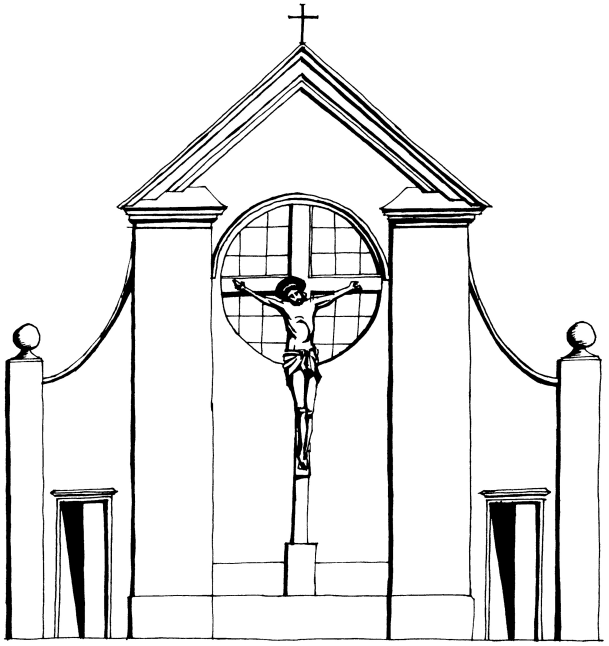
FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



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Sister Barbara June SLG Editor Sebastian Brock
Sister Christine SLG Sister Avis Mary SLG

COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

At the time of writing these notes, we are in the thirty-fourth week of the liturgical year, which some lectionaries term rather ominously, 'The Last Week of the Year'. The Post-Communion Prayer for this week in *Common Worship* begins, 'Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people…'

Before the Church of England included the Feast of Christ the King in its calendar, this prayer was the Collect for the Sunday before Advent Sunday, which became known as 'Stir up Sunday'. For some of us it still has strong associations with making Christmas puddings! Leaving aside the culinary aspect, what can we deduce and learn from the opening of this collect and the prayer that God will stir us up?

This prayer asks for our wills to be stirred up. It does not ask that our emotions be stirred, or indeed that we be 'churned up inside'—to use a popular phrase. It is a deeper part of us that we are asking the Lord to work upon. Perhaps the Prayer Book version had a greater urgency in its opening phrase, 'Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people...'

But whether or not 'beseeching' is included in the prayer, it requires courage to ask to be 'stirred up' by the Lord. If we give God a free hand in any aspect of our lives, we will have no control and do not know what may be asked of us.

The Gospel passages read at the Eucharist each day during the last week before Advent Sunday are taken from Luke, chapter 21, where the Evangelist predicts the desolation of Jerusalem, wars, earthquakes and plagues, which bear much resemblance to a contemporary news bulletin! But despite all the foreboding, we are bidden:

> … when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (v. 28)

and to:

> be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. (v. 36)

The readings lead into, and prepare for, Advent Sunday. This year, St Mark's Gospel bids us, 'Keep alert'; 'Keep awake'—central themes for this season. Keeping watch, for we do not know, despite the meticulous calculations of some, 'when the master of the house will come'.[1]

We live in a time when exactness and precision is possible in so many areas of life: time-keeping to a degree of a second, medical prognoses, and even the weather forecast, are more precise than in past years. When guests are expected, we appreciate an estimated time of arrival and a text message or phone call if this time will be very different from the one anticipated. It seems harder for people in the twenty-first century to live with this unknowing than in previous times. But, as St Paul tells us, 'We walk by faith, not by sight.'[2]

In times when there is so much political and economic uncertainty, and when even the seasons seem unpredictable, it is not surprising that some of our contemporaries seek to provide certainties with calculations and predictions. But Christians are called to live by faith, and in the sure knowledge that, as St Luke tells us, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'[3]

The first anniversary of the death of Canon Donald Allchin, Fr Donald, falls on 23 December 2011, and we are grateful to the *Merton Journal* for making it possible to include in this edition two articles relating to Fr Donald. The first is a tribute to him; the second, an article by him about Thomas Merton, whom he knew well. Both Donald and Merton had a great respect for the Shakers, and we also include in this *Chronicle* a book review by Sr Barbara June of Merton's book *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers.*

On 6 August, the Community marked the centenary of SLG at Fairacres with a service of thanksgiving in a marquee, and we were glad that some of our near neighbours were able to join us on this significant day. The same marquee was the venue for the Oblate Sisters' Chapter on 9 August, when twenty-two came for the day. It served as the chapel for the Eucharist, the refectory and the meeting

[1] Mark 13: 35.
[2] 2 Cor. 5: 7.
[3] Luke 21: 33.

area, contributing to an enjoyable and fruitful day for the Nuns and Oblate Sisters. The theme of the day was ‘Living on the Margins’, and this edition includes some contributions for and from that day. Many people in our society feel ‘on the margins’, among them those living on urban housing estates. Also included is an edited report by Al Barrett and Andy Delmege from the first one-day conference of the ‘Strengthening Estates Ministry’ group of the Diocese of Birmingham, on the subject of ‘Thriving in Ministry’ on outer estates.

On 1 November, Sister Catherine stepped down as Prioress and Sister Clare-Louise was installed and blessed as Prioress. Five days later Sister Judith was blessed as Novice Guardian. Sister Catherine is having a time of sabbatical and in January expects to move to the Lambeth branch house of the Community of the Holy Name, a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace, the London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. She will join Sister Margaret CHN in being a ‘praying presence’ and assist with sacristy duties and hospitality. ‘Mary anoints Jesus, who is the Christ’, reflections on the gospel accounts of the woman who anointed Jesus, has been contributed by Sister Pauline Margaret, another CHN Sister.

In June Sister Avis Mary and Sister Judith attended an ecumenical conference at Triefenstein in Germany, where Sister Avis Mary gave a paper on the place of Scripture in Anglican Religious Life. That paper is printed in this edition.

At the beginning of September, we moved the SLG Press shop to a larger and lighter room, opposite the old one, making more space for books and cards. We have a new range of SLG cards, which are available only from the shop.

During the installation of a lift in the convent from the end of April until the end of August 2012, we shall be able to offer hospitality to only a few guests at a time and are sorry to have to disappoint those who often stay with us.

As we walk the Advent road, may we do so with watchfulness and alertness to the working and stirring of God within us. We wish all our readers a very happy and blessed Christmas and New Year.

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

CANON A. M. (DONALD) ALLCHIN
20 APRIL 1930—23 DECEMBER 2010

AS WE reported in the Summer edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, Donald Allchin (Warden of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God 1967-95, and Warden Emeritus after that) died at the end of last year. One very important aspect of Fr Donald's life and ministry was his Presidency of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland from its beginning in 1993. He was a friend and encourager to many people associated with the Society, and to others with an interest in Thomas Merton. We are grateful to the Thomas Merton Society for permission to print articles by Paul Pearson and by Fr Donald himself, which were published in *The Merton Journal*, Eastertide 2011, vol. 18. no. 1, as part of the tribute to Fr Donald in that edition of the *Journal*. We also print the following quotation from Merton, chosen by the Merton Society to illustrate something of the truth of Fr Donald's own life:

> This is our contemplation: the realization and 'experience' of the life-giving Spirit in whom the Father is present to us through the Son, our way, truth and life. The realization that we are on our way, that because we are on our way we are in that Truth, which is the end and by which we are already fully and eternally alive. Contemplation is the loving sense of this life and this presence and this eternity.[4]

DONALD ALLCHIN
AND THE THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

PAUL M. PEARSON

I FIND it hard to believe that there is anyone who knew Donald Allchin who would not have been aware of his interest in the life and thought of Thomas Merton. Like Merton himself, Donald was a man of unbounded enthusiasm, and for those of us who knew

[4] Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life,* The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. V, p. 182.

Donald, it is hard to imagine the energy that must have been present when Donald met Merton for the first time at the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1963 and on his subsequent visits in 1967 and 1968. Recalling that first meeting, Donald mentioned his shyness on meeting Merton, the world-renowned author, until in small talk he mentioned that his host, Dale Moody from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, had taken him to the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, whereupon the conversation immediately took off. Donald recalled:

> We started off on the Shakers and that got us going. And from that time we never stopped… there were so many things we talked about. It was very difficult to make a kind of catalogue of them. There was a kind of quicksilver quality about the conversation.

From that time onward Donald would continue to share his enthusiasm for the life and thought of Thomas Merton, believing that Merton's message needed to be heard, shared, and celebrated and Donald took every opportunity that came his way to do this. So Donald became the British spokesperson for all things Merton, and over the years he gave freely and generously of his time and energy to speak of Merton. Through his friendship with William Shannon, Donald was all too aware of Merton celebrations that took place in the United States and of the formation of the International Thomas Merton Society in 1987. Subsequently Donald was very involved in the initial attempt to found a British Merton Society in 1989.

However, the time was not quite ripe for a Merton Society, so it was a few years later, at a day organized by Donald at the St Theosavia Centre in Oxford, that the key people who would play a part in the foundation of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland began to come together. Influenced by Donald's infectious enthusiasm and his own love of Merton's work, David Scott was inspired to plan a conference in Winchester to commemorate, and celebrate, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Merton's death in December 1993. Over the course of those few days opportunity was provided for a small group to meet and to share ideas about how to carry forward the enthusiasm and energy David had generated, and thus plans were hatched for the foundation of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and

Ireland. On the final day of the Winchester conference those plans were shared with the gathered participants who enthusiastically endorsed them and thus the Society came into existence.

Plans were soon made to start publishing *The Merton Journal,* to organize the first formal conference, ('Your Heart is My Hermitage' held in Southampton in 1996), and it was felt by all of the founding committee that Donald should be asked to become the Honorary President of the Society in acknowledgement of his leadership in promoting Merton, of his enthusiasm and of his place as one of the few people in England who had actually known Merton and could bring that knowledge and connection to the fledgling society. Donald graciously accepted and over many years was a boundless source of encouragement and support to the Committee and to the Society as a whole.

Donald's presence, his enthusiasm and his stories will be greatly missed from future gatherings of the Society, but his spirit will no doubt be remembered and his stories retold. And I'd like to conclude with one such story that sums Donald up so well. When asked for his advice on what a speaker should bring to an audience Donald's immediate and simple advice was: 'Give them poetry, poetry, poetry!'

MEMORIES OF MERTON

DONALD ALLCHIN

An edited version of an essay, 'Merton at Ninety', first published in The Merton Journal*, Eastertide 2005.*

IN THE 1960s, when I was visiting the United States and lecturing in New York from time to time, I hardly ever told anybody about my meetings with Merton. It seemed such an impossible thing to happen! People had heard he was a Trappist monk and so didn't talk much, if at all. They knew he was an internationally famous writer and so wasn't likely to be available to meet casual visitors from abroad. In the sixties, people were already perplexed about him, since they could see from his more recent books that the circle of

his interests was growing rapidly: the dialogues with other religions, notably Zen Buddhism; his growing concern with contemporary questions of public life; racial discrimination; the possibility of nuclear war; the constant threat of a sudden development of the Cold War conflict. How was all this compatible with his whole-hearted monastic commitment, his profound and powerful way of expounding the Christian tradition of contemplative life?

My introduction to Merton was in itself instructive, revealing something of his ecumenical activities which had begun already in the I950s, before the calling of the second Vatican Council. I was introduced to him by a professor of New Testament theology in the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, Dr Dale Moody. Dale had been spending a sabbatical year in Oxford and got into the habit of coming most days of the week to have lunch at Pusey House, where I was then on the staff. When he learned that in 1963 I was going to take part in the big Faith and Order conference in Montreal in July, he at once said that 'if you are in North America, you must come and see us in Kentucky. Come to Louisville, and while you are there I can take you out to the abbey of Gethsemani and you can meet Thomas Merton.'

So it was that Dale Moody brought me out to the monastery early in August in 1963. We had lunch together in the guest house and Dale Moody left to go back to Louisville. I found myself sitting with Merton in his office in the Novitiate. He began by asking me what I had been doing in Kentucky. I told him how Dale Moody had driven me to all kinds of places and made me gradually aware of the very special quality of that particular state, between east and west, between north and south. 'Yesterday we visited the buildings of the old Shaker community at Pleasant Hill. I was enormously impressed by them; they seemed to have a kind of monastic quality. Do you know about them?' I asked. Merton got up, went over to the filing cabinet on the other side of the room, pulled out a whole file of photographs of Shaker buildings, Shaker furniture and Shaker artefacts. 'Look what quality they have. I'm hoping to write a book about them.'

So we began our conversations near at home in Kentucky, from our shared enthusiasm for the Shakers, those remarkable nineteenth-century communities which brought women and men together in a remarkable collaboration. We began from near at hand, but soon

began to venture more widely. Merton had few enough visitors from England and very few who were Anglicans. One subject we certainly began to explore was the seventeenth-century Anglican poets. Vaughan and Traherne especially fascinated him but he was also interested in contemporary poetry from Britain. He was beginning to discover Edwin Muir—and Stevie Smith greatly attracted him. What about R. S. Thomas? He soon came over Merton's horizon. And then in the last two years there was what for him was the great discovery of David Jones, a profoundly sacramental poet and painter, who awoke Merton's own deep sense of a Welsh family background.

But in the end, it was the extraordinary expansion of Merton's heart and mind which was the most striking fact about him in the 1960s. Here we see his gradual discovery of all the major religious traditions of mankind, not only Zen but also Tibetan Buddhism; the teaching of the Tao in China; the various schools of Hindu devotion; and his constantly growing sense of importance of the Sufi tradition in Islam, beautifully conveyed in the correspondence with Abdul Aziz in Karachi, published in *The Hidden Ground of Love,* the volume of Merton's letters edited by Bill Shannon. Here is Merton for the twenty-first century, the Merton who has already got beyond September 11, 2001. It is moving to observe that, on September 11, 1960, Merton was meditating deeply on the life and prayer of the Staretz Sylvan (St Sylvan of Athos) on the words spoken to him by the Lord: 'Keep your mind in hell and do not despair.' I for a long time thought that was the word of the Lord for the twentieth century. I now have the feeling that is the word of the Lord for our own troubled time, in which Merton's voice needs to be heard more clearly than ever.

Merton is someone who speaks directly to us today. This was evidently the case when one met him in person. I believe this is no less the case for so many people who meet him in his writings. How many readers have had the feeling that 'he is saying this directly to me'. He is a man in whom God's word and God's gift can be freely given to us. It is ours to receive.

Note: see also the review of Thomas Merton's book *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers* by Sister Barbara June on p. 63.

HOW HOLY SCRIPTURE FORMS AND INFORMS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

AN ANGLICAN CONTRIBUTION

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

This paper was given at the International, Interdenominational Congress of Religious (CIR) hosted by the Christusträger Bruderschaft at Triefenstein in Germany 25-30 June 2011.

Introduction: Silence and the Scriptures

IN PREPARING this paper, a key word came to me: 'silence'—the importance of silence in allowing Holy Scripture to form and inform our religious life. And so I shall begin and end with the subject of silence. I shall also be saying quite a bit about Anglican heritage and tradition before I say something about three particular ways in which I see Holy Scripture as forming and informing Anglican religious life.

Last year, Fr Christopher Jamieson, a Benedictine of Worth Abbey in south-east England, was invited by BBC television to lead five very different people on a journey into silence. It was an experiment, to see what would happen. The story of that journey was told in three one-hour programmes in September 2010. The participants spent a weekend together at Worth Abbey, to introduce them to monastic silence and to the practice of meditation. They went home for one week to try to put into practice in their busy lives what they had learned—and all except one of them failed completely to do so! They then went together to St Beuno's, a Jesuit retreat centre in Wales, for an eight-day individually-guided retreat, where each of them was permitted to speak only to the retreat conductor and a video diary. Each one was taken, by way of anger, boredom, frustration and loneliness, to experiences such as the facing of past unhappiness: unresolved grief, violence, family rejection, etc. Perhaps unexpectedly, *all five* came to see silence as a way to hidden dimensions in their lives. Each one admitted on camera that this had been a decisive and life-changing experience and made significant life adjustments as a result.

The experiment with silence was undertaken within the framework of the religious life: first within the Benedictine monastery at Worth, and then supervised within the Jesuit tradition. The link with our subject is that Holy Scripture was central to what was offered to the participants. In the television series, we saw the participants responding to what they were reading and pondering in the Scriptures, often texts which were completely unfamiliar to them. One of them, David, went into the Welsh countryside, to ponder St Luke's account of the Nativity and of the angels appearing to the shepherds; and there he heard within himself a voice saying (as the angels had said): 'Don't be afraid.' Jon, a businessman who had been resolutely anti-religious, said: 'There's no need to fear the silence any more—the silence is like a friend. The fear is inside me.' He wept as he read on camera the verse of the Psalm which says: 'Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God"'; [5] and he continued in tears as he said: 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.'[6]

Both Worth and St Beuno's are, as it happens, within the Roman Catholic tradition, but the series was intended to explore what the Christian religious life in general has to offer people in their busy lives today. I have taken this as my starting place because I think that there could be resonances here with the starting place for all of us, with what pushed us in the direction of the religious life. Some of us will have been familiar with, and have taken on, the Christian faith from childhood. Some will only truly have discovered it later in life. But I'd be surprised if any of us could say that the Scriptures, and particular words of Scripture, did not play a significant part in our decision to embrace the religious life. And I'd also say that some measure of silence will have been necessary to hear those words in our hearts. There may have been the familiar words of call, such as, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me',[7] or, 'Here am I; send

[5] Ps. 14: 1.
[6] Ps. 51: 17.
[7] Mt. 19: 21.

me!'[8] Or there may have been words of total claim upon us, such as, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. … You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'[9]

Pondering words of Scripture, letting them speak to us in silence, letting them shape the way we live, even to the point of making radical change: these things are the foundation of our lives as committed Christians. Knowing and reflecting upon the Scriptures—or at least upon the biblical stories and what they can teach us—is the *sine qua non*, the essential thing, in serious Christian life. We are not, therefore, looking at something unique, as we explore 'how Holy Scripture forms and informs the religious life' and how this is experienced within the different Christian denominations. The Scriptures were basic to Christian life even in times when the Bible was not available in the vernacular. In the tradition of Christian spirituality, even teachers who had not been given great educational opportunities used for reflection what they had been able to learn of the Scriptures, and they passed on to others in their teaching and writing what they had received. The sixteenth-century Carmelite, St Teresa of Avila, springs to mind here. Being a woman, she had not had the opportunities for learning enjoyed by, for instance, her co-helper in the Reform of Carmel, St John of the Cross. Furthermore, at the time of the Spanish Inquisition, it was not safe for a woman to advocate knowledge of the Scriptures. She nevertheless longed for all Christians to know all the secrets of Scripture, and for her, the spiritual life *must* conform to the teaching of Holy Scripture.

The religious life, as a particular way of living out the Christian vocation, is a way which does contain particular aids to reflection, prayer and biblical study. In general, as religious we have more recourse to silence than do those with busy daily lives (even when it doesn't seem like it, as we cope with increasing needs and demands, both as citizens of a busy world and as members of ageing communities!) Our way of life is fed constantly by the Scriptures. We meet passages from the Bible as soon as we go to chapel with

[8] Isa. 6: 8.
[9] Mark 12: 30-31.

our brothers or sisters. Our rules and constitutions have sections on the importance of Scripture and/or of the Divine Office for our lives as religious, and we usually have requirements laid down for us about study of, and meditation upon, the Scriptures. This is the framework by which we live.

The Anglican Heritage

TURNING NOW more specifically to the Anglican tradition of religious life, I'll first say something about the general background to the Anglican heritage, going back to the time of the Reformation in England, because Anglicanism is very much the product of its own history. As most will know, King Henry VIII was responsible for the schism with Rome and the establishment of the Church of England. Yet the Reformation in England took a different course from that in Northern Europe, which was spearheaded first by the stand taken by Luther, then also by Zwingli and Calvin. Henry even wrote a book, in response to Luther, entitled *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*,[10] for which in 1521 Pope Leo X gave him the title of *Fidei Defensor (*'Defender of the Faith'), a title still used in its English version by the British Sovereign to this day. Henry VIII broke with Rome primarily for political and dynastic, rather than for theological, reasons: the interference of Rome in affairs of State was resented, and this came to a head when the Pope would not give approval for Henry to divorce and remarry, and therefore would not enable Henry to continue his efforts to acquire a legitimate male heir for the throne. Even after his excommunication by Pope Clement VII in 1538, Henry remained a believer in the central teachings of the Church.

Although subsequent kings and queens were troubled by religious divisions in the realm, the means by which the Reformation came to England had set the stage for the Church of England to consider itself *both* Catholic *and* Reformed. The religious settlement of Queen Elizabeth I in 1559 laid the foundations for the Anglican *via media* (or 'middle way'), a reconstitution of the Church, an attempt to include everyone (whether Catholic or Protestant) in structures, theology and forms of

[10] *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum.*

worship forming a middle way between the extremes of the claims on each side. The faith of Anglicans is founded in the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, in the traditions of the Apostolic Church, the historical episcopate, the first seven Ecumenical Councils, and the early Church Fathers. The Old and New Testaments are regarded as 'containing all things necessary for salvation'[11] and as the ultimate standard of faith.

However, the actions of Henry VIII and his ministers had set in train a series of unstoppable events, and they then pursued relentlessly the goal of the complete Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-41), bringing to an end all religious life as it had been known hitherto. Until then, the country was rich in powerful monastic foundations. They had posed a threat to State authority and often had substantial endowments and fortunes. Westminster Abbey, where kings and queens are crowned, and where the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton took place on 29 April this year, was itself a Benedictine monastic foundation, as is clear from the fact that it is still referred to as an abbey church.

So how, and when, was the religious life restored within the Anglican Communion? The answer is that it was a consequence of the Oxford Movement within the Church of England (also known as the Tractarian Movement, from the *Tracts for the Times*, published 1833-41). This Movement was primarily clerical in character, and its members often had associations with the University of Oxford. It began as an attack, made in John Keble's Assize Sermon in Oxford in 1833, upon the perceived secularization of the Church; but it soon became so much more. Anglicans were perceived as forming, together with Orthodox and Roman Catholics, one of three 'branches' of the one 'Catholic Church'. The Tractarians were led by their interest in Christian origins to reconsider the relationship of the Church of England with the Roman Catholic Church. Blessed John Henry Newman was, prior to his reception into the Roman

[11] Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion on 'The sufficiency of Scripture' stated (in the original English) that: 'Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.'

Catholic Church in 1845, a leading member of this Movement. In the last of the *Tracts*, number 90, Newman argued that the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, as defined by the Council of Trent, were compatible with the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the historic defining document of the Church of England (1563). The Oxford Movement began to have a considerable influence on Anglican theology and liturgical practice, pressing for the reinstatement of lost traditions. Many Catholic practices were re-introduced into worship, and the Eucharist became more central in Church life. In consequence, the Movement was subjected to attack for being 'papalist'. Yet it endured, at least in the influence which it exerted within the Church of England.

Due to this Catholic Revival in the Church of England, interest was very soon awakened in the re-establishment of religious and monastic orders, for men and for women. In 1841, Marian Rebecca Hughes became the first woman since the Reformation to make vows of religion in communion with the See of Canterbury. In 1848, Priscilla Lydia Sellon became the superior of the Society of the Most Holy Trinity. It was not the very first Sisterhood, but the first one organized formally as a religious order. It is important to stress here that, although specifically contemplative communities were established for men and for women, most Anglican communities lived their consecration to God under vows in a *mixed life* of reciting the full Divine Office, along with a daily Eucharist, plus service to the poor. This mixed life, combining aspects of contemplative and active orders, remains to this day a hallmark of Anglican religious life. Again, perhaps, we see something of the Anglican *via media*.

Anglican religious orders flourished and spread throughout the world, mainly to English-speaking countries and to regions under British influence. Since the 1960s there has been a general decline in numbers, though there has been significant growth in Melanesia and certain parts of Africa. Two features that we might note from recent decades are the establishment of some mixed communities of men and women and the formation of a number of grass-roots communities. These grass-roots communities live out monastic practices, but without necessarily having traditional religious structures, such as the traditional vows, and they are collectively

referred to in the United Kingdom as 'Fresh Expressions of Church', and in the USA as 'Emergent Churches'. They increasingly take part in meetings of Anglican religious.

The Word of God

MAKING a switch from the Anglican historical background, let us now turn to the basis of our Christian faith, to the Word of God, to Jesus 'who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known',[12] the one, definitive word given to us. To quote from the Letter to the Hebrews:

> Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.[13]

And as Saint John of the Cross expressed it:

> In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word—and he has no more to say. … because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has spoken all at once by giving us this All who is his Son.[14]

I realise that I might not be the only one who will do so at this Conference, but I should like to mention at this point, and commend warmly to you, the 2010 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church—though I have to say that the English prose translations emanating from the Vatican seem consistently turgid and at times nearly incomprehensible! In this document, particular emphasis is laid upon the Prologue of the Gospel according to St John,[15] in which the Word, who is from the beginning with God, who became flesh and dwelt among us, is revealed. To quote from *Verbum Domini*:

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[12] John 1: 18.
[13] Heb. 1: 1-2.
[14] *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St John of the Cross, II, 22: 3,4, trans. Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, Doubleday, 1964.
[15] John 1: 1-18.

> God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love.[16]

We may note here the part played by the Holy Spirit with regard to the Divine Word. The Spirit who acts in the incarnation of the Word through the Virgin Mary is the same Holy Spirit who guides Jesus throughout his mission, and who will teach the disciples all things, reminding them of all that Christ has said to them,[17] that Spirit of truth[18] who will guide the disciples into all the truth.[19] The Spirit who spoke through the prophets is the same Holy Spirit who sustains and inspires the Church in the preaching of the Apostles, in the writing of Holy Scripture and in the proclamation of the word of God.[20]

The religious life is a reminder and a sign that we live, not 'by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'.[21] In our lives of dedicated prayer and service, it is our task to meditate upon, and listen attentively to, the word of God. Three principal ways come to mind in which we share in 'the dialogue of love between the divine persons' through the Scriptures, ways in which the Scriptures form and inform us. The first way is through study of the Scriptures. The second way is by participation in the Liturgy (principally the Divine Office and the Eucharist, but also the other Sacraments), and the third is through *lectio divina*, or 'holy reading'.

1. Study of the Scriptures

I AM REFERRING here to serious *study* of the Scriptures, whether group or individual study, whether following some particular leading of the Holy Spirit, or under instruction, or following a set course or

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[16] *Verbum Dei*, I, The God Who Speaks, God in dialogue.
[17] cf. John 14: 26.
[18] cf. John 15: 26; 16: 13.
[19] cf. John 16: 13.
[20] cf. *Verbum Domini*. I, The God Who Speaks, The word of God and the Holy Spirit.
[21] Matt. 4: 4.

a particular book. This is important in the religious life, but not specific to it, and the amount of study undertaken will vary according to a combination of the ethos of the order, its other commitments and the aptitude and needs of the individual.

In the early days of the revival of Anglican religious life, a difference in attitudes between men's and women's communities towards the study of Scripture could be seen. (I am not at all sure that this does not continue to exist in more subtle forms, but it is certainly less marked…!) The men's communities tended to include priests, who had received training in biblical study and who continued their studies. Part of their ministry and mission was to preach regularly. Scholars like Richard Meux Benson, founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist (1824-1915) and Charles Gore of the Community of the Resurrection (1853-1932), later to become a bishop, established a lasting tradition of study, and Barnabas Lindars of the Society of St Francis (1923-91) was to became Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester, with the distinction of being a scholar of international repute in both Old and New Testament studies.

We may contrast this with the situation in many early women's communities, where there was an emphasis on social, rather than on academic, work. It meant that fewer Sisters were involved in biblical study, although the emphasis on the Divine Office in most Anglican communities meant that Sisters were conversant with scriptural texts. But even though serious academic study was comparatively unusual, many Sisters did teach at 'Sunday school', a familiar part of English church life for children, and so Scripture and scriptural stories were significant.

In time it was possible for Sisters to become more scholarly. The Community of the Holy Family, for example, founded in 1898 by three women Cambridge graduates, encouraged Sisters to engage in Bible study in addition to their experience of the Scriptures in the Liturgy. The founder of the Community of the Sisters of the Church, Emily Ayckbourn, was also, from the foundation in 1870 onwards, very keen on training and study for the Sisters. As the twentieth century began, convent libraries contained mainly pious biographies and hagiography. This changed in time, particularly as trained teachers joined the orders. A teaching order, the Order of the Holy

Paraclete which was founded in 1915, encouraged Sisters to read biblical commentaries. On the whole, though, it must be said that in the early decades of the twentieth century, orders focussing upon nursing and social work were not notable for encouraging Sisters to read at all, or even for providing any books to be read!

At the present day, although some differences of opportunity may still persist between men and women religious, I think that these probably have a lot to do with how much liberty orders have to provide time for individual study, given the ministries of the order and the ever-increasing need to care for elderly members. In my own Community, Sr Benedicta Ward has a worldwide scholarly reputation for her writings on the Desert Fathers and Anglo-Saxon and Medieval spirituality. The ordination of women (permitted in the Church of England since 1994) has also enabled women to study in the course of their preparation for the priestly office. Many women's communities have some ordained members.

2. The Liturgy: Divine Office and Eucharist

THE OTHER two ways in which Scripture forms and informs us as Anglican religious are more particularly characteristic of the religious life, because the way of life provides the conditions for them. The first of these is exposure to the Scriptures in the Liturgy, that is, in the Divine Office and the Eucharist (and in the other Sacraments), and the second, to which I'll return, is the traditional monastic practice by the individual religious of *lectio divina* or 'holy reading'.

The tradition of the monastic way of life, outwardly lost entirely within the Church of England at the Reformation, nevertheless continued and flourished in a particular form as part of Anglican culture. The hours of prayer which traditionally sanctify different parts of the monastic day were prayed in parish churches and cathedrals. The Church's standard prayer book, the *Book of Common Prayer,* put the Psalter and the Office into the hands of the laity. Until the movement for more frequent celebration of Holy Communion took off in the 1970s, most parish churches would expect the main Sunday services to be 'Mattins' (formed from Matins and Lauds) and 'Evensong' (formed from Vespers and Compline), as set out in the prayer book. There would often be an

'early' celebration of Holy Communion on Sundays at 8 a.m. Since then, the Eucharist or Mass has become the main service, and often Mattins and Evensong have fallen away—Mattins, because its place has been taken by the Eucharist; Evensong because evening services are poorly frequented these days, as people feel less safe out at night, and as the average age of congregations increases.

The *Book of Common Prayer* of 1559, introduced in the reign of Elizabeth I, laid emphasis upon the importance of the singing of the Scriptures. It was provided that in 'quires and places where they sing…' the lessons of Morning and Evening Prayer, together with the Epistle and Gospel of the Holy Communion service, should be sung. In the Elizabethan Settlement, the long choral tradition of many English cathedrals and monasteries was maintained by establishing choral foundations for the daily singing of the Divine Office. Consequently, some 34 cathedrals, collegiate churches and royal chapels were established with choirs in the late sixteenth century. Almost all of these have continued daily choral prayer to the present time, with scarcely a break.

So, building on a long tradition, and also on the ideas of the Oxford Movement, most Anglican orders were founded with an understanding of a religious life which was shaped by the dual obligations of the Divine Office and the Sacrament of the Mass, and this is a constant feature in the ethos of Anglican orders.

A number of the nineteenth-century communities had priest-founders, or priests who were influential in their establishment, which meant that loyalty to the liturgical use of the Church of England was stressed. (Anglicans differ from Roman Catholics in that orders have considerable freedom to devise their own form of Office.) For instance, the office book used by Canon T. T. Carter for the women's Community of St John Baptist at Clewer near Windsor, *The Day Hours of the Church of England* (1858), at first used scrupulously the calendar of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Authorised Version of the Bible. This seems to have become the version of the Office most widely used among the nineteenth-century Sisterhoods. Dr John Mason Neale, founder of the Society of Saint Margaret for women at East Grinstead in southern England, stressed the place of the Mass in the life of the Society, as well as

the place of the Bible in reciting the Psalms and reading the lessons in the Divine Office, and in the private reading and meditation of the Sisters. John Mason Neale often taught about the help given by the Liturgy in understanding Scripture. Influenced by what he had seen in continental Europe, he produced an English translation of Matins for singing at night, namely a version of the Night Office, or Vigils.

I wrote much of this paper in Holy Week and the first days of Eastertide. At this time, even more than in normal daily life, we are presented with a rich diet of Scripture. The Easter Vigil, when we celebrate the first Mass of Easter, begins with seven lengthy readings from the Old Testament, tracing salvation history. The Psalter plays a significant part: on Good Friday and Holy Saturday we recite the long Psalm 119 (or 118, depending on numbering) each day during the Little Hours. Throughout Holy Week a recurring motif from Philippians is heard and sung in my Community:

> Christ became obedient for our sakes unto death, even the death of the Cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the Name which is above every name.[22]

Yet I would stress the importance of silence to absorb the Scriptures. From *Verbum Dei* again, on 'the importance of silence in relation to the word of God and its reception in the lives of the faithful':

> The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. … Rediscovering the centrality of God's word in the life of the Church … means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence. Our liturgies must facilitate this attitude of authentic listening.[23]

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[22] Phil. 2: 8-9.

[23] *Verbum Dei*, II, The Liturgy, Privileged Setting For The Word Of God, Suggestions b) The word and silence.

3. *Lectio divina*, or 'holy reading'

I'D LIKE to begin our consideration of *lectio divina* with a quotation from an Anglican divine, William Law (1686-1761), best known for his book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Just to explain: within the Anglican tradition, theologians whose works are regarded as setting a standard in terms of faith, doctrine, worship, and spirituality are sometimes referred to collectively as 'the Anglican divines'. There is no authoritative list, but they have a common commitment to the Christian faith as conveyed by Scripture and by the *Book of Common Prayer* and a positive view of the Anglican *via media* (which I have mentioned). Here is the quotation from William Law:

> The book of all books is in your own heart, in which are written and engraved the deepest lessons of divine instruction. Learn therefore to be deeply attentive to the presence of God in your heart, who is always speaking, always instructing, always illuminating the heart that is attentive to him. Here you will meet the divine light in its proper place, in that depth of your soul, where the birth of the Son of God and the proceeding of the Holy Ghost are always ready to spring up in you.

It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us in the depths of the heart, and this is aided by attentiveness to the Scriptures. The Rule of my Community, the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God, states:

> The study of Scripture to form the basis of their prayer should be the first charge upon the Sisters' attention in the time set apart for reading. Nothing can take the place of *lectio divina*.[24]

Origen (c. 185-254) maintained that understanding Scripture demands (even more than study) closeness to Christ, and prayer. He believed that the best way to know God is through love, and that there can be no authentic *scientia Christi* (knowledge of Christ) apart from growth in love. In his *Letter to Gregory*, he counselled:

> Devote yourself to the *lectio* of the divine Scriptures; apply yourself to this with perseverance. Do your reading with the intent of believing in and pleasing God. If during the *lectio* you encounter a closed door, knock and it will be opened to you by

[24] Rule of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God, Chapter 17.

> that guardian of whom Jesus said, 'The gatekeeper will open it for him'. By applying yourself in this way to *lectio divina*, search diligently and with unshakable trust in God for the meaning of the divine Scriptures, which is hidden in great fullness within.

Lectio divina is a traditional part of Christian monastic culture, a response to the injunction to 'pray without ceasing'.[25] Both St Pachomius and St Benedict required their monks to learn to read. In the Rule of St Benedict, *lectio* is mentioned in a chapter devoted to manual labour, because he says that, to avoid idleness, the enemy of the soul, 'at fixed times, the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labour; and again, at fixed times, in sacred reading'[26]— which does underline that this sacred reading is itself a work.

Many lay people also practise 'holy reading' in some form. There is currently an upsurge of books coming onto the market on this subject, intended for all Christians, together with a general upsurge of books on 'monastic spirituality' for all. *Lectio divina* is to be distinguished from our modern cerebral approach to reading, and indeed, the medieval monk followed the ancient practice of reading out loud. It begins with *lectio* (reading) of a text, reading and listening at a deep level, with a desire to understand what the text is saying in itself. This is linked with *cogitatio*, thinking about the text, and with *studium*, studying it.

Then follows *meditatio* (meditation), where we ask what the text is saying to us: here we are challenged and changed as individuals, and as members of our communities. Reading and meditation together have sometimes been described as *ruminatio* (rumination), chewing over in the depths of the soul what has been taken in and received as spiritual nourishment. Before the twelfth century, the text, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good', was applied more often to reading Scripture than to the Eucharist. The Latin word *sapere* means 'to savour' or 'to taste'; to have a *discerning* sense of taste and therefore 'to be wise'. Like the Israelites journeying through the desert,[27] we are in religious life fed daily in our *lectio*. We gather what we can from what we are given, as with the manna in the wilderness, of which we are told: 'those

[25] I Thess. 5: 17.
[26] Rule of St Benedict, Ch. 48.
[27] cf. Ex. 16: 13-36.

who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed'.[28]

Following meditation comes *oratio* (prayer), and this prayer seeks to answer the Lord's word to us. Prayer—petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise—is the primary way in which the word transforms us. Then comes *contemplatio* (contemplation), where we enter a silent awareness of God's presence, resting in the gaze of loving awareness, with a heightened sense that God simply 'is'. In the words of Thomas Keating:

> Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God. [29]

In contemplative prayer, we perceive the presence of God in all things, and the Communion of Saints becomes a reality, as we participate in prayer in union with all. We encounter the Word beyond words; we receive as gift God's way of seeing and judging reality, and we come to know what God asks of us in the way of conversion of mind and heart, and in transformation of our lives. St Paul expresses it like this:

> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.[30]

Finally, as an outcome of *lectio divina*, there is *actio* (action), the impulse to translate into our lives what has been received.

These stages may not happen in this precise order, and if we are drawn to prayer without having completed our reading of the text intended for this time of spiritual reading, then the process of *lectio divina* has in fact achieved its purpose, which is to draw us into deeper prayer. We recall how the hearts of the disciples were burning within them while Jesus was talking to them on the road to Emmaus and opening the Scriptures to them.[31] He again appeared to

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[28] Ex. 16: 18.

[29] *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, Thomas Keating, Continuum, 1997.

[30] Rom. 12: 2.

[31] cf. Luke 24: 32.

the disciples and 'opened their minds to understand the Scriptures',[32] explaining how 'it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day'.[33] Jesus was both the teacher and the meaning of all that was revealed.

And in all our spiritual reading, we have a model in Mary, the Mother of God, who 'treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart'.[34]

Conclusion

CONCLUDING where we began, with the place of silence: we have to make conditions of silence where we may hear and be responsive to the Word. This is common to the whole monastic tradition. Yet we may also have to accept that what we may experience may itself seem like silence. To quote again from *Verbum Domini*:

> As the cross of Christ demonstrates, God also speaks by his silence. The silence of God, the experience of the distance of the almighty Father, is a decisive stage in the earthly journey of the Son of God, the incarnate Word. Hanging from the wood of the cross, he lamented the suffering caused by that silence: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'[35] … This experience of Jesus reflects the situation of all those who, having heard and acknowledged God's word, must also confront his silence. … Hence, in the dynamic of Christian revelation, silence appears as an important expression of the word of God.[36]

[32] Luke: 24: 45.
[33] Luke 24: 46.
[34] Luke 2: 19; cf. 2: 51.
[35] Mark 15: 34; Matt. 27: 46.
[36] *Verbum Dei*, I , The God Who Speaks, God the Father, source and origin of the word.

OBLATE SISTERS WRITE ON THE THEME OF 'LIVING ON THE MARGINS'

MANY PEOPLE feel themselves to be on the margins at some time in their lives. For a meeting this summer, Oblate Sisters of the Community offered written contributions on how their oblature links with 'Living on the Margins', which has led to a fruitful and ongoing discussion. Some of their writings are printed here, with their permission, arranged for simplicity according to the year in which they made their Life Promises. Contributions from those who made their Life—or, where applicable—Annual Promises after the turn of the millennium will appear in the Summer edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

PART ONE

Susan (1970)

Living in the margins of the Church and Society can be quite painful. There is much need for more charity towards the unwanted and the uncared-for, and the realization that even bankers have souls! Circumstances which cause one to live on the margins have the great and unexpected blessing of making one more thankful for the blessings that one formerly took for granted. There are also the unexpected blessings that arise all of a sudden, from nowhere.

Evelyn Silouana (1974)

Life on the margins—living—margins—marginalization. I immediately find myself asking, 'Can living be separated from marginalization?' Fear of difference—difference of any kind, age, ability, status, race, colour, creed, disabilities, language, customs, life-style—seems to be endemic in humankind. Anything different from ourselves is seen as a threat and leads to anxiety and then rejection. So we seek

to make others conform, or persecute them, drive them away, or simply ignore them, overlook them. We are all marginalized in one way or another most of the time. And then we in turn marginalize others.

When we are marginalized, we react with anger and resentment. Such anger is good; it can be used as a first step towards overcoming the evil of marginalization. It can make us more alert, more sharply aware of our own tendency to marginalize others. It can become a spur towards reaching out to others across the barriers of difference, even if this makes us feel vulnerable and insecure. Resentment is a negative reaction that needs to be overcome.

'For as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia'[1] 'Put on Christ': a despised Jew, a member of a conquered race in a not-particularly-important province of the Roman Empire, who consorted with the dregs of society, tax collectors and prostitutes, was rejected by most of his people. And their leaders conspired to cause his death, hanging on a Cross outside the city walls. What could be more marginal? Yet he willed that death, and Life came from the tomb. If we have indeed 'put on Christ', then we must be where he is: on the margins, accepting our own marginalization, saying 'yes' to fear, insecurity and vulnerability, and joining him in his prayer: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'[2] Then new life can come to our world too and, through the power of the Spirit, we are enabled to say 'alleluia' with our whole being.

Mary Christian (1976)

It has become clear in the last 50 years that change is inevitable in the Religious Life and new ways of living out that commitment have to be found. It is not a matter of being subsumed by the norms of secular society, or of standing out as a counter-culture which has little relationship to secular society, but of finding a way in which we can indeed be 'People of the Way' and 'People of Reconciliation'. This will require being on the margin, not in a critical or condescending way, but in a way of allowing Christ to live through us in love and healing power.

[1] Gal. 3: 27 (AV), and as sung in the Orthodox Liturgy.
[2] Luke 23: 34 (AV).

Georgina (1983)

To me, margins are not static and immovable, but ever-changing as we move on: for example, when our prayer changes and it is time for new ways. Perhaps we have grown out of old paths, and we fear, or are at a loss, to know how to face new ones—but the Holy Spirit will always be there for us, if we keep 'turning up' at prayer time. It is possible to become too fixed in our own ideas of what prayer is. We may try to conform ourselves to ways we have read about or heard of. And so that is another margin to adapt to, when the time comes. Basically, prayer is relationship with God, and all relationships vary according to the participants. Once one margin has been faced and accepted, another appears on the horizon, and that has to be grown through in the same way. It is another way of saying that here we have no abiding city.[3]

Sometimes the margins are to do with changes in our outer circumstances, and sometimes to do with inner conflicts and doubts, but they are all to be seen as gateways to God and opportunities for growth in faith. The main thing is to persevere as best as we are able.

Mary (1984)

I believe that every Oblate Sister's vocation is individual, and that no two are identical. Moreover, just as the life of a contemplative nun is hidden *from* the world, so that of a contemplative oblate is hidden *in* the world. SLG is our spiritual home, but our material home is elsewhere. We have our own homes, some of us have families, some have jobs and we have obligations and responsibilities to fulfil there. So we do not belong completely anywhere. I have also been made to realise that, in addition to this, there is no reassurance in our material circumstances either. We may be sent onto the margins again, through illness or loss of close family, or through our own infirmity of body or, worse, of mind, so that we need to be cared for and we lose our independence. 'Here we have no abiding city…' I think this is fundamental to our vocation.

[3] cf. Heb. 13: 14.

Maureen Hilary (1986)

I have been constantly aware of those throughout history who have been marginalized: refugees and other victims of war and/or natural disaster; ethnic minorities, the homeless, out-of-work and all subject to the prejudice of others who see them as different from themselves, through race, colour, sexuality, education, poverty, religion etc. We see it too in both the Old and New Testaments; and certainly Our Lord and his disciples, both in his day and now, have experienced it. We do not need to look far, either, to see in the Church today people marginalized by their beliefs and the divisions amongst us. As individuals too, in some degree, we marginalize those we find difficult to like, although we may not recognise this as such. All this is material for our work of prayer and reconciliation.

On the margins: through circumstances in my own life from early childhood, I have often felt on the margins, though not articulated it as such. Vocationally, priests, hermits, religious, and all drawn by God to a particular life of prayer, by their response choose to live on the margins to some extent. Monastic religious, especially, are often misunderstood: 'What do they *do*?' or, worse, 'Aren't they wonderful!' In recent years, religious communities have had to look at different ways of working out their particular charism in today's world. Change has not been easy, as they have explored how that should be put into practice; and the traditional monastic life has not escaped it. As Oblate Sisters I think we live to a great extent on the margins, because of the hidden-ness of our lives outside the Community. Inside the Community, as the life of SLG has evolved and changed, we too have been affected by it. That is sometimes uncomfortable, but also challenging.

Jean Irene (1988)

I have always felt that Oblate Sisters are a sort of hybrid, for we are not given through our oblature a recognised position within the Church, as the nuns are through profession; nor do we have any particular place in the society in which we live. We are married, single, in paid employment or not, as we choose and are called. Some of us, through ordination or by our position within our church communities, have a particular place in the Church; but that is what we happen to be—it is not a qualification for oblature. We are

hidden within SLG, and we are hidden within our own place at home. This is why I feel that 'living on the margins' is a very fruitful topic for us to explore.

As I get older, I am struck by how easy it is for elderly women to be overlooked and disregarded in our youth- and celebrity-obsessed culture. This may be a wild generalization. And here is another: people don't like to admit to getting older, and we try to ignore the fact that we are all going to die. Being an increasingly older person, and one of faith too, is a recipe for being marginalized. It is easy to feel lonely, though the reality is that we share this predicament with many others throughout the world. What we learn in these difficult marginal places is the adventure of faith. We have the conviction that God is here with us and we are caught up in his self-offering love, being poured out for the life of the world. A phrase from Fr Gilbert Shaw is very familiar to us, since it is at the top of the intercession board at Fairacres: 'In stillness nailed, to hold all time, all change, all circumstances in and to Love's embrace.' Whatever our personal circumstances, we are all sharing in this.

Diana (1989)

Margins, marginal, marginalize: the same word, but with different endings; and to me that gives a different emphasis to each word.

To marginalize a person, an idea, an activity, seems to mean to put on one side as uninteresting or irrelevant, and if something is marginal, there is also the feeling that is it unimportant. A margin, however, seems to have a quite different aspect. The margin of a page, either holding the left side of the text or flowing with an uneven edge on the right-hand side, helps to give form to the text and helps to make it easy to follow and absorb the meaning. The margin of a road also edges the road. Sometimes it breaks up more readily and is not as firm as the road, nor in as good repair, but where the road goes, there also the margin always runs on each side

It may be that, in a world where evident activity, success and achievement are admired and highly valued, people of a contemplative disposition do live on the margins, marginal to society's main preoccupations, and marginalized because of a perceived lack of interest in obtaining these goals. As Oblates, too, perhaps we live in the margins of the Community. We obviously are

not nuns in the mainstream, on the crown of the road, but that does not mean that the road goes on without us; roads always have margins of one kind or another. If I can live in the margins of the Community, I think that is a good place to be, and I am thankful and grateful to be there.

Melanie (1989)

For many years I have held to the concept of prayer, of intercession, as laid down in the Bible, of 'standing in the gap': for me as an Oblate, this is 'living on the margins'. Over the course of many years, different verses and passages from Scripture lodge in the mind, some taking on a specific significance as the Lord has laid them upon my heart.

For me, there are two verses particular to my oblature as it has matured. One particular verse, Ezekiel 22: 30, with several attached and related verses, speaks of 'standing in gap', living on the margin, to pray for the salvation of the world:

> I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before Me in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.

At that time no one was found, with catastrophic consequences. I pray that, with His strength, I can stand in the gap and be an intercessor. A similar theme is taken up in Ezekiel 13: 5, where the prophets failed to ascend to the breaks—margins—to pray: 'You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it for the house of Israel.' This can be related to Jeremiah 27: 18 and the instruction to make intercession to the Lord of Hosts: 'Let them plead with the Lord Almighty…' The implication is that a 'righteous' person can avert threatening tragedy by standing in the gap (on the margin) by intercession and prayer of repentance.

The prayer of a prayerful person can indeed help the community, individuals and the world. What greater calling can we have? Psalm 106: 23 is another confirmation of the individual standing alone before the Lord, retelling how Moses knew how to stand in the gap, living on the margin of the Jews in a place of leadership, being a go-between for man and God. Moses stood before God in the breach and successfully turned aside God's wrath and destruction.

I said that there were two verses that have greatly influenced my intercessory prayer life, as well as my times of contemplative prayer. The second verse is Lamentations 2: 19, being the working out of the first verse (Ezekiel 22: 30):

> Arise, cry out in the night in the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water in the Presence of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him for the life of your young children, who swoon from hunger at every street corner.

I have the blessing of time and an ordering—not so good on the ordering!—to live fully on the margin, with the prayer of Solomon:

> Yet give attention to Your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence this day.[4]

All in the power and Name of Rebbe, Melech, haMaschiah, Yeshua—our Master, King, The Messiah, Jesus.

Joan (1989)

Having lived what I have come to recognize as a 'marginal life' for over 30 years, I felt I must bring some thought to this. In my eighties, where movement is more difficult, things can be a struggle. I have found something written by another Oblate Sister which also expresses this, and the other faces of this time of ageing: 'Simultaneously, however, the contemplative soul dimension expands, becomes broader, deeper, more perceptive.' I have found that too, much to my surprise and joy.

I have been continually grateful for this vocation, and I am amazed at how well I am known. I read that there has to be an element of ruthlessness in such a vocation. I am sad about this, but it is essential to retain space, and this is ever more so with frequent invitations to communicate, and a constant battle in a society that mostly has little conception of what one is doing! I have been nurtured, confirmed and developed by my association with Fairacres, and continue to be, for which I am extremely grateful.

[4] I Kings 8: 28.

Aileen Margaret (1989)

Being on the margin seems to be the inevitable start of our quest. What brought us to the Community—maybe personal dissatisfaction with the state of our life? For me, it was the need to find a way to live positively on the edge of society—to start on a pilgrimage that might bear fruit. Without oblature, I would still be a frustrated seeker. Within it, the pilgrimage can continue, strengthened by the loving support which the Community gives—all the time, but so strongly when we are in difficulties. Living on the margins may change its parameters as we get older, but the privilege of having made Life Promises provides all we need in this life.

Pam (1992)

What is fascinating, but I knew to be true, having listened to Oblate Sisters' stories, is a fine thread that flows in, through, and around, that binds and upholds us in the life of oblature in SLG. The mercy and grace of God nourished by our Rule, Morning Oblation Prayer, and Offices, all taken up, 'in stillness nailed', in intercession.

I have felt on the margin many times in my life, probably through childhood experience of my parents being divorced when I was small, and subsequent family changes. It really was a stigma in those days. Going to church on my own and feeling the pull and desire to be there… It was on my first retreat that I recognized I was being called into a different way of praying. I eventually came to Fairacres, where at once I felt at home and in the right place, and warmly welcomed my spiritual home. 'I have placed before you an open door'[5]—but when we step over the threshold, we have no idea what is ahead. Neither did Jesus. He knew he had to do his Father's will, but not the details of the journey, or his companions on the way. Neither do we, but when we meet together, there is a recognition and a mutual understanding of vocation and calling.

A margin can be a good place to be, as you can often see things more objectively. To be alongside someone who is in a different place from where we are, or would want to be, is a privilege. There are those we choose to help, and those we would prefer not to be

[5] Rev. 3: 8.

alongside, but prayer takes us there. This, I am sure, is where I am meant to be, and where being an Oblate of SLG has brought me. It can be where we are with Christ, on the edge and usually hidden, with Christ at the foot of the Cross.

Natalie (1996)

On the margins? Never! When I walked into Fairacres for the first time, I felt I belonged and knew that if I didn't have a husband [who had just died when she wrote] and children, I would have become a nun, if you would have had me! For the last few months I have been reading the notebooks I kept—writing in them every day when I was at Fairacres, or Bede House[6]—a little paragraph each night, reliving those wonderful days. Remembering the hermit sisters at Bede House. Great details of gardening, being the 'garden advisor' there. So I never felt marginal, just totally at home.

Sue (1999)

My parish is in the 1% of the most deprived parishes in the United Kingdom, covering income deprivation, health, disability, employment, skills and training, crime, child well-being, and so on. My strong sense is that estates such as this are the modern day equivalent of the 'desert' in the early centuries of Christianity. Living on the margins is the place where realities are confronted and battle is done, and I have chosen to be here. It is difficult in so few words to speak of the meaning of this geographical place, but some generalisations may echo aspects of the enclosed life of SLG. There is nowhere to run to—people have no income to escape from this place. All the barriers we erect between ourselves and others and God have been stripped away—people here tell it as it is, and see themselves as they are. All my personal, hidden fears have been dragged to the surface by anti-social behaviour, crime, the presence of the mentally ill, etc. Intercession is an important work: desperate people ask for prayer; their pain is on view. There is a great sense of the darkness out there on the estate and inside ourselves, need is expressed, and Eucharistic joy is strangely very evident. There is nowhere to hide.

[6] One of the Community's houses 1967-2003.

My anniversary of Life Promises is St Antony's Day, 17 January. Antony is a desert saint, one defined by the margins and refined by spiritual battle. His journeying further *out* (from the edge of the village, to the tombs, to the fortress, to the mountain in the outer desert) is inextricably linked with his journeying further *in*.

There is a sense of movement, of choosing to be in a place, praying, learning, listening, and then moving on to go further out (and so 'in'). I think I discern the drawing to this within myself; and [my parish] is the furthest 'out' place of my life so far, and also the place where I have been most challenged to 'stand in hell and, in Christ, despair not' (St Silouan).

Julie (1999)

I have not felt 'marginal' while at Fairacres. Whether that is due to being there for two weeks at a time, or to being there only once a year, I couldn't say. But my impression is that everyone is occupied in pursuing their own vocational life and leaving me to do the same. I find that very affirming.

It has long been my experience that attempting to live a contemplative life in itself puts one on the margins. Although accepted, and warmly so, in the parish, I am still rather the odd one out. 'What does she do all the time?' is rather the attitude, even though I do pursue several active ministries within the parish. It is the sense of being viewed as 'different'. My family used to be the same way, but have over the years just gotten used to Mom or Grandma being how she is. I do have to correct grandchildren again and again about my time in England, which they persist in referring to as 'being a nun'!

STRENGTHENING ESTATES MINISTRY

THRIVING IN MISSION

AL BARRETT AND ANDY DELMEGE

This article is an edited and abridged version of 'Thriving in Mission', the Report in August 2011 of the first 24-hour residential conference of the Birmingham Diocese 'Strengthening Estates Ministry' group at Offa House near Leamington Spa, March 2011. The full, unedited Report will be available to download from our website at www.slgpress.co.uk at the beginning of 2012.

Introduction

'Strengthening Estates Ministry' is a group for clergy and church community workers ministering in the outer estates of Birmingham Diocese. The conference, funded by the Church Urban Fund, was attended by 15 parish clergy and pioneer ministers, 4 diocesan officers and the Bishop of Aston. It was designed to be a structured conversation, allowing space for reflecting on ministry within an estate context.

From the conversations over the course of the conference, a rich and complex picture emerged of mission in outer estates. Picking up on an early suggestion, to think about 'thriving, not just surviving', we focused in on the key question: 'what would thriving, or flourishing, in mission look like, in outer-estate parishes?' We found answers to this question both in examples from our experience (often quite personally rooted) and in our theologically-shaped imaginings and longings. We also began to identify specific, concrete practices and gifts which, we felt, contributed to the nourishing and nurturing of such a thriving, flourishing mission.

These are detailed in the full version of this Report, but we did return repeatedly to the idea of 'attractive, infectious goodness', that is, of a kind of goodness that might be seen in individual Christians, and in the church community as a whole, and be seen by others as

attractive. This was linked to the almost clichéd desire for the church community to be seen as welcoming and friendly, but had much more substance to it than that: a 'goodness' that is exemplified in tangible qualities or virtues. It was also linked to a confidence and sense of self-worth which, rather than making other people feel 'not good enough', was quite the opposite. This kind of confidence and goodness would be infectious, spreading out through the church community and its many wider relationships, infecting the wider neighbourhoods in which church members lived and moved.

Barriers and obstacles to our thriving in mission

We also looked at barriers and obstacles to our thriving in mission. A recurring theme was the fragility of the lives of many people who live on outer estates, and who are therefore both our neighbours and, often but not always, members of our congregations. We also noted, however, in passing, a 'connectivity' in outer estates, where networks of family and friends may often mean that everyone seems to know everyone else—within their own network, at least. The fragility of many outer-estate people's lives was, for us, translated into the fragility of many outer-estate congregations. 'Lack' was the key word: of money and resources, of (able) people, of local leadership, of structures that work, of capacity for vision. 'Small and fragile, ageing, tired' was an oft-repeated mantra. Congregations, like individuals, were often enmeshed in wounded and turbulent histories. Sustainability into the future was by no means certain.

We touched on some observations of what we might identify tentatively as 'cultural norms' in outer estates. Chaotic lives often mean a reduced capacity for self-discipline and 'sticking' at things, it was suggested. A distrust of, or indifference to, neighbours was another suggestion, as was the strangeness of inviting people (other than family) into your home. These seemed to have at least two obvious implications: on discipleship and learning, and on clergy well-being.

Nurturing Christians in their discipleship emerged as a key challenge in outer-estate parishes. Getting people to take part in things outside Sunday mornings was a common struggle, whether it was through a reluctance to come out at night, shift-work patterns,

or stressful family circumstances. Regular and long-term commitments also seemed difficult.

Linked to the sense of cultural norms among outer-estate people was the sense of multiple difference between clergy and their neighbours—often in terms of academic background, cultural tastes and opportunities, and size, style and location of house—leading to a perception of inaccessibility to neighbours, and feelings of isolation for clergy themselves.

Another kind of isolation was linked to the perception of lack of local capacity: an often quite limited sense of being part of a team—rather, the inevitability of having to do lots of tasks (e.g. administration, finance) which in more affluent places might be done by other people, and which were often felt to be de-energising. Managing demands from all directions, constantly shifting from one mode to another, was wearing, and sometimes it was personal health that suffered. There was a sense that outer-estate ministry is 'unglamorous'—compared, perhaps, with (no doubt romanticized) perceptions of inner city 'heroism' or suburban 'comfort'—and this perhaps has its own bearing on clergy souls.

We identified a number of issues to do with our sense of place—as neighbourhoods, as parishes—within wider communities and structures. While these can often be positive, they can also bring their own sense of threat.

We discussed, in a number of different contexts, the dangers of dependency and co-dependency—their destructive effects on individuals and relationships, and the ease with which they can be encouraged or fallen into.

Thriving in mission needs a certain way of seeing, we suggested. We can see the people, community and neighbourhoods around us as lacking, deficient, coursed by loss and scarcity—or we can uncover a different kind of wealth, and potential and possibility in the (apparently) unpromising. A key word here is 'hope', which begins with imagining, and seeing the first shoots of, God's kingdom in a community or neighbourhood. We suggested that the priest might sometimes be the 'bringer of daring'—to point to the possibilities in moments of apparent fragility and crisis. As we turn to explicitly biblical and theological resources, the role of the priest

as the bringer of a daring, hopeful, theological imagination is worth holding in mind.

Biblical and Theological Resources

What resources from Scripture and theological tradition nourish us and help us imagine our way into thriving in mission, and energise us in taking significant steps, however hard, down that path?

Missio Dei: God present and active in all things

God, the creator of all things, is present and active in creation—in the world, and in our neighbourhoods. Signs of life that we glimpse around us are signs of God at work. Each and every human being is created in God's image, and in each of them we can glimpse something of God's beauty. 'Doing business with God' is something we, and all our neighbours, can engage in. Prayer, in many different forms, helps us both to see God's presence and activity around us and to respond to God.

'Exile' and the prophetic traditions: inhabiting the edges with hope

The exile theme has many layers to it. Residents of outer estates are in the city, but are on its edges, both geographically and, often, within its structures of power. Christian communities are, in some ways at least, (re)discovering themselves as marginal to society, rather than a taken-for-granted part of its establishment. From that position we might be able to empathise more with our neighbours, including those other exiles (political, economic) who find themselves in our neighbourhoods, often after long and dangerous journeys from other parts of the world.

It is from within this context of exile that many of the Jewish prophets speak: often words of challenge for the powerful and the corrupt, but also visions of hope for a broken people longing for 'home'. Three passages stood out for us, from Jeremiah, Zechariah and Isaiah.

Jeremiah

> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.[1]

In 'the welfare of the city' (= peace, *shalom*), we found one of those vital, over-arching visions for our mission and ministry, a related, but perhaps richer biblical image than 'thriving' or 'flourishing', helpful as they are. We noted the two-way 'infectiousness' at work in this text: seeking the *shalom* (or thriving) of others is a process through which we find *shalom* (or thriving) ourselves. A third dimension to this text is the crucial role of the exile in the flourishing of the city: learning how to be (faithful) 'guests' of others, and with apparently marginal power, we can somehow help usher the city into fuller life.

Zecharaiah

> Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.[2]

We were particularly drawn to this image of the city streets, populated rather than empty, with generations coming together and at peace with each other. Instead of the fears and anxieties that keep people—young and old—behind closed doors, the streets in this thriving community are a place of meeting, of resting, of sharing and of playing.

Isaiah

> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise

[1] Jer. 29: 7.
[2] Zech. 8: 4-5.

> instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.[3]

So many layers of meaning are held within this text, but we heard it particularly as a call, or commission, to hear the cries of pain of our neighbours, and to help them to find their voices to express that pain. The careful process of rebuilding what is broken in our neighbourhoods requires an openness and attentiveness to those who lament, a solidarity with them and a commitment to journey together towards healing, liberation, and celebration.

Christology: Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection

Of course Jesus was a central focus of our theological reflections, but we drew out a number of key themes and 'grammar' from the Jesus story that resonated particularly with the outer-estate contexts we have begun to describe.

Jesus made his 'centre' at the 'margins'

Jesus spent much of his time, and gave much of his attention, to those who were on the margins of society: the poor, the women, the ill and disabled, the foreigners, the socially outcast. If the heart of the Incarnation is that 'the Word became flesh and blood and moved into our neighbourhood', then that is for us both an encouragement—that Jesus dwells here, on the outer estates, and with us in our own sense of marginalization—and also a challenge—that he meets the most marginalized people of our estates exactly where they are, and that we, the Church, often fail to do likewise.

Jesus put seeking God's kingdom first

When Jesus claims the vision of Isaiah 61 as his own mission,[4] he unites the calling of his disciples with the calling of the Jewish exiles to seek 'the welfare of the city'. The prophetic hope—of

[3] Isa. 61: 1-4.
[4] Luke 4: 16-30.

healing, rebuilding, liberating and celebrating, from within the brokenness and imprisonment of exile—becomes the foundation of the kingdom vision which Jesus calls his disciples to seek first.[5] In our contexts and ministries where there are so many competing pressures and priorities, Jesus offers a decisive priority with which to order everything else.

Jesus' way of 'thriving', through Cross and Resurrection

We noted in the life and ministry of Jesus a seeking of 'life balance' between giving out, partying, and time alone. We also reflected, from a number of different angles, on the Cross and Resurrection as the definitive lens through which we Christians are invited to understand, among other things, 'thriving' and power.

> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.[6]
>
> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.[7]

We reminded ourselves that hope (the exilic hope of rebuilding, the flourishing of the kingdom, the new life of resurrection) is inseparable from the Cross, from a costly way of giving, suffering, letting go and losing. True power, the power to bring life and healing and reconciliation, is found only through a letting go of the dominant, and dominating, forms of power with which the world—and we include ourselves, and the Church, in that world—is familiar.

The risen Christ as guest/ host

Reflecting on Jesus' resurrection appearances took us back to the cluster of themes around exile. When Jesus draws near to the forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus, he comes as stranger, and he is invited into their home as guest. Yet as stranger he listens to their stories of disappointment and heartbreak and re-tells their accounts within God's bigger story; and as guest he takes bread, blesses, breaks and shares it. From within the place of the stranger, the

[5] Matt 6: 33.
[6] Mark 8: 35.
[7] John 12: 24.

guest—the place of dependence, of marginality, of lack of control—the risen Jesus makes space for challenge, story-telling and transforming hospitality. As Churches, as Christian disciples, and as clergy, it may often be in the places where we are stranger and guest, rather than host, that the mission of God is able to be most authentic, most fully thriving.

Missiology ('being sent'), baptism, and Christian distinctiveness

Another cluster of theological themes extended Christology into missiology.

> Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'[8]

First, we are sent in the way that the Father sends the Son: our 'going' is part of extending the presence of God in the world; it is about 'practising the presence of God' where we find ourselves. The content of our going, of our 'practising'—at least in the terms of this passage—is the peace and reconciliation that God breathes, through Christ, in the Spirit.

Secondly, our baptism is what immerses us—clergy and lay Christians together—in that mission: firstly in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus; and, by extension, in the waters of chaos[9] within which many of our neighbours live much of their lives. Baptism summons us to solidarity with them in their struggles. There is much in the imagery of baptism, we felt, that could helpfully be explored further in contexts like ours.

The third dimension of missiology we explored was that of 'Christian distinctiveness'.

> Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed

[8] John 20: 22-23.

[9] Note: some connections were made in our discussions between Hebrew understandings of water/the sea, baptismal imagery and the lives of many of the people in our parishes.

> to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'[10]

We have talked already about a kind of 'attractive, infectious goodness' that might be both fruit and roots (if that is possible) of thriving in mission. We understood this to be a holiness caught from, and rooted in, the holiness of God, that meant we were both good neighbours, and, in subtle but significant ways, being, looking, and behaving differently from our neighbours. One of us described it as 'needing to be just different enough'.

Church: roots, gifts, reconciliation, Eucharist

These reflections on Christian distinctiveness lead us towards the last cluster of theological themes that we identified as valuable resources to enable our thriving in mission—the significance of the church community. We wondered what people—both 'inside' and 'outside'—expect us to offer, or to be able to offer; we wondered where, as well as the obvious building, 'church' might happen on outer estates; and we then explored some of both the theological ideals, and the practical realities, of 'church'.

First, we identified the worshipping community as the place which offers roots—for ourselves, for our congregation members, and for our neighbours beyond the obvious boundaries of 'church'. Within often chaotic neighbourhoods and often chaotic lives, the regular rhythms and prayer of the church community signify—to many, we believe—a heart of community, a stable hub, a doorway to the numinous, and the possibility of peace. We must remind ourselves, however, that while the worshipping community has this 'power'—a 'treasure in clay jars'[11]—we are also, as one of us put it, 'entering a place of worship every time we leave the church building'. Our encounters with God in worship prepare us to encounter God in our neighbourhoods and in our neighbours.

Secondly, we identified 'church' as a community which shares gifts. We read the dramatic growth in number of the Church in Acts 2: 44-47 as being the fruit of radical practices of generosity

[10] 1 Pet. 1: 13-16.
[11] 2 Cor. 4: 7.

and sharing. We had all met people through whom something radiates—that 'attractive, infectious goodness' again—but how do we cherish and affirm these people in our congregations, and how do we help others become similarly radiant? We reminded ourselves that the gifts of God's Spirit—both spiritual and practical resources—are not contained within a building, but shared across a community. We also rejoiced that the wider body of the Church is a community that intentionally redistributes its wealth, in many different kinds, so that the materially poor can be rich givers in other things. We see this document itself as a gift from the relatively poor outer-estate churches to the Church as a whole.

Thirdly, we understood the Church as a community of reconciliation. In a society and a world where relationships are often impoverished, strained or broken, the Church is called to be a focal point for pain and grief, an enabler of lament, a safe space for brokenness to be faced. It can also often be an inspiration, a voice of hopeful possibility, that relationships can be good, healthy and healed. Most significantly, perhaps, the Church is called to be what we might call a 'workshop' for reconciliation—knowing that this ministry has been entrusted to us, acknowledging also that we are often pretty bad at it and that it is as hard a task as any, but committing not to give up, to keep wrestling with it, because that is who we are.

Returning to our central Christological theme through a Eucharistic lens, we reminded ourselves that it is through our brokenness that we, and others, are fed. We know ourselves as individuals in the process of being formed as, and transformed into, a Eucharistic people, and we trust that in that process, our communities are being transformed too.

Practices to nourish our thriving in mission

How do we—how could we—work out this theology in practice in our outer-estate contexts? What are the culturally-appropriate practices of faith that might effectively shape us in the qualities of thriving in mission which we have outlined above? We conclude this chapter on resources for 'Thriving in Mission' with some initial glimpses and gut feelings towards what kind of practices might be significant.

They include: daring in relationship, e.g. the moments of privilege and grace when we dare, or are compelled, to visit someone as a 'stranger'; conversation—enabling, sometimes even permitting, honest, small-scale conversations around real issues such as anger, and how we might learn to respond as Christians; telling stories—reviewing and reflecting together.

We may also think of attention to different kinds of 'terrain'—e.g. socio-economic, practical/organisational, spiritual (both internal and external), intellectual and emotional literacy and capacity; discernment—the hard work of working out 'what is truthful, here?'

There is also lamenting and celebrating, together, and with others; en-visioning, working with the grain of vision that is already there, even if it initially looks unpromising; seeking out common/core values, 'community organising' model—inviting, or allowing, different, potentially competing, wishes, needs and mixed motives, to be voiced around one table; confidence-building.

There is seeking 'life balance', e.g. through the rhythms of the week or seasons, as much as attending to our boundaries; prayer—for everyone and everything locally, for healing and reconciliation—developing mutual support to help us all 'improve our praying'.

The theological reflection recorded in this Report is at a basic and working level. All of us, as we are able, are called to gather these fragments and to take them further and deeper. We hope to write more in the coming years.

MARY ANOINTS JESUS, WHO IS THE CHRIST

SISTER PAULINE MARGARET CHN

'A Panel of Six'

On holiday with my sister in Essex, I attended an amateur photographic competition in which entries were in the form of a panel of six. My sister and her husband explained to me that, instead of looking for just one arresting image, the judge would consider all six prints in one panel and judge the whole impression or theme, as well as the merit of each print. As the competition progressed, I noticed how each entry was arranged in an order that helped the prints relate to one another.

I realised that this could be a useful metaphor for exploring the Scriptures. The four gospel writers originally made selections from a vast number of stories, memories and teachings circulating around the person of Jesus. John says, for instance:

> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples. … But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.[1]

Within the stories chosen, the Evangelists selected or omitted various details, so that we have different views of the same event, or different versions of Jesus' teaching.

I have selected a group of stories from the Gospels which I hope will give a creative study of Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Not all the stories refer to or name Mary, but as we look at them we find that themes in these stories overlap, echoing or enhancing each other, and that ideas flow in and out and through them. They make up a panel of six, reflecting light onto each other and opening up the possibility of an insight into what might have been happening when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. In the photographic competition, the title gave a clue to the intentions of

[1] John 20: 30.

the photographer and the subject theme. The title I want to give to this gospel panel is: ‘Mary anoints Jesus, who is the Christ’.

At the heart and centre of the panel is the story from John 12, where Mary anoints the feet of Jesus. Beneath it—as the foundation and context for this story—is the raising of Lazarus found in Chapter 11 of John’s Gospel. To either side at the top of the panel, are two stories from St Luke: first, the well known story in Luke 10 describing the two sisters, Martha and Mary, as they relate to Jesus in different ways, and secondly the story in Luke 7 of the unnamed woman who anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Finally, in the lower two corners, there are the parallel, but not identical, stories in Mark and Matthew of a woman anointing the head of Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany.

Luke 10: 38-42 Martha and Mary. Contrasts in discipleship.	**John 12: 1-8** Bethany, the home of Lazarus. Mary anoints the feet of Jesus.	**Luke 7: 36-50** In Galilee. A woman (referred to as ‘a sinner’) at the house of Simon the Pharisee.
Mark 14:3-9 An unnamed woman anoints Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany.	**John 11** (Context) Bethany. The raising of Lazarus.	**Matthew 26: 6-13** An unnamed woman anoints Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany.

God’s Anointed

The New Testament Scriptures record the faith of the early Church that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed of God. They proclaim him as anointed by God, anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Although Jesus was apparently reluctant during his

earthly ministry to accept the title Messiah, he had quoted, with reference to himself, the words of the prophet, 'The Lord … has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.'[2] In the Old Testament, Saul and David are anointed by the prophet Samuel as an enactment of God's purpose and authorisation of each of them as anointed king. There is, however, no record of any human sacramental enactment of God's anointing of Jesus, other than the tradition that a woman anointed him with costly perfume during the last days before his death. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus asked the disciples, 'Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'[3] Was Mary, perhaps, the first disciple to recognise the significance of the vocation of Jesus who, as God's Anointed, was called to suffering and death?

The Christ must suffer (John 12: 1-8)

The central story in my panel of six is from chapter 12 of John's Gospel. A feast is given for Jesus after the raising of Lazarus. The atmosphere is probably one of overpowering gratitude. Yet Mary anointed Jesus in anticipation of his burial. Jesus sees in the action of Mary more than an act of thanksgiving. The lavishness of her gift, poured out in love and devotion, foreshadows the grief of the bereaved women approaching the tomb with spices and ointments on Easter morning. Jesus says in her defence, 'She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'[4]

The disciple sitting at the feet of Jesus (John 11; Luke 10: 38-42)

How do other stories enhance and interpret this story? The well-known account of the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 of John's Gospel gives us a larger context and the background for our story. Here we see the two sisters, Martha and then Mary, interacting with Jesus in conversation and gesture, before Jesus calls Lazarus forth from the grave. We might notice especially that when Mary comes to the grave, she kneels at the feet of Jesus, a detail indicating the characteristic posture of Mary in the panel. In the anointing story,

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[2] Luke 4: 18.
[3] Luke 24: 26.
[4] John 12: 7-8.

she anoints his feet, and in another story of Martha and Mary, found only in chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel, we find Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him.

With this detail in mind, we might look more closely at the story in Luke, where Martha welcomes Jesus to a meal and later complains that Mary is leaving her to do all the work. This narrative is frequently used to illustrate the need for Christians to avoid falling into the trap of frenetic and anxious over-activity. Martha's critical attitude to her sister is corrected by Jesus, who commends Mary as having chosen the better part, the one thing needful. However, it may be that behind Martha's discomfort is the awareness that in sitting at the feet of Jesus, Mary is flouting custom and etiquette. Women were not permitted to study the Law or to become formal disciples of a rabbi, in the way that Paul described himself as being 'brought up … at the feet of Gamaliel'.[5] Was Martha aware of the possible scandal attaching to her sister if she behaved in a way not expected of a woman? Perhaps Martha's complaint was not only about frustration at being left to do all the work. And perhaps Jesus, in speaking of the one thing needful and the better part, is commending to Martha, and to all women and men, Mary's recognition that to be a disciple of Jesus is the one and only good path to be chosen and pursued. Martha too is called to this discipleship, and it is worth noting that, immediately before this, Jesus tells the tale of the Good Samaritan, commending ministry to the poor and needy. Jesus welcomes as disciples all who listen his teaching and all who, listening, put it into practice.

'She has performed a good service for me'
(Mark 14: 3-9; Matt. 26: 6-13)

In the anointing stories we have similar attitudes of shock and disapproval, this time at the behaviour of a woman anointing Jesus. There are two more stories in the panel which take place in Bethany. In Mark 14 and Matthew 26, we find records of a meal at Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper, where a woman anoints the head of Jesus from a jar filled with costly and pungent perfume. In each of these, we are told that the disciples are critical because costly

[5] Acts 22: 3.

perfume has been wasted in this extravagant gesture; the money could have been used to relieve the poor. The stories in Matthew and Mark, unlike the one in John 12, do not name Mary of Bethany, but it is hard to believe that the origin of all three is not the same. All take place in the week of the trial and death of Jesus, all happen in Bethany, and all record a similar defence by Jesus of the action of the woman: 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.'[6]

'In remembrance of her' (*Mark 14: 3-9; Matt. 26: 6-13)*

In the stories in Matthew and Mark, there is a further comment by Jesus about the unnamed woman:

> Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.[7]

The comment does not appear in John, but it may be that the Evangelist himself preserves this memory of her by giving extra details, such as that the woman is named as Mary, the note that Martha was serving at the meal and the information that Lazarus was present.

The woman who was a sinner (*Luke 7: 36-50)*

It is less clear whether a similar story in Luke 7 derives from the same incident, or whether it refers to a wholly different occasion. We can add this story to the panel of six with some questions: 'Do you think it is the same location?' 'Has Luke used a story from one source and superimposed it on another location?' 'Or was there another woman who acted in a similar, but not identical, way?'

Luke's story is set in Galilee before Jesus begins his journey toward Jerusalem. Here the woman is said to be a sinner, and the context is a meal given by a Pharisee. Jesus addresses the Pharisee as Simon, which may indicate that Luke originally took the story from the same source as Mark and Matthew, where the host in Bethany is named as Simon the Leper. As in John's version, the

[6] Mark 14: 6; cf. Matt. 26: 10 and John 12: 7.
[7] Mark 14: 9; Matt. 26: 13.

woman anoints the feet of Jesus, not his head, but there is a difference, in that that she has first washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, whereas in John, Mary anoints the feet and wipes them with her hair. With some knowledge of contemporary custom, we can picture the expressions on people's faces. A woman with her hair uncovered in public would be enough to shock and disturb. Add to this the unrestrained show of emotion, and we can imagine the pinched lips and wagging heads of the onlookers. In Luke's account there is a different atmosphere of disapproval, in that Jesus allowed such a woman anywhere near him. We may have a different incident in Luke, especially as the context, and the teaching Jesus gives in response to Simon's disapproval, are quite different from those in the Holy Week accounts. But it is interesting that John has Mary anointing the feet, rather than the head, of Jesus. I include this story because some of the details can give a new focus to the overall impression. One highlight is that it reminds us of Jesus' attitude of inclusiveness. Women are welcomed as disciples, but sinners are welcomed too and have access to his presence.

The poor

What of the poor? In all three Holy Week stories of anointing, there is the open criticism, either from the disciples or Judas, that this extravagance deprives the poor. Jesus uncharacteristically does not take the part of the poor against Mary, but points out that in this case there is something more critical happening, to which Mary has responded by her action. Yet the poor remain important: 'For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish.'[8]

As we trace the appearance of various motifs across the six stories, we find that the poor are present symbolically in two of them, in the person of Lazarus. Lazarus has the same name as the character in Jesus' story about a poor man and a rich man, which ends with the comment, 'Neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'[9] In John, Lazarus is literally the man

[8] Mark 14: 7; cf. Matt. 26: 11 and John 12: 8.
[9] Luke 16: 31.

who comes back from the dead, and John particularly notes that Lazarus is present at the meal given in Jesus' honour. Such resonances can alert us to undercurrents and nuances in the panel of six.

Jesus says: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.'[10] The good news to the poor is above all that, in Jesus, God comes to us where we are, in the emptying, the *kenosis*, of the Incarnation. As Paul says, he 'became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'.[11] And yet Jesus is also present *in* the poor, to whom his disciples minister in his name.[12] Mary's lavish act of devotion is to be remembered because this extravagant generosity of spirit is what characterizes truly Christian discipleship in response to the needs of a neighbour. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine onto the wounds of the traveller, and went beyond this anointing to provide generously for his continued recovery. The poor will always be with us, and in ministering to the poor, Jesus' disciples anoint Jesus himself with the devotion of a Mary of Bethany.

Following Jesus today

How can the exploration of these stories encourage us to follow Jesus today? I was interested in the encouragement given by the judges to the entrants in the photography competition, such as, 'I enjoyed that' or, 'I felt I had been there'. Later in my holiday, I went to another competition, where single entries were given marks out of ten. The average mark seemed to be about seven-and-a-half. My brother-in-law was delighted to receive a ten for an entry. It was a photograph taken at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford. The judge said that the print made him want to visit the museum and take some photographs himself; it made him want to go there.

When we read and reflect on the stories about Mary of Bethany, do we want to go there? Am I moved to become involved? Have I encountered in the stories the Christ, the Anointed of God, and have I recognised with Mary of Bethany that the Messiah, the Anointed

[10] Luke 4: 18.
[11] 2 Cor. 8: 9.
[12] Matt. 25: 31-46.

One, walks to the suffering of the Cross and to the place of burial? Can I, with Mary, not only sit at his feet listening to his word, but follow him? Can I become his disciple and minister to him in his suffering by pouring out the precious ointment of love in service to the poor?

And as I recognise Jesus as the Christ, anointed by the Spirit to preach good news to the poor, can I recognise my own poverty? Can I receive with joy the good news that, although we have our treasure in earthen vessels, or clay jars,[13] it is God who has shone in our hearts,[14] and we who are poor are being transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another?[15]

Note: Sister Pauline Margaret is the author of the SLG Press publication, *The Jesus Prayer: Gospel Soundings* (FP154) (£3.50).

ASSOCIATES

New

Companions

(The Revd) Sarah Miller, 3 September 2011
Helen Bush, 30 November 2011

FLG

(The Rt Revd) Martin Shaw, 24 August 2011
Margaret Ann Leeke, 10 November 2011

R I P

FLG

James Shiel, Summer 2010 (notified July 2011)

[13] cf. 2 Cor. 4: 7.
[14] cf. 2 Cor. 4: 6.
[15] cf. 2 Cor. 3: 18.

IN MEMORIAM

HARRY GALBRAITH MILLER

15 July 1914—23 July 2011

We remember with thanksgiving our author Harry Galbraith Miller, who died in July, a few days after celebrating his ninety-seventh birthday.

Harry Galbraith Miller graduated from Glasgow University in Arts and Systematic Theology and then trained for ministry within the Church of Scotland. He was ordained in 1941 and ministered first at Cathcart Old Parish Church near Glasgow, then at Lochgilphead, at Inch near Stranraer and at Inchinnan. He spent the last sixteen years before retirement ministering in Iona and the Ross of Mull, and after retirement moved to Glasgow. During his time in Inchinnan he oversaw the demolition of the 1904 church and the building of a new parish church within the village—rendered necessary by the designation of Abbotsinch as the new Glasgow Airport. His funeral service took place at Inchinnan, in this church.

His father had been a musician, and Harry Galbraith Miller had inherited a skill with music. He was a renowned preacher, yet despite his learning, and his ability to communicate the gospel and tell stories, he published just one book, *The Unicorn: Meditations on the Love of God* (SLG Press, FP108, £1.50). Inspired by some medieval tapestries, he wove together, within this short book of meditations on the Love of God, stories of the mythical unicorn and the great days in the Church's year.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

PAUL M. PEARSON is director and archivist of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine College, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

A. M. (DONALD) ALLCHIN (1930-2010) was Warden of the Community 1967-95. Several of his writings have been published by SLG Press.

AL BARRETT has been a parish priest in different parts of the Diocese of Birmingham for the past nine years. He is currently Priest-in-Charge of St Philip & St James, Hodge Hill (Local Ecumenical Project), and has begun doctoral research in practical theology, focussing on community regeneration and 'political liturgy' in outer urban estates.

ANDY DELMEGE has been a parish priest in the outer estates of Birmingham for the past ten years. He is currently Vicar of St Bede, Brandwood and Priest-in-Charge of St Gabriel, Weoley Castle. He is a Priest Associate of the Community and the Convenor of 'Strengthening Estates Ministry'.

SISTER PAULINE MARGARET is a member of the Community of the Holy Name, the mother house of which is in Derby, England

SEBASTIAN BROCK is a former Reader in Syriac Studies at the Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford and currently a Professorial Fellow at Wolfson College. He is the translator of two publications by SLG Press.

BOOKS

The Art of Biblical Prayer, J. W. Rogerson, SPCK, 2011, £9.99.
ISBN 978-0-281-06450-2.

In his introduction to this book Professor Rogerson claims that he is not very good at prayer. Most of us can echo this statement, however long we have been waiting before God. It is, perhaps, an endeavour in which none of us will ever consider ourselves to have achieved success, but books like this one help us to keep our focus. The book is written by an eminent and accomplished Old Testament

scholar, who looks at personal prayer with the observant and critical eye of one well-versed in Scripture. However, his biblical exegesis is interwoven with serious consideration of arguments against praying, and problems in prayer. He shows how ancient texts become relevant to our condition in our contemporary attempts to turn to God. This reading of Scripture is at the root of both Protestant teaching and the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, so the book should appeal to a wide audience. With the number of books about *lectio* currently available, it is easy to forget that the Reformers, too, viewed reflective reading of the Word of God as the way of entering into the saving work of redemption.

As well as a specific chapter on praying with the Old Testament, the author looks at issues that arise in building up a life of prayer, and reflects on the background to the Lord's Prayer. There is also a short Epilogue suggesting ways of overcoming 'pray-er's block', when prayer is difficult. Each chapter includes a series of penetrating questions based on its content which are useful for either personal or group use. Professor Rogerson modestly claims to know nothing about contemplative prayer, so does not attempt to speak of it. However, it is hard to believe he is not, unknowingly, already practising it.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

Note: Professor Rogerson is the author of the SLG Press publication, *Strength in Weakness*: *the Scandal of the Cross* (FP160), a series of meditations for Holy Week (£4.00).

Praying the Dark Hours: A Night Prayer Companion, Jim Cotter, Canterbury Press, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-109-0.

I first met this book by Jim Cotter—surely the best-known of all his writings—in a draft form which Sister Jane SLG (1927-95) showed me early in 1983, and it accompanied me at a time of retreat before Profession. It is good to read Jim's preface to this edition and to recall the history. The book had its origin when, praying the ancient Office of Compline with a group, Jim noticed that the word 'Lord' occurred 36 times in 12 minutes, the word 'Father' 12 times. Other

biblical images for God were used sparingly. Ever the pioneer, and at a time when inclusive language and patriarchal imagery had barely begun to dawn upon our consciousness, Jim set about writing some alternative forms of Compline, along with what he called at the time 'Cairns for the Journey', a collection of short thoughts which could provide a springboard for prayer and into deep solitude. One of my favourites is that from Rainer Maria Rilke:

> Be patient towards the unresolved: love the questions themselves, and live them now. Gradually, without realizing it, in the distant future, you may come to live into the answers. (p. 132)

The Office has been adapted and sharpened, but there is still the recognizable shape of a variation for each day of the week, along with seasonal changes. 'Cairns for the Journey' have now become 'Waymarks', and there is a 'waymark' for each night of the year at the back of the book.

A generation on, the book has become a classic, and the Cairns Publications imprint is now carried on in association with Canterbury Press.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Being Good, 2009, Monastic Wisdom Booklets 1, and *How We Treat One Another*, 2010, Monastic Wisdom Booklets 2, both by Amos Schmidt OSB, Mirfield Publications, £3.00. (Currently no ISBN.)

Br Amos Schmidt OSB, born in 1950 and professed in 1989, is a monk of the Benedictine Monastery of St Matthias, Trier, Germany, a monastery with which the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield has had close links for many years. His particular academic interests are theology, philosophy and the Rule of St Benedict.

These short pamphlets, the first two in a series of 'Monastic Wisdom Booklets', are greatly to be welcomed. The Community of the Resurrection says of this new series that it is

> intended for any reader seeking insight into their own life from the monastic tradition. Initial numbers will appear in relatively quick succession, eventually settling down to appearing twice a year.

Translated into English by Richard Parker and Fr George Guiver CR, these readable and informative little books give clear guidance on

particular aspects of the Rule of St Benedict (living a good life and relating to one another in various facets of community life). Given the upsurge in interest in monastic spirituality for daily living, their appearance is timely.

Of interest to SLG Press is the way in which some Anglican communities are now feeling particularly drawn to publish small, inexpensive books of Christian spirituality to help people in their Christian discipleship. This is how SLG Press began in 1967, and it is very much in accordance with our own task. They are available online from the Mirfield bookshop at www.monastery-stay.co.uk (Tel: 01294 483346).

EDITOR

Borrowing from the Future: A Faith-Based Approach to Inter-generational Equity, Ann Morisy, Continuum Books, 2011, £14.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-2536-1.

Ann Morisy, a community theologian, opens up a new vein of practical theology, offering the first faith-based exploration of inter-generational fairness. She draws on gospel teaching to explore how we can channel and control power and self-interest, how we can adapt our lifestyles and redirect resources to take account of increasing longevity within society. In a challenge to move into action, she calls for the rights of tomorrow to be valued alongside those of today, and for an extension of justice into the future.

Writing as a 'baby boomer', one of those born in the period up to 20 years after the Second World War, Morisy says that this apparently lucky generation is poised to take more out of the system than it has put in, that it will require younger generations to dig deep to provide the resources needed as it grows older. Recession has added to the issue. Those in later stages of life are, she says—admitting that many statements are, of necessity, generalizations—less likely to be hit by changes to student finance, pension provision, unemployment, the challenge of getting a foot on the property ladder. The usual flow of advantage is directed towards the future, with a reasonable expectation that upcoming generations will have a somewhat easier life than those before them. The reversal of this assumption can lead to inter-generational rivalry.

This book, with a text, layout and style of writing which are easy to read, is one for people seriously grappling with theological thinking with regard to a society where issues cannot any longer be viewed as clear-cut, and where so many fundamentals upon which society was built in past decades, and even centuries, can no longer be taken for granted. The examples which Morisy gives refer chiefly to England and Wales, but there will be resonances for other societies in our increasingly 'global' world.

EDITOR

Edith Stein: Woman of Prayer, Joanne Mosley, Gracewing, 2004. £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-85244-596-9.

Edith Stein, or Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (in Latin, Sancta Teresia Benedicta a Cruce—'blessed by the Cross'), was canonized in 1998. Although her writings have become increasingly available in English translation, there has not been a corresponding flow of books providing commentary on her life and thought. This study, presenting Edith from the aspect of a woman of prayer, is, therefore, particularly welcome. The author is assistant editor of *Mount Carmel* magazine and writes and gives retreats on the spirituality and saints of Carmel.

The book is in two distinct parts. The first, 'Ideals in Edith's Life', is biographical, but the events of Edith's life are considered in the context of certain defining characteristics of her witness and message: her dedication to the Truth; her devotion to the Cross; and her way of suffering and sacrificial love, taken to the ultimate sacrifice of her life at Auschwitz in 1942. Having given up the practice of her Jewish faith when young, Edith's search for truth led her first to include philosophy and psychology in her university studies, and later to become a pupil of Edmund Husserl, the founder of 'phenomenology', a new movement in philosophy seeking to find the truth. Edith's favourite lecturer, Adolf Reinach, was killed in action in 1917, and when she visited his widow, Anne, at the end of the year and perceived the strength which Anne radiated in her sadness, she was given a completely new understanding of what it meant to be 'blessed by the Cross':

> It was then that I first encountered the Cross and the divine strength which it inspires in those who bear it. For the first time I saw before my very eyes the Church, born of Christ's redemptive suffering, victorious over the sting of death. It was the moment in which my unbelief was shattered, Judaism paled, and Christ streamed out upon me: Christ in the mystery of the Cross. (p. 12).

It would, perhaps, not be an exaggeration to say that the rest of Edith Stein's life and death were lived in the context of this insight, as well as in the context of her search for truth. Indeed, she wrote a whole book on the subject of St John of the Cross and 'The Science of the Cross'. Anne Reinach, having started Edith on the path to conversion to the Catholic faith, would subsequently play a major part in her vocation to Carmel. A few years later Anne lent Edith a copy of the Autobiography of St Teresa of Avila to read. She stayed up all night reading it, and then declared: 'That is the truth!' Now her way was clear. It was to lead through baptism to Carmel, to offering herself consciously for her own Jewish people, and ultimately to her death. 'In a world of hatred and confusion, she was a visible sign of love.' (p. ix)

In the second part of the book, 'Ideal Figures in Edith's Prayer', the author uses her extensive knowledge of Edith Stein to show how certain figures influenced Edith's writings, life and prayer. There are four sections. In the first, on Jesus, Edith's study of 'empathy' (which formed her doctoral thesis) is brought in; in the second, on Mary, Edith's teaching on Mary as role model and on the role of women are given their place; in the third section, on Queen Esther, Edith's Jewishness and sense of call to intercede for her own Jewish people in their time of crisis are emphasized. In the fourth section on Carmel, the author shows the influence of a number of the saints of Carmel on Edith, and how Edith made their spirituality her own, developing and extending it for her own Christian journey. Of these figures, the most significant are: Elijah, patron saint of Carmel; Teresa of Avila; John of the Cross; and Thérèse of Lisieux.

This is a book which repays careful study. To anyone familiar with the biography and the writings of Edith Stein, the content itself may not be new. What is particularly useful, however, is the utilization of these elements to emphasize specific strands in Edith Stein's life and witness.

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Useful Servanthood: A Study of Spiritual Formation in the Writings of Abba Ammonas, Bernadette McNary-Zak, with the Greek Corpus of Ammonas in English translation by Nada Conic, Lawrence Morey, OCSO and Richard Upsher Smith Jr., Cistercian Studies Series 224, Liturgical Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-87907-224-7.

Abba Ammonas will be no stranger to readers of the *Fairacres Chronicle* who have come across, or even possess, Derwas Chitty's translation of his spiritual Letters. Evidently a younger contemporary of St Antony, he features a number of times in the various collections of *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, as well as in his writings. The most important of these are his Letters, which retain a freshness across the centuries.

Fr Chitty's translation was made from the early Syriac translation of the Greek original, whereas the Letters are translated here from the Greek, which is only available in rather later manuscripts. Not only is the order different in the Syriac version, but it also has four extra Letters, not preserved in Greek (which has eight). The present translation now allows English readers to read both forms of the correspondence, and a further benefit is the translation of some other texts attributed to Ammonas. The literary problems concerning all these texts are in fact more complex than the introductory chapters indicate; thus, for example, two of the texts translated, 'About the joy of the soul of one beginning to serve God' and 'Exhortations, or Paragraphs of encouragement', are really by Abba Isaiah, a point not mentioned anywhere. For the ordinary reader, however, such details are not of much significance, since both Ammonas and Abba Isaiah are authors whose writings can often sound a chord with modern readers.

The book is divided into two parts, the introductory chapters, and the translations. Part I, entitled 'Understanding the writings of Abba Ammonas', offers an introduction to the literature of the Desert, and then, more specifically, to Ammonas' Letters. The ensuing chapters bear the headings 'The Monastic Journey', 'The Gift of Discernment', 'A Community of Discernment', and 'Monasticism, Mysticism, and Ecclesia' (a brief epilogue). These chapters are written very much with recent academic discourse on the literature of the Desert in mind. Though thoughtful and instructive, they may

not appeal so much to the general reader, who might find it better to turn directly to Ammonas' Letters in Part II.

SEBASTIAN BROCK

Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers, Thomas Merton, ed. Paul M. Pearson, Orbis Books / Alban Books, 2011. £12.99.
ISBN: 978-1-57075-931-4.

In 1998 the Barbican Art Gallery in London hosted a series of exhibitions and events celebrating 'A Year of American Culture'. In the Spring these included a fascinating double exhibition on two floors. On the top floor the display was entitled, 'Shaker: The Art of Craftsmanship'. Paired with it down below was, 'The Art of the Harley'. An onlooker invited to compare and contrast these two 'Arts' that at first glance seem worlds apart might have been tempted to say they cancelled one another out. What could a wooden rocking chair possibly have in common with a gleaming, powerful motorbike? Yet the superb craftsmanship they both exemplified, whether in wood carving and carpentry, or in metal work and engineering, revealed some profound common connections. Despite more than a century's difference in their making, the rocking chair and the bike are objects with a timeless, compelling beauty. Moreover, they equally display the power of perfect design, in something flawlessly functional, made with a specific user in mind. The Shaker craftsman would have expressed satisfaction when his chair was used for the first time by saying it was 'just right'. I hope the team that crafted one of the more uniquely flamboyant Harley Davidsons would have been pleased with the phrase about it in the exhibition catalogue: 'modification: extremely custom'. The idioms reflect their different cultures, but express the essential connection made between maker and user.

Making connections is a characteristic of this slim volume. *Seeking Paradise* allows and encourages the reader to discover and make some astonishing connections between Monks and Shakers, between work and worship, between silent stillness and 'dancing in the water of life',[1] to name but a few. The book is subtitled *The*

[1] A reference to the title of vol. 5 of the Journals of Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage*.

Spirit of the Shakers, and it is an appetite-whetting 'starter' for any reader new to the Shakers or knowing nothing of their life. Equally, it captures vividly 'The Spirit of Thomas Merton' as, in his own words, we begin to recognise and understand why the Shakers mattered so much to him. We learn from the text that over some years Merton had hopes of writing a book on the Shakers. We can be truly grateful that this hope, cherished but unrealized in his own lifetime, has now found a worthy fulfilment. His legacy is a remarkable anthology, edited in masterly style by Paul M. Pearson. In his Preface, the editor gives a helpful and clear summary of the book's contexts and main themes and enables us to get to know something about the people to whom Merton was writing in the letters which feature in the correspondence section at the end of the book.

The first two long articles make connections with one another, as both focus on Pleasant Hill, a Shaker village in Kentucky founded at about the same time as Gethsemani, Merton's Abbey. Pearson in his substantial introductory article, 'Seeking Paradise: Thomas Merton and the Shakers', traces for us the growth and development of Merton's enthusiastic interest in the Shakers and how their way of life influenced Merton's own priorities and insights. Pearson backs up his own narrative with quotations, some quite lengthy, from Merton's own published writings. We begin to get a clear impression of the deepening sense of affinity with the Shakers, as we hear and become familiar with Merton's own voice. This helps the reader to recognize and make connections with the other articles in the book which are written exclusively by him. It is interesting to compare and contrast Merton's chapter, 'Pleasant Hill; A Shaker Village in Kentucky', with Pearson's 'Seeking Paradise: Thomas Merton and the Shakers'. Merton makes connections with the Shaker way of life and that of his monastic community. He sees that the early Cistercians in their commitment to simplicity, work, worship and plain living have a great deal in common with the Shakers, seeking something 'Eden-like' in their 'just right' 'valley of love and delight', as one of their best-known hymns puts it.

The next two articles are also a pair related by a common theme: this time, 'Work'. The first one is the introduction Merton was

asked to write to *Religion in Wood: A Book of Shaker Furniture* by Edward Denning Andrews, an eminent and acknowledged authority on Shakers. Here we have a chance to listen to Merton's writer's voice at its very best, fluent, clear and enthusiastic. He makes connections between the Shaker work ethic and the poetic and visionary insights of William Blake, a contemporary of the earliest Shakers.

The next piece, in contrast, lets us hear a very different voice. 'Work and the Shakers' is a transcript from a tape of a conference Merton gave at Gethsemani in 1964. Here, understandably, the style of the spoken word is more informal and discursive, but no less thoughtful and authentic. Talking about work on home ground, he addresses his own brethren in a more Benedictine and theological idiom, as well as drawing on Shaker attitudes and insights. Behind *laborare est orare* ('to work is to pray') and vice versa, we hear the ring of truth. I think this conference was in a series originally addressed to the Novices, and I guess (and hope) they could make appropriate connections to their own situation and that there were moments of responsive laughter and recognition at statements such as:

> … it is right in the monastic life that everybody has something that he can do fairly well and within reason, perfectly, and he should get a crack at doing that some of the time, even if it is just a question of sleeping or something like that. (p. 91)

The contents of this book can be roughly divided into three categories, each covering about one-third of the total number of pages. The first third consists of the writing of Pearson; the second is Merton's contribution in words; a very important non-verbal third of the book, the photographs, is essential to our understanding of 'The Spirit of the Shakers'. Several photographs of Pleasant Hill were taken by Merton, and all the rest by Pearson. Their written words let us hear their voices, but their black-and-white photographs let us see through their lenses. Like a kind of visual continuum, punctuating the written text without any word of identification or explanation, these silent, simple black-and-white images transport us into the Shakers' world, with glimpses of the landscapes, the architecture and the indoor and outdoor environment in which they lived out their community vision day by day. These

quiet, calming, unfussy scenes and objects catch the eye and catch the heart.

There is another recurring theme in the book which binds it together. The 'paradise' idea which is part of the book's title is a key to something very important to Merton. He sees the Shakers as a prime example of what he likes to call 'the American paradise myth'. They are not unique, but are in his view an outstanding archetype of those who came, and continue to come, to America 'seeking paradise'. They brought with them a spiritual blueprint and a determination to work together to make their version of 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness'[2] come true. They did not look back nostalgically to Eden, nor seek a secular city where 'gold' can be 'picked up on the streets' (p. 122) and the future can be safe, secure, successful. Like Blake, the city they sought was the New Jerusalem. This is challengingly expressed by Merton in the ending of a letter to Mary Childs Black on the last page of the book:

> The Shakers realised that to enter into a genuine contact with the reality of the 'paradise spirit' which existed in the wonderful new world, they had to undergo a special kind of conversion. And their conversion had this special, unique, wonderful quality in that it, more than any other 'spirit', grasped the unique substance of the American paradise myth, and embodied it in a wonderful expression. For myths are realities, and they themselves open into deeper realms. The Shakers apprehended something totally original about the spirit and vocation of America. This has remained hidden to everyone else. The sobering thing is their vision was eschatological! And they themselves ended. (p. 122)

More than a little of Merton's enthusiasm has rubbed off on the reviewer. The publishers claim in a kind of mission statement printed on the back of the title page that they 'endeavour to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit and challenge the conscience'. This reviewer's verdict is: 'mission accomplished!'

SISTER BARBARA JUNE SLG

Note: See also the articles on pp. 5-9 of this edition of the *Fairacres Chronicle*.

[2] United States Declaration of Independence, 1776, second sentence.

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Canterbury Press (Norwich Books):

The Desert Movement: Fresh Perspectives on the Spirituality of the Desert, Alexander Ryrie, 2011, £16.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-094-0.

The Daily Prayer Rosary with daily and seasonal readings from Common Worship, complied by Clay Roundtree, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-088-8.

Living on The Border, Esther De Waal, 2011, £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-85311-962-0.

Love Set Free: Meditations on Christ's Passion, Martin L. Smith, 2011, £6.99. ISBN: 978-1-84825-100-7.

From Continuum Books:

First Sight: The Experience of Faith, Laurence Freeman, 2011, £10.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-6157-4.

From Liturgical Press:

Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from the Desert Mothers and Fathers, David G. R. Keller, 31 December 2011, £15.99. ISBN: 978-0814633878.

From SPCK:

The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life, Joan Chittister, 2011, £10.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06619-3.

Home by Another Way: Biblical Meditations Through the Christian Year, Barbara Brown Taylor, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06583-7.

Joseph: Insights for the Spiritual Journey, Sara Savage, 2011, £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06415-1.

Simply Jesus: Who He Was, What He Did, Why it Matters, Tom Wright, £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06479-3.

Parallel Lives of Jesus: Four Gospels, one story, Edward Adams, 2011, £12.99. ISBN: 978-0-281-06377-2.

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

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