cold and crystal night,
darkness o'er the earth,
the heavens ever bright:
Her heart reflects the splendour
though her feet feel piercing pain,
abandoned all the world holds dear
that all the world may gain;
something precious, holy, new,
born in shadows, mist and dew;
the transforming Light, the creative Word,
let Love be heard.

THOMAS MERTON AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DESERT

JANE EASTELL

The Desert

There has been much interest in the spirituality of the desert in recent years. The desert exercises a fascination, a spiritual pull to solitude and silence, a call to nothing except God alone. There is a long tradition of this in Christian spirituality. Jesus himself went into the desert for 'forty days and forty nights'. Later, in about the middle of the third century, Christians began to flee from the cities and towns into the Egyptian desert. For some, this was to escape persecution; for others, it was because they felt that their faith was being compromised, as the Church was becoming too comfortable, too firmly-established in public esteem.

Discovering who we most truly are lies at the heart of the spiritual journey. In taking flight to the desert, the desert fathers and mothers discovered the reality of God's love and their true identity under God. They believed that this discovery comes only with knowing the whole being to be rooted in God's love, and that it leads to true love, joy and peace. They stressed repeatedly that this is a hard, painful struggle, one which takes time and requires solitude.

Withdrawal into solitude allows the lenses of our sight to be cleansed. It enables our motives to be purified and frees us from baggage which is unnecessary for our Christian journey. It enables clarity of thought and sight, and a release into our true identity—the basis of truly loving God, ourselves and our neighbour. Some experience of solitude and desert space will help us develop a contemplative stance on life, and act as a balance to the noisy, frenetic pace of life today. We can look to Thomas Merton for guidance in understanding a contemplative way of living. Particularly in Advent, as we await the coming of the King of Peace, we need in some measure to withdraw to the desert.

Contemplation

Thomas Merton lived from 1915 to 1968, and his life contained many strands: monk, contemplative, writer, poet, photographer, priest, prophet and hermit. He was called to the austere, silent life of prayer as a Cistercian monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, later living as a hermit in a bungalow in the grounds of the Abbey. One of the underlying notes in Merton's life was his call to be a contemplative. Contemplation has been defined by Richard Rohr as taking a long, loving look at the 'Real'—the ultimate reality being God; seeing the 'Real' with a capital 'R' in the 'real' with a small 'r'. Contemplation is about reality—the reality of oneself, the world and God. It is not an escape from the world, but is about seeing things as they really are, rather than as we would wish them to be, or as we have made them. At the root of contemplation is an awareness that God and the world and ourselves are inseparable. To see the world in God, and God in the world, brings with it a unity of seeing, a contemplative oneness.

Contemplation therefore brings a fresh perspective to our seeing, a perspective that reverences the uniqueness of each person and reverences the presence of God in all things. And in contemplative prayer, we come before God, as someone has said, as 'one part of torn and broken humanity', and direct our attention to God, allowing all else to take care of itself. Contemplative prayer is never just for ourselves. We are connected to one another, and we come before, and rest in, God in that contemplative space as connected human beings. Contemplation brings a connectedness to our living, acknowledging the unity and diversity of all.

This contemplative connectedness means that our sense of autonomy and independence loses its grip: there is an openness of heart and a willingness to be affected by the reality at the heart of the world. If we are too stressed out, too busy, or too preoccupied, we do not experience the world in this way, but rather find ourselves cut off from one another and from the present moment and the reality of God's presence. The poet Mary Oliver says, 'To pay attention; this is

our endless and proper work.'[1] Paying attention enables us to take a long, loving look at the real.

Contemplation is not just for monks like Thomas Merton, but is rooted in the very depths of our being—in the true self Merton so often described: that part of ourselves which is always in communion with divine reality. Contemplation is seeing and living from that deep centre within, away from ego-consciousness. It is a movement towards openness and vulnerability and towards others. Merton wrote in a letter to Daniel Berrigan in 1963:

> What is the contemplative life if one does not listen to God in it? What is the contemplative life if one becomes oblivious of the rights of men [and women] and the truth of God in the world and in his Church?[2]

This contemplative awareness brings a deep connectedness with the whole created order. Merton knew and understood this awareness and wrote, most movingly, of such a moment in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

> In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that I loved all those people, they were mine and I was theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness. … The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. … Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes.[3]

These words surely speak to our hearts, as we await the coming of Christ's kingdom of peace, love, and mercy. In Advent we try to break away from our busyness and step into the desert and that contemplative space Merton knew so well, and so come to rest in God, who is in that deep centre within. In his Advent Journal of 1964, Merton writes about the monk, yet the words are appropriate for us all, for this contemplative space is within each one of us:

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[1] *New and Selected Poems*, vol. 2, Beacon Press, 2007.
[2] Letter 25 June 1963, quoted in *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation*, William Henry Shannon, Continuum, 2000, p. 249.
[3] *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Image Books, 1966, pp. 156-8.

> The soul of the monk is a Bethlehem where Christ comes to be born. … The advent liturgy prepares that Bethlehem with songs and canticles of ardent desire. It is a desire all the more powerful in the spiritual order because the world around you is dead. Life has ebbed to its dregs. ….
>
> But the cold stones of the abbey church ring with a chant that glows with living flame, with clean profound desire. It is an austere warmth, the warmth of Gregorian chant. It is deep beyond ordinary emotion, and that is one reason why you never get tired of it. … it draws you within, where you are lulled in peace and recollection and where you find God.
>
> You rest in him and he heals you with his secret wisdom.[4]

'You rest in him and he heals you with his secret wisdom.' The emptiness, the desert contemplative space, has the effect, as all the mystics—notably St John of the Cross—say, of filling us with the spirit of love. Love heals our fears. Contemplative prayer heals. God is touching us in the depths in a way that is beyond our comprehension. Here we find our true joy, our true peace and consolation. Yet we focus not on that, but on God, and we let God do the rest, and come to find that:

> The things that are on the surface are nothing, what is deep is the Real. We are creatures of love. … Oh God, we are one with You. You have made us one with you. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realise that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. Oh God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You and we thank You and adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is in Your being, our spirit rooted in Your spirit. Fill us then with love … united in this one spirit which makes You present in the world. … Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen.[5]

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[4] *Advent Journal 1964*.

[5] First Spiritual Summit Conference in Calcutta, quoted in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas McDonnell, Image Books, 1972, p. 512.

Solitude

As well as being called to be a contemplative, Thomas Merton was called to solitude. For Merton there was always a pull to greater solitude, but he knew that he was not living a solitary life in order to escape from others. His journey into solitude also led him on a journey towards other people, and he worked out the implications in an increasing commitment to social justice and peace. He found that, as we draw closer to God in solitude, so we draw closer to others, find ourselves relating in communion (not communication), and find ourselves in unity:

> And the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older community. My dear, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.[6]

A goal of the solitary, as for the contemplative, is the unmasking of illusion, because it is illusion which prevents the fulfilment of the person and the world in Christ. Merton would say that illusion is sin, for it prevents us as individuals and communities from becoming all that we are intended and created to be in Christ; it prevents unity and integration.

> It is in solitude that illusions finally dissolve. … He who is truly alone truly finds in himself the heart of compassion with which to love not only this man or that, but all men. He sees them all in the One who is the Word of God, the perfect manifestation of God's love, Jesus Christ. If we believe in the incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no-one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ.[7]

and:

> In solitude I learn to love my brothers and sisters for what they are. True solitude is deeply aware of the world's needs. It does not hold the world at arm's length. It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers and my

[6] *A Book of Hours*, Sorin Books, Ave Maria Press, 2007, p. 162.
[7] *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

> sisters. … Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers and my sisters for what they are, not for what they say.[8]

He says that we are also to extend to ourselves this gentleness which we extend to others: 'We must be meek and loving, even towards ourselves, especially towards ourselves.' Often we find it hard to be merciful to ourselves, accepting ourselves as we are, our strengths and weaknesses. But if we are merciful and gentle to ourselves, we can find that we are then able to be gentle to others.

As we wait in our Advent desert space, solitude has the effect of bringing us closer to the world's needs and to others, and to who we really are. 'What we have to be is what we are', says Merton. And what we are, is the truth that, 'God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of himself.' There is much to reflect on here, for these are powerful words; words that can shape our Advent solitude. Yet, paradoxically, this is the way of self-forgetting and unity with the *kenosis*, or voluntary self-emptying, of the Word. 'The fact remains', he says, 'that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance'.[9]

For Merton, this general dance included those of other faiths, for he found within the differences a connectedness in God, and that the ground of all Reality is love. Merton discovered that in the other faith traditions there are also mystics, as in the Christian tradition. Whatever the differences between the religions, mystics turn their attention inwards and discover the God within. The language may differ, yet these mystics are all trying to express the same experience: an underlying truth for which they struggle to find words, because it is inexpressible. What they discover is that there is a total loss of self and a total realisation of self in merging with the ultimate Real. To join in the dance, allowing God to utter us as partial thoughts of himself, to merge in the ultimate Real, is, for Christians, to join in the self-emptying of Christ, who for our sakes, though rich, became poor. As we contemplate the mystery and the wonder of the emptying of God in becoming a vulnerable baby, we can pray that the self-giving poverty of Christ might fill us with the poverty that is grace upon

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[8] *The Sign of Jonas*, Burns & Oates, 1953, p. 261.

[9] *The General Dance*, quoted in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas McDonnell, Image Books, 1972, p. 505.

grace, riches upon riches. Merton writes of a point of nothingness and poverty within us which is, paradoxically, the glory of God:

> At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God. … This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak, God's name written in us. … It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely. … I have no programme for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.[10]

The gate of heaven is everywhere. The gate of heaven always lies wide open. This Advent, we respond by flinging wide the gates of our hearts and minds, so that we may enter more deeply into the mystery of the Word made flesh. As Merton entered more deeply into this mystery, he found that, under the illusions of the world, and in the world with its many struggles, there is God, and God is love. This is the true depth of the world, the true reality. As we allow this depth to take hold of us, so we find we are created of love and for love, and this shapes our living more completely.

The Desert Today

We are not all called to become hermits or flee to a physical desert to live out our human vocation. The desert today is more a marginal place, a place of powerlessness, poverty, a place of waiting and solitude. And we cannot all be like Thomas Merton. But the Church in every age needs its desert voices, its solitaries and its contemplatives, and would be poorer without them.

What can Merton say to the Church today? Perhaps he is telling us not to be afraid of the desert, to be prepared to be in that marginal place of apparent powerlessness, to be there and be content to stay there. The desert also stands for uncertainty and living with questions, so that means it is about being open, wide open, to whatever is before us in the 'here and now'. The desert is the place of seeming weakness,

[10] *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Image Books, 1966, p. 158.

and perhaps the Church is called to live in that desert marginal place; to live with the questions and uncertainties.

There may well be questions and uncertainties, but the desert also brings a clarity and a 'knowing' in the unknowing; a knowing of the Real behind the real, as mirages and illusions slip away. This 'knowing' and clarity of seeing inevitably leads to compassionate living. Merton spoke with conviction and compassion from his marginal place of apparent powerlessness and solitude; from the depths of his desert contemplation and silence, his voice spoke with prophetic urgency. In biblical narratives, the desert is the place of prophetic possibilities, the place of transformation and of hope. Is the voice of Merton calling us to the desert, telling us not to be afraid of it? May we take time this Advent to enter our own desert space, that place and time of withdrawal, and hear again and see again the Reality at the heart of things.

On the last Sunday before Advent, the Feast of Christ the King, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is often read.[11] Both the 'sheep' and the 'goats' ask: 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison?' Neither group recognized Christ in those who suffer. Yet one group was open, like Merton, to the 'here and now', to seeing everybody as brothers and sisters, and to responding with compassion, love, gentleness. May our experience of the desert this Advent deepen our openness to the people and circumstances we encounter in the 'here and now'.

[11] Matt. 25: 31-46.

A JOURNEY TO OBERAMMERGAU

BERNHARD SCHÜNEMANN

IT WAS in 1880 that the English travel entrepreneur Thomas Cook discovered the Passion Play in Oberammergau, a village high up in the Bavarian Alps. He soon realized that this could be a profitable enterprise to market within the emerging travel industry in Britain and America. And so it was that, when I arrived from Northern Germany at my High Church English public school in 1977, everybody knew about 'Oberammergau'—except me! In my largely secular Protestant family (which worshipped regularly at the Wagner festival in Bayreuth!) no one had ever heard of Oberammergau.

The Passion Play at Oberammergau is a unique three-way mix of commercial success, profound religious experience and evangelistic event. Every ten years, over half-a-million visitors descend on this small village to witness a performance of the story of the Life and Passion of Christ put on by a cast of over a thousand volunteers from the village. I was taken there this year by a generous and enthusiastic group of my parishioners. The group spent two nights in Oberammergau or the surrounding villages, and we attended this five-hour spectacle, for which a special festival theatre was erected some years ago. There is no doubt in my mind that we were sharing in a religious experience of the deepest kind. When the tour guide, who had not seen the Play, asked my churchwarden whether we had 'enjoyed the play', she was adamant in emphasizing that 'enjoyment' was the wrong category to be applied.

The custom of putting on the Passion Play every ten years in Oberammergau goes back to the first half of the seventeenth century, when the villagers made a solemn vow to God that they would do this in perpetuity if they were spared from the Plague. They were spared, and they have kept their vow ever since. A monk from the nearby Benedictine Abbey at Ettal wrote a script which is still at the heart of the Play. The current director, Christian Stückl, was born in Oberammergau and went to school in Ettal, but now works at the Volkstheater in Munich. He has modernised the text and cleansed it of anti-Semitism. Even though—as a parish priest with a special

interest in New Testament interpretation—I was sceptical as to whether the complex biblical record of these theological events could be brought to life in this form, when I saw the Play, I was fully engaged. The conflation of the four gospel narratives worked, because it addressed this simple question: why was it that Jesus had to suffer in this drastic way? The answer came as story, giving prominence within the narrative to all to whom Jesus had been a cause of offence, but also never leaving entirely untouched the other, more theological, questions about the human condition, its sinfulness and its longing for redemption.

It was other-worldly to be a guest at Oberammergau. The visitors could easily be distinguished from the locals in their shops selling alpine carvings. Most of the locals looked like 'hippies', as they had parts in the Play and had been obligated by the village authorities not to shave or have their hair cut from Ash Wednesday 2009 onwards. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches both put on a daily Eucharist for visitors, and their pastors said joint prayers for the actors on the stage before every performance. On the same part of the stage, the Old Testament background to the Passion was fully depicted during the Play in very artistic living tableaux.

I borrowed a bicycle during my two days there and cycled to Ettal Abbey to attend a conventual Latin High Mass, which was carried out in the way that only Benedictines can. Sadly, Ettal is currently at the heart of the child abuse scandal in Germany, part of the worldwide scandal which has shaken the Catholic Church to its foundations. The Church throughout the world needs to show much deeper contrition on an institutional level, to begin to become worthy of the Passion of Christ and the salvation it brings. I hope that the staging of the 2010 Passion Play at Oberammergau (the concluding performance of which was on 3 October) may have made some contribution towards this.

A PSALM

JANE WENLOCK

Holy God, you go by a hundred names, and by none.
You are worshipped in every land and by people of every religion.
Like a father you light the path before us,
And forgive us when we realise we are lost.

Like a mother you wrap us in the darkness
of your cloak and give us form.
We wrap your cloak around ourselves
when we are assailed by loss or despair.

You are power and powerlessness, light and darkness,
You are mercy and vengeance,
You are infinitely large and infinitely small,
and yet you are not any of these.
All of creation is made of your love.

When we suffer you watch by us,
When our hearts are hard you suffer for us,
When we repent you make all things right.
You wait with eternal patience for us to heed your love.
And watch with compassion when we die.

As love, you have sacrificed yourself many times
that we may come into being.
You have given us life, and feelings,
and thought, and freedom to chose.
Teach us to watch, and suffer, and rejoice as you do.

‘GO, DO THIS; THEN COME, FOLLOW ME’

A SERMON FOR ST BENEDICT’S DAY[1]

BROTHER THOMAS OSB

‘WHY DO you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’[2] I can readily imagine that St Benedict might have said that: as a young man at Subiaco, when another hermit asked him for ‘a word’; or later at Montecassino, when a pilgrim from Rome or Campania asked his counsel—and some of them had many possessions.

St Benedict is venerated nowadays as a ‘patron of Europe’: this is an honour which, as a Benedictine, I consider totally justified, even if some of it is due to Charlemagne’s insistence on ‘good order’—a characteristic, incidentally, shared by the saint. But two good reasons for this honour are, I would suggest: first, like St Paul, Benedict built firmly on the foundation of Jesus Christ; and second, Benedict gives us in his Rule a pathway shaped rather like Jesus’ memorable call to the rich young man. Two of the enduring virtues and inspirations of this Rule are, I believe, its composition and its provisionality.

In composition the Rule is not a creation *ex nihilo.* It comprises edited highlights of an earlier ‘Rule of the Master’, with additions from other extant monastic rules, and some passages from Benedict himself. He borrows, deletes, adjusts and composes, based on his own experience and intuition, resulting in a rich texture grounded in human realities, pervaded by Holy Scripture and raising us up towards heaven. Benedict had the humility to learn from others past and present and to accept their wisdom; and also the discernment to reject some ideas and contribute others, according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in his own spiritual life. The result is an enduring composite that has supported and invigorated its monastic disciples for centuries, and continues to do so.

As for provisionality, Benedict himself tells us that the Rule is not the last word in monastic teaching—rather it is only the first! This

[1] Preached at Fairacres on Sunday 11 July 2010, the Feast of St Benedict. The Gospel was Mark 10: 17-22, the story of Jesus and the Rich Man.
[2] Mark 10: 18.

first step comprises seventy-two chapters of spiritual and practical provisions, ranging from 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart … soul … and strength'[3] to 'On Monday at Prime three psalms are said, psalms 1, 2 and 6'.[4] But at various points he suggests something—an arrangement of psalmody,[5] a quantity of food,[6] a mealtime,[7] or an appropriate amount of bedding[8]—and adds that if local conditions warrant, or the superior finds it better, then that community should do things differently. And after all that flexibility, largely on practical grounds, he turns to the spiritual imperatives, and again exemplifies the humility he preaches so ardently, saying:

> The reason we have written this Rule is that, by observing it in monasteries, we can show that we have some degree of virtue and the beginnings of monastic life.

but, he goes on at once:

> For anyone hastening on to the perfection of monastic observance, there are the teachings of the holy fathers, the observance of which will lead to the very heights of perfection.

and having cited some of these 'fathers', he famously concludes:

> Whoever you may be, then, if you are eager to reach your heavenly home, with Christ's help keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we have mentioned.[9]

In this way, Benedict holds out the promise of eternal life (for he has no doubts that such is the end of the monastic path) and invites his disciples to take the next step, then the one after, then the one after that. In today's Gospel, when the man runs up to Jesus seeking eternal life, Our Lord begins by citing the rule of life given in the Decalogue. 'Teacher', the man answers, 'I have kept all these since my youth.'

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[3] Rule of St Benedict, 4.
[4] RB, 18.
[5] RB, 18.
[6] RB, 39.
[7] RB, 41.
[8] RB, 55.
[9] RB, 73.

But it does not stop there; as St Benedict reminds us, 'our lifespan has been lengthened that we may amend our misdeeds'.[10]

We are told that 'Jesus, looking at [the man], loved him'. That Jesus responded to him in this way cannot surprise us. Even at the more prosaic level of community life, Benedict warns the superior not to show favouritism, 'not to love one more than another', albeit 'unless he finds someone better in good works and obedience'.[11] We know how much easier it is to approve, and therefore to be gracious towards, a Sister or Brother who turns up on time, sings in tune, and does their work conscientiously! Of course, Jesus, as we know from so many other occasions, looked at and loved sinners too: 'looking' at them, seeing into the depth of their soul; and 'loving' them, willing the best for them. So it is in this account. He knows the man's lack, and asks of him one more thing: 'Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor'.

In our discipleship, as individuals and as communities, it is always 'both / and'. We have our Rules—with great traditions behind them—but while it may seem we struggle to 'keep first this little rule … for beginners', we can never stop there. As a Benedictine, I have taken vows which include Stability and Conversion of Life. Ironically, just at the moment, fidelity to the second vow is seriously re-interpreting the first: my Community is in transit, both geographically and in the detail of its witness to the love of Christ. Indeed, many monastic communities are experiencing change, whether of their own making or through force of circumstances—and this tide of change is still running.

Such tensions, however, are no more than today's Gospel is teaching. There is a code of Law, a Rule, a body of tradition, that expresses God's will for his people; but, to quote Jesus elsewhere in the synoptic tradition, God is 'God not of the dead, but of the living'.[12] There is always a further call, an invitation to slough off another layer of deadness, a challenge to go forward the next pace into the mystery of the Divine. On the pattern of the incident described by St Mark in today's passage, we discover that whenever

[10] RB, Prol.
[11] RB, 2.
[12] Matt. 22: 32.

we look up, or look into our depths, there we find Jesus saying, 'You [still] lack one thing; go' … and do whatever it is. So we must ask ourselves, today, and the next day: Do we have the humility to absorb, to learn from others, to accept Christ's call? Can we let go of the next thing that we've been clinging to? How will we respond when Jesus says to us: 'Go, do this; then come, follow me'?

ORTHODOX MONASTIC REVIVAL IN RUSSIA

AN OVERVIEW

JANICE BROUN

MONASTERIES in Russia were not only places where people sought God. Traditionally they played a multiple role: fortresses against invaders; places of refuge and shelter; institutes for training clergy, choirs and church employees; estates with agricultural holdings, lakes, and forests—often self-supporting, with crafts for sale; centres for pilgrimage where people of all ranks sought advice. Some were virtually mini-cities—or even forerunners of Soviet collectives! To the Communist government, monasteries presented a threat as islands of spiritual resistance and of an alternative way of life. By 1929, all 1,025 monasteries were closed and monastic life had ceased to exist, except in a very private form—in the lives of individuals who managed, in the words of the great lay theologian, Sergei Fudel, to create a 'monastery in the world'. He taught this through his *Lives of the Fathers*, an anthology of guidance in monastic ascesis for lay people only available in *samizdat*, namely censored publications passed on from reader to reader. He advised that:

> Living the dimension of the monastery in the world enables you to resist its stifling secularism. It means that when you go down into the tunnels in the metro you are conscious of the gaze of the Saviour following your every step.

Many religious who managed to survive prison and camp maintained their Rule in the homes of families brave enough to

shelter them—often in remote places of exile. One clandestine monastery, centred on the Central Asian Geological Institute, survived from 1933 until 1944. Members took part in secret liturgies during expeditions, and they donated part of their salaries to sustain those who had been arrested. Four clandestine monks survived to become Metropolitans during the post-war thaw, and Ioann Wendland, Metropolitan of Jaroslavl, became once more a delegate at an international geological conference. Some clandestine communities even discouraged members from regular church attendance, so as not to draw attention to themselves. Essentially it was women—whether lay or nuns—who continued to uphold and practise religious ideals and exercise a hidden ministry, helping neighbours and the needy, and providing the foundation for the eventual renewal of religious life. Some monasteries became notorious prisons, such as Solovetski Monastery, an island in the White Sea just below the Arctic Circle, where thousands, including bishops and hundreds of priests, perished.

During World War Two, 40 more monasteries were reopened under Nazi occupation, and Soviet expansion brought another 64 into its territory. Monastic life was allowed again on a limited scale until Khrushchev's persecution of the Church during the late 1950s and 1960s. At that time almost every monastery was closed—often brutally, and even, as at Pochaev in Ukraine, with loss of life. Only six monasteries and ten convents were left. Only one of these was on Russian territory, the prestigious Sergei Posad Zagorsk lavra, and it survived partly as a showcase. In 1988, in a complete *volte face*, a Sobor (Church Council) provided for church communities, including monasteries, to buy property, and specifically to receive church property from the State or build, rent and buy premises for their needs. Within a few years, hundreds of monasteries and convents had reappeared, particularly on Russian territory. It was anything but plain sailing for the Church, which still encounters resistance from many monasteries which had become prestigious museums. There were hundreds of ruined shells of buildings which had to be painstakingly rebuilt and restored, demanding total dedication and back-breaking manual labour.

Sometimes the Church was able to call on older people who had had a religious upbringing and had perhaps longed all their lives to make a total commitment. When these people came forward to staff monasteries and convents, they often brought personal talents and experience in other fields. Such was the diminutive Mother Serafima, head of Novodevichy monastery, whose story is described by Wallace L. Daniel in *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia*.[1] As a child she lived with her grandfather, Leonid Chichagov, a hero of the Balkan wars who, as a widower, took vows and became a Metropolitan. He was one of the thousands liquidated in 1937. Mother Serafima became a leading expert on rubber and married an arts researcher. She and her husband kept their faith deeply hidden. Her husband's death in the early 1990s, when she was 77, left a large gap in her life, for they had no family. As she worked through and published the photographs and sermons of her grandfather (who would be beatified in 1997), she was drawn back to the Church—for the first two years in the humblest category, as a candle seller in the cathedral, talking to visitors, seeking to respond to their questions and problems. Around her formed a discussion group of influential people who sought to recover the Church's role in society. In 1992 she took monastic vows. In 1994, when the government returned the huge Novodevichy monastery complex to the Church, she was, with her 55 years experience as an administrator, an obvious choice to supervise its renewal.

The problems facing her were daunting. The monastery lay 42 miles outside Moscow and, since their quarters were not immediately habitable, her nuns had to commute from lodgings in the city, arriving at 6.15 a.m. for two hours of prayer and the liturgy, then spending the day at various tasks, ending with another two hours in prayer, and returning late at night. The Smolenskii Cathedral, to which the monastery was attached, had no areas for private prayer, and she felt the need for small cells where they could meditate in private. With such a demanding schedule, she had to select her sisters with great care. Hundreds wrote, women of all ages from all over Russia, but she was loath to accept any she did not know personally. At the time she met Dr Wallace Daniel, she had accepted a dozen, mainly young, women who were physically able to tackle the work ahead of them.

[1] Texas A & M University Press, 2006.

This included activities designed to help the community become more self-supporting, as well as able to feed some of the hungry people who came to them in the winter. They had to relearn basic agricultural techniques, grow vegetables, care for livestock, recreate craft workshops, produce their own habits, and bake bread for the church services. Because of the monastery's prestigious reputation, they could call on world-famous artists to give fund-raising concerts—an advantage not enjoyed by most of the other communities struggling to restart their life. Meanwhile, the whole complex was being restored, and frescoes repainted.

Against this background of noise and dust, Mother Serafima's task was to reconstruct memories, traditions and spiritual values that could nourish a whole and challenging way of life. She sought to re-awaken the practice of *miloserdie*, mercy, kindness, respect and compassion for others, especially the destitute—once deeply ingrained in monastic and in normal daily life—together with a sense of the holiness of creation. The word *miloserdie* had been excised from the Soviet dictionary as 'obsolete'. As a result of self isolation, the legacy of years of terror, most people had become completely indifferent to each other. What social services there were had largely collapsed in the face of aggressive consumerism. Women, particularly the elderly and young, had to bear the brunt of the burden. Mother Serafima related easily to people. Daily she listened, as they sought help with harsh economic realities, chronic instability within their families and the demoralisation they encountered in everyday life. Many were homeless. The nuns ministered in a children's hospital, cared for the elderly, helped in the parish, established a school for children who wanted to work in the Church. Sadly, Mother Serafima did not survive to see her work complete. She had only another five years to live.

For some small groups of monks and hermits, the wilderness is the most appropriate place. Between Lake Onega and the White Sea, monasticism had for centuries flourished in the forest, near key trade routes—but the region was virtually depopulated under Soviet rule. Three communities are living as simply as did their forebears, rebuilding churches and reclaiming the desert. A community has moved back into Solovetsky, which is once more a place of pilgrimage. Each year a party led by Marta Dell'Asta, editor of the

journal *La Nuova Europa*, comes from the centre of the organization 'Russia Cristiana' near Bergamo in Italy.

Unfortunately the Orthodox Church had been completely unprepared for such unprecedented opportunities, and it lacked the resources and educational and spiritual base to undergird the abrupt transition to freedom. Igumen Petr Mescerinov, superior of a community attached to St Daniel in Moscow, told a Russia Cristiana Conference last year that he doubted whether, after such a protracted interruption, it would be possible to recover authentic monasticism. Like Mother Serafima, he lamented that too many Christians had an image of the monastery in the wilderness as a refuge from the material conflicts of human existence, where their personal problems would be resolved—yet the monastic life should only be undertaken as a way to embrace the fullness of the Gospel, and through it to encounter Christ. The Church often had to improvise, admitting young people to the priesthood and to monastic life without adequate training or mature spiritual direction.

Freedom also brought a proliferation of self-appointed spiritual directors, the 'neo-startsi', who were only too ready to guide the many neophytes, whether within or outside monastic life, and who stressed absolute obedience to directives involving rigorous rules on fasting, vigils and prayer. Fr Petr sees these self-appointed guides as having no conception of true spiritual formation; he has seen many novices come to grief, abandoning the monastery, or even the Church, completely disillusioned. Even worse, some stay on, apparently conforming, but descending into depravity. His compassion goes out towards religious with genuine vocations living in an atmosphere of indifference or even outright hostility. Instead of offering a sustaining community, too many monasteries have become hotbeds of bigotry, pharisaism, formalism and servility, and are prey to ecclesiastical and even political intrigue, the adulation of nationalism and xenophobia. 'Monasticism cannot be tied down to skills in fasting and gastronomy!' Fr Petr has emphasised. Life is infinitely more complex than any set of rules. One cannot apply rules to God. The relationship between God and the human person is an enigma, a mystery. God is incommensurably more compassionate than we can imagine and loves every person more than a mother loves her child.

Fr Pankrati, abbot of the St Nicholas Monastery at Rylsk, with 27 monks, confirmed Mescerinov's opinions during a visit by the Russian team which was working with Keston Institute to produce an encyclopaedia about religious life in Russia today. This was recounted by Xenia Dennen in Keston Newsletters. 'Good judgement is essential', he said. He had given up the draconian statutes introduced by his predecessor, Fr Ippolit, which had led to lack of sleep and irritation, saying:

> Work should be a joy; you must not overdo work or prayer; you must respect the body. Prayer and relationships within the community are the most important.

Even so, few novices stuck it out—most left after a couple of years. The community had to give up the demanding outreach of Fr Ippolit, who had taken in all and sundry, and concentrate on farming, exporting wheat to the Ukraine and Belarus, and hoping to make bread to sell locally. They are building contacts with local schools, but only one per cent of the local population attend church, except at Easter.

The Korennaya Pustyn near Kursk, with its holy spring, is a place of pilgrimage which attracted half a million people when a revered icon was brought back to the city in 2009. It supports a group of orphaned sisters who cater for hundreds of pilgrims and some students. Local people, resentful that many had been forced to leave their accommodation in the monastic buildings when the monks arrived, do not attend the services. Monks have made regular visits to the 1,500 inmates of the local psychiatric hospital and to the local polytechnic, where a quarter of the students are orphans or from single parent families.

Near Vologda, the active Fr Alexei Mokievsky was spiritual director of the Goritsky Convent, while his wife organised a programme 'For Spiritual and Moral Health' for various groups, linking with the nuns who, apart from running a farm, tried to help society's rejects, drug addicts and alcoholics. Novo-Tikhvinsky Convent in Ekaterinburg, where the Tsar and royal family were murdered and which has become a shrine, is another matter. Most of the 150 nuns are young. They translate ancient Greek and Church Slavonic texts into Russian, paint icons and produce embroidery—on very modern equipment—connected with the very popular and

lucrative cult of the royal saints. Xenia was concerned when she noticed icons of the royal family on the iconostasis; an Old Believer former soldier told her he was appalled by the glorification of people he did not rate as worthy martyrs.

Each community needs to work out its own way of life, its own ministry, adapt to local needs and conditions. This may take years of trial and error. There is no one rule which fits all in the present revival. Some communities have found local people indifferent, even hostile. We must remember that, although Orthodox believers may move to several other jurisdictions now competing in Russia, the dominant authoritarian Moscow Patriarchate sets strict parameters on individual projects. From 1992 until 2006, Fr Evmeni Peristy was Abbot of the Makariev-Reshemsky Monastery, setting up an educational centre, a publishing house ('Light of Orthodoxy'), and a drug rehabilitation centre. He is a brilliant man who studied psychology and built up warm relations with Christians in the west. His missionary course, 'Alpha and Omega'—based on the British Alpha course, but carefully adapted to meet the differing needs of unchurched young Russians—aroused the ire of the national guardians of 'true' Orthodoxy. They denounced Evmeni and accused him of co-operating with Protestants, of removing the essential distinction between priest and participants, of failing to familiarise seekers with Orthodox culture and terminology. Because he sometimes speaks in tongues, he was accused of promoting a charismatic sect. He was expelled from his monastery, and two years later dismissed from the Church Missionary Department. He had made the mistake of trying to bring seekers to a relationship with the Gospel and Christ, rather than the Orthodox Church.

‘WE ARE TREATED AS DYING, AND SEE—WE ARE ALIVE’

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY[1]

MARK BIRCH

A TELEVISION series with the snappy title of ‘Rev’ has been shown on the BBC this Summer. It is billed as a comedy, and it follows the life of a fictitious London vicar as he wrestles with the demands of a run-down parish, some particularly needy and troublesome parishioners, and a Machiavellian archdeacon who could be straight out of Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers*. The series has been heart-warming in many ways, an affectionate portrayal of a very ordinary and very faithful priest trying to do his best in very imperfect circumstances. It is clearly written by someone who knows their stuff, and at times it comes painfully close to the real despair that haunts so many parish clergy. In one episode this despair was given full reign, when the priest was depicted falling into a deep crisis of faith, fundamentally questioning his vocation, and ending up being picked up by the police, in his own churchyard, distinctly drunk and disorderly.

But it was not his drunken behaviour that the police were concerned with. They took him to a flat in the parish, where an elderly, dying woman was asking for the last rites. The priest pleaded with the policeman that he was in no fit state to minister to the woman, to which the policeman replied, ‘Are you her Vicar, or not?’ In a truly tear-jerking moment, the priest recalled the story of the call of Isaiah which had been read at his ordination,[2] and realized that, however dysfunctional he might be, however chaotic the parish and the people in his care, he had nonetheless been sent to them. He rediscovered his vocation in this call to minister to the dying. It could have been a parable on Paul’s words in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, ‘We are treated … as those who are dying, and see—we are alive.’[3]

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[1] A sermon preached at Fairacres on the Feast of the Assumption, Sunday 15 August 2010.

[2] see Isa. 6.

[3] II Cor. 6: 8-9.

On 15 August we celebrate Mary, the Mother of Jesus, our Lord and God. Whether an Assumption or a Dormition, we celebrate her passing from this world—the end of her earthly pilgrimage, a life in which she had faced so many losses; one could even say, so many deaths. First, the unorthodox manner in which she conceived could well have meant a kind of social death—rendering her unmarriageable, were it not for the angelically-guided wisdom of Joseph. Then there was the terrible prediction of a sword piercing her soul when she presented her infant Son in the Temple, and later, the agony of losing him and then finding him again amongst the Temple teachers. Furthermore, many parents, and particularly mothers, would recognize the loss and anxiety of seeing a child leaving home and embarking upon a distinctly precarious and itinerant existence, beyond the reach of their care. Above all, the powerlessness of watching her Son being rejected and put to death must have been the purest form of agony. Artists have usually shown her fainting away; but as I have never seen a fainting mother at Helen House, the children's hospice of which I have been Chaplain for the last few years, I doubt there would have been any such relief for the Mother standing at the Cross.

Mary's life was full of losses, full of all kinds of death; yet each death was more than matched by an experience of new life. Her disastrous pregnancy became a source of extraordinary hope—the hope of a Messiah, a Saviour, recognized by Mary's cousin Elizabeth, and the unborn Baptist within her. The words of the Magnificat[4] may have been the words of Elizabeth, rather than of Mary, the elderly Elizabeth representing the old Israel looking forward to the new, and recognizing it in Mary with a hymn of ecstatic joy. Simeon's dark predictions in the Temple came alongside both his and Anna's recognition that this Infant represented God's promise of salvation: 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of your people Israel'.[5] Losing her Son in that same Temple, and finding him questioning the teachers, also served to quicken the hope that here was something new, something one could hardly dare hope for—a new intimacy with God. The boy Jesus says, 'Did you not know that

[4] Luke 1: 46-55.
[5] Luke 2: 32.

I must be in my Father's house?'[6]—God as Father, as Abba, and we as adopted children through the one true Son. Most significantly, the death on the Cross yields to the new indestructible life of Easter. It is new life not just for Jesus, but for his Mother, for his apostles, and for all throughout the ages who put their hope and trust in that testimony.

So what must it have been like for Mary to face the end of her mortal life? What would approaching death mean for her, given the many deaths she had already faced, and the new life and hope that she had witnessed emerging from them? Having carried 'the resurrection and the life' within her, what would her dying have been like? My guess is that it would have been very like ours. Faith in the resurrection, faith that even dying we live, like the hapless priest in the television series 'Rev', does not necessarily mean a calm acceptance of death, in whatever form that may come to us. I was reminded by my supervisor that changing jobs and moving to a new part of the country, as I am about to do, is a kind of dying; and that has helped me to understand why I feel very far from calm about it. Dying always involves some fear, and sometimes a very great deal of fear. I guess it was the same for Mary. It certainly was for her Son.

But I wonder if Mary was able to review her life, or whether, more importantly, she had others to help her to do so: to bring to remembrance the many deaths and the many resurrections she had known through her Son—the events in her own life that witnessed to the truth that even in dying we live—and to let those experiences be an ark, a vessel, to carry her naturally frightened soul into the darkness and unknowing of death?

It has been a great privilege for me to play a small part in the life of this Community over the last six years or so. One of the more significant losses which I am currently facing is not being able to come here regularly. This may seem like a rather trivial kind of dying in the great scheme of things, but it doesn't *feel* trivial. In the fellowship we share here, at this altar, I am reminded, with your help, that death and resurrection is the pattern of the Christian life. And through our sharing in the sacrament, my own timid soul is strengthened and carried into what lies ahead. I am grateful for your

[6] Luke 2: 49.

fellowship, within the whole household of God, in the company of Mary and all God's saints; for this remembering, this reassurance, which we bear far more fruitfully for one another than we ever can for ourselves. Thank you!

For we are treated as those who are seen as dying—and yet we, with Mary, are alive. On this Feast, we celebrate Mary at the end of her earthly pilgrimage, following in the path of her own Son's dying and rising. Let us commit ourselves once more to this path, unashamed to be reminded of the dying and rising of our Lord.

OUR AUTHORS

IN MEMORIAM: FR EMMANUEL RENAULT OCD

SLG PRESS notes with sadness the death of Fr Emmanuel Renault. He died in hospital in Lisieux, France, on Maundy Thursday 2010. We are producing a book by Fr Emmanuel and hope that we can publish it some time in 2011. Fr Emmanuel was born in 1922 in Pointe-à-pitre, Guadeloupe. After serving with the Free French during the Second World War and taking part in the liberation of Provence and Alsace, he became a priest and then also a Carmelite. He was professed in 1950, and from 1979 to 1991 was Definitor General of the Order. In 1998 he was a founder member of the Priory at Lisieux, and its first Prior. Latterly, he had lived in Paris, but for his last year he moved back to Lisieux, where in his last illness he was an inspiration to his brethren.

Fr Emmanuel Renault became a recognized expert on both St Thérèse of Lisieux and St Teresa of Avila and left behind an unfinished study on the influence of the *Imitation of Christ* in the spirituality of St Thérèse. His last published work had been *The Influence of St Teresa of Avila on Thérèse of Lisieux* (2009). Earlier, he published on the influence of St John of the Cross on St Thérèse, and SLG Press hopes to make available a talk given by him in 1989 on this subject.

May he rest in peace.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREW TEAL is Warden of the Community.

DAVID BARTON was Warden of the Community 2001-9.

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

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

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

JANE WENLOCK, a retired nursery nurse and a new reader of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, lives in London and is a visitor at Brixton Prison. She was a member of the group from St Stephen's, South Dulwich, which travelled to Oberammergau.

BROTHER THOMAS OSB is a monk of Mucknell Abbey in Worcestershire.

JANICE BROUN, a reader of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, got to know the Community through her husband. Specialising in the subject of the persecution of religion in communist states, working in close association with Keston, she has written numerous articles, and a book entitled *Conscience and Captivity, Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988), and contributed to *CensorshipA an International Encyclopedia* (1997). She currently reviews books for *Religion, State and Society.*

MARK BIRCH is currently Chaplain to the Treloar Trust in Alton, Hampshire, a charity providing education for students with physical and learning disabilities. Prior to that, he spent 4 years as Chaplain to Helen and Douglas House, hospices for children and young adults in Oxford, during which time he was a regular celebrant at Fairacres.

ELLEN F. DAVIS is the Amos Ragan Kearns Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke University Divinity School in North Carolina. She is a long-time friend of the Community and a subscriber to the *Fairacres Chronicle*. Her most recent book,

Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture (Cambridge University Press, 2008), integrates biblical studies with a critique of industrial agriculture.

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

STEPHEN BROWN, a Priest Associate of the Community, currently ministers within the Diocese of York. Following many years working in Anglican dioceses, he set up a freelance business making links between the moving image and spiritual development. He teaches film for secular and ecclesiastical organizations, runs movie retreats and prayer workshops, broadcasts for BBC radio and is a contributor to the *Church Times* and for the Bible Society.

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

ASSOCIATES – Fellowship of the Love of God

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Gillian Nicholls 31 October 2010

New Members

Roger Burne 7 July 2010

Hetty Kothari 13 August 2010

NEW FROM SLG PRESS

GOD AND DARKNESS

A Carmelite Perspective

GEMMA HINRICHER OCD

This book begins with an exploration of a paradox at the heart of Christian life and prayer: that God's light is darkness and God's nearness is hiddenness. Sister Gemma stresses that Jesus, the human face of God, is our way and orientation through the darkness, confusion and incomprehension which are so often part of Christian experience. God comes closest to us in Jesus, whose experience of darkness, above all on the Cross, and example of self-giving love inform and guide us.

In the second part of the book, the author examines the witness of two of the best-known saints of Carmel, St John of the Cross in the sixteenth century and, three hundred years later, St Thérèse of Lisieux. Both learned to know God in and through darkness, obscurity, hiddenness.

The mystical tradition, including some of the spirituality of Carmel, offers not only a spirituality of presence, but also an apophatic spirituality of darkness, of awareness of what God is not, the better to attain to the reality which is God.

SISTER GEMMA HINRICHER (1932-90) studied theology in Münster. She entered the Carmel in Pützchen (Bonn) in 1959 and was a founding member of the Carmels in Dachau in 1964 and in Berlin in 1982. She wrote and published on topics of Carmelite spirituality and in 1982 was awarded the Romano Guardini Prize of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria. Now, for the first time, her words are made available to English speakers in published form.

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OUT OF THE DEPTHS
Encountering Depression

GONVILLE FFRENCH-BEYTAGH

> *Experiences of darkness, depression, dereliction are so much a part of maturing into the depths of friendship with God. We need people who can be true to their experience and share it with us* (' Epilogue', Wendy Robinson).

Since its first publication in 1990, this candid, personal account of depression, and recovery from 'out of the depths', has helped many to come to terms with their own experiences, or provide support to other sufferers. It was by continuing to say the Psalms and read the Bible, through force of habit, that the author discovered voices which penetrated his darkness and confusion.

Wendy Robinson, the writer of the Epilogue, pays a warm tribute to Gonville ffench-Beytagh, with whom she shares an understanding of the challenge presented by depression for the Church and for the Christian faith. As a Christian and a psychotherapist, she contributes her own insights into the nature and treatment of depression, and its liberating potential.

GONVILLE FFRENCH-BEYTAGH (1912-91) spent much of his life in South Africa, becoming Dean of Salisbury (Harare) and later Johannesburg. He opposed apartheid, which led to his imprisonment in 1971-2 and subsequent exile to England, where he spent the last years of his life. He was also a respected preacher, spiritual director and author, whose works include *Encountering Darkness*, an account of his imprisonment, and *Facing Depression*, the latter also published by SLG Press.

Fairacres Publications 162 ISBN 978-0-7283-0183-2
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> *Both books are available from SLG Press at the stated price plus a shipping charge. An invoice will be sent with the books—send no money.*

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

If there is a watershed in modern treatments of the Song of Songs—when, after centuries of relative neglect, it suddenly became intellectually interesting again—then likely it was somewhere around 1977, when Marcia Falk published a poetic rendering under the rubric of 'Love Poems from the Bible', and the following year, with Phyllis Trible's acclaimed study in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Different as those works are, one thing they share is an interest in the female voice and feminine perspective that is so pronounced in the Song. Another thing they share is the conviction that the Song is about human love, envisioned as a relationship of equality between the sexes. At a moment when feminist criticism was just finding its ground within biblical studies, such readings of the Song brought it into the scholarly mainstream, and there has been a modest flow of publications ever since.

Edmée Kingsmill's 'study in biblical intertextuality' has a strong point of connection with this work of the last generation, specifically in its focus on the feminine perspective of the Song. At the same time, she directly opposes its central and now nearly unchallenged presupposition that the Song celebrates human love and does so in terms that are not directly theological. In other words, it has little or no direct connection with the essential subject matter of every other book of the Bible. According to this modern orthodoxy of the Song, then, the once-traditional notion that it speaks of love between God and Israel, or God and the soul, is an extraneous imposition—even if that imposition is what won it a place in the canon.

Kingsmill rejects this orthodoxy, because it misses the essential literary fact about the Song, namely that its metaphorical language is thoroughly biblical and associates the Song directly with other poetic texts, especially in the prophetic corpus. The poet picks up on yet reverses the prophetic metaphor of the *eros of* God for Israel; while the prophets generally represent this as a failed marriage, this poet 'portrays the *eros for* God of his chosen people at its most sustained,

unfaltering and faithful' (p. 39). The Song is a mystical composition, woven together largely from strands of Israel's religious and liturgical traditions (with coloration from those of Egypt and Mesopotamia) and presented for the sake of encouragement. It shows the earthly paradise that God will establish in Zion at the end of the age. A strong messianic element points not to national deliverance but rather to the ideal of intimacy with God, with a corresponding emphasis on the validity of the Jerusalem Temple—the gardens of the Song—as the locus of abiding intimacy.

In an important introductory essay, Kingsmill explores the conditions in religious and intellectual culture that led to an eclipse of mystical understandings of the Song in rabbinic Judaism and much later in the European Reformation, an eclipse that has proven to be enduring in most parts of the West. She traces to Luther the waning of the 'bridal strand' of Christian spirituality—or the 'feminine principle', as she often calls it. The feminine principle is not a gendered phenomenon; rather it is a style of worship and religious thought: 'the intuitive, contemplative, and mystical life of the soul which yearns to be drawn by the *eros* of God into union with him' (p. 274).

Dating and provenance are more central matters for Kingsmill than for those who view the Song as more or less secular love poetry. She associates the Song within Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic traditions, drawing careful lines of philological and theological connection, not only within the Hebrew Bible but also with the deutero-canonical and non-canonical literature of the Second Temple period. This leads her to date the Song somewhat later than most scholars, to the late second century. She considers it likely that the poet was heavily influenced by Sirach (p. 66), and especially the great speech of Wisdom 'herself' in chapter 24. Further, and crucially for her argument, Kingsmill cites the growing scholarly appreciation of Jewish asceticism as an active and varied phenomenon in the late Second Temple period. Thus she proposes that the poet was a member of an ascetic community, a master of 'some form of proto-Merkava mysticism' (p. 38), which finds reflection in the Song's creative adaptations of Zion and Temple mythology.

Seven chapters present the argument in persuasive detail, showing the ancient literary history of such key themes and images

as the *eros* strand in wisdom traditions, breast imagery, mythical elements of God's self-manifestation, the Beloved, and the Garden Temple. Kingsmill is an articulate writer with an eye for significant detail, and the unfolding argument is enlivened throughout by intellectual passion for her subject. More importantly, it is firmly anchored by broad and solid knowledge of ancient sources, both Jewish and Christian. Thus 4 Ezra is adduced to illumine images of Israel that are prominent in the Song: vine, lily, dove, flocks and sheep. Lebanon as a metaphor for the Temple is traced from the Hebrew Bible to the Habakkuk Commentary from Qumran and also to the Targums to Hosea and the Song.

Kingsmill's intertextual method is disciplined by close attention to clusters of allusions and even to precise morphological and grammatical echoes, which sometimes yields surprising results. A strong example is her reading of the poem of praise addressed to the dancing Shulamite (Song 7: 1-6). The passage begins with a verb denoting visionary seeing, and it includes ten nouns with the second person feminine suffix—a grammatical form, she observes, that prophetic texts use most often in address to cities. Moreover, most of these particular nouns—'your navel', 'your breasts', 'your nose', etc.—'only occur otherwise in address to Jerusalem' (p. 146)! Based on these and other linguistic data, she concludes that 'the description of the human body piles on indications that it represents a geographic area … of which Jerusalem is the centre and of which, in turn, the centre is the Temple' (p. 130 f.). As a complement, she notes with C. T. R. Hayward that 'The "praise of Wisdom" abounds in geographical references.' In comparison with this sort of precision, most intertextual studies attempted by biblical scholars, including myself, might be judged impressionistic.

Kingsmill is appropriately modest before her subject; she does not claim to understand or explain everything in the Song. Yet the most impressive aspect of her study is precisely the comprehensiveness of treatment and the overall coherence of the reading that results, as evidenced in the translation and commentary that constitutes the final section of the book. Admittedly, I did not need to be persuaded that the Song has pronounced symbolic dimensions that must be teased out through an intertextual approach; I have treated it as a mystical book that dwells on (among other things) the theological

significance of Jerusalem. Yet in rigorous application of this method, breadth of the literary corpus from which she draws, and plausibility of her conclusions in reconstructing the intention of the poet, Kingsmill has outstripped any Song scholar in our time. She has produced a study that cannot be ignored (and at points begs development and refinement) by interpreters of the Song and students of Second Temple Judaism, even as it profoundly challenges our academic culture of compartmentalization with the assertion that 'worship … provides the hermeneutical key to the Song' (p. 199).

In light of that achievement, my quibbles with this book appear to be just that. The first of them is that the discussion of the binary female/male principles strikes me as the one part of her argument that is more asserted than argued, particularly in the critical introductory chapter. Is it so obvious that John the Baptist is purely male and Moses purely 'female'/bridal? The more serious question I would raise is how far this argument can accommodate material or horizontal understandings of the Song, especially a sexual interpretation (although I would also see an ecological dimension to the poem). Is Trible right (as I think she is) that the Edenic rupture between man and woman is at least part of what is being healed in the Song? Kingsmill seems to allow for this possibility, especially with her fascinating though undeveloped observation that 'the repression of divine *eros* … leads to the repression of human *eros*' (p. 27). In a concluding comment on the famous 'love is strong as death' (Song 8: 6) she asks: '… what does it matter whether it is human or divine love since, at this level of intensity, can a difference be maintained?' (p. 278). I suspect that Kingsmill's answer to my question would be that a sexual interpretation of the Song is allowable, but scholars interested in the poet's original intention must in honesty admit that such an interpretation is metaphorical, indeed *allegorical*. Touché.

ELLEN F. DAVIS

This review was originally published in Review of Biblical Literature *(July 2010), at* http://bookreviews.org/pdf/7342_7999.pdf

Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ, Gerald O'Collins SJ & Michael Keenan Jones, Oxford University Press, 2010, £25.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-957645-6.

Beautifully produced, as we would expect from OUP, this handsome, hard-backed volume of 311 pages complements the book *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* by Gerald O'Collins published in 2007. Gerald O'Collins is Professor Emeritus of Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. The co-author, Michael Keenan Jones, is pastor of the parish of St Lawrence, Huntington, Connecticut, USA and holds a doctorate from the Gregorian University. The book is not just an attractive volume for the bookshelf, but a serious and profound study of the priesthood of Christ, from whom all priesthood is derived, both the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of all believers. The publication of the book last March coincided with the declaration by Pope Benedict XVI of the twelve months to June 2010 as a 'Year for Priests'. At the Beatification of John Henry Newman on 19 September 2010, the Pope laid stress in his homily on the role of Newman as a parish priest, and Newman is given particular prominence in this study.

The issue of the ordination of women continues to be contentious and to bring division, and the attempt of the Vatican to forbid discussion of the topic is in itself a matter of contention. I find it a relief, therefore, that the authors leave aside this burning issue of our day to explore the theology of the priesthood of Christ—something from which the Church has often been distracted in its concentration upon derivative human priesthood.

The book begins with a consideration of the 'Jewish Matrix'. In the Levitical priesthood, the priest represented God to the people and the people to God. The authors examine ways in which this Jewish understanding was continued in the accounts in the gospels of Christ's exercise of his priesthood—in his Passion and Resurrection and in his ministry of healing and teaching—and ways in which his priesthood is prior to, and greater than, this. Priestly language in Paul, in the First Letter of St Peter and in the Book of Revelation are considered, and the Letter to the Hebrews is studied in detail. Christ being a 'priest according to the order of Melchizedek' involves, in Hebrews, not only Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice offered for the

sins of others, where he himself was both priest and willing victim, but also his priestly intercession which continues forever in heaven.

Following the chapters on the biblical foundation, the authors consider, in depth and chronologically, the developmental role of a number of great names in the Christian tradition and also of the Council of Trent. Augustine of Hippo develops understanding of Christ's priesthood in the light of Christ being the Head of the Body, the Church. Christ is both Priest and Victim and now offers sacrifices (the Eucharist) on our behalf. In baptism all Christians are incorporated into Christ and become one with him, the 'spotless lamb' (p. 91). Thomas Aquinas adopts and modifies Anselm's theology of redemption as 'satisfaction' and explores the concept of Christ as 'Mediator' which is referred to in different places in the New Testament. Christ's function as priestly Mediator depended upon his becoming incarnate. Luther and Calvin champion the priesthood of all believers and stress the propitiatory death of Christ on Calvary. In its reaction to the Reformers, the Council of Trent emphasized the priesthood as cultic and hierarchical, leaving out of the picture the preaching of the Word as a priestly function.

After taking note of the teaching of other important figures, the book moves to the central place of Newman at the heart of the modern Church. Between 1824 and 1877 Newman developed further the threefold role of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King hinted at in Patristic writers, stressed by Aquinas and explored by Calvin. Others, particularly Karl Barth and Thomas Torrance, then take up this torch. Yves Congar brings the triple role into the awareness of the Second Vatican Council. With references to Augustine, Vatican II declares that 'every liturgical action' is an 'action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church'.[1] The ordained ministers and all the baptized share in the priesthood of Christ, as well as in his prophetic and kingly functions.[2] At the end of the book are twelve theses—some relatively indisputable, others more controversial—about Christ's priesthood and the extent to which the whole Church and ordained ministers share in this.

[1] *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 1963.
[2] *Lumen Gentium, Light of the Nations*, 1964.

Over the centuries the titles 'Saviour' (used 16 times in the New Testament) and 'Redeemer' (never in fact applied to Jesus in the New Testament), have endured as Christological titles. In contrast, Jesus' title of 'Priest' and the theme of his priesthood, along with the Letter to the Hebrews, have to some extent been marginalized. The authors conclude in their Epilogue:

> The priesthood of Christ should be drawn into the mainstream of theological, pastoral, and prayerful reflection. His priesthood will prove revelatory and transformative for those who wish to appreciate more deeply and deploy more effectively the graces of universal priesthood and ordained priesthood (p. 292).

It has only been possible to touch on a few aspects of this fascinating book, but it could make a most helpful contribution for anyone wishing to engage in that serious 'theological, pastoral and prayerful reflection'.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Praying with Confidence: Aquinas on the Lord's Prayer, Paul Murray OP, Continuum, 2010, £10.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-4713-4.

The Lord's Prayer is often introduced in Church of England services with the words, 'Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Saviour gave us.' It was St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) who said, 'Of all the things required of us when we pray, confidence is of great avail.' We warmly commend for reading, study and prayer this book, an examination with quotations of Aquinas' texts on the 'Our Father' by an Irish Dominican at the Angelicum University in Rome. We print here some extracts concerning the book.

From the Foreword by Fr Robert Barron, Francis Cardinal George Professor of Faith and Culture at Mundelein Seminary, Illinois:

> We have the privilege of listening in as one Dominican master interprets another. There is something distinctive about the Dominican approach to the spiritual life. Unlike the Carmelites, who place a great stress on the stages of development through which the spiritual seeker moves, and unlike the Jesuits, who emphasise the role that the human will plays in giving glory to God, Dominicans customarily

> speak of the God who is always already present to the one who prays. … Fr Murray … analyses the thought of his Order's greatest theologian, Thomas Aquinas, in regard to the prayer that Jesus gave the church—and therefore we are not to be surprised that, throughout this book, themes of gift and grace are paramount (p. ix).

From the back cover:

> [It] is both a stimulating scholarly study and an ideal introduction for the general reader. Never before have the most important reflections by Aquinas on the Lord's Prayer been drawn together and considered in a single book. Here, Aquinas comes alive not merely as a profound speculative theologian but also as an impressive master and guide of the spiritual and moral life. And he also comes across, on occasion, as a teacher capable of saying the unexpected, openly confessing, for example, '… it is hardly possible to say a single Our Father without our minds wandering off to other things.' … evident on every page is the serene, unmistakable mark of wisdom, Aquinas's own, and that of the great tradition.

From the author's Introduction:

> If, in Aquinas's work, there is a single point of entry which will allow the average reader immediate access to the profound and practical wisdom of the Dominican Master, I believe that point of entry can be found in St Thomas's many and various reflections on the Lord's Prayer. These reflections have, of course, sprung from the mind of a medieval scholar and theologian. Nevertheless, they are not notably obscure or difficult to grasp, being marked, for the most part, by a fine simplicity of expression, and by a content largely unencumbered by academic terminology. On occasion, in fact, St Thomas asks very simple, very direct questions, the kind of questions most people, at some stage, are likely to raise with regard to the Lord's Prayer. Why, for example, if God's name is already holy, do we say, 'hallowed be thy name'? And why do we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation', as if to suggest that God might, in some way, be inclined to tempt us? … In his attempt to answer even the

most obvious questions, we find him drawing instinctively on a wide range of learning and theological wisdom. And that learning, that wisdom, when fully manifest in the different reflections he makes on the prayer, betrays not merely the wisdom of an outstanding intellectual, but the wisdom also of a saint (pp. 2-3).

EDITOR

Gateway to Resurrection, Maria Boulding OSB, Burns & Oates, 2010, £10.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-4388-4.

Tell us, Mary, tell and say
What you saw along the way?[1]

This book is about the Christian journey, about resurrection discovered, and is the fruit of much study and experience. Maria Boulding, who died in November 2009, was an enclosed nun of the Benedictine Stanbrook Abbey Community and no mean scholar. Sister Maria writes intelligently, passionately and devotionally. The book begins and ends with the commission to Mary Magdalene to go and tell the resurrection news. The Magdalene becomes an apostle—although by Sister Maria's final chapter, 'Mary' is seen as more than just a personal name, taking in other Marys in the gospels; Mary sent on the Easter journey, as the Church she symbolizes is sent. In the intervening chapters, we are taken through the Easter story with the help of comments by many others, not least St Augustine of Hippo, on whom Sister Maria is an undoubted authority. (Incidentally, readers of this book will learn much about Augustine—fruitfully.)

This is not a book to be rushed. Each page has personally-validated nuggets, which excite the heart, but then have to be slowly savoured, absorbed, lived. It can be read at more than one level. It certainly draws on the author's academic studies and addresses the biblical texts: what does *this* mean, or *that*? Perhaps more important for most readers of this review, it is also pastoral and devotional, and it draws on her experience of the religious life. Best of all, study and

[1] p. 135. Easter Sequence from the Liturgy of the Church, addressing St Mary Magdalene.

devotion are married, as in her reflections prompted by the great Augustine. But there is yet another level, perhaps even more significant and more wonderful.

It would be difficult to separate Sister Maria's comments on the biblical texts from her experience of being terminally ill at the time of her writing, nor have I tried to do so. Having lived as a hermit for much of her life, she was recalled to her monastery as the number of professed Sisters diminished. There, after a few years, she developed cancer, and this book was written during the last phase of her life. I kept sensing the parallel—equivalence even—between the subject matter (including what her studies of St Augustine had shown her) and what she was now experiencing, namely bodily diminishment and pain, and resurrection. The book becomes a version of the Emmaus story: 'Did not our hearts burn within us?' It becomes a completion, so far as that is possible this side of death, of the spiritual journey she and all of us are invited to take: an Easter journey which must involve death, as it did for Jesus. There is a lived sense of resurrection *now*. The pattern of Sister Maria's life emerges as a mirror of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection.

Of course, there is the danger that such a book could attract or repel, and for the wrong reasons, as I'm sure Sister Maria would have been the first to recognise, but she writes in a way that avoids any such danger. It is not primarily a book about the reality of living with terminal illness, but a book of theological reflection. Sister Maria tells the story of her final months only indirectly, through the Scriptures, and through the story of St Augustine's struggles. Of St Augustine she writes:

> Only when Augustine could listen to the merciful, creative word of God addressed to him, only when he had come to stand in the light of Christ and respond with all the truth of his being, could he understand his own life as a narrative that had meaning (p. 65).

Perhaps this can also be understood as autobiographical. Writing of the two disciples' encounter with the risen Jesus at Emmaus, Sister Maria sees that it was only *after* Jesus' Passion that 'every last barrier was down between his human mind and the self-revealing word of God' (p. 67). Perhaps accepting a painful cancer could also be considered a kind of revelatory passion. Sister Maria's book certainly reads as if it were; risen life shines through.

A Simplified Life: a contemporary hermit's experience of solitude and silence, Verena Schiller, Canterbury Press, 2010, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-025-3.

This book is hard to summarise. It is slow moving, yet packed with incident; wide open, yet reticent; of the spirit, yet also about landscape. It operates at three levels simultaneously: history, nature, and spirituality, all embraced within autobiography. Much is told; more is hinted.

Sister Verena is a member of an Anglican religious community. Having lived within her community for many years, she has spent the last 25 years living in solitude in a shack at the end of the Llŷn Peninsula in north Wales, overlooking Bardsey island—a part of Britain soaked in sanctity for centuries, and a place where several SLG Sisters have also lived an eremitical life in the past. With increasing age, Sister Verena has now moved, reluctantly but realistically, to a more 'normal' bungalow a couple of miles inland, nearer to people, services and supplies. From here, she reflects on her experiences with a glad and gracious heart.

Of her spiritual life she tells us explicitly relatively little. Perhaps that is proper. But she does describe beautifully what she has seen and heard and learned over these years. Her appreciation of the ever-changing beauty of nature—its scenery, its inhabitants, its fearsome but magnificent power and ever-changing shapes—is backed up with full accounts of how things have come to be and are as they are. Indeed these passages form the largest part of the book. But Sister Verena has learnt, by waiting and watching, to read such things. She shares with us some of the insights she has gained, or which have been strengthened in her.

At first her hut had no electricity, and darkness opened her eyes. So, too, being a silent solitary heightened her awareness. In a key passage on page 57, she tells us how loneliness—at least in her early days as a hermit, but perhaps always?—had to be, and was, faced, and turned into 'integration, transparency and transformation'. But

Sister Verena does not kid herself, or us, that all was a bed of roses. A low point during a storm is described on page 97. A key phrase comes on page 88: 'learning to live in however small a way "at the point of intersection where the love of God and the tensions and sufferings we inflict on one another, meet and are held to God's transforming"'. We are told elsewhere in the book (p. 6 and p. 191) that the quotation is from Mother Mary Clare SLG. Another quotation: 'Solitude enables silence to speak to the imagination beyond symbols or signs. In the silence, the immediacy of experience makes space for awe, and in the emptiness of the moment a threshold may be crossed.' (p. 145).

Welsh history and tradition have influenced Sister Verena's life on the peninsula, and she includes a long and beautiful quotation from the seventeenth-century Welsh contemplative, Morgan Llwyd, beginning, 'Behold your first task is to be still' (pp. 121-2). Evidently she came to be 'at home' in Wales, and she describes how the Welsh, after the Reformation, have slowly rediscovered their roots and how old traditions have been 'given new clothes that were woven from the thread of the people themselves' (p. 123). Many beautiful moments are described—none more so than the beauty of the silence in church before the funeral of Morwenna, a member of the parish, who had died at 51 after falling downstairs at home (p. 130).

Sister Verena looked out over Bardsey Island—a holy place indeed. She describes visits there, when waves and wind permitted. Her account is moving. But she ends her book by writing of a visit to another holy island, Skellig Michael, off the south-west coast of Ireland. Those who have been there will have been astounded that anyone should be able to land, let alone survive, on that inhospitable, lonely, frequently un-reachable, storm-raged, tiny *massif* out in the Atlantic. Yet monks did live there. Not now, though; I think even doughty Sister Verena was shaken by the thought!

JOHN ARMSON

No Greater Love, directed by Michael Whyte, DVD region 2, 105 minutes, 2010, distributed by Soda Pictures, 17 Blossom Street, London, E1 6PL. Currently £15.99. (tel: +44 (0) 207 377 1407; fax: +44 (0) 207 377 1406; website: www.sodapictures.com)

Michael Whyte, director of the film *No Greater Love*, is a brave man. It is only a couple of years since Philip Gröning's documentary about the contemplative life, *Into Great Silence*, was released; and now we have another one. In *No Greater Love*, the subjects are nuns, however, not Carthusian monks. They belong to the Carmelite Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity, Notting Hill, in London. While the Carthusians throw snowballs in the Alps as a means of recreation, the Carmelites enjoy country dancing. St Teresa of Avila, on whose reformation the Order is based, would have approved. On high days and holidays she told her Sisters: 'Bring out the castanets.'

In some ways, it is a pity that we see only this side of community life at the end, although we have already witnessed many an indication of the Sisters' joy long before then. Gröning's piece similarly holds back on a vital element—until an epilogue in which one of the monks speaks and explains their way of life. Whyte, on the other hand, has various Sisters talking about their outlook and practices as they go along. This works well, although it is hard to hear the questions that he puts.

Whyte holds his gaze on the multifarious tasks that the Carmelites undertake, and thus lulls us into a contemplative mood of our own. It is something that films can do superbly, but do only rarely. D. W. Griffith, the cinematic pioneer, said that he was trying to make us see. This film does that effectively, as we watch clothing tailored, altar breads manufactured, vegetables dug, and floors cleaned—all in the context of the daily offices of prayer.

Most of the devotional and liturgical activities are centred on Holy Week. We get much made of Maundy Thursday and veneration of the Blessed Sacrament in repose, as the nuns watch and pray. There is also coverage of the service of light from the Easter Ceremonies, but most of the Good Friday and Paschal liturgies are absent from the film. Why? The death and funeral of Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament is recorded, as well as the profession of a Novice. Whyte, despite his background in television drama, resists cross-cutting these scenes with the Holy Week themes of death and resurrection. His film is neither polemical nor proselytising. Its emotional feel is best summed up in the words of the Jewish poet and philosopher Paul Landsberg, quoted by a Sister: 'With my hand in the hand of

goodness I have walked life, the sweet strength of your blessing has filled my cup.'

Tough and dark, as well as beautiful and loving, this is a film that stands on its own, leaving behind it a delightful odour of holiness.

STEPHEN BROWN

The review above first appeared in the Church Times*, 9 April 2010, issue 7673 and is reproduced with permission. To subscribe: email subs@churchtimes.co.uk; tel: 01603 785911; or write: Church Times, 13-17 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9PN.*

Lift High the Cross: Anglo-Catholics and the Congress Movement, John Gunstone, Canterbury Press, 2010, £25.00.

ISBN: 978-1-85311-817-3.

In the Afterword of his 1994 book, *The Anglican Parochial Clergy*, Dr Michael Hinton concludes that 'the number of regular churchgoers has been in relative decline since the middle of the nineteenth century, in absolute decline throughout the twentieth century, and in catastrophic decline in recent years'. Canon Gunstone therefore has the task of guiding us through territory at once familiar and astonishingly different as he revisits the Anglo-Catholicism of the 1920s and 1930s. When churchgoing (but the context requires me to say 'Mass attendance') is universally sparse, it will not surprise us to read that 1.6% of the population around London's Euston station were worshippers before the First War—a very good turn out, you might say. But at the same time 34.5% of the residents of South Kensington were at their prayers in Anglican churches.

Anglo-Catholics, whose strength lay largely in cities and towns, were moved by two powerful emotions: first, the desire to spread the gospel and secondly, the conviction that only the Catholic way of being Anglican could achieve this. A combative spirit was needed; and was embraced. Recounting how this spirit led to a succession of national (i.e. London-based) and provincial Congresses, Gunstone shows how Anglo-Catholics managed, little by little, to bring round

at least a number of the bishops most antagonistic to catholic claims. If the notorious modernist Bishop Barnes of Birmingham remained unmoved, evangelicals like Watts Ditchfield of Chelmsford recognised the preaching by Catholics of Christ crucified and welcomed it. And so it came about that the Church of England came to wear an increasingly catholic face. In this, of course, Anglo-Catholics were aided by counting a number of the aristocracy and senior politicians among their adherents. Congresses, sponsored by committees liberally sprinkled with titles, acclaimed enthusiastically overseas bishops who patiently explained how the Church could be better organised. Bishop Frank Weston might be called by some 'the Zanzibarbarian', yet he charmed into admiration even Hensley Henson of Durham. At the first Congress, in 1920, he stunned the Albert Hall audience by appealing for £50,000 for the missions, and achieved a final total of £44,000—in today's values, ten times that amount. Such was the conviction, such was the sacrifice.

Gunstone has been careful to give us a study placed within both its ecclesiastical and societal context. But the particular value of the book is that he has actually read the papers that were delivered at the various Congresses and gives us helpful précis of them. Few are going to go back to these sources, and perhaps even fewer now that we have such a helpful resource here. What stands out is the theological and spiritual quality of the contributions made by speakers. Requiem High Mass in the Albert Hall, the sight of banks of religious, a meditation on Christ's humanity by Frank Weston—for many these may have been the highlights of a Congress, but the faithful sat through papers by a galaxy of scholars and others, for the Anglo-Catholicism of Gregory Dix, T. S. Eliot, Dorothy L. Sayers and their contemporaries was developing, and its vision was of a world both challenged and infused by the Church, the Church of England restored and fully in possession of her true heritage. If, as Hinton suggests, catastrophic decline has been the recent pattern, then the Congress movement was at least a heroic effort and at least in part visionary.

I am suggesting that Gunstone has given us a valuable account of the Congress movement, and Canterbury Press has reflected that in the price of this volume. It is, therefore, disappointing that some chapters bear the marks of having been dictated into voice

recognition software, with words left out or distorted or varying from page to page. To be a work of reference, this book deserves a corrected edition.

JOHN SCOTT

To Believe in Jesus, Ruth Burrows OCD, Burns & Oates / Continuum, 2010, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-8282-1.

Continuum is bringing out new editions of books written in past decades by the Carmelite Ruth Burrows, something which I personally welcome very much. I have been glad over the years to read her books on the spiritual life and about her experience of Carmel. I was pleased to meet the autobiographical *Before the Living God* again in 2008, now with a new preface by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. I read the book when it was first published by Sheed & Ward in 1975, at which time I found Ruth Burrow's strength of character, commonsense and often simply dogged dedication to God inspirational. She has a gift of communicating the essentials of the spiritual quest and of showing that what we need is:

> … not a unique level of self-sacrifice only for specialists, but a stubborn confidence in Jesus Christ … a willingness to go on seeing one's own unsatisfactory life and experience as a place where the Son of God [has] chosen to settle and to praise and love his Father.[1]

The latest in the series is *To Believe in Jesus* (first published by Sheed & Ward, 1978). The words of Rowan Williams quoted above apply equally to this new book. It is not a systematic analysis of belief in Jesus. It is a book in which Jesus is given sometimes more, sometimes less, prominence. But he is always present, in the sense that the book is about the quest for holiness, which means finding Jesus in the midst of what life brings us. 'Only Jesus is holy, the only one pleasing to God. Only by allowing him to communicate his holiness to us can we be pleasing to God' (p. 17). Jesus belongs

[1] Rowan Williams, Introduction to *Before the Living God*, Ruth Burrows OCD, Burns & Oates / Continuum, 2008.

completely to God and is fully on God's side and 'by our union with Jesus we too can enter, and do enter, into God's holy world' (p. 89).

It is fair to say that I do have difficulty with the fact that the book was not updated to use gender-neutral language. I am very glad to know that this may well be addressed for future reprinting, and this will make it accessible to more readers. Now in her late eighties, Ruth Burrows continues to communicate a valuable spiritual message to us.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press:

Living the Hours: Monastic Spirituality in Everyday Life, Anthony Grimley and Jonathan M. Wooding, 2010, £14.99.
ISBN: 978-1-85311-971-2.

Woven Into Prayer: A Flexible Pattern of Daily Prayer Through the Christian Year, Angela Ashwin, 1999, new ed. 2010, £9.99.
ISBN: 978-1-84825-052-9.

Cave - Refectory - Road: Monastic Rhythms for Contemporary Living, Ian Adams, 2010, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-028-4.

From Continuum Books:

Lectio Matters: Before the Burning Bush. Through the Revelatory Texts of Scripture, Nature and Experience, Mary Margaret Funk OSB, 2010, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-5169-8.

Sources of Transformation: Revitalising Christian Spirituality, edited by Edward Howells and Peter Tyler, 2010, £17.99.
ISBN: 978-1-4411-2575-0.

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

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