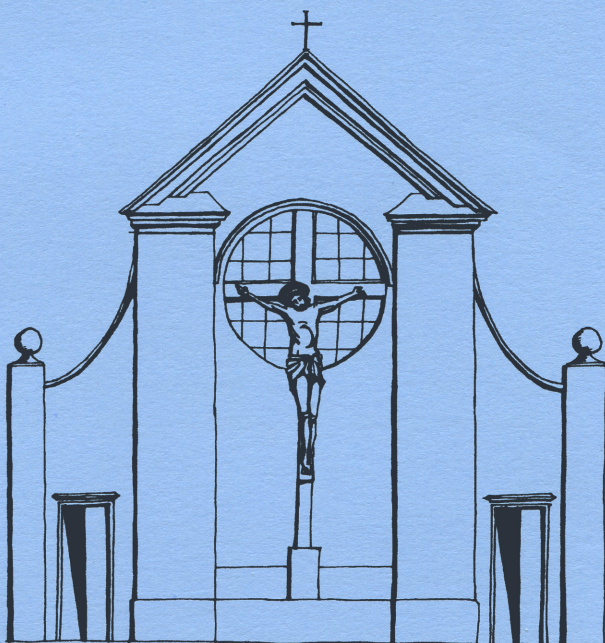


F A I R A C R E S
C H R O N I C L E



SUMMER 2011
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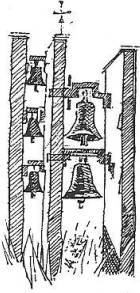
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CONTENTS

Community Notes	
<i>Sister Margaret Theresa SLG</i>	2
When the Words Run Out	
A Reflection on the Mystery of the Trinity	
<i>Andrew Teal</i>	7
Resources for a Marginal Life	
<i>Sister Christine SLG</i>	10
The Prayer Life of an Oblate Sister	
<i>Oblate Sister Joanna SLG</i>	12
My Monastery	
<i>Peter Cuthbert Stobart Obl OSB</i>	15
Arthur MacDonald Allchin (Donald Allchin) RIP	
<i>Hugh Wybrew</i>	18
<i>Sister Rosemary SLG</i>	22
<i>Fr Donald in his own words</i>	23
The Easy Yoke	
<i>Sister Barbara June SLG</i>	26
‘Now Thank We All Our God’: Gratitude	
<i>James Woodward</i>	27
The Concept of Healing	
<i>Jeremy Swayne</i>	30
‘Faith Seeking Understanding’	
Academic Spirituality Today	
<i>Sister Benedicta SLG</i>	40
Asking an Expert	
<i>Sister Rosemary SLG</i>	44
Slow Prayer	
<i>Doug Constable</i>	47
<i>In Memoriam:</i>	48
Roland Charles Walls Charles Dumont Ian Stuart Lockhart	
About Our Contributors	53
New from SLG Press	54
Books	54
<i>Sister Clare-Louise SLG</i> <i>Sister Susan SLG</i>	
<i>David Barton</i> <i>Sister Avis Mary SLG</i>	
Books Received	66

COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,



‘Summoned by Bells’ is the title of John Betjeman’s life in verse. It could also, it seems to me, describe the call to prayer at the Monastero di Bose in North Italy, where I spent a few days in May. In the United Kingdom, many Brothers and Sisters are summoned to corporate worship by one bell. At Bose, there are five bells; I am grateful to Sister Rosemary, who has also visited Bose, for the sketch of these five bells. At the monastery, one bell is used for the morning call at 5.30 a.m., two for weekday offices, and more on Sundays and feast days. The monastery is close to a small town, Magnano, and set amid beautiful countryside. The meadows were full of wild flowers and exuded a seemingly continuous chorus from the invisible crickets hidden within them. There are many ancient churches in this area, in varying states of repair. Near the monastery is a beautiful twelfth-century Romanesque church. The Community is now using a purpose-built new church, its fourth, as it has outgrown the others. As well as the Community, there are many guests who come to share in their worship. The Community consists of about forty Brothers and forty Sisters, and is ecumenical. Its members belong to the Roman Catholic, Reformed and, latterly, Orthodox Churches, and they retain the membership of their own Church when they enter the Community. They grow much of their own produce in areas near the monastery, in many polytunnels and on numerous fruit trees. They keep bees, and some members write icons and produce pottery, which, together with literary works, are for sale in their shop.

It was as part of the PIECR (Permanent International Ecumenical Consultation for Religious) that I visited this monastery. We were a very small group, but our meetings coincided with the first meeting of ARCIC 3, so there was a very ecumenical ambience surrounding us. It seems to me that ecumenism has become lukewarm in this country, and perhaps in much of the western Church. Maybe we are preoccupied with trying to survive our internal disagreements and

struggling to witness in an increasingly aggressive secular age; or perhaps the ‘novelty’ of meeting with and worshipping with Christians of other backgrounds has worn off. Our SLG Rule says that

the Community ... bears witness to the Divine will for unity. For this reason the Sisters shall have the visible unity of Christ’s Church as a central theme of their prayer and offering.¹

The Rule of the Community at Bose describes ecumenism as a ‘daily task’. In the fourth Gospel, St John records Jesus saying:

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.²

Jesus’ command is for all Christians. One person who had heeded this command throughout his life is the late Canon Allchin, known to the Community and many of his friends as Fr Donald, who died in December 2010. He was Warden of the Community for 27 years, and I think that part of his legacy to us was a breadth of vision and calling which came about not only through his personal prayer and study, but also through the variety of his contacts. He was not only aware of how much Christians of different traditions shared, but also of how much they could learn from each other, and the potential for mutual enrichment; he was always alert to ‘the Divine will for unity’. He encouraged and enabled us to meet some of his ecumenical contacts—and sometimes they appeared at our front door without any warning, having been ‘sent’ by him. Many *Fairacres Chronicle* readers will have met him either in person or through his books or through his articles in this periodical. A number of us were able to attend the funeral here in Oxford, and we include the notes from which Sister Rosemary spoke at the funeral. There is also a sermon given by Hugh Wybrew at a Requiem for Fr Donald celebrated here at Fairacres, together with a few extracts from Fr Donald’s own writings.

Two Sisters attended an ecumenical conference in Germany in June, and there will be more about that in the Winter edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*. This year, we have had three Roman Catholic

¹ SLG Rule, chapter on ‘The Aim of the Community’.

² John 17: 22-24.

Sisters living with us: one has been here mainly to be alongside us for five months, and has also engaged in some study of Islam and Judaism; another has been studying at the University for two terms, and a third is here to learn English at a Summer school. All three Sisters have contributed to our life in different ways. We are grateful for their time with us and for a particular experience of ecumenism.

I mentioned the death of Fr Donald; three of the Community's Companions have also died. Melva Finney had been a Companion for 50 years, Joan Wood for just over 40 years; another, Audrey Day, nearly four years. We thank God for their companionship in its widest terms, and pray that they may rest in peace and rise in glory.

News of Oblate Sisters to share is that two have made Life Promises this year, Jennifer of the Indwelling Christ on 21 January and Kathlyn Joan of the Ascension on that Feast on 2 June. Preparations for our Oblate Sisters' Chapter are underway and we expect 21 to be with us in August for the day. We include in this issue two articles by Oblates: one by our Oblate Sister Joanna and another by Peter Cuthbert OSB, an Oblate of Rostrevor Benedictine monastery in Northern Ireland. Sister Christine, the SLG Oblate Guardian, has contributed a talk, 'Living on the Margins', which she gave to the Oblate Sisters during their week here in March. This theme ('Living on the Margins') is something which the Oblate Sisters will be discussing at their Chapter Day in August. The SLG form of association which has most members is the Fellowship of the Love of God. Sister Alison is engaged in updating our Fellowship records, and you may hear from her shortly, if you have not already done so. Bishop Peter Walker, a member of the Fellowship since 1958, died in December 2010. We give thanks for his long friendship with the Community, which began when he was a curate at St Mary's Church, Hemel Hempstead.

As part of our Lenten exercises this year, each Sister was asked to keep a 'Gratitude Journal'. The format was to write down three things for which you were grateful at the end of each day. Sometimes more than three things rushed to one's mind; on other days, it was difficult to find three items—but many of us found it a very illuminating exercise. Often it is relatively easy to bring petitions and intercessions before God, but gratitude can sometimes

be overlooked, and it is good to have Jim Woodward's article, 'Now Thank We All Our God', in this edition.

There is a general appreciation today that there is a strong connection between physical and 'inner' wellbeing, and if we are able to acknowledge our need for healing, that is a great step toward wholeness. This necessitates humility to acknowledge that we are in need of help, and our Lord does not ignore our request. At Tuesday Terce we have a verse from Jeremiah:

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.³

We are all, it seems to me, in frequent, perhaps constant, need of healing, and we are glad to include Jeremy Swayne's article, 'The Concept of Healing', in this *Chronicle*.

Each year the Community has three weeks of corporate retreat, and often one of them is a conducted retreat. This year we are grateful for the addresses given by Fr Martin Laird OSA and for the time he has also been able to spend with individual Sisters. Last year, one Sister attended a weekend which he led in Oxford; others had read his book *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*,⁴ and we are very grateful that he was able to join us for a week. Bother Curtis SSJE led our retreat last year, and our latest publication, *The Gift of Joy*, is the concluding sermon of that retreat (more details on p. 54). We consider ourselves very blessed in having the opportunity for whole weeks of retreat, something which we know is not possible for many people. If it is not possible to stay somewhere specifically set aside for retreat, it may be possible to set aside some time within your own home. For computer users, some communities (Anglican and Roman Catholic) include retreat material and spiritual reading on their websites.

This issue includes two sermons given in the Chapel at Fairacres, one by our Warden, Andrew Teal, on the Trinity and the other by Sister Barbara June entitled 'The Easy Yoke'. We are grateful to all our contributors for their articles in this edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

³ Jer. 17: 14.

⁴ Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006.

2011 marks the centenary of the Community's move to Fairacres. We began in a terraced house in Leopold Street and then moved to a larger property, 349 Cowley Road, where a little chapel was built in the back garden. But soon after its completion, it was necessary to look for another property, with a garden and an enclosure. Our Community records contain this written account:

In May 1911, the Sister Superior and Senior Novice, who with Sister Clara, met our Father Founder [Fr Hollings SSJE] and the owner here [Fairacres]. How well we remember that morning. We returned to Cowley Road like the spies from the land of Canaan; but it was all very undecided at first and we do not remember anyone being very excited about it. ... The Father Founder was away at the date of our departure from Cowley Road, but the day before we left Father Congreve SSJE came and refreshed us by reading an Address. ... The next morning the Sister Superior and Sacristan drove off early with the sacred things. The others stayed behind to finish—the hardest part—and arrived in the evening.

We are marking the centenary with a gathering for our near neighbours in early August. Thanks be to God for all that has been, all that is, and all that will be, for we can say with the Psalmist:

The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage.⁵

With all good wishes,

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

The Community is planning to install a lift in the main part of the Convent (St Mary's) in 2012, which means that we may need to use some of the guest accommodation for Sisters.

From after Easter 2012 for just over three months, our space for guests will, therefore, be very restricted, and at times we may be unable to take guests. We are sorry to have to limit what we can offer to those who appreciate staying with us.

⁵ Ps. 16: 7 (Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England).

WHEN THE WORDS RUN OUT

*A REFLECTION ON THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY*¹

ANDREW TEAL

WE ARE confronted by the impossibility of ever doing God justice by talking about him. We ask too much of language when we expect it to carry this profoundest mystery of all:

... words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place.²

For how can we speak about the God who is both high and deep, beyond us yet within, encompassing all that has been, and is, and is yet to come? Only the one who before time was begotten by the Father, and the one whom He breathed forth can do that:

I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.³

I can barely comprehend the mystery of another human being, my own self even, let alone the mystery of God. Even when God discloses himself:

For one like me
God will never be plain and
out there, but dark rather
and inexplicable.⁴

Perhaps there is nothing we can say. 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'⁵ On this holy ground, we must be silent.

¹ Extracts from a sermon preached at Fairacres on Trinity Sunday, 30 May 2010.

² *Collected Poems 1909-62*, T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*: Burnt Norton V, Faber & Faber, p. 194.

³ Prov. 8: 27-31.

⁴ 'Pilgrimages', *Later Poems 1972-82*, R. S. Thomas, MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 1983, p. 26.

The contemplative's vocation is to be able with trust to be still and silent rather than full of bluster and rattle. To be happier to praise God than to debate or argue about him; to be people, that is, who are not afraid of the demands of silence, who are as ready to be as to do, who are at home not only with earthquake, wind and fire but also with the still, small voice. Religion, if it is anything, is about the practice of the presence of God, about discovering and discerning the signs of that presence in all life. It is about exploration and awareness, about finding meanings and making connections, about celebrating what is yet to be in the face of what already is. To do that, we need to learn afresh every day how to be quiet, become more present and attentive to life, see what is there, and love what we find. That is what the contemplatives and mystics down the centuries have always understood. They teach us that when the words run out we become open to God in a new way, because he is nearer to us than our own souls. In a Church so often obsessed with acquiring a mission-shaped physique, that is so often busy, hectic and loud, I believe people are looking to you, in your enclosed life here, for that sense of peaceful reflection to help guide and give purpose to the wider Church and world: to be a pool of grateful, loving awareness where ordinary men and women can reconnect with the gift that is in them to know the mystery of God.

But those who are most practised in contemplative ways of prayer tell us that we cannot stop there. The Religious Society of Friends, for instance, whose worship is a weekly celebration of the sacrament of silence, has been more active in politics and social concern than most of us! Contemplation and prayer is not passivity. It is about what we can be, indeed must be, if we are to live as Christians. In the Trinity, we see a pattern of relationship that speaks of how we are to be towards others and towards the world. The three-ness of Trinity means community, a society of persons moving constantly out towards one another in self-giving, living and being in that perfect oneness we call by the name of love.

Love, as the New Testament understands it, is not so much a matter of passion as of the will. 'If you love me you will keep my

⁵ 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen': Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Proposition 7.

commandments.’ We are called to the life of active love: love for our neighbours and community, love for our nation and for the world and the whole creation. There is no other way of being a Christian, no other path than this, if we are to be a part of the divine energy of God’s Trinitarian life. Contemplation and action belong together. In this Community, activities and stillness are often felt to be in tension, but they are as indivisible as loving God and loving my neighbour, as indivisible as the love of Father for the Son which is the Spirit. The more we practise God’s presence, the more we find ourselves caring about justice and peace, not as issues, as external things, but because they are central to the nature of the God whom we worship. We hold all things in prayer, so that those who look to us for their stability and perspective can pray in their suffering and action.

‘What matters for prayer is what we do next’, said Alan Ecclestone, that great parish priest and theologian of Sheffield’s urban east end, where I learnt more than I thought I’d ever need to know of what being a priest is—and whose words and spirituality were passed on by the lay people of his parish to new priests with great devotion. ‘What matters for prayer is what we do next.’ The paradox is that the more we immerse ourselves in the quest for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, the more we need to be rooted in scripture, sacrament and silence. That’s because the healing of the world is God’s mission, God’s quest, not my job or your work. What matters for action is what we do next. Prayer, reflection, the examined life, begins and completes the circle.

Faith isn’t an anaesthetic or perfect preparation for all that life has in store. We couldn’t bear that; it would remove us from the very place where we should be—in the world with fear and trembling, open to not knowing, but ready to trust. This Trinity of Love—the high and hidden one, who is beyond all words and images, the creator of the world and the holy one of Israel—is in our midst, present to us forever as grace and truth. This is God, the mighty and eternal, who calls worlds into being and loves us into life. This is God the compassionate and merciful, who bears on his heart for all time the sorrow and pain of the world. This is the God—Holy Holy Holy—who is enthroned in majesty, who answers the longings of the ages and shows us his glory.

RESOURCES FOR A MARGINAL LIFE

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

An edited extract from a talk given by Sister Christine to the Oblate Sisters at Fairacres on 2 March 2011.

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.¹

A quick look at a thesaurus yields the following synonyms for 'margin': border, edge, frontier, verge, brink, boundary, fringe, outline, outskirts, threshold, limits. Being on the margin, being marginal: it is painful not to be part of the crowd, the main centre of activity, even the centre of attention by an audience or an individual. That is something to which those trying to live a contemplative life of prayer grow accustomed, especially as that prayer life grows.

We are called more and more into the fiery furnace of God's love which is also a consuming jealousy, for he desires our total attention. If we give ourselves to that love we will have a constant work to simplify our lives, and our relationships to others. But if we remember that the sacrifice of Christ was 'outside the camp', we have a place to stand, the uncomfortable and agonising foot of the Cross.

Our individual lives will be marginal if we stay with Christ in his death and dying. We will be called to perceive the forces that work to dismantle the good work of Jesus's reconciliation of humanity with God. They will manifest themselves in difficult situations in our families, in our own or our friends' lives, in our workplaces, in power struggles in our parishes, or just the ordinary give and take of worshipping the same God with other people, some of whom we may not like very much or with whom we have little in

¹ Heb. 13: 11-16.

common. We shall also become more and more aware, in a way that goes beyond having listened to the daily news bulletins, of the distorted power that rules so many countries and the lives of ordinary people. On the whole we are not called to participate directly in changing circumstances, just to be with Christ, holding the misery to him for healing. However, there are times when we will agree with Bishop Tutu: ‘How could anyone really think that true reconciliation could avoid a proper confrontation?’² To know the difference between simply praying with the misery and confronting others requires much discernment and trust in the Holy Spirit.

Amma Syncletica, one of the early wise women of the desert tradition, put it well when she said:

In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God, and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek (as it is said: ‘Our God is a consuming fire’ Heb. 12: 24); so we also must kindle the fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.³

‘Hard work’ in this context means the cultivation of the disposition towards, and ascesis of, prayer.

Mother Mary Clare has much to say about the witness of contemplatives; here is an extract from her 1961 retreat, ‘The Oblate Vocation’:

By their silent witness the contemplatives speak to the world and more directly to the Church of the things of God. They speak as Christ speaks through them—‘Be ye reconciled to God.’ They live in Christ, not to be drawn out of the world, but that through the wholeness of their surrender to him, his prayer and his love should pass out into the world and through his Church to draw and reconcile, to heal, to reform, to reintegrate, to put love in where love is not. The contemplative is not taken out of, nor is in some way above, ordinary church life, but is the bearer about in the body of the death of Jesus that the life of Jesus may be manifested.

² *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu, Rider, 2000.

³ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward SLG, Mowbray, 1975, Syncletica 1.

But margins are also good places to live. Think of the variety of plants and wildlife that inhabit the verges of highways and paths. Think of how borders can enhance the centre of a page of writing, a picture, a piece of needlework, furniture, architecture, etc. Think of medieval illuminated manuscripts where the borders of pages are inhabited by a huge variety of imaginative illustrations. Think of proofs with corrections covering the margins which will be incorporated into the main text; of things you have written or read where you have scribbled notes in the margins to remind you of what you have reflected upon; of being in a quiet byway of life where you can think, read, pray, paint, sew, throw pots, or do something else equally creative. It is by deliberately settling oneself on a margin of society that the creative work of reconciliation happens in ourselves and in those around us.

Mother Mary Clare very often likened the Oblate Sisters to lighthouses, which stand on the edge of land throwing out a beam of light at regular intervals to guide those in danger away from rocks and dangerous currents. It is a good image, though I suspect you often feel there is very little that is beam-like in your prayer or lives. However, it is true that contemplatives, those who give their lives specifically to contemplative prayer in intercession for the world and the Church, do shed light in the darkness of so many lives. People turn to you for help, knowing you will not brush them off without good reason; or will tell you that they have a sense of peace when they are with you; or that they know they can trust you. This praise usually feels like a burden, but carries with it a joy that you sense is not the same as pride. God's work is being done in and through you, though you are the last to be aware of this.

THE PRAYER LIFE OF AN OBLATE SISTER

OBLATE SISTER JOANNA SLG

I AM AN Oblate Sister of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God. This article explains what an Oblate Sister is and how being one has shaped my life. Many people are not aware of the fact that there are a number of religious communities in the Anglican Church, both in this country and abroad. They vary greatly in their ethos, but

most carry out some work such as teaching or nursing. This work, by necessity, has to come first and prayer fitted in when there is time. For some communities, however, prayer is the main work. These communities are usually enclosed, which means that the Sisters only leave the enclosure for essential matters.

The Community with which I have been associated for over 30 years is an enclosed Community, and therefore its main work is prayer. Oblate Sisters don't live in the convent. They continue their ordinary work and live at home, following a Rule of Life based on that of the Sisters, but adapted to their particular situation. Whatever they do, they must have sufficient time for prayer. Prayer comes first, so everything else, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc., has to be fitted in around it. When visiting the convent, Oblate Sisters live within the enclosure and follow the same rule and timetable as the Sisters.

All Christians are called to be vigilant in prayer and to glorify God for the good of others. Enclosed religious are separated not from the world, but for the world. Such convents are centres of spiritual power to which people can come for refreshment and guidance.

The Eucharist, which is the supreme act of Christian worship, is celebrated every day. Other services, called the 'Divine Office', take place at intervals in chapel starting with Matins at 6.00 a.m. and finishing with Compline at 8.00 p.m. These services are known as the Divine Office because they include much Holy Scripture and because they offer worship to God as a regular duty, as well as a privilege. In addition to the prayer which takes place in Chapel, the Sisters spend 2½ to 3 hours daily in prayer and spiritual reading.

It is important to remember that neither contemplative prayer nor the contemplative life is for itself. Intercession is implicit in every moment of the day: at the Eucharist, the Divine Office, other times of prayer and in the activities of daily life, all is offered on behalf of all people. A notice board outside the Chapel is used for requests for prayer and to give details of world news. St John of the Cross sums up the truth of the intercessor:

Such is the fervour and power of the love of God that those of whom God takes possession can never again be limited by their own souls and be contented with them. Rather it seems a small

thing to go to heaven alone, therefore they strive to bring many to heaven with them. This arises from the great love they have for their God and this is the fruit of perfect prayer and contemplation.

I have mentioned various kinds of prayer, both public and personal. All prayer is the growth of a personal relationship with God and can take various forms. A Christian sees the task of prayer as the realisation of our union with God our Father through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Just as my Rule of Life is based on that of the Sisters, so my prayer is based on what I have learnt from them. It consists of a loving attention to God and a listening to him, the only words being a repetition of a mantra or word prayer such as ‘come, Lord Jesus’, which helps to guard against distractions. This lasts 20-30 minutes, morning and evening.

To give time to pray is vital if we are seriously seeking God. We are made up of body, mind and spirit. Most people take care of the mind and body by developing the brain through learning and the body by a sensible diet and exercise. But the spiritual part of life is often starved or even ignored altogether.

We can only learn to pray by praying. If we want to begin, we can do so with confidence because—and here I am going to quote St John of the Cross again:

If the soul is seeking God, much more is God seeking the soul.
God loves all people. He has no favourites and is anxious to make our acquaintance.

Like learning to play the piano, we shall not be competent in a day, or a week, or even a year. God does not look for our expertise, but for our love and desire to know him. We show this by persevering in our prayer in love and by giving our time as generously as we can. It may seem as though nothing is happening, but gradually it will begin to change our lives: not only by the way we relate to other people, but above all in an ever-deepening relationship with God, who is our very life; the creative, sustaining environment in which we live, move and have our being. It leads eventually to a peace and joy no words can describe.

This article originated in a talk given to a parish group.

MY MONASTERY

PETER CUTHBERT STOBART

Oblate of Holy Cross Monastery, Rostrevor

A FEW years ago, when I began exploring the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and the Oblate life, I made my first enquiries at Alton Abbey in Hampshire. At the time I was an Anglican. (I have since become a Roman Catholic.) Alton seemed a logical place to start with, it being near London. Following an exploratory visit and conversations at Alton Abbey, it was suggested that I go away and pray and reflect; if I still felt the draw to the Oblate life after six months or so, then I should enquire further.

Shortly after my visit to Alton in early 2007, I shared this with my dear friend Sister Anna. She responded by urging me to contact the Benedictines at Holy Cross Monastery in Rostrevor, County Down, explaining about their ecumenical outreach and their work relating to peace and reconciliation. This struck a chord with me straight away. Since 2002 I had been praying daily for Northern Ireland, for its people, its hurts, the cessation of violence, and I was involved in grass-roots peace initiatives through the Cornerstone Community in Belfast. Whilst keeping my options open regarding Alton Abbey, I arranged to spend a day at Rostrevor when next visiting Belfast.

I went to Rostrevor with a completely open mind and with no expectations. Apart from attending the Offices and Mass, I spent the rest of the time in the grounds or in the church; I wanted to be completely open to the Holy Spirit. In the afternoon there was a heavy downpour, so I was in the church for some time. I just sat in silence, waiting on the Lord. Eventually I knew that Holy Cross, Rostrevor was the right place; this was where I should make enquiries concerning Oblation. There was no dramatic revelation from the Lord, no booming voice or bright light, just a gentle awareness that it was the right place.

When I left the church I returned to the guest lounge and noticed a folder containing a short history of the Monastery. As I

read it some of the words of the Monastery's Foundation Decree resonated with me:

Our particular mission is to contribute to reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in a land marked by reciprocal violence and stained by the blood of Christian brothers and sisters.

Given my involvement in Northern Ireland already, being at Holy Cross was surely through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For various reasons it was a few months before I wrote to the Superior at Holy Cross and in the meantime I had arranged a further visit to Alton Abbey. On my second visit to Alton arrangements were made for me to meet the Oblate Master. As much as the Holy Spirit can prompt us to speech or action, I believe that in this case the Holy Spirit stopped me saying something. Our meeting lasted a long time, yet at no stage did I mention Rostrevor. Towards the end of our session Brother Andrew (now Father Andrew) said that Alton Abbey was not the place for me; had I ever heard of Holy Cross Monastery in Northern Ireland? At first I just smiled, which he took as being a 'yes'. He went on to say that in view of my involvement with peace and reconciliation and my praying daily for Northern Ireland, he felt the place where I should pursue Oblation enquiries was Rostrevor, and that I went there with his blessing.

I first stayed at Rostrevor in October 2007 and following further visits I began my Oblate Novitiate in February 2008. During my Novitiate I discovered that Sister Anna and Father Mark-Ephrem Nolan OSB, Superior of Holy Cross, were almost lifelong friends, having been neighbours in Belfast when Sister Anna was working there and Father Mark-Ephrem was in his teens.

My Final Oblation was made on 4 June 2009. The timescale from initial enquiry to Final Oblation in my case was quite short, but this was clearly God's Plan. For each of us who are called to be Oblates, the journey will be different, whether in seeking and finding the right monastery, or the length of time the whole process takes. As with any part of our journey through life with Our Lord, it takes as long as it takes. As God's children we are each individuals and unique; no two journeys are, or ever will be, the same.

Deo volente, I will be moving to Belfast before the end of this year. I have come to care for and love the island of Ireland and its

people (especially Northern Ireland) over the years. As my journey has unfolded over these years the Lord has been nudging me, calling me to my adopted homeland.

In the last year my erstwhile Spiritual Director and two friends who are Religious, one in England and the other in Belfast, told me that my future would be one of prayer for Northern Ireland based in Belfast. Indeed, I would be bold enough to say my Spiritual Director was prophetic, as there was no ‘maybe’, ‘if’ or ‘perhaps’; she said, ‘You will move to Belfast and spend the rest of your days there in prayer; that is what you will do for the Lord.’ As to the timing, I knew I had to continue to wait on the Lord and listen with the ear of my heart.

Our Lord works in strange ways at times. I was in Belfast in early April this year, just for the weekend, and was waiting in the departure lounge to fly back to Heathrow when I heard the news of the horrific death of a young policeman, Ronan Kerr, in Omagh. On hearing this news, I was devastated and anguished. I did not want to return to London, I wanted to be united in prayer and share in the grief of Ronan’s family and friends; such is the heart the Lord has given me for Ulster and its people.

I believe that was a watershed; I know now that, if I am to be obedient to Our Lord, when I retire in August I am to move to Belfast before the year’s end. There I will spend the rest of my days in prayer. I shall not be able to visit Fairacres so often; it has always been important to me ever since visiting my aunt Sister Teresa Mary when I was a small child.

I’d like to say to anyone enquiring or considering Oblation: be open to the Holy Spirit’s Guidance at all times. As in my case, you may not end up where you expect to. Most important of all, on your journey, ‘Listen ... with the ear of your heart.’¹

¹ Rule of Saint Benedict, Prologue, verse 1.

ARTHUR MACDONALD ALLCHIN (1930-2010)

(DONALD ALLCHIN)

R I P

HUGH WYBREW

*An appreciation given at the Requiem Mass
at Fairacres on 3 January 2011*

DONALD ALLCHIN died on 23 December 2010; and with his death, the Church of England and the whole Church of Christ has lost a dedicated priest and theologian. The sermon to be preached at his funeral on 12 January will no doubt include a full appreciation of his life and ministry: the preacher, Archbishop Rowan Williams, has known Donald well ever since he supervised Rowan's doctoral thesis on one of the outstanding Russian Orthodox theologians of the Paris school, Vladimir Lossky. It was not the only thesis Donald supervised, for he was an excellent scholar, very widely read. But since not all of you will be able to attend the Requiem in St Mary Magdalen's church, it seemed good that something should be said at this Requiem. For, as older Sisters will be aware, Fr Donald had a long and fruitful relationship with this Community.

I don't know whether he came to the convent when he was an undergraduate at Christ Church and an ordinand at Cuddesdon in the early fifties. But in 1960, after a four-year curacy at St Mary Abbots in Kensington, he returned to Oxford as a Priest Librarian at Pusey House and was there for nine years. He had a good deal of contact with the Community in those years, since he was deeply interested in the monastic life. One of his books, *The Silent Rebellion*, was devoted to the revival of the religious life in the Church of England in the 19th century. He had, of course, a very intimate relationship with Fairacres during his years as Warden (1967-95), in the course of which he greatly broadened the spiritual horizon of the Community. Donald was interested in many aspects

of Christian spirituality. He studied and wrote about the Danish Lutheran theologian Grundtvig; he wrote with H. A. Hodges *Rapture of Praise*, an Anglican evaluation of the hymns of John and Charles Wesley; he studied the writings of the Welsh poet and hymnographer, Ann Griffiths; and he was steeped in the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic spiritual traditions. Another of his books is *God's Presence makes the World: The Celtic Vision through the Centuries in Wales*. He had close relations with the Cistercians, and was a close friend of André Louf, a former Abbot of Mont des Cats in France, where he once spent some months. Thomas Merton was another of his Roman Catholic friends. Donald as Warden encouraged the Community to study these varied traditions and learn from them.

One of Donald's gifts was the ability to detect hints of Eastern Orthodoxy in sometimes unlikely places; and it was perhaps Orthodox Christianity which was his chief interest. One of his Orthodox friendships began early in his life. As a prefect at Westminster School, he had to supervise younger boys' prep; among the boys in his charge was one Timothy Ware, four years his junior. Fr Donald and Bishop Kallistos, as he became, were to be life-long friends. Donald also had a close friendship with the distinguished Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, who twice visited Fairacres. Donald encouraged links between the Community and the Romanian Orthodox Church, and for some years there were regular exchanges between Sisters here, of whom one was Sister Eileen Mary, and Sisters from Romania. One of his books, *The Kingdom of Love and Knowledge*, was devoted to the encounter between Orthodoxy and the West. It was dedicated to Vladimir Lossky, another Orthodox friend. He was a life-long member of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, and for many years editor of its journal, *Sobornost*.

Within the monastic life, Donald had a particular interest in the hermit life. He encouraged the Community's founding of Bede House, with its provision of accommodation for hermits, and was enthusiastic about the revival of the eremitical life by members of this Community on the Lleyn Peninsular in North Wales. These were all initiatives taken when Mother Mary Clare was Reverend Mother, and she and Fr Donald worked closely together.

In 1973 Donald was appointed Canon Librarian at Canterbury Cathedral, and his connection with Fairacres was inevitably more distanced. In the same year he was appointed by Archbishop Michael Ramsey as a member of the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions. The commission's inaugural meeting took place here in Oxford, and for the next few years Donald made a valuable contribution to its work. Among the papers he wrote was 'Anglican Comprehensiveness', a notion totally incomprehensible to the Orthodox, but one which Donald could expound clearly and with conviction. He was a committed Anglican, at the same time convinced that spiritual riches were to be found in other traditions. He was a dedicated ecumenist, too, firmly believing that the different Christian traditions should be open to learning from one another. He felt at home with the Orthodox, and could enter into fruitful conversation with them precisely because he knew so much about their tradition.

Donald was not altogether at home at Canterbury. He was not a natural administrator, nor did he care particularly for the cathedral's civic role. Cathedrals these days are complex organisations, the running of which demands much time and energy. Chapter meetings did not attract him; and he was notorious for not answering correspondence. The reason became clear when he acquired a secretary. Sylvia Freck had retired to Canterbury after many years working as a secretary in the Council for Foreign Relations at Lambeth. She went to live in some almshouses just outside the Close. On her first visit to Donald's house she found that the guest room bed was covered with the letters of many months, some opened, some not, while others were lying in heaps in the smaller rooms of the canonical residence. It took her months to reduce Donald's epistolary chaos to some sort of order.

Donald was much more at home in Canterbury Road, Oxford, when in 1987 he became the first Warden of the St Theosevia Centre for Christian Spirituality. Until he retired in 1994, he arranged meetings and speakers at the Centre on a variety of topics, and found himself among people who shared his interests and enthusiasms. Donald was always enthusiastic about his interests, and he had the ability to enthuse others in their pursuits.

In 1994 Donald retired to his beloved Wales, and was made an Honorary Professor of the University of North Wales in Bangor. There he had time to pursue his Welsh interests. He was quite often in Oxford, among other things for meetings of the Trustees of the St Theosevia Centre, until two or three years ago, declining health made travel less easy. He would have liked to move back to Oxford, but a house in Bangor will not buy one in Oxford, and he settled for Woodstock, north of Oxford. Donald had never acquired the arts of cooking and of keeping house, and so he continued to be looked after by Ciaran, a former Franciscan. When he became unwell and needed more care than Ciaran could give, Donald went into the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, until a suitable home could be found. There he caught an infection which he was too weak to resist.

Fr Donald made a tremendous contribution to this Community, the religious life in the Church of England, and relations between Anglicans and Orthodox and other traditions. As well as being Warden of this Community, he was also Warden of the Society of the Sacred Cross at Tymawr for many years. He had a great gift for theological synthesis, and for making friendships with those of similar mind in other churches. There is much for which to give thanks in his life and work; and as we do so, we pray that he may enter more fully beyond death into that ecumenical communion of saints which was so important for him during his life.

Very many friends gathered in the Church of St Mary Magdalen in Oxford for the Requiem Mass and funeral on 12 January 2011. The celebrant was the Parish Priest, Fr Peter Groves. Archbishop Rowan Williams preached, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware gave a tribute and, with members of an Orthodox choir, led prayers at the conclusion of the Mass. Sister Margaret Theresa and several other Sisters and Oblate Sisters were in the congregation. Sister Rosemary made a brief contribution on behalf of the Community before the final committal.

SISTER ROSEMARY SLG

FR DONALD was our Warden for 27 years, and then Warden Emeritus. During the intercessions at Mass he would pray for the Sisters of the Love of God ‘wherever they may be’, and we would wonder... And we could apply the same phrase to him, praying for Fr Donald ‘wherever he may be’, whether in Canterbury, Denmark, Wales, or America. He used sometimes to say that his relationship to SLG provided a thread of continuity through the changes in his life; and he gave something of the same to us.

By way of tribute, at this stage I want simply to say that he was a good man. You only had to watch him censing the altar during the Eucharist to see that he was a man of God; God was the heart and centre of his life.

A necessarily hidden but treasured part of his life was his ministry to solitaries, and his understanding of the hermit life. And one of his enduring enthusiasms was for Julian of Norwich, whom he recognized as a great theologian significant for our times. So, having remembered Donald as we have known him, and entrusted him to God as God knows and loves him, let us allow Julian’s words to speak to us:

And I saw quite certainly in this and in everything that God loved us before he made us; and his love has never diminished and never shall. And all his works were done in this love; and in this love he made everything for our profit; and in this love our life is everlasting. We had our beginning when we were made; but the love in which he made us was in him since before time began; and in this love we have our beginning. And all this shall be seen in God without end, which may Jesus grant us. Amen.¹

When Mother Jane died, Fr Donald said to us that when a good person dies, there is a special out-pouring of grace for those who remain. May that be so for all of us now.

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich, trans. Elizabeth Spearing, Long Text 86, p. 179, Penguin Classics, 1998.

FR DONALD IN HIS OWN WORDS

The opening paragraphs of Fr Donald's Introduction to his book, The Dynamic of Tradition,¹ summarize some of the subjects nearest to his heart and to which he constantly returned.

This is a book which is concerned with the question of unity, and specifically with the question of the unity of Christendom. The subject, however, is not envisaged primarily in terms of Church structures or disputed doctrines, though those things are not wholly ignored, but in terms of a unity of faith and experience, a continuity of prayer and life through the centuries, a vision of the wholeness and coherence of things. The unity of the Church is considered here insofar as the Church is seen as a sign and sacrament of the unity of mankind, and of the reconciliation of man with God, his neighbour and himself. 'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold': W. B. Yeats' words must be amongst the most frequently quoted of our century. That fact itself witnesses to the powerful sense of disintegration which afflicts our society. In this book we try to see a little of what would be implied by the Christian affirmation that all things finally hold together in one.

In particular the book is concerned more with the question of unity in time than in space, with what the poet and painter David Jones has called 'the inward continuities' which link apparently divided centuries. Like T. S. Eliot, David Jones was one who saw clearly the necessity of tradition for the work of the writer or the artist. In another field, one of the greatest Eastern Orthodox theologians of our time, Fr George Florovsky, stressed the same point. He was in the habit of speaking of the need for 'an ecumenism in time', a serious exchange, an active encounter between the Church of today and the Church of former ages. That is what we seek to explore in these pages; the possibility of emerging from the parochialism of our own period, and the

¹ *The Dynamic of Tradition*, A. M. Allchin, Darton Longman and Todd, 1981, Introduction pp. 1-2.

liberty which comes from being able to live alongside men and women of other epochs and other civilizations than our own.

At the heart of this process of tradition, there stands the practice of prayer in its many forms, hidden and personal, public and corporate, spontaneous and ecstatic, ordered and ceremonial. All of them provide ways by which the past is linked with the present and the present opened to the future, because all of them bring the world of time into touch with the world of eternity. In all of them the idea of *anamnesis* is to be found, the memory of God and memory of what God has done.

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From: a talk to the Community at a 'Conference on the Love of God', Fairacres, January 2001

Faced with this runaway world, can we find the principles to guide us on our way forward, principles to help us in living our life now? We can look for a way of life which is *rooted* in what has been given; which is *answerable* to the world around us in its perplexity, in its pain and in its promise; a way of life which is *expectant* of the future. And looking to the future with confidence, particularly when we feel least confident, particularly when we are aware of the extremity, the incapacity, of the human, finding there the moment when God reveals himself. We have lived through a time when I think many of the most profoundly Christian people have in fact experienced this world as an impossible world. [He had been speaking to us about Fr Dumitru Stăniloae in communist Romania.] 'God bless this mess'—someone like Sister Jane, and like Bishop Robert Runcie, have experienced very much the absence of God, the silence of God, and they've longed, as it were, for God to reveal himself as more present, more apparently present. One thinks too of a poet like R. S. Thomas, but I think what made his poems so extraordinarily helpful to so many surprising people, is that he has faced that and stayed with it, even sometimes enjoyed breaking up the pious ways people have of speaking about God. But he has done

that in order that God can speak again. It seems as though we are living in that kind of rather extreme time, and I think we have to lift up our heads because our redemption is much nearer than we expected.

Some words of counsel showing Fr Donald's characteristic generosity of mind:

There are many different ways of loving.

No one person can give us all we need in the spiritual life, but we can receive many different gifts from many different people [and traditions].

In our generation, it is not that the classic stages of the spiritual journey (e.g. purgation, illumination and union) are absent, but that they do not necessarily occur in that order.

See our website for publications by Canon A. M. Allchin available from SLG Press.

OUR NEW WEBSITE

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It contains much information about SLG Press and the Community. It is now possible to purchase our publications and to take out subscriptions to the *Fairacres Chronicle* online. There is also some free content available.

THE EASY YOKE

SISTER BARBARA JUNE SLG

‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’¹

‘My yoke is easy’, Jesus tells us, ‘and my burden is light’. The disciples—and we with them—become used to the invitation to take up a personal cross and ‘come, follow me’; but here, Jesus says, ‘Come to me and shoulder *my* yoke’: shared yoke-bearing.

It is the yoke, and the drawing power of this invitation, that the architect of our chapel at Fairacres, Paul Waterhouse, chose to set before our eyes in the Latin inscription he placed above the door leading into the visitors’ chapel. He wanted it to record the date of its completion and dedication (1923), and in Latin, letters can stand for numbers. The first two sentences are an insight into our vocation:

Suave iugum Christi.

This first sentence means: ‘Sweet is the yoke of Christ’. And there is a reminder in the next sentence that we shoulder his easy yoke in Fair (sweet) acres:

Sunt suava iugera nobis.

The Latin word for ‘acres’, *iugera*, comes from the estimated area that a yoke of oxen could plough in a day; more than an acre, in fact:

Sweet is the yoke of Christ
and fair are our acres.

But the yoke isn’t a cosy shawl or cape. Those who heard Jesus speaking would have associated it at a human level with *subjugation*—Latin: *sub* (under) *iugum* (the yoke)—and with *submission*, being forced to stoop into bondage as a defeated captive. The Latin for making someone into a slave is *sub iugum mittere* (to send beneath the yoke). Yoke-bearing and yoke-sharing symbolize both the constriction and the liberation of obedience. The Shakers knew bending and bowing to one another is a way of dancing our glad, costly mutual submission. One of their danced hymns ends:

I will bow, this is the token / I will wear the easy yoke. . . .

¹ Matt. 11: 29-30.

‘NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD’

GRATITUDE

JAMES WOODWARD

‘THE TROUBLE with you is that you are never grateful’, was the heartfelt challenge from a mother to her child, overheard by us all in a coffee shop in Windsor. As I looked out of the window, I wondered how I might have responded to the accusation. Am I grateful?

Gratitude, thankfulness, or appreciation is an acknowledgement of a benefit that we have received or will receive. We express it when we receive help, such as time listening to our concerns. We express it when others show that they care. We see it when people go out of their way to demonstrate kindness, perhaps by looking after our children when we need some time.

If the Christian life is understood as a journey, then we need some essentials in our backpack that both assist us on our way and keep us in touch with the heart of Christian living. Gratitude is an essential. The nurturing of gratitude supports the discovery of God in and through the ordinary experiences of our lives. This is a presence to be discovered when life is monotonous as well as exciting. It is a discovery for both the Church and the communities where we live.

In all of our worship, we find space to thank God for the sheer wonder of creation and the love given to us in Jesus. We are a grateful people, sustained by God, and this gratitude permeates our prayers and teachings.¹ God gave us a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have we used one of them to say ‘thank you’? Gratitude can defend against isolation, pride and greed, opening us to interconnectedness, humility and fulfilment.

God is working the salvation of the world through us. It is our job, and gratitude is part of what we need for the task. For every material blessing we have received, for the gift of talent or health or home or a kind spirit, for the good news of the love of God in Jesus

¹ Ps. 92: 1-2; Col. 3: 15-17.

Christ—whatever it is, we were given that blessing in order that we might use it to bless others. It is the basic lesson that we learned in school: share. One toy willingly shared creates community: one toy hoarded creates tears and tantrums.

In Christian gratitude, we know God to be the selfless giver of all good things. Our common bond is one of indebtedness. Christian gratitude is a virtue that shapes our emotions and thoughts, and also our actions. Gratitude can make us happier and wiser Christians.

Here are five areas that provide some starting points for the nurture of more thankful, and therefore more gracious, living.

First, give thanks for material goodness. This might mean saying a prayer (aloud or silently) before meals. Our lives depend on the richness of God's bounty and the host of people who grew, processed, distributed, prepared and served our food. In this physical nourishment, we delight in the source of all life.

This goodness is reflected in the wonder of creation. I remember stepping out of a car in north-east Scotland to take a closer look at the most incredible rainbow I have ever seen. It was bursting with vivid colour. In moments such as these, we can feel deeply connected to the goodness of our earth. Open your eyes, and be ready for delight.

Second, give thanks for your relationships. Our community of faith is an important part of the influence that people and places have had on our journey of faith. Remember those people who started us on our adventure of discipleship, or the person who stayed with us when the going was tough. God has done much for us through these people: the time and care taken by the priest over a funeral; the children's leader who helps make faith real and fun; the preacher who gave us a word at the right time; the choir that carried us deeper with its music.

We all receive many acts of kindness. We should continue to express our thanks for the people closest to us, our families and friends, and even our pets. These people and the things we share are a gift from God. Sometimes it is easy to overlook the blessings that we share with others, especially when we are preoccupied with the imperfections of love and our daily capacity to make mistakes. Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present

and not giving it. This does not mean that we should evade the complexities of living; we can give thanks for our relationships, and we know love to be always good, even when it is entwined with our fallen-ness.

Third, we live generously when we express our gratitude. We could try saying thank you to more people this weekend. Look at the person, and express your gratitude to the shop assistant, the postman, but especially to the people with whom you work.

Thank-you notes can become a way of practising gratitude: of putting into words the truth of our belonging to one another. As we write our thanks, we can be weaned away from the myths of entitlement and the arrogance and isolation of independence. Think about the small things that have made a difference, and express your thanks.

Fourth, give thanks when things go wrong. Of course, if you are reading this thinking that your life is a mess, or you feel that things have gone wrong, or you are in emotional or physical pain, then giving thanks is perhaps furthest away from your thoughts. But, however unfortunate these times are, they are part of the complete picture of life. There is often something new to learn, a habit or attitude to change. We can see the kindness of those who listen and care in a more appreciative light. At these times, we know ourselves to be fragile and dependent. Dependence is not the dirty word we have sometimes made of it, but merely the pattern and the plain truth about life, especially when it is difficult.

Fifth, always end the day with a positive thought. Perhaps grateful people can sleep better because they cultivate a perspective that is not infected by negativity.

Gratitude is deeply relational, which is why developing this virtue protects us from a sense of creeping isolation. These steps can suggest to us that we all have something to be grateful for. There may well be a lot going wrong in our lives, but practising gratitude can help us to celebrate the worth of receiving life and love. It can nurture in us a feeling of deep connectedness. We can create a more fulfilling life by seeing what we already have. When we look carefully, and acknowledge what we do have, we may find more than we expected.

We do this because it reminds us that God is God, and because it is our responsibility to thank God for the good things that he has given us. It is also good for us. It helps us to refocus our minds which are often fixated on what we want or need. It also reminds us of the good things that are already happening, and of the wonderful ways in which God already showers love and goodness on us. Give thanks for a little, and you will find a lot.

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THE CONCEPT OF HEALING

JEREMY SWAYNE

This is a revised version of a paper presented at a conference on The Ethics and Spirituality of Health, under the patronage of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers in Rome in October 2009.

Introduction

THE CONCEPT of healing has preoccupied me throughout my career as a doctor, and the opportunity to explore it here was particularly welcome. The first distinctive characteristic of this conference was its insistence that health and healing are attributes of men and women as spiritual beings. The second was that it addressed issues raised by the relationship between mainstream Western medicine and the practice of traditional and complementary medicine. Both schools were well represented amongst speakers and audience, for many participants had experience and expertise in more than one field.

Traffic in truth

Those who are conventionally trained in medicine and science, but have studied, reflected upon or practised either traditional medicine or contemporary complementary medicine, work on both sides of an unfortunate intellectual and metaphysical divide. They represent two frequently, but quite unnecessarily, competing paradigms or ‘mind sets’—ways of thinking about the world. One is the reductionist and mechanistic paradigm of modern science that has produced the biomedical model with its welcome power to control disease processes and body functions. The other, usually described as the ‘holistic’ paradigm, emphasises the subtle interplay of the many dimensions of human nature and experience in determining individual well-being and predisposing to illness. And it recognises the importance of using subtle means to stimulate healing and self-regulating processes within body, mind and spirit.

In fact these two paradigms are entirely compatible. The holistic perspective is common to all healthcare practitioners who really care about their patients, whatever the biomedical focus of their treatment. It is no more the prerogative of one medical discipline than another. But the biomedical model and its reductionist perspective dominate Western medical thinking and practice, and often leave little time and space to pay due attention to the holistic perspective.

Those who do have a foot in both camps are engaged in what physicist and priest John Polkinghorne calls a ‘traffic in truth’ across the border between the two; a border that, as in the relationship between science and theology which he describes, is artificial and unnecessarily divisive.¹

Healing, theology and science

A proper understanding of the concept of healing is so important precisely because it occupies the common ground between science and theology. For example, healing provides a connecting thread throughout the story of evolution. Regardless of other attributes that have equipped it to compete successfully and to establish itself, no

¹ *Traffic in Truth: Exchanges between Science and Theology*, J. Polkinghorne, Canterbury Press, 2000.

organism would have survived without the capacity to resist and to recover from the hostile influence of its environment and its competitors, and from disorder within itself. Preserving health, whether by protective and prophylactic means or by healing processes, is an evolutionary imperative.

But this imperative, this instinct, present from the first emergence of life, is also seen in a deeper response to what some would regard as our ultimate evolutionary goal, that of becoming completely realised human beings.²

For many years I have been dealing mostly with chronic and complex health problems, and it has been apparent that, whatever the presenting problem and its physical and psychological components, there may often be an element of the story that has something to do with the person's spiritual life. It may be to do with experience of religion (often, sadly, bad experience); or with some unsatisfied sense of God-consciousness; or with some lack of meaning or value that has to do with more than worldly needs; or with some sense of unfulfilled potential that I would call vocation, and which I find to be inseparable, at least in some small degree, from that sense of God-consciousness.

I have come to recognise this striving for integrity and wholeness as an inherent instinct, which is comparable to the body's instinct for self-regulation and repair in the face of physical damage and disease. And I have come to recognise that these mechanisms and this instinct have common characteristics at whatever level of our being they operate—in body, mind or soul.

The biological perspective provided by science, and the holistic perspective to which theology contributes, are inseparable from the concept of healing. We are compelled to seek an integrative understanding of human nature in sickness and in health, one which embraces both the perspective of medical science and the holistic perspective that makes room for the instinctive God-consciousness essential to our well-being.

² Jeremy Swayne, 'The Healing Instinct: Functionality, integrity and relationship—holistic principles in evolution', in *Theology, Evolution and the Mind*, ed. N. Spurway, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp. 206-12.

Characteristics of the Healing Process

General principles of healing

What is this ‘healing’, so essential to our survival, and to the full realisation of our human potential? Its most essential characteristic is that *it is creative, and not just remedial*. What this means will become clearer soon, but first some general principles that govern the healing process as I understand it. These are: that it is *fundamentally similar at whatever level of our being it operates*; that *healing cannot be achieved without some degree of suffering*; and that it involves us in *changing attitudes and new responsibilities*.

Common features of the healing process

That *the healing process is fundamentally similar at whatever level of our being it operates* can be seen in that all healing involves, in some fashion, these elements, exemplified in wound healing. It requires that our body ‘understands’ what has happened; that it recognises and responds to the effects of trauma. It requires conditions conducive *to* healing: that the edges of the wound are brought together, that the wound is kept clean, and so on. It requires that the physiological resources of immunity to infection and tissue repair are effectively mobilised. There will be new growth of tissue, which may even be stronger than the original. And if the damage is sufficient, it will require ‘reconciliation’, some adjustment to compensate for any loss of function. These principles can readily be extended to the healing of psychological and spiritual wounds.

Healing involves suffering

The second proposition is that *healing involves some degree of suffering*. Suffering is not only the consequence of illness and trauma, but inherent in the healing process. This truth is vividly expressed in Christian theology in the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus. But it is represented in a more mundane fashion in one of the most basic healing processes in the body, the inflammatory reaction. This is not an enjoyable experience, but we cannot do without it, and we are increasingly aware of the disadvantages of suppressing the discomforts with anti-inflammatory drugs. Pain, another normal physiological and emotional reaction, is a stimulus to change. Understanding the source of the pain, responding to it and working through it is part of the healing process.

Reconciliation and change

The third proposition is that *healing always involves reconciliation and change*. At a physical level, this may involve a change in relationship of one part of the body to another—one part taking additional ‘responsibility’ for another, the function of which is impaired. And it is likely to affect, and to require us to adjust, the way we regard our body, our appearance, our physical abilities.

More broadly, any illness, injury or disability affects our relationships with others, and with ourselves, whether temporarily or in the longer term, through the limitations it imposes on our activities and prospects. Illness affects other people’s responsibilities towards us, and ours towards them. The responsibility of others towards us, including society’s responsibility to its sick and disabled, is for compassion and care. The responsibility of the sick person, subject to any absolute limitations, is to get well, because only when we are as well and as fully ourselves as possible, can we fulfil our potential to contribute to the well-being of others. True healing will require some reappraisal of our own life, but it can never be a self-centred process. These too are precepts that have their theological counterpart; for example, in Jesus’s expectations of and admonitions to the people who found healing through him; and in St Paul’s account of the interdependence of the many parts of the ‘body’ of Christ.

Paradox in illness and healing

There are aspects of illness and healing that appear paradoxical. One such is *the role of illness as the agent of healing*. It is best exemplified in the development of immunity: a child’s exposure to infection is necessary to the development of a mature immune system. In other words, we need challenge, and the discomfort that challenge may produce, in order to be fit and well, to develop as a well-integrated whole. Mental and emotional illness, a ‘nervous breakdown’, is often an essential prelude to the development of new psychological insights and strengths, and the healing of old wounds; the breaking down, a necessary condition of rebuilding and new growth.

Another paradox is that, *rather than suffering from an illness, we are often suffering from a ‘wellness’*. The pain caused by a physical

injury is the response of a healthy nervous system to trauma. The pain of rejection, abuse, the denial of love and of self-worth, is the healthy response of our wounded humanity; the denial of some quality of life fundamental to the fulfilment of our unique potential as a person, and that we know, perhaps subliminally, we need. The eventual consequences of suffering may be psychological illness. But the *experience* of suffering affirms our unique personhood.

A third paradox is that *healing does not necessarily involve cure, and cure does not necessarily involve healing*. Indeed, the pursuit of cure may allow destructive influences that produced the disorder to persist. And within the constraints of an incurable illness, an individual may achieve the personal and spiritual growth, the integration and reconciliation that amount to healing in the fullest sense.

The goal of healing

What is the goal of these healing processes? It is suggested by the assertion that healing is not just remedial, but creative. There is always something to be learned from the circumstances of even a minor injury; about the clumsiness, carelessness, mischance or risk that induced it. As persons, we learn from the experience, we hope. As a body we may develop better coordination or sensory skills, or some other adaptive physiological process. All the characteristics of healing that I have described will be in some small measure a creative experience. Depending on what we make of them, they can help us to become a better integrated person, in our selves and in our relationship with others. They can help to make us whole.

The goal of healing is wholeness.

The Meaning of ‘Wholeness’

What then is this ‘wholeness’, which is the goal of the healing process?

Vocation and wholeness

It is the fulfilment, as far as is possible in our lifetime, of the unique potential of each individual; becoming the person we have it in us to be, whatever our fixed limitations. It is *the fulfilment of our unique vocation*. It has to do with what Carl Jung called ‘individuation’. It

has to do with integrity, in the sense both of structural integrity and of truthfulness. It is what Jesus meant by finding or gaining our true self. It has to do with integration, the bringing together into a balanced and interactive whole of all our faculties, attributes and characteristics, physical, emotional and intellectual, psychic and spiritual. The concept of *integrative* medicine represents medicine's responsibility to serve this balanced and interactive whole: integrative of the individual in themselves; integrative of the individual in their relationship with others; and integrative of those involved in their care into a compassionate and effective community of care.

Wholeness and perfection

As all this implies, *wholeness does not mean perfection*. Indeed the pursuit of perfection may only be achieved at the cost of our true humanity, our capacity for wholeness. The wonderful thing about becoming a whole, well-integrated person is that flaws and imperfections, the vulnerable, disordered and ugly parts, are transcended by the value of the whole.

Some hard questions

These propositions beg some hard questions. For example, why do I associate vocation with wholeness and healing? And how do they apply to the life of someone seriously disabled mentally and/or physically? Someone whose fixed limitations are severe?

Healing, wholeness and vocation

Why do I associate vocation with wholeness and healing? I have already affirmed that just as our bodies have an instinct towards self-regulation and self-healing, so, *we as persons have an instinct towards self-fulfilment*; as unique individuals, and as individuals with a unique place and value in the scheme of things, the bigger picture. We have an instinct for wholeness, inseparable from a sense of vocation that is not restricted to certain careers or professions, but an instinct that we all possess to be fully ourselves, however hidden that instinct may be.

Living our lives in the search for wholeness is like doing a jig-saw puzzle; an attempt to make the picture that is truly 'me'. But, unlike most jig-saw puzzles, we do not have a picture on the lid to tell us what that 'me' should look like. What we do have is a set of

pictures provided by other people—our parents, our peers, our teachers, our society and culture, our religion perhaps—that tell us what they think we should be. These pictures may be seductive or persuasive, or simply taken for granted, but the chances are that they will be, at least in some respects, wrong, and sometimes completely wrong. And ironically, sometimes tragically, even the positive attributes that earn us admiration and success may distort the true picture.

As we live our lives it is inevitable that in an attempt to build one of the misleading pictures, the puzzle becomes distorted; like an ordinary jigsaw that begins to buckle when pieces are forced into the wrong position. This can happen in our own lives when the picture we are building becomes too distorted a version of the picture it is meant to be. The only guide we have is our instinct to wholeness, the vocation to be uniquely ourselves. This is actually inviolable; it never dies. It belongs to the part of our being that we call the soul. If it is too severely denied by the life we live, the picture will break down. The disorder in our soul will be reflected in disorder of body, or mind, or in our relationships and conduct towards others. If we are able to, or are helped to, recognise what is happening and to respond to it, the process of rebuilding can begin. Thus illness becomes the agent of healing.

The jigsaw analogy also illustrates the principle that each one of us is part of a greater whole, a bigger picture, from which we derive value and meaning. However nondescript we think we are, or appear to be, we are a unique and indispensable part of this bigger picture. And within that picture, relationship is the key: each piece is valid only in correct relationship to its neighbours, as well as to the picture as a whole.

Healing and disability

Another question concerns people so severely affected by disease, disability or adversity that any prospect of greater wholeness and self-fulfilment seems denied them. No brief comment can do justice to this, but I will offer the following observations.

No piece in this jigsaw of life is without its unique quality, and its value to the whole. And none of us is without imperfection that plays some part in the working-out of our own vocation. Every

person, however diminished or restricted in their personal attributes, gives meaning to the lives of others who are in relationship with them. These may be family, friends, carers or fellow sufferers; or the wider community whose compassionate and ethical qualities will be defined by the way it values and provides for its most damaged, disadvantaged and dependent members.

Every person, however apparently lacking in self-awareness or the ability to express themselves, or to determine the course of their lives, has at some level a degree of self-knowledge and personal integrity. This will be affirmed and be able to grow in relation to the respect and love shown to them by others. And the healing and integrative process made possible in even the most disordered lives, is healing and integrative not just for the individual but for the community of which they are a part.

Jesus's love and respect for the sick, the disabled, the disadvantaged and the outcast is our model. His transforming and healing power did not confer some magical new status on the individual, but tended towards evoking the individual's potential for wholeness and fulfilment as a unique person.

The Structure of Wholeness

The one dimension of wholeness that we seldom discuss is the soul. I do not believe that medicine and the healing professions will ever be able to do full justice to people's need for healing and health care until they recognise and understand the soul as the core of our being; and understand that illness can involve, and even arise in, the soul. And I believe the Church has much to do to achieve greater clarity in its own understanding of the soul, and its ability to articulate that understanding, to contribute to this process.

The soul has been described as 'the information-bearing essence' that expresses our unique identity as a person.³ For me it is best understood as comprising psyche and spirit. But a difficulty arises from the various uses of the word 'psyche'. The Greek word *psyche* has entered the English language and acquired a life of its own, to accommodate the concepts of modern psychology, but also

³ *Theology in the Context of Science*, J. Polkinghorne, SPCK, 2008, p. 104.

to refer to the phenomena that are commonly described as psychic. The psychic dimension of our nature has been called ‘the intermediate dimension’;⁴ intermediate between mind and spirit, embracing unconscious elements of our personality, and the collective unconscious described by Jung. It includes those attributes that are described as extrasensory or paranormal. We all possess some psychic sensitivity and some psychic attributes, to a greater or lesser degree. The psychic dimension is a normal aspect of human nature and of the world we inhabit. Its moral and spiritual value, as with all human attributes, depends upon the use we make of them. It helps to form, and is formed by, our personality. We are all susceptible, to a greater or lesser degree, to psychic influences, which can affect our body functions and our personality.

It is on this level of psychic rapport, in addition to our emotional empathy and our psychological insight, that any of us may develop a healing relationship with another person, whether within a professional health care relationship or in everyday life—as Jesus did, supremely. Our psychic nature could be described as the matrix of the soul, that aspect of the soul in which our spiritual identity is formed. This ‘soul-making’ comes about through the imprint and working out of our life experience, and by the presence in the core of our being of the Spirit, the divine essence. The Spirit’s action within us, and our response to that action, are essential to the fulfilment of our spiritual vocation. It is through the intermediate dimension of the psyche that prayer is effective in promoting healing, by the agency of the Spirit, usually in the absence of any overt psychic gifts in those who pray.

In short, I would say that the ‘structure’ of our personal wholeness is the interactive, interpenetrating and interdependent relationship of body, mind and soul, infused by the Spirit of God, in whom we live and move and have our being, and in whom we have unique value in relation to one another and to the ‘bigger picture’ of creation as a whole. It will not often be the case that in our healing relationships we need to address the state of another person’s soul. We may not be equipped to do so anyway. But awareness of our limitations does not preclude awareness of the possibility of such a

⁴ *The Intermediate Dimension*, Martin Israel, The Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, 1970.

need in the other, nor a willingness to be open to it, to be accepting of it, and seek the discernment that is needed and that we perhaps cannot provide.

Conclusion

I have tried to articulate my understanding of human nature in its wholeness and of its unique expression in each one of us; and my understanding of the healing process that helps us to achieve that wholeness, whether at the level of our shared biological identity or of our unique and deeply personal human vocation. And I have described the approach to health care that must underpin it if medicine is to reclaim and justify the healing vocation that should be at its heart, but from which I fear it has become divorced. A proper understanding of the concept of healing is essential, not only to the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of us all, but to the fulfilment of our human destiny, and to the well-being of the whole creation.

‘FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING’ ACADEMIC SPIRITUALITY TODAY

SISTER BENEDICTA SLG

SINCE 1997 the University of Oxford has had a ‘Reader in the History of Christian Spirituality’, and long before that the theology faculty introduced a Final Honours School paper in Christian Spirituality, a tough paper depending on detailed reading of texts. I note that there are other papers springing up with a slightly different approach to this subject, which suggests an increasing interest in it. I would like to consider one of the terms under which they are all offered, ‘spirituality,’ and its place in the academic world, by referring to a very great thinker, theologian and philosopher, Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), who was also fundamental in the history of spirituality, far beyond his own times.

At once there are problems in even getting beyond the word ‘spirituality’: what is ‘spirituality?’ It is not a word Anselm would

have recognized, nor indeed a medieval word at all. Its earlier use in the plural, ‘spiritualities’, referred to spiritual jurisdiction as opposed to temporal jurisdiction; the ‘Lords Spiritual’ as opposed (and how often literally opposed!) to the ‘Lords Temporal’. *Spiritualité* has, of course, undergone a later transformation and in its French form there is a very good chance that *un spirituel* will be someone who is witty, lively, mad or even drunk. I suspect these are not the official uses of the word we have in mind today.

There is another use of the word ‘spirituality’ nowadays, which I regard with caution, since it seems vaguely gnostic, in which it refers to the non-material aspect of things, as in the ‘spirituality of the motor bike’, the ‘spirituality of progress,’ ‘the spirituality of electronics’: a passive use of the phrase, referring, I hope, to human reaction to these objects. This is popular enough to have engendered a shelf-ful of books in Blackwell’s Bookshop, maybe because it seems to promise a less ruthless intellectual content and a more exciting emotional ethos. A more active use of the phrase is current in ‘the spirituality of culture’, and this is closer to the use I want to make of the term. To see the prayers and desires and aspirations of human beings within their cultural context can be extremely illuminating for the historian, both for the shaping of their social setting and also for understanding the individuals concerned. With regard to Anselm, even this is not enough; neither emotion alone nor social exploration was what he had as his motive in either prayers or theology.

I seem to be suggesting that we apply the method of Humpty Dumpty—‘when I use a word it means what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less’—when I combine the modern use of the word ‘spirituality’ (which is perhaps closer to ‘mentality’) with another meaning given to it in the nineteenth century when it was coined. It was used then to describe a field of study earlier called ascetic theology, and/or mystical prayer. By ‘spirituality’, then, I mean what people have thought and said and done and prayed in the light of the Spirit of God. It seems to me that Anselm would recognize this approach.

The supreme example of this interplay between prayer and thought can be found in two places in Anselm’s works: first, in his third meditation, ‘On Human Redemption’, which is a summary, in

the form of a prayer, of his *Cur Deus Homo*. Here, his keen arguments about the manner of the Atonement become a demonstration of the redeeming act of God in Christ, a personal encounter with what had been defined: ‘Consider the strength of your salvation, and where it is found; meditate upon it, delight in the contemplation of it, taste the goodness of your redeemer, be on fire with love for your redeemer.’ The intimate absorbing of what he understands about the Atonement—‘taste’ is the word he uses, and elsewhere, ‘chew’, ‘suck’, ‘bite’, ‘swallow’—leads Anselm directly into prayers of adoration, of repentance, of thanksgiving and of petition, followed by a prayer of commitment to Christ: ‘Draw me to you Lord in the fullness of love, I am wholly yours by creation, make me all yours, too, in love.’ For Anselm the mind had to be stretched to its limits to have a true apprehension of God in a dynamic of devotion.

It is enough to mention this meditation to show that in Anselm there was no divorce between theology and prayer, between faith and understanding. Secondly, the real test-case for this point of view is the *Proslogion*. It seems to me that here Anselm proves himself to be pre-eminently a Christian scholar, using his mind rigorously to its limit in the search for God which is prayer. It would be wrong to ignore the structure of the *Proslogion*, or to suppose the prayers it contains are mere pious appendages to an otherwise sensible work. Anselm says himself that he wrote it in order to share his own joy in discovering this demonstration of what he believed about God. He wrote it ‘for someone trying to raise his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes’. It is faith in search of understanding, not a series of logical propositions which issue in a previously unknown conclusion. ‘God is that than which nothing greater can be thought’ is the basis from which the whole writing proceeds, not the end-term of its arguments. Using credal, scriptural, and dogmatic texts, as well as secular and rational concepts, Anselm expresses something that he, as a creature of God, has apprehended about his maker. The very apprehension of this is a confrontation with God, since it is true, which further draws him into deeper understanding.

This way of looking at the *Proslogion* is obviously far from the ordinary modern way of thinking, in which we believe that a

statement is the end product of our thoughts and no more. Anselm's concept of truth and reality is involved here, and for him truth was an objective reality. In the *De Veritate*, he suggests two levels of truth—something which exists in the mind has a certain reality; if it corresponds to what is outside the mind, it has quite a different kind of reality. In the *Monologion*, he adds that both these realities subsist in the highest degree of reality which is the mind of God. The *Proslogion* argument shows simply that God exists in intellect and reality, and cannot be thought to exist in any other way, which is unique. In both the Atonement theology of *Cur Deus Homo* and here in the so-called ontological argument of the *Proslogion*, Anselm was not concerned to 'prove' anything in a modern sense. He knew beforehand that, in the one case, God has redeemed mankind by the death of Christ on the cross; and in the other, that God exists and that certain statements are possible about Him. He sets out to show what it means to make such statements, and by the effort to understand, to assimilate what is already known. He is treating the doctrine of Atonement, and the *Proslogion* argument which he meant especially for the unbeliever, as ways to be in touch with the reality that they represent in order to be changed by it.

Today we not only have a thriving spirituality industry in the Theology Faculty of the University of Oxford, but maybe quite soon we shall expand further into a paper on the spirituality of other religions. Like Anselm, we have made spirituality into serious academic study, demanding not less but more strict application of academic discipline. I think this indicates a recognition of a method inherent in all theology subjects. In a word, we are exploring in all the subjects we teach some level of ascetic theology. Our thinking has to be open-ended towards God whatever forms we are concerned with. We must be rigorous about method in all subjects, knowing that there is more to it than the surface text we use. We do this not only within the Faculty, but also the University; and we do a disservice to the whole academic enterprise if we do not affirm this inner principle. Spirituality is not just another subject; it is at the centre of all we study.

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ASKING AN EXPERT

SISTER ROSEMARY SLG

SOMETIMES the readings at the Eucharist surprise us by putting side by side passages, or people, who do not have an obvious connection. In such cases we have to struggle a bit.

Having agreed to ‘give a word’ at the Eucharist on the Feast of St John of the Cross, I was dismayed to find that the appointed gospel passage was the Parable of the Sower, which brought to my mind Van Gogh’s painting of the Sower, but not a single association with St John of the Cross. Stumped and lacking inspiration, I turned to John himself—after all, he is something of an expert on parables. He used parables often, most famously the ‘parable’ of the dark night, and the ‘parable’ of the ascent of Mount Carmel, and he added volumes of detailed interpretation. Furthermore, to read St John of the Cross is to read Scripture through his eyes and under his guidance. I began to feel hopeful that he could help me, and excited too as one verse in particular began to stand out:

*And he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable?
Then how will you understand all the parables?’¹*

Taking St John of the Cross as my teacher, I asked, What is it that we just don’t get? And how can we understand?

The answer to the second question was a poet’s answer, for John is a consummate poet and well understands how imagery works. He knows how different pictures complement and contradict one another, how their contradiction can challenge us to understand in a new way. In the poems of the Dark Night, the Living Flame and the Spiritual Canticle his whole concern is to release us into direct insight, into that leap of faith which is the foundation of real understanding. Hence,

My Beloved is the mountains,
And lonely wooded valleys,

¹ Mark 4: 13.

Strange islands,
And resounding rivers,
The whistling of love-stirring breezes
The tranquil night
At the time of the rising dawn,
Silent music,
Sounding solitude,
The supper that refreshes, and deepens love.

Yet, at the same time as heaping up images, John insists upon their limitation when it comes to representing God and the action of God. He is as ruthless as anyone in the Christian tradition about this, for it is fundamental in purifying the mind and heart from idolatry. One of his favourite scriptural quotations is given as the first reading at the Eucharist on his feast day: ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived ... God has prepared for those who love him ...’² He goes so far as to say that ‘however impressive may be one’s knowledge or feeling of God, that knowledge or feeling will have no resemblance to God and amount to very little’.³ And this is *good* news! Our very failure to understand, and, crucially, our realization that we do not understand, contributes to the life of faith and hope and love. It opens us to God himself effecting a revelation within us where the Holy Spirit searches everything and finds there, *within us*, the depths of God.

Most of us will be able to understand something of the Parable of the Sower because we know from experience what it is like to be sometimes stony ground, to be scorched earth, to be thorn-choked and, sometimes at the very same time, to be good soil in which the life of God has taken root. John has something to say about this; he says that becoming attached to riches is like being snared and wounded by thorns;⁴ and he says that by becoming attached to joy we make it very difficult for ourselves to persevere when joy is withdrawn and times are hard.⁵ This much we can understand.

But what is it that we just don’t get? We never can grasp the full extent of God’s extraordinary love. It is just too much for us to

² I Cor 2: 9.

³ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, 4: 3.

⁴ *ibid.*, III, 18: 1.

⁵ *ibid.*, III, 29: 2.

comprehend! God is like a crazy farmer who broadcasts seed indiscriminately over every sort of ground. Such is his gift in Jesus Christ that John cries out:

Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God Himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me.⁶

John is the Doctor of Divine Love and there are two short sayings of his which I think are key to that. They come in the collection of maxims and counsels which were remembered and treasured by those to whom he gave spiritual direction:

All for me and nothing for you.⁷

All for you and nothing for me.⁸

For years I was puzzled by them. In daily life, ‘all for me and nothing for you’ is an all too familiar song in my greedy heart, so how *could* St John of the Cross possibly be recommending it? But what if what we are being given here is a glimpse of John’s own prayer and relationship to God? It makes perfect sense if we imagine him kneeling before the crucifix, looking at the Lord. St John of the Cross sees that this is the ultimate act of love and, as he gazes at him, exclaims, ‘All for me and nothing for you!’ Then whispers in response, from his heart, ‘All for you and nothing for me.’

⁶ *Prayer of a Soul taken with Love.*

⁷ 31.

⁸ 32.

SLOW PRAYER

DOUG CONSTABLE

I like to go
to where I know
time passes slow
days ebb and flow

where flowers abound
on sloping ground
birds chirrup around
winds chime their sound

ivy spreads there
apples swell fair
mellow the air
riches laid bare

hill-woods in view
swift river too
sheep graze in dew
rich misty hue

east meeting west
where angels nest
souls seeking rest
prayerful the quest

Love shelters me
and lets me be
sets all things free
breathes heavenly

Written for his granddaughter's ninth birthday, describing being in 'the Garden Room'.

IN MEMORIAM

ROLAND CHARLES WALLS

7 June 1917 – 7 April 2011

FATHER ROLAND WALLS could tell a good story. They were genuinely funny and he enjoyed his favourite anecdotes as much as the hearer, laughing uproariously at the absurdity of life as he met it. No one could long escape the tale of how he began the ecumenical Community of the Transfiguration at Roslin when he was asked in 1962 by the Bishop of Edinburgh, Ken Carey to take charge of Rosslyn Chapel—now made famous by Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. Wondering whether he should accept the request, he wrestled with the problem on a train journey. Going north as he headed south, was a coal train with a sign on one of the cars, ‘Return Empty to Scotland’. For him this was a sign from God and the answer both to his own anguished prayer and the reply he should give the Bishop. He did indeed begin the ministry there empty, only sure that he was called to the religious life in some form. Out of this emptiness came the Community of the Transfiguration, a small body of monks and nuns who committed themselves to living as simply and as closely to the Gospel teaching of Jesus as they could.

Roland first came into my ken when Mother Mary Clare, Sister Marjorie and Sister Rachel Mary drove to Scotland in 1972 to meet with Community associates and the few Episcopalian religious communities in Scotland. They visited Roslin and returned with tales of the spartan garden sheds in which the Brothers lived, their army-blanket habits, their simple life and unadorned chapel. Mother Mary Clare had known Roland from the time he was a Cambridge don in the 1950’s; there he was known for his radical interpretation of the New Testament and his suspicion of the more Establishment manifestations of Anglicanism. She encouraged us to support with our prayers and interest this new venture in which he was now fully engaged. Over the next few years Roland, John Halsey and Patty Burgess, the permanent members of the Community, visited Fairacres dressed in their rough, grey wool habits. When Sister

Rachel Mary was in charge at Boxmoor, they would include a visit to her as well. I remember a long, hot summer afternoon there in 1980, spent in leisurely conversation with Patty, when a little of the vision that bound them together communicated itself to me. It was heady stuff to a young Canadian nun, still very puzzled by the Established Church of England. There really was another way to live the gospel!

In 1978 and 1979 Roland was invited to give us talks during our pre-Advent retreat weeks, the first series on sacramental theology, and the second on relating rule to law and gospel. The latter was published later as *Law and Gospel* (FP077), and has been out of print for many years; but four talks that he gave as ‘Thought for the Day’ in 1975 have remained in print as *From Loneliness to Solitude* (FP054, available from SLG Press, £1.00), now in its tenth impression.

Later in 1980 Roland visited Mother Mary Clare to lay before her his increasing sense of call to become a Roman Catholic. This had been percolating for some years, but he had at last reached a place of decision. Afterwards he spent a few days at Boxmoor and laid the matter out before the five of us living there. There was stunned silence, then, catching the seriousness of his intent, we tried to affirm his choice. When the others went to make tea, I was left alone with him. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, ‘You don’t think I’m mad to be doing this, do you?’ He meant real insanity, not doing something wild. I caught a glimpse of the depths of suffering he was experiencing and could only say I did not think so; remaining an Anglican would have produced the madness he feared. Of course, by becoming a Catholic, and eventually being ordained a Catholic priest, the eucharistic division of the two denominations was painfully present in the Community’s life. But Patty and John had counted the cost and fully supported him in his decision.

If you run a search on the Internet under ‘Roland Walls, Death’, 7,100,000 hits come up in a matter of seconds, probably not all directly relevant to Roland himself. The first two or three gave me enough material to perceive how widely he was known and how great his influence. He himself would have roared with laughter to think that modern technology has given him an eternal name, especially as his simple life did not include the Internet. He would

then have pointed out that the eternity of bits and bytes is not what life in Christ is, nor what Jesus lived and died for, nor life everlasting in the Love of God.

At his funeral in St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh, memorial cards were distributed with his final message to us all, which I quote below. The themes of his life—total dedication to the love of God as found in Jesus, and the possibility and power of Transfiguration—are ones he hoped every Christian would appropriate. He was convinced that none of us was without the capacity to do so.

TESTAMENT TO MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Whom I bless in the Threefold Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I bequeath to you my vocation which I received from God and unworthily fulfilled in this life. In His mercy He called me to shew His Love for all creatures and His Compassion on poor Man. He called me to sing the Praises of His Love, to study and to speak of His Love, in words but also through silence. He shewed me the quiet tenderness of His Love, which is Himself.

Keep therefore LOVE to be praised, shewn, and treasured in silence—bring all things, all mankind, all circumstances into the Light of that Love. Keep to the poverty of LOVE which is the secret of joy, and by which you will make many rich. So great is this calling that I leave you, that to fail in it is worth more than success in any other. Keep to Love as LOVE keeps you and still keeps my poor soul that in earthly life so often betrayed HIM whom it loved.

*May He who was transfigured by LOVE,
transfigure us all as He brings us to GLORY.*

AMEN.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

CHARLES DUMONT

26 September 1918 – 25 December 2009

IN THE LATE 1990's we were fortunate to be offered an article by Fr Charles Dumont concerning spiritual reading, which in English became *Praying the Word of God* (FP132, available from SLG Press, £2.75). It is likely that most of us who translated and prepared the paper for publication had no idea of his standing and influence in the monastic world, especially within the Cistercian Order. By then he was an elderly monk of Scourmont Abbey in Belgium.

In fact, he was renowned for his work as an educator within the Order and for his gifts of handing on the Cistercian tradition to young monks and nuns. As well as being the foremost scholar of our times on Aelred of Rivaulx, he put his wide knowledge to good use in editing the French-language journal *Collectanea Cisterciensia* for many years. Alongside these scholarly pursuits, he was a published poet. One of his books on St Bernard has been translated into English, entitled *Pathway of Peace: Cistercian Wisdom according to Saint Bernard*, and Sister Elizabeth Connor OCSO has written a biography of him, *Charles Dumont, Monk-Poet: A Spiritual Biography*.

Fr Charles Dumont entered Scourmont in June 1941 and made Solemn Vows on 16 July 1946. He died in the early hours of Christmas Day 2009.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

IAN STUART LOCKHART

9 November 1940 – 15 April 2011

FOR THE Community, the death of Ian Lockhart at the age of 70 marks a transition from our having what amounts to a traditional 'family solicitor', one who has known and cared about us and our affairs and concerns over decades, to the inescapably more pragmatic and task-based world of today. This transition began

more than five years ago, when Ian began to scale down his working activities and to move gradually into retirement. A house was purchased in Ludlow, Shropshire, the part of the world from which he came, and he and his wife Rosanna were intending to spend an increasing proportion of their time there. Then came the great blow for everyone. Ian, with his sharp legal brain and kindly, charming, courteous nature, was diagnosed with a rare, progressive, incurable disease, meaning that, mentally and socially, he was taken from us years sooner than we might have expected. He resigned his partnership at Charles Russell, Solicitors, in London, and retired with Rosanna to their new home in Ludlow.

At the funeral service, Ian Lockhart was described as ‘a modest man’, ‘an honourable man’, ‘a man of integrity’, who ‘believed in getting things right, in proper behaviour and conduct, in tradition and in quality’. The son of an Anglican parish priest, he was a practising Christian, educated at Cheam, Rugby and Clare College, Cambridge. He joined Peake & Co., Solicitors, in London, and it was some time in the early 1970s that he took on the affairs of the Community and SLG Charitable Trust Limited. In 1989, Peake & Co., where Ian was now senior partner, was merged with Charles Russell, where he remained for the rest of his working life. As well as his professional legal and charity work, he served in a voluntary capacity as trustee of a number of Christian charities.

As was observed at his funeral: ‘Private clients were the great pleasure and privilege of his professional life. He had a real, abiding interest in his clients as people. He became part of the family. A chat with a client on the phone was great fun, both for Ian and for his client. He attracted the confidence and loyalty of clients.’ Those of us in SLG who have had reason to ‘chat on the phone’ with Ian would agree with this.

We commend Ian to God, and continue our prayers for Rosanna and his wide circle of friends. Though sad that he has gone from us, we are thankful to have known him, and that he was able to accompany the Community with his skills and wisdom for so long.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREW TEAL is Warden of the Community.

OBLATE SISTER JOANNA has been an Oblate Sister of the Community since the 1970s. After working as a teacher, she now lives in retirement in North Wales.

PETER CUTHBERT STOBART Obl OSB has been in touch with Fairacres from an early age, as Sister Teresa Mary SLG (1890-1972) was one of his aunts.

HUGH WYBREW, a Priest Associate of the Community, was Vicar of St Mary Magdalen, Oxford. Since 2004 he has lived in active retirement next door to the convent at Fairacres.

JAMES WOODWARD is a Canon of Windsor and has been a Priest Associate of SLG since 1990.

JEREMY SWAYNE qualified in medicine in 1966 and was in general practice in Yeovil and the Forest of Dean. He later introduced homeopathy to his practice, and has been Dean of the Faculty of Homeopathy. Ordained in 2000, his particular interests are wholeness and healing, and the relationship between science and religion. He is a Priest Associate and a member of the Christian Healing Ministry Team in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. He is the author of various articles on homeopathy and healing, and his book *Remodelling Medicine* will be published by Saltire Books later this year.

DOUG CONSTABLE and his wife Valerie have been in touch with Fairacres for many years. Having read Esther de Waal on Celtic spirituality, they joined pilgrims to Bardsey Island in 1997, where Donald Allchin spoke to them about Welsh spirituality. This moved them to want to retire to Cymru, and they have lived in Llandeilo, as members of the Church in Wales, since 2005.

DAVID BARTON was Warden of the Community 2001-9.

NEW FROM SLG PRESS

THE GIFT OF JOY

CURTIS ALMQUIST SSJE

The theme of joy is mentioned only infrequently in the media. The author explores the question of why joy, a gift of the Spirit, appears to be such a rare commodity in our society. He offers reflections on some of the key features of joy, and encourages us to rejoice, to 'do joy'. This book has its origin in a sermon preached on 29 August 2010 in the context of a retreat given to the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God at Fairacres, Oxford.

CURTIS ALMQUIST SSJE is a member of the Society of St John the Evangelist and resides at the Society's monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA (www.ssje.org)

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BOOKS

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

Margaret Mary Funk recalls in this book that when she mentioned to someone that she was writing a book on *lectio divina*, his response was: 'Heavens, no! Not another book on *lectio divina*. What we need is someone who does it!' (p. 137). But this turns out to be not 'just another book on *lectio*', but a book that takes you into deeper levels of the various meanings and spiritual senses involved. And it is a book by someone who does it; Sister Meg has based this book around her own experience of doing sustained *lectio divina*, over a period of many months, with the Book of Jonah. Reading her book does disclose a method of doing *lectio divina*, it is true, but Sister Meg's main purpose is to take us beyond the beginning stages of learning the mechanics of the process, into an exploration of the deeper senses of the text being read.

Anyone familiar with Sister Meg's earlier books, *Tools Matter*, *Thoughts Matter* and *Humility Matters*, will know her wisdom and knowledge of the teaching of John Cassian and of other traditional practices of the spiritual life. She restates these teachings in all her books, approaching them from fresh directions and different perspectives, and building up a picture of how these spiritual practices are integral to the spiritual life. It is no surprise to find in *Lectio Matters* teachings on thoughts, the practice of the cell, the Jesus Prayer, and silence, among others, but this time seen in the context of *lectio divina*. Like the other practices, *lectio* is not an end in itself but a pathway to God, and Sister Meg sees the journey holistically, with a variety of practices supporting the person on their journey to and with God. This is one of the strengths of this book; it shows us that *lectio* is not just another method (albeit a rather popular one at the moment) but part of a network of practices supporting the growth of the believer.

This is perhaps a book which would best suit someone with some experience of *lectio* and a desire to go deeper. A newcomer to this method might do better to read an introduction to the bare bones of the practice and to try *lectio* for themselves before reading *Lectio Matters*, and to read some of Sister Meg's earlier books. More experienced readers will find much to help them in the author's description of the literal, allegorical, moral and mystical voices of the text; in her suggestions for taking their reading deeper and living it out; and in her teaching on related spiritual practices. Those who find Sister Meg's approach helpful might like to explore her webpage (www.megfunk.com) for more of her insights and teaching.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

Finding Hope and Meaning in Suffering, Trystan Owain Hughes, SPCK, 2011, £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06249-2.

The Community read *Finding Hope and Meaning in Suffering* in refectory during Lent this year. It would be a rare event for a book to receive uniform approval amongst us, but Trystan Owain Hughes provided us with both challenge and new perspectives. Writing out of his own experience of a debilitating and long-term physical condition, the author has produced a deeply thoughtful book. He demonstrates,

through the Bible and spiritual classics and through the writings of the Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl, that suffering need not be diminishing; and that, even though its arrival is outside our control, we do have a choice when it comes to our response. He suggests not that we will find God *in* the journey we take through our suffering, but that God *is* the journey (p. 5).

Using the analogy of a building, he has two initial chapters on the awareness and acceptance of suffering, which he calls ‘foundations’. These he follows with five ‘building blocks’: nature, laughter, memory, art and helping others. All these, he claims, can give us hope. It was in these chapters that Sisters sometimes disagreed with him. This in itself may indicate that response to the book depends on one’s starting point, particularly perhaps one’s concept of God. But protests do not necessarily invalidate the message; they may indicate the depth of the challenge posed.

The final chapter concerns finding meaning in existence, and his conviction that reflecting on a period of pain, bereavement or sudden loss can enable us to find meaning, not just for the suffering, but for our lives. He quotes the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer: ‘In the middle of the forest there is a glade which can only be found by someone who is lost’ (p. 98).

Threaded throughout the book is his belief that we create our own experience; that, for me, was its strongest message. His use of the Bible and Viktor Frankl’s writings, of poetry, films and literature, is an integral part of the book. For instance, when pondering isolation as a common ingredient in suffering, he quotes George Eliot writing in *Adam Bede* that ‘our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible source, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one poor word which includes our best insights and our best love’ (p. 89).

It is a short book of 111 pages, including the bibliography, but its value is not measured by its length. As one Sister said to me, ‘It doesn’t say anything new, but it needs to be said’, or perhaps better, the sum is greater than the parts. The outcome is a book with a message which one can hope to apply in the ordinary adversities of daily life, as much as in the major occasions of suffering and affliction.

SISTER SUSAN SLG

A Retreat with Thomas Merton: A Seven-day Spiritual Journey,
Esther de Waal, Canterbury Press, 2010, £12.99.

ISBN: 978-1-84825-066-6.

Sometimes when people come to Fairacres for a time of retreat we become conscious that finding the time to leave work, family and other commitments can involve considerable sacrifice. And recently, as I looked at details of retreats and retreat venues available in the helpful magazine *Retreats 2011*, I was aware that going on retreat may also involve not inconsiderable financial cost. At the same time, the idea of making a retreat, as a way of spending dedicated time with God and reaching to deeper levels of the self, is becoming more popular than ever before, due in part to the success of those television programmes where participants spend time in retreat at a monastery or convent and their journey is documented.

This third edition of a book first published in 1991 lives up to its title. The material for seven days of retreat is provided by Esther de Waal, a well-known writer on aspects of the Christian monastic tradition. It can be used to provide the content for a week of retreat, either as the input for a non-conducted retreat, or in situations where a conventional retreat is not possible for some reason. The material can also be used in other ways, such as for a weekly half-day of recollection spread over several weeks.

Esther de Waal takes Thomas Merton's spiritual teaching as her main theme and interweaves constant references to Merton and his life with familiar Merton quotations. She also provides her own helpful thoughts and reflections and includes a number of quotations from the Psalms. The end result is a carefully-prepared retreat in the company of Thomas Merton, which is greatly enhanced by a number of his own black-and-white photographs. A helpful and concise biography of Merton's works and of books about him is included.

Although Thomas Merton died more than 42 years ago, the issues with which he struggled are the same ones facing us today, such as how to give prayer its due place in our lives:

If we really want prayer, we'll have to give it time. We must slow down to a human tempo and we'll begin to have time to listen. ...
Today time is a commodity, and for each one of us time is

mortgaged ... we must approach the whole idea of time in a new way. We live in the fullness of time (p. 40).

Having given time to prayer and to following the retreat, and as we then look towards a return to our daily lives, we find these words from Esther de Waal:

How do I work out a commitment to time for silence and for prayer and a commitment to doing my job properly and my responsibilities towards the people who need me? This is a question about which Merton thought and wrote a great deal through out his life (p. 89).

As always, I have found Thomas Merton utterly compelling, and an inspiration to set out (yet again!) on a life of prayer. In the Foreword, Henri Nouwen writes of his one encounter with Merton:

He was dressed in blue jeans and a workman's shirt and talked in a very down-to-earth way about people and events that came up in the conversation. Nothing pious, nothing 'spiritual', nothing very uplifting. It really seemed that Merton did everything to make us forget that he was one of the most known and spiritual writers of his time (p. 9).

A down-to-earth man, but one whose spiritual authority shines out from his writings and particularly in those selected for this retreat. As Esther de Waal writes:

He had this great gift of going out to each of his friends in a unique way—he touched each at his or her own level, answering their need, giving them his love. And for those of us who have come to know him through his writings it is the same. At whatever point we may be on our own particular journey we find that he seems to know what that journey entails (p. 30).

I can only agree with that. This book makes me want once again to follow Merton's guidance and teaching.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics, Richard Woods, Continuum Books, 2011, £17.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-3442-4.

'Why is it that I am only now hearing so much about Eckhart?' an American professor of philosophy asked me recently. The answer lies in the odd story of Eckhart. Acclaimed as a major scholar

during his lifetime, and recognised as the one who carried forward the mantle of his teachers, Albert and Thomas Aquinas, he was condemned by a Papal Bull shortly after his death in 1329. The reasons are obscure: partly he fell victim to the rivalries between Franciscans and Dominicans at the time, and partly the ambitions of his project and his daring use of language made him vulnerable. It has to be said that the condemnation was by a Pope who was himself condemned for heresy. Nevertheless, Eckhart fell into obscurity, though his teachings were kept alive within a small band of fellow Dominicans. In the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars began work on the surviving manuscripts, and over the past 30 years a wider interest has grown. But some of that interest has itself been unusual. In the late 1950's, D. T. Suzuki, an eminent Japanese Zen philosopher and teacher, read the sermons and was startled by the many echoes of Zen spirituality that he found in them. On a lecture tour of Europe and America he found no one knew of Eckhart, until he met Thomas Merton, with whom he established a close friendship. It was perhaps by this route that Eckhart's reputation grew in what might be loosely called New Age circles. In recent years his most notable promotion has been by Eckhart Tolle. Tolle not only adopted the name: his book *The Power of Now*, a worldwide best seller, is in a direct line with Eckhart's teaching.

By comparison, the Church has been slower. Michael Walsh's three-volume translations of the sermons and writings were published in 1979. The Eckhart Society, through its meetings and through the enthusiasm of its first Chair, Ursula Fleming, has done much to open up a wider audience. With the Dominican Order, she spearheaded an effort for the exoneration of the Meister. While this has not entirely happened, the fact that Pope John Paul II quoted Eckhart in an audience in 1985 does now presume a recognition of doctrinal orthodoxy.

But despite a number of collections of excerpts from the sermons and writings, and much detailed scholarly work, there remains a gap within the general knowledge of Christian readers, a gap which this thought-provoking book may go some way towards filling. Richard Woods published his first book on Eckhart 25 years ago, and he has been immersed in Eckhart studies ever since. What he gives us here is essentially a collection of essays which are the

fruit of a lifetime of research and understanding. As well as serving as an introduction for the general reader, Wood's ability to put the sermons into the wider context of the Latin works adds a perspective which otherwise would be impossible for many to achieve.

Woods makes liberal use of quotations, especially from the sermons. And one aspect of the way the book has been put together is that the different essays and talks sometimes range around similar quotations and themes. Some of them Woods returns to several times, with the effect that the extraordinary layering of meaning that is latent in the Eckhart's texts becomes evident. It is this density of meaning that is both an attraction and a hindrance in Eckhart. The chapter on Eckhart's 'Wayless Way', something Eckhart returns to in several places, is a case in point. It is tempting to think that what Eckhart advocates here is a 'spirituality without technique' (an impression reinforced by the way we so often read Eckhart in the form of an isolated quotation). But his 'Way' is defined by the end, and the freedom we might achieve when, at last, we have sufficiently surrendered to God's will as it is inwardly revealed to us. By gathering all the material together Woods shows that, though Eckhart may not have advocated a particular methodology, and the number of steps on the pathway he proposes can often vary—three, four, six, seven and even more in the Latin works—at the heart of his teaching are the elements that have been true of the contemplative path from at least the fourth century onwards: contemplation and action, purification, illumination and unification. Woods brings out the rigour that underpins the teaching, while setting it against the vision Eckhart frequently holds before us: 'our birth into God in this life ... where seer and seen, knower and known, lover and beloved experience undifferentiated and perpetual unity'.

Eckhart constantly speaks out of an awareness of such an experience. So Wood's chapters on 'Eckhart and the World', with its reference to current environmental issues, and 'Eckhart on Suffering and Healing', are entirely appropriate, and make this important reading for those who seek to live out a contemplative life in contemporary society. The chapter on 'Eckhart and the Incarnation' is an important counterbalance to those who often seem

to want to detach Eckhart's spirituality from the Church and the Christian message.

The book ends with a tribute to Eckhart, written by a Jesuit priest in a Nazi prison shortly before he was hanged:

During the day I read a little Eckhart. His mind and soul were always soaring into higher spheres. He did his best to follow their flight in word and expression—but how can any ordinary mortal succeed in an undertaking that defied even St Paul? Eckhart failed, as in his own way, everyone must fail.

But he 'gives the reader a glimpse of the divine secret in every human heart'. He does indeed, and it is that which makes the recovery of Eckhart so important for the contemporary Church.

DAVID BARTON

| *Heart Speaks Unto Heart: Pope [Benedict XVI](#) in the [UK](#): [The Complete Sermons and Addresses](#), Dartman, Longman and Todd (via Norwich Books), 2010. Hardback [£10.99](#). [ISBN: 978-0-232-52841-1](#). Paperback [£6.99](#). [ISBN: 978-0-232-52842-8](#).*

The visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Scotland and England in September 2010 was warmly received: the mixture of strident protest on the one hand and widespread indifference on the other (something feared beforehand) did not materialize. It was a time of rejoicing in the visit of a brother Christian, the leader of a substantial proportion of the world's Christians. This was also the first time that it had been possible for the Head of State of the Vatican to make a state visit; Pope John Paul's 1982 pastoral visit had helped to prepare the way for this. Pope Benedict showed himself to be a humble and pastoral visitor, as well as an experienced diplomat, and to be sensitive to tensions accompanying his visit. At the Beatification of John Henry Newman in Birmingham, this German Pope made mention of the Second World War. He referred several times to the issue of child abuse, apologising on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church—an apology for which very many people had been waiting. Many of the undoubted irritations and differences of opinion, including the effect on ecumenical relations

of the recent setting up by Rome of the Anglican Ordinariate, were laid aside in the mutual courtesy of hospitality and in the joy of celebrating what was positive. (These other matters were not simply ignored, and they have resurfaced in the months following the visit.)

The addresses given by Pope Benedict, together with those of Her Majesty the Queen, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and the Chief Rabbi, Lord Sachs, are collected together in a handsome volume, published soon after the visit. Although months have passed, it is good to have in book form, for ongoing prayer and reflection, the words we received from Pope Benedict on British soil. It is unlikely that we shall see him here again, but through the words he spoke, he has left us with a treasury of spiritual input, comfort, support and encouragement.

He came, as he declared at Anglican Evening Prayer in Westminster Abbey, ‘as a pilgrim from Rome, to pray before the tomb of Saint Edward the Confessor and to join [us] in imploring the gift of Christian unity’, expressing the desire that ‘these moments of prayer and friendship’ should ‘confirm us in love for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour’ (p. 57). The theme which the Pope had chosen for his visit, *cor ad cor loquitur*, ‘heart speaks unto heart’, came from the motto chosen by Blessed John Henry Newman for his coat of arms on becoming a Cardinal. Newman’s motto, Pope Benedict said at the Beatification Mass, ‘gives us an insight into his understanding of the Christian life as a call to holiness, experienced as the profound desire of the human heart to enter into intimate communion with the Heart of God’; for Newman reminds us that ‘faithfulness to prayer gradually transforms us into the divine likeness’ (p. 97). During his visit, Pope Benedict himself showed us something of this.

As a matter of urgent concern and as a theme of the visit, he attempted to begin a national conversation about the role of faith in society. With regard specifically to the Christian faith, he said in his homily at the vigil of prayer in Hyde Park, London, preceding the Beatification:

No one who looks realistically at our world today could think that Christians can afford to go on with business as usual, ignoring the profound crisis of faith which has overtaken our society, or simply trusting that the patrimony of values handed down by the

Christian centuries will continue to inspire and shape the future of our society (p. 90).

A necessary warning! This crisis of religious faith also led the Pope to reach out to the leaders of other faiths, whom he met at St Mary's University College, Twickenham, where he said:

The quest for the sacred is the search for the one thing necessary, which alone satisfies the longings of the human heart. ... As we embark on this adventure we come to realise more and more that the initiative lies not with us, but with the Lord. ... Genuine religious belief points us beyond present utility towards the transcendent. ... It motivates us to cultivate the practice of virtue and to reach out towards one another in love (pp. 35-7).

How times have changed in Rome! Underlying the Pope's words, manner and prayer was undoubtedly his personal commitment to Jesus Christ, that commitment of which he spoke at the prayer vigil:

Newman teaches us that if we have accepted the truth of Christ and committed our lives to him, there can be no separation between what we believe and the way we live our lives. Our every thought, word and action must be dedicated to the glory of God and the spread of his Kingdom (p. 88).

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week, from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, Pope Benedict XVI, Catholic Truth Society, 2011, £14.95. ISBN: 978-1-86082-707-5.

The departing Jesus does not make his way to some distant star. He enters into communion of power and life with the living God, into God's dominion over space. Hence he has not 'gone away' but now and forever by God's own power he is present with us and for us. In the farewell discourses of Saint John's Gospel, this is exactly what Jesus says to his disciples: 'I go away, and I will come to you'¹ (p. 283).

This extract (relating to the Ascension) from the recent book by Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, provides some insight into

¹ John 14: 28.

the message which, writing initially in his native German, he longs in the time remaining to him to speak ‘heart to heart’—I employ here the theme chosen by him for his visit to Great Britain in 2010. It is Jesus whom he proclaims, the risen Jesus who is ever present with us, and Pope Benedict desires, as he states in the Foreword to his new book, to help readers who ‘seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in him’ (p. xvii). The sense of urgency which Pope Benedict experiences, and the incredible pressures on his time and energy (he is 84), are manifest in the manner of publication of the first two volumes of what he hopes can be a trilogy. He decided to publish his ten complete chapters on the public ministry of Jesus, forming the first volume, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*,² reviewed in the Winter 2007 edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*. He did so because he considered it to be ‘the most urgent priority to present the figure and the message of Jesus in his public ministry and so to help foster the growth of a living relationship with him’.³

Pope Benedict had thought that a book on the first years of Jesus’ life, on the Infancy Narratives, would be the second book to appear; he still hopes, if he is spared, to write a slimmer, third volume on this subject. Yet, as he states in the Foreword to this new book, it had become increasingly important to him, prior to the appearance of his second book, to ‘understand the figure of Jesus, his words and his actions’ (p. xvii). This meant moving to Holy Week and Easter, for it is only here, he asserts, that ‘we encounter the decisive sayings and events of Jesus’ life’ (p. xvii). This second book has a different publisher, and a different translator, Philip J. Whitmore. The book’s presentation is similar, though not identical, and the price more or less the same. There is a bibliography, of mainly German sources, and a very useful glossary prepared by the publisher, containing names, places and concepts.

A concern expressed in the first volume is continued in this one, namely about the limits of historical-critical method, based as it is on actual history but, in his view, missing a sense of the transcendent. He comments that the quest for the historical Jesus is

² Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, £14.99. ISBN: 978-0-7475-9278-5.

³ *ibid.*, Foreword, p. xxiv.

too much focused on the past to enable a personal relationship with Jesus (p. xvi). He therefore continues his attempt to develop a way of observing and listening to the Jesus of the Gospels which can lead to personal encounter and—when combined with listening with Jesus’ disciples across the ages—to knowledge of the real historical figure of Jesus.

From time to time, serious incidents stemming from anti-Semitism are reported in the media. The decree of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (1965), instructed that ‘the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from Holy Scripture’.⁴ Yet there are two passages in the Gospels, used particularly in the Liturgy during the sensitive days of Holy Week, which continue to be highly problematic in the context of the so-called ‘blood libel’ against the Jews. It was inevitable, therefore, that intense media interest would be aroused prior to the publication of this volume as to how Pope Benedict would treat those passages. In the first passage, John 18: 28-40, it is stated that it was ‘the Jews’ who called upon Pilate for Jesus to be executed. In Chapter 7, ‘The Trial of Jesus’, the Pope follows the scholarly consensus that ‘the Jews’ does not here refer to the whole population, but to ‘the Temple aristocracy—and not without certain exceptions’ (p. 185). The second passage, Matthew 27: 23-5, contains the demand for Jesus to be crucified, and here, alone among the four Gospels, ‘the people as a whole’ cry, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ Pope Benedict rejects here the historical accuracy of Matthew, preferring the accounts in Mark and John and following Joachim Gnilka in his view that Matthew was attempting a ‘theological etiology’, to account for the fate of the Jews in the Jewish War to come. Furthermore, ‘Jesus’ blood speaks a different language from the blood of Abel (Heb. 12: 24): it does not cry out for vengeance and punishment; it brings reconciliation’ and is ‘poured out *for* many, for all’ (pp. 186-8). Although the Pope’s writing is the speculation of a theologian, rather than definitive papal statement, the extent of interest in this vital issue from many quarters shows how his writing bears a particular weight due to his role in the Roman Catholic Church. In this book he is seen as

⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, Part 4.

having rejected historical accusations that the Jewish people bear a collective guilt for the death of Jesus. The Israeli premier, Binyamin Netanyahu, has led a chorus of Jewish welcome for this book, praising Benedict's 'clarity and courage'.

With regard to Benedict's treatment of the issue, we may note that modern historical scholarship does have its uses! In fact, his expressed focus in writing is what is known as canonical criticism, a way of reading which focuses on the finished form of the text. There are those professional critics who say that Benedict often engages with scholarship which is no longer at the forefront of debate. Yet the range of topics which he brings into his book is not only astounding, but also instructive and illuminating. There is in Chapter 6 on 'Gethsemane', for instance, extended discussion of the interrelation, in the figure of Jesus Christ, between the human will and the divine will. In doing so, he brings in the controversy addressed by the Council of Chalcedon (451), where it was proclaimed that the one person of the Son of God embraces and bears the two natures—human and divine—'without confusion and without separation'.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press (Norwich Books):

Great is the Mystery of Faith: Exploring Faith Through the Words of Worship, Paul Ferguson, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-055-0.

For all That Has Been, Thanks: Growing a Sense of Gratitude, Rowan Williams and Joan Chittister, pb. 2010, £9.99.

ISBN: 978-1-84825-053-6.

New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church, ed. by Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby & Aaron Kennedy, 2010, £14.99.

ISBN: 978-1-8425-044-4.

The Contented Life: Spirituality and the gift of years, Robert Atwell, 2011, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-076-5.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard, 2011, £12.99.

ISBN: 978-1-84825-078-9.

The Church's Healing Ministry: Pastoral and Practical Reflections, David Atkinson, 2011, £14.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-077-2.

From Continuum Books:

The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition, Peter Tyler, 2011, £18.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-0444-1.

Barefoot Disciple: Walking the Way of Passionate Humility, Stephen Cherry, 2010 (the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2011), £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-8286-9.

The Transforming Power of Prayer: From Illusion to Reality, Michael Marshall, 2011 (the 2011 Mowbray Lent Book), £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-1724-3.

The Extra Mile: A 21st Century Pilgrimage, Peter Stanford, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-6735-4.

From Gracewing:

Edith [Stein](#): *Woman of Prayer*, [Joanne Mosley](#), £9.99.

ISBN: 978-0-85244-596-9.

From Liturgical Press (Cistercian Publications):

Useful Servanthood: A Study of Spiritual Formation in the Writings of Abba Ammonas, Bernadette McNary-Zink, Liturgical Press (Cistercian Publications), 2010, £19.99. ISBN: 978-0-87907-224-7.

From SPCK:

The Art of Biblical Prayer, [J. W. Rogerson](#), 2011, £9.99.

ISBN: [978-0-281-06450-2](#).

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Donations: Please make cheques and donations for SLG payable to SLG Charitable Trust Limited.

Gift Aid: If you pay UK tax, you can increase the value of your donations by Gift Aid: currently, for each £10 given to SLG, we can reclaim a further £2.50 from HM Revenue and Customs. If you are a higher rate tax payer, you can claim relief on the difference between the basic rate and higher rate of tax. If you do not pay tax you should **not** use Gift Aid.

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

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

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

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

Convent of the Incarnation Fairacres
Parker Street Oxford OX4 1TB
email: charityoffice@slg.org.uk