FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

SUMMER 2016

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Cover Picture:

The Lamb of God
Bas-relief above high altar tabernacle
Fairacres Chapel

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COMMUNITY NOTES

Dear Friends,

I am sitting down to write these notes just after Corpus Christi and as we enter liturgical Ordinary Time once more. With only just over three months between Christmas Day and Easter Sunday this year, Ordinary Time seems to have come around again rather quickly! However, blessed ordinariness has a lot to say for it. After the Lenten fasts and Easter feasting, we now slip back into ferial time, a reminder that even our most normal and mundane activities are held within the Christian liturgical year.

One of the blessings of SLG Community life is the way in which the different seasons play out liturgically. We do the same things and follow the same rubrics year by year, yet each celebration is different, and each time something new attracts our attention or becomes significant. The liturgical year follows a cycle, but it isn't a closed circle. Rather we find ourselves experiencing a spiral, taking us seemingly to the same place, but always at a new and deeper level. Each yearly cycle takes us deeper into the liturgical celebration, providing we are open and willing to be taken deeper.

I suspect our own 'ordinary time' follows much the same dynamic. We may seem to tread the same paths and do the same things, but again our experience is actually of a spiral, covering the same ground at a deeper or higher level. It seems to be the way the Holy Spirit most often works in our lives. Not many of us have Damascus Road experiences or live the sort of life of discipleship recounted about St Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. Instead we follow familiar and ordinary paths which turn out in the end to lead us to extraordinary places. The present moment and everyday concerns become a sacrament of the presence of God and it is in the living out of our daily life that we are invited to grow deeper in the Spirit.

During Paschaltide the Gospel readings at the daily Eucharist have been from St John, and as we approached Ascensiontide and Pentecost we were given Chapter 15 to ponder in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds us to abide in him, and tells us:

> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (vv. 10–11)

It is of course the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost which leads us back into ordinary time and gives us grace to live the ordinary things. We abide in the love of Jesus when we keep his commandment to love one another, and we do all that in the context of ordinary life. Our life as Sisters of the Love of God is experienced as much over the washing up as it is in Chapel.

As I write, Sister Mary Kathleen of the Holy Ghost is very gently and peacefully moving towards the end of her life. She has been failing for some time and is now in bed with little interest in food or drink. There is a great sense of peace around her in her cell, and one senses that the veil between life and death is very thin. In a recent obituary of the American poet and novelist Jim Harrison, I came across a quote which seems to sum up where Sister is abiding now, as well as her life as a whole:

> In a life properly lived you are a river. You touch things lightly or deeply, you move along because life itself moves and you can't stop it.

Or to put it another way:

> The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3:8)

There is a sense of graciousness around Sister Mary Kathleen at this moment, and also awareness amongst us of the mysteriousness of the border experiences of human existence, birth and death. We are all both

deeply mysterious and deeply ordinary; one doesn't negate the other. The movement of the Spirit in our lives and the ways in which grace works out happen in the day-to-day activities, during the fasts, during the feasts and in blessed ordinariness.

On 17–18 May the Community had its Annual General Chapter meetings. In years past that would have meant Sisters gathering from the various houses of the Community. Now, of course, we live at Fairacres, our mother house; but there was still a sense of consciously gathering together as a Community for mutual discernment on where we are being led by the Spirit at this time. One ongoing topic is discernment on how best to use our buildings here to enable our life. Those of you who know Fairacres will be aware that it is a long building, with many stairs and various floor levels throughout the building, which are becoming an increasing problem for us in our daily life. As a way forward we have made the decision to remove our current choir stalls. Chapel and choir worship are at the heart of our life, so this is a big step to take. But we take it attempting to listen to the hints and whispers of the Spirit as we are guided onwards.

Other Community news is that Janet Aiden was clothed as Novice Oblate Janet of the Transfiguration at Vespers on the Feast of the Ascension. We are glad to welcome her into the next stage of her SLG journey.

In my Address to Chapter I asked the Sisters to look back at a figure who had influenced their spiritual growth in Community and who had been formative for them. Our Oblate Sisters will be joining us in this, and I would like to invite readers of the Chronicle to write or email with your own memories of Sisters and others associated with the Sisters of the Love of God who have been formative in their spiritual journey. 2017 is the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Father Gilbert Shaw, and it would be particularly interesting to hear from anyone who either remembers Father Gilbert or who has been influenced by his teaching. I am sure there are many of you with memories of Mother

Mary Clare or Sister Jane to name just two. Please do share your memories of the person and of what you learned from them.

I conclude with the Common Worship Collect for Pentecost Sunday as we seek to live ordinary time in the spirit of Pentecost.

> God, who as at this time taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG
Reverend Mother

R. I. P.

SISTER MARY KATHLEEN OF THE HOLY GHOST SLG

31 May 2016
the Feast of the Visitation

Professed
Good Shepherd Sunday 1967

R. I. P.

SISTER ISABEL OF JESUS GLORIFIED SLG

14 June 2016

Professed
26 May 1960

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A MODERN DAMASCUS ROAD ENCOUNTER

Some years ago a parish priest was preparing a group of adults for confirmation. They had been reading and thinking about the story from Acts which describes Paul's shattering encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 1–8). One of the men in the class asked: 'Why don't things like that happen nowadays?' The priest was silent. There was a woman in the class who had confided to him her experience of a hardly less dramatic encounter with God. But she had made it clear that she did not want it to be made known to anyone, and thus he was unable to reassure the questioner that 'things like that' do indeed 'happen nowadays'.

Shortly after her confirmation the woman was directed to Fairacres by a friend (the one mentioned in the account below) and in due course she became an associate of the Community. As time went on, she began to think that what she had experienced should not, after all, be kept to herself, profoundly personal though it had all been. What God does for one, she thought, may have meaning for many. Consequently we are able to publish the pages she has entrusted to us, trusting us at the same time to guard her anonymity. What follows is a shortened account of what she wrote at the time when she was first under obedience to the One who was communicating with her.

* * * * *

I

I was lying awake, bursting with fury, resentment and the utmost loathing towards Fate or God—in whom, however, I did not believe. The problem had been with me for a long time and was getting progressively worse. I felt I had a huge millstone around my neck that would remain with me for ever. All other aspects of my life were going well except this one thing, the one thing that was more than I could bear. I was desperately trying to think of a new approach to the problem. I had been rather creative with my attempts in the past. They had been varied

and unusual. But nothing had ultimately been of any help. I was scraping the bottom of the barrel as far as ideas were concerned.

Suddenly it occurred to me that some people might suggest prayer. This had never occurred to me before, and I recoiled from the idea as being ludicrous and embarrassing. I recoiled so much that I was shocked at myself. I had always liked to think that I was open-minded about everything, but on the subject of prayer I had clearly uncovered a profound prejudice.

This made me cross. Surely praying could not do any harm—except to my pride. Presumably it could not exacerbate the problem even if it could do nothing to help. I now really wanted to get rid of the prejudice—clearly a stupid, irrational limitation. I had always thought of religious people as having a need in themselves to accept the idea of God, 'God whom people would have invented if He did not exist', as someone had, I seemed to remember, once said, a viewpoint which, it seemed to me, was a complete explanation for religion. So I had thought of myself as being broad-minded when I related to religious people in the same way I related to everyone else.

But now I really wanted to get over the prejudice against prayer. I was, in any case, willing to attempt anything at all that might help to solve the problem, however far-fetched the remedy might seem. It then struck me that people normally kneel to pray, and this presented me with another apparently insuperable problem. How could I? It seemed so undignified. Yet there also seemed no point in going at it half-heartedly. To pray at all was an appalling and embarrassing prospect. But, of course, no one need ever know.

It took me quite a while, probably about forty minutes, to screw myself up to it. I remember that when I started it seemed like a total capitulation, but there seemed no point in drawing back. So I prayed and then, rather surprisingly, went to sleep and forgot all about it.

II

About ten days later someone spoke to me aloud in the middle of the night and told me to turn on the radio because there was something on I needed to hear concerning my *big* problem. I had been lying awake but comfortable, and my immediate reaction was a slight resentment that someone should get me to sit up in bed at 2.0 a.m. This resentment was followed immediately by curiosity and fear about who it could be in the middle of the night issuing instructions. At this point the command was repeated, so I simply sat up and turned on the radio while at the same time looking to see who was standing right beside me. There was clearly no one there but the radio was apparently tuned in correctly because a poem was instantly introduced and first read through and then repeated sung to a guitar accompaniment. The poem, 'On Children' by Kahlil Gibran, I recognized instantly. I had read it before in a book and had intended to read it again, but had forgotten:

> Your children are not your children.
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
> They come through you but not from you,
> And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
>
> You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
> For they have their own thoughts.
> You may house their bodies but not their souls,
> For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
> which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
> You may strive to be like them,
> but seek not to make them like you.
> For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
>
> You are the bows from which your children
> as living arrows are sent forth.
> The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
> and He bends you with His might
> that His arrows may go swift and far.
> Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

I was dumbfounded. Who had spoken? Who had planned the radio programme, and how long ago? Did everyone hear the same broadcast, or was it just for me? The poem was so exactly on the subject which was causing me such anguish, and was exactly what I needed to hear to help me come to terms with it. I was *utterly* confused. Clearly something supernatural had happened but exactly what I couldn't understand. And neither could I cope with it. My almost forty-two years of life had given me not the faintest inkling of how to cope with something like this; it didn't fit with anything I knew at all. I couldn't sleep—and didn't sleep all that night. I could see that all my thoughts on life would need revising. I had based my life on certain assumptions and all these now seemed obsolete, swept away in an instant. The job of rethinking so much seemed quite overwhelming.

For nearly a week I was in a daze. I felt that everything had been taken away from me, all preconceptions, prejudices, immovable opinions, expectations. I remember looking at quite ordinary and familiar objects and feeling that I could no longer rely on what I had always believed them to be. And this extended to everything. The task of rebuilding any kind of security seemed too big to contemplate. And I could also understand that it was probably better not to try. I understood that the whole edifice on which my life had been built had simply crumbled, demolished overnight. Painful though this was, I could at the same time understand that this was an advantage; that what had been swept away from me in one fell swoop would have taken years and years for me to dismantle bit by bit by myself.

All the same, it was incredibly painful. I felt totally vulnerable, and I wanted to get away and to be by myself. I craved the countryside with no people (unusual for me). So I went. The country felt more tolerable than the town. And when I got there I just sat and thought or wrote. I tried to make a bit of sense of it all. It seemed as if I were on a very fast

train, heading at perilous speed toward an unknown destination, with no one at all from whom to ask directions.

But I continued to receive information and instructions, though no longer spoken out loud. The instructions were not in line with anything I had ever thought about, and they sounded very strange and largely nonsensical to me. The things I came to understand during this period are more difficult on the whole to put into exact words than the instructions. Nevertheless I was left with an absolute conviction that whether I understood any of this or not was totally irrelevant—the important thing was to respond.

III

The first three instructions came during the days after 'the voice' and were:

1) The most important thing to learn is to listen. It is impossible to do anything more without this ability.
2) You must empty yourself so that I can come into you.
3) You must never do anything you don't want to do.

I thought at first that these would help me to feel less confused, but when I thought about them I became even *more* confused. I had come to assume that the person with whom I was dealing—and it was all very personal—must be either God, but by whose name I did not know, or that I had gone mad, presumably schizophrenic. I had never heard of God as being other than one on the receiving end of prayers. And I had absolutely no idea that prayers were other than a one-way affair, from humans upwards. But for almost ten days I experienced a deep, intense absorption in the 'Other', sometimes for hours at a time, never for a moment ceasing, not even for a second. Even at night there was constant communication, but I had said nothing. I was only on the receiving end. So the first instruction clearly fitted with what I was experiencing and with what I was being taught. But I couldn't see how it could possibly relate to God.

But whatever it was it had made itself known to me. It was not a cautious approach—as to a wild animal, which is what I was. I was simply *swamped* and completely overwhelmed, astonished and frightened by the hugeness of his/its infectious delight in me—ME, who had resolutely not understood and had been so unspeakable towards him! I was instantly brought to my knees in gratitude, adoration and repentance by his response of overwhelming and unmerited love and forgiveness. (By this time I could only think of whatever it was as 'he'. The sense of relationship demanded a personal pronoun.)

For days it felt like a party. I was utterly swept up in a wonderful happiness, to such an extent that I found it *very* difficult to pay attention to daily life. He drew my full attention. I could not look away, even briefly, and although I was ecstatically happy I was also extremely frightened, often terrified. He was so unbelievably big and overwhelming, and this was all so totally beyond anything I had ever experienced before. But I also realized that if God did exist I had behaved very badly in all my railings against him. If he existed he should be regarded as a human plus, namely, He would have feelings. So I felt very ashamed.

I had never in my life been happier. But I was also deeply disturbed and frightened. The second instruction only served to make me more frightened: 'You must empty yourself so that I can come into you.' I wanted desperately to comply with this. I had never wanted anything so much, and indeed felt quite powerless to resist. Who was asking this of me? With very little religious education I had never heard of anything like this. I had clearly experienced the supernatural, so I could not deny its existence any more—unless I was mad, in which case how could I understand what was going on? If this was not God, and it seemed too much to expect that it was, who was it? I had read a bit about poltergeists. Could this be something supernatural and undesirable? And if so, what then? This was a truly terrifying thought since I felt quite powerless to resist. I wanted it so desperately to come into me. And indeed I knew it had already done so since I had been willing that it should.

I *felt* possessed. But I kept noticing that in my dealings with the outside world I was behaving differently; something *within* me was directing my thoughts and actions. This was truly alarming, but when I looked at how I was now behaving there certainly seemed to be a great improvement. I was being more tolerant and less impatient. Surely something really bad wouldn't have that effect? I attempted to console myself with these thoughts, since clearly I had good reason to be scared, whether I was mad or whether I wasn't.

All this was compounded by feeling unable to talk to anyone else about what was happening, not even to my beloved husband. I would surely sound insane. And the combination of anguish and deep delight simply left me more confused.

I was further confused when I pondered the third instruction: 'Don't do anything you don't want to do.' This could not come from God! All I had learnt about God, mainly from tit-bits of Christian teaching, suggested the opposite: spend your life in awful good works and suffer—the more the better—for the sake of other people.

IV

To return to the morning after 'the voice', I remember feeling that I had suddenly been grabbed and held and my attention fixed on him. I had no choice at this stage, and although it was incredibly wonderful it was also absolutely terrifying. I had had no idea that things like this *could* happen. I knew somehow or, rather, was informed, that this was to be a lesson in how to do things properly, that the lesson was obligatory but that I could take it or leave it—that would be entirely my choice. I was uncertain who 'he' was; I expected the lesson to take a couple of hours or so, but it lasted ten days, by the end of which I was completely exhausted. I had eaten and slept little and my attention had been held. Moreover, during all this time I was attempting to behave normally towards those around me in the hope of not revealing anything or arousing curiosity. On the tenth day the lessons suddenly stopped and I understood that I could choose. At that moment the Presence withdrew from inside me, leaving me completely free to make my choice.

To my surprise I felt utterly and completely devastated and I chose instantly, begging it or him to return. Meanwhile I could hear my rational mind screaming at the top of its voice that this was stupid, imprudent. I had been offered a choice, but no time limit had been given, and it was crazy not to spend some time considering what was clearly an important decision. Moreover, I had no idea with whom I was dealing, and this was very dangerous. But I could not for a moment think of retracting. I had already decided—flat contrary to my cautious and considering character—and I could not wish it to be otherwise.

But in leaving me free to choose he had left me. I was desolate and wanted desperately that he should return. I had, it seemed to me, been taken over 99% for ten days and I couldn't bear his absence. Over the next few days, in response to my decision, I believe, he gradually returned.

V

It had never for one moment occurred to me that if God did exist He might take the initiative.

And if it wasn't God what else might there be out there? It terrified me that there was something so vast and powerful around, something or someone whose will I was powerless to resist. This was a tremendous shock. I believe I was in a state of profound shock—though of diminishing intensity—for at least the first year.

I had decided at the start of the instructions that I would immediately try to do anything I was told. The emptying of myself presented problems. How should one do it, and what should one empty? It became clear after a while that I had been emptied already. That was why I felt *so* disoriented and naked. But I understood that it was my job to remain empty, empty of preconceptions, prejudices, immovable opinions, strong desires … in fact anything that might impede his working through me.

I had heard of creative visualization, and that was the best I could think of to help me empty myself. I did exercises many times a day of visualizing various bulldozers, cranes, and suchlike machines, remov-

ing large blocks of stone from inside me, though my inside seemed nevertheless to become constantly littered. Sometimes it was stones rather than blocks of stone that needed removing; sometimes the floor was clear but the walls were encrusted with green lichen, or stone needed chipping away from the walls to make the cavity broader. There was always something, though I was surprised that the type of obstruction always seemed to vary of its own accord after a few days, and it seemed up to me to invent new ways of ridding myself of it—summoning gangs of cleaners to help scrub the walls, or new and more powerful machines.

On about the eighth day I received a new instruction: 'You must go and tell H about all this or you will pretend it has never happened.' I was stunned. How could I possibly pretend nothing had happened? Every second of every day was changed into something new, and I was still in a state of profound shock. I didn't want to say anything to anyone at all. I had not felt able to talk about it even with my husband. It was all too embarrassing. What could I say? If I were to describe my sense that something had come into me and was directing me, surely I would sound either mad or amazingly presumptuous? I was appalled at the idea of telling anyone. I was exhausted by this time by lack of sleep due to being woken for several hours each night for wonderful but exhausting communication. To tell someone, to get help, even to be diagnosed as schizophrenic would, nevertheless, be a relief in some ways. But how could I do it?

However, I had decided to obey. So I tried to work out what to do. In the end I wrote the briefest of notes which I took immediately to leave for H before my nerve failed me. In the event I had to put the note into his hand. This was very difficult and I instantly became icy cold and shivering with fear, so much so that I had to sit in the car for some time before I could drive away.

H phoned me later. He realized that whatever it was that was disturbing me was important and he suggested I visit him. When I did I was again speechless, but I had written everything down and was able

to give it to him to read. After reading it and asking me a few questions he said he considered I was not at all mad—that this was God! I had expected a diagnosis of schizophrenia ((H is a doctor) and was newly shocked. We talked and H said I had little choice but to go along with it. I remember saying that presumably I had the choice of pretending nothing had happened but H replied that he thought that would be very cowardly. From someone as sensible, accepting and non-judgemental as H this struck me forcibly. Then he spent some time attempting to reassure me, and suggesting books. And he asked me if I would visit a priest he knew. I agreed to this.

VI

When I went to meet the clergyman—B, as I shall refer to him—about three weeks later, I armed myself, as it were, with my template. I had received a lot of very specific information and instructions which I felt quite sure would bear no relation to Christianity, and I hoped they wouldn't. Christianity sounded so uninviting. But it wasn't as though I would be in any danger of swallowing his line. Anything he said would have to fit the template I had been given. I felt quite sure there would not be a match, but even so I found the prospect of meeting a clergyman difficult. I expected a pressurizing salesman and felt unexpectedly frightened. If I was not mad, and I still was not at all sure I wasn't, what I had written would seem amazingly presumptuous.

I was very pleasantly surprised by the man who met me. But I could barely speak and once again I could only show him what I had written. To my amazement, having read it all, B told me he was in no doubt about the good nature of my experiences. I remember asking him how he could think so in the light of instruction No. 3: 'Don't do anything you don't want to do.' He answered that I was lucky to have been told this. It was not much understood, but it was right.

After a long conversation, that included absolutely no pressure, and no accusation of presumption, for which I had braced myself, only an invitation to return the following week, I started to feel a bit better. I

was still confused and disorientated. But here at least was someone who thought he understood what I was experiencing.

By the time I returned the following week I was again in a state approaching panic. I told B that I felt I had a noose round my neck, and I would never be able to get free. I did not want to live a masochistic life of doing good works which, surely, was what Christianity was all about? At the same time I had experienced too much to get free. If what I had got involved in was Christianity I was truly alarmed. That was not at all what I wanted. He told me I had got the wrong idea of Christianity, that it was like being held in someone's arms, and I should not be frightened. He went on to say that even now, he knew for sure, I could break free if that was what I really wanted. But, he said, Christianity is not a noose but a yoke, and if at first it feels a bit uncomfortable it was because I was not used to it. He was very reassuring; he never gave me pat answers or made me feel in the least pressurized, but he answered my many questions and lent me books.

By the end of the third meeting I was more or less convinced that B was probably right in all he said. From the start I had the feeling that he was someone I could trust completely. But it was the books he lent to me, mostly written before I was born, which provided the most immediate help. I found that in their light all I had written, which seemed complete gobbledygook at the time, turned into perfect sense. The fact that I had written it all down before meeting B, and with no knowledge of or interest in the subject of religious experience, remains for me like concrete proof.

Once, sometime later, I told B how much I had appreciated his lack of pressure. He smiled and said: 'I had no need to use pressure. I could see you were being pressurized from elsewhere!'

Readers might like to know that the child, who was the cause of the original anguish by reason of being heavily into drugs, was completely cured and has become a source of constant delight.

ASSOCIATES

NEW

FLG

Revd Carol Smith	5 February 2016
Julienne McClean	9 March 2016

Companion

Clare Sillince	12 April 2016

RIP

Companion

Ursula Bunbury	14 December 2015

Priest Associate

Revd James Coutts	22 April 2016

FLG

Revd Dr Leslie Barnard	July 2015
Christine Dow	5 January 2016

CITADELS AND LIGHTHOUSES

Gilbert Shaw

From the earliest days of the Church, there have been those who feel that the end of human life is the love of God *per se*, and have found their mode of life in monasticism, making their effective witness through it. The work of the enclosed monastic is prayer, prayer in itself, not as a means to support other works, however good and useful they may be. Contemplatives gathered together in community can be likened to citadels on which the strategy of spiritual warfare is based. For monastics do not deal at first hand with the world's needs. They are not directly concerned with busy activity in the pattern of parochial life. However, parochial life will suffer unless it is supported and complemented by the prayer of the contemplative, whether living in a monastic setting or in the world.

The monk or nun is directly concerned with God, to respond to and to know the meaning of the life of the Spirit. The monastic life is the pursuit of religion in itself and by itself. Within time and space, of history and actual living, we must always be aware of and respond to the dimension of eternity. Monasticism witnesses to human dependency on that eternal dimension, and brings eternity into time.

To think of monastic life otherwise is to fail to understand its primary purpose of bearing witness to the truth of God's sovereignty and human dependence, and to the dynamic efficacy and energy of prayer. In an age of change and uncertainty monasticism stands not for conservatism, but for what is eternal. That is its contribution to the needs of the present age. In that sense the religious life is universal; it is a life within the Church, however much general historical circumstances may condition the local or temporal situation. The monk or nun stands for the simplicity and regularity of the great tradition, with his or her largely unseen contribution to the wholeness of devotion. It is not the expression of a temporary or local religious temper to which the individual community bears witness, but to the continuity of spiritual life. Temporal cultures pass: monasticism remains. Its roots are in the Desert

tradition, an expression of the completest dependence of the finite on the Infinite.

The prayer of the Desert may be unseen, but the life of the Desert draws the world to it for inspiration and counsel, just as it did in the days of Anthony. Throughout history contemplative religious houses have been centres of spiritual power to which the faithful can resort for enlightenment and spiritual refreshment. Out of the withdrawal of the contemplative the living waters of the Holy Spirit flow back into the world's affairs to fertilise them. The monastic knows the most complete identification with the busy world through concentration on God and the activity of the Spirit.

Contemplative Vocations in the World

Associations of priests and laity united to the religious communities in spiritual offering can be found from the earliest days of monasticism. St Benedict made provision in his Rule both for cloistered Oblates who were bound by enclosure and by vows, and for Oblates living in the world. This practice is largely followed by many religious orders today. In this way an enclosed community recognises the spirit of fellowship between its members and those who, while not having received the call to a life of enclosure and permanent consecration as religious, are inspired with a similar purpose and associate themselves with the Community through the consecration of their daily life.

In the complexity of living in the world today, there are an increasing number of calls to contemplative prayer in the general body of the faithful. The call is not that they should be withdrawn from their active occupations, but that they should be lighthouses of prayer in the world, giving their light of witness above the floods and storms of the world's confusion which break upon them. By their prayer and God-dependency, they are the bearers of the light of Christ. By their silent witness they speak to the Church and to world of the things of God.

The dependence on the divine glory, the conviction of the power and majesty of the eternal God, is of the essence of the contemplative life. Through the still being of contemplatives in the presence of God,

they participate in eternity here and now. Thus they bring eternity into time. It is not the multitude of committees and the restless search for new techniques that will bring the tide of conversion, but the witness of still obedience of souls given to and gradually perfected in prayer.

Though circumstances are different today, there is a close parallel with the fourth century of the Christian era. It was then that the desert blossomed with ascetics and warriors of the spiritual battle. But today, unless the whole structure of modern life breaks down, the solitary places are made in the soul and in the busy-ness of life. Those with contemplative vocations in the world struggle, together with those in community, against a distorted humanism. They keep the desert solitude in their hearts; because it is there they are enabled to serve more completely, to bring peace, to be peace, to put love in where love is not.

The inmost heart of the contemplative offering is of spirit, not of place; therefore the need for the contemplative life is perennial. We are living at the end of an age. Whether in the providence of God it is the end of the world is no matter; however, with the advent of atomic energy, old things have passed away. At the end of an era, any era, the garment of the past can no longer be patched. It has to be unwoven in order to be rewoven, and in order that it may be rewoven, the loom must first be set up. That setting up of the loom is the first task, and it is on the loom of wholly consecrated lives that the new garment can be woven.

If we look back at history we see the 'end of the age' recurring, and it has always been the souls of prayer who have corrected the balance. Ever since the days of the Desert monks, contemplatives have been the means of bringing back to the Church's consciousness the fundamental truths of her being. They show faith in living out the oblation of Christ's offering and atonement. The prayer of contemplation and the life of contemplation are witnesses to that gift of God, the knowledge that all things are being made whole through loving sacrifice. The end and purpose of both is the unity of love.

The particular vocation of contemplatives in the world could be described as one of recollection, where their main work of charity is prayer rather than action. Of course, action will flow out from their prayer, and some of them, by force of their circumstances, may have to lead active lives. Their life must be based on the prayer of the Church; that is, on the Eucharist and Divine Office, with time for daily contemplative prayer.

If it is possible they will participate in the Eucharist daily. There Christ, the great high priest, unites the Church to his offering in heaven, through the blessed sacrament of his body and blood. The members of his body unite their lives with his, so that they may be strengthened to offer themselves as a sacrifice of love and reparation for the needs of the whole world. The Eucharist is the supreme act of worship; flowing out from it is the offering of the Divine Office.

The perfect prayer of our Lord did not cease when he ascended into heaven. Through his indwelling in his mystical body, the Church, this prayer has risen to God unceasingly through the ages. Because of our incorporation in his risen life, the Divine Office is part of the great work of the extension of the Incarnation. It is called the Divine Office because it relates wholly to God. The words of Scripture make up the greater part of the Office. There are psalms and antiphons, most of which are drawn from some part of Scripture, as well as hymns and lessons which are based on Scriptural ideas. So it is divine in origin.

It is divine in its intention because it is directed to God. The foundation and background of the recitation of the Office must be the pure worship and homage paid to God. Daily those who recite the Office visit the court of the heavenly King in this wonderful way. It is divine in its enabling, too, for the Holy Spirit shows us how to speak and to praise God. We are lifted out of the narrowness of our natural limitations; and the Word of the Father utters itself again through the medium of human lips. However, while contemplatives delight to join in this corporate prayer of the Church, with the conditions of life today, those

who live in the world need to look at this practice realistically and make their own individual rule accordingly.

There must be set times of personal prayer and these should be adhered to as faithfully as possible; but when circumstances sent by God make them impossible, there is no break in the rhythm of the life of prayer. All is taken up into the one complete oblation of Christ. Prayer is not a matter of words or holy thoughts. It is the growth of a personal relationship between the soul and God. If there is no time for a long period of prayer, then the repetition of the Holy Name or of the Sanctus may sing in the heart; or some loved verse of a Psalm direct the soul Godward, so that everything is savoured within the love of God. The contemplative sees life as a unity: prayer, work and recreation are all gathered up into one unity of offering to God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Contemplatives should have a special devotion to the Holy Spirit, for it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that the whole heart is given to God. Through the Holy Spirit individuals see those personal sins which need amendment, and the sins of the world for which they offer reparation.

By their silent witness contemplatives speak of the things of God to the world and, more directly, to the Church. Christ speaks through them to 'be reconciled to God'. Through the totality of their surrender to Christ, his prayer and his love may flow out to the Church and the world. Intercession is implicit in every form of prayer, whether it is the Eucharist, the Divine Office, the times of personal prayer, or in the activities of daily life. All is on behalf of all humanity.

The Love of God demands a reciprocal love for God's will and the divine purpose that all should be saved. The lives of the saints teach that the highest experience of the knowledge of God through prayer only increases the desire to sanctify oneself for others. They follow Christ who, sanctifying himself for others through his sacrifice on the cross, longed to draw all people to himself. The great 'I thirst' (*Sitio)* of

the Saviour resounds down the ages through the offered lives and prayer of the lovers of Christ's Passion.

St John of the Cross sums up this truth in the sixth of his 'Spiritual Sayings':

> Such is the fervour and power of the love of God that those of whom He takes possession can never again be limited by their own souls and contented with them. Rather it seems to them a small thing to go to Heaven alone, wherefore they strive with yearnings and the keenest diligence to bring many to Heaven with them. This arises from their great love which they have for their God, and this is the true fruit and effect of perfect prayer and contemplation.[1]

Conclusion

Christians must share in the redemptive love of their Lord; otherwise they cannot abide in that love. God loved us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5: 8). The cross is the perennial sign of that love. 'My soul weeps for the whole world, and my soul has remembered God's love, and my heart is grown warm,' says St Silouan, one of a host of God's lovers who prays that the Lord will take us all into His Kingdom.

The contemplative might well pray, 'God grant that our hearts may be expanded by Love to love and to be used by Love for God's purposes.'

[1] *The Complete Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. E. Allison Peers, Burns & Oates, 1935, p. 313.

From time to time there is an opportunity for a Sister to give a homily at the Eucharist. We publish here a selection of three from many excellent contributions.

LEARNING BY HEART

Sister Clare-Louise SLG

When I was at University, in a certain Welsh seaside town, one of the things that the members of the Christian Union were encouraged to do was to memorise Bible verses systematically. You could go along to the local Christian Bookshop, and buy packs of small cards with Bible verses printed on them, Authorised Version on one side and New International Version on the other (those being the two accepted translations), which you then proceeded to memorise. I wasn't bad at memorising the verses, but I could never get the reference into my memory. If you said, 'Romans Five Eight' to one of the expert memorisers, they would immediately reply, 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,' without missing a beat. Top of the memorising Pops was one of today's verses: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3: 16).

That kind of rote memorisation has pros and cons; a mind filled with Scripture is a wonderful thing. My generation wasn't encouraged to memorise Scripture texts and Collects as previous ones were, but I imagine that those of you who were are grateful for it now. However, I suspect most of our memorisation is rather more informal, for the things we say regularly in the Divine Office become part of our mental furniture, so to speak. I will never forget wheeling Sr Irene into Vespers—usually late—and, without a book, she would pick up the Psalms immediately from the point the Choir had reached.

Even more important are the Bible verses that stick in our minds because of the impression they have made on us at some point in our lives—some word that encouraged, challenged, inspired or comforted

us which we have never forgotten. As Scripture says—and this is another of the verses that could be found in that pack of cards—'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3: 16).

The little pack of cards was right in putting John 3: 16 as one of its choices, for if we move from memorisation to reflection we will soon realise why. It was a verse that stayed with me, not so much because I had learnt it by heart, but because when pondered it contains such a message of hope and transformation.

This verse is part of Jesus's dialogue with Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night and who was taught by Jesus that he needed to be born anew—or 'from above'—in order to see the Kingdom of God. John 3: 16 plunges us into the heart of the Gospel message, the good news that Jesus is bringing to Nicodemus and to us all. Reflecting on this verse, my mind goes first of all to the story of the Creation and Fall. Adam and Eve have just been tempted by the serpent to eat from the forbidden tree, and the result is a rupture in their relationship with God: 'They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden' (Gen. 3: 9).

That hiding of themselves, instead of standing before God, is the first step in the breakdown of the relationship with God for which humankind had been created. By chapter six of Genesis, the story of Noah, God looks at the wickedness of the peoples of the earth and we read that 'the Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually' (v. 5). And as a result he 'was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart' (v. 6). How grieved the heart of God must be at the current situation of the world! St John of the Cross puts it like this in *Verses on Christ and the Soul*:

A lone young shepherd sorrowing apart
Was far from comfort and in deep distress;
His thoughts were dwelling on his shepherdess,
And a deep wound of love had torn his heart.

Later, in Genesis 22, we have the story of the testing of Abraham. You will remember that Isaac says to his father, as they walk together to the land of Moriah, where Abraham has been commanded to sacrifice Isaac, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' And Abraham replies, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son' (Gen. 22: 7–8). Indeed, God did provide a lamb for a burnt offering; Abraham had been willing to offer his son, but was stopped. Jesus was offered, the Lamb of God, and the sacrifice was accomplished.

To quote John of the Cross again, from the same poem:

'Alas for him who from Love draws apart!'
The shepherd said. 'He does not wish to know
Joy in my presence, close to me, although
A deep wound of love for him tore my heart!'

At last he did what he alone could do:
Mounting a tree he stretched his arms out wide
And there remained in love until he died,
His heart by a deep wound of love pierced through.

In this Paschal season, our daily Gospel readings from St John lead us to reflect more deeply on the nature of what God has done for the human race through his Son and the way that new life is mediated through the word of Scripture, Sacraments and each other. Our task is to enter into that life in our daily choices, in the way we relate with each other, in our prayer and in the Eucharist. John 3: 16 is Gospel, good news; though the world is broken and distorted by human greed and sin, yet, God loves us so much that he gives his Son, and, through his resurrection, 'everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'. The relationship described by St John of the Cross, that experience of joy in the presence of God, is restored. John 3: 16 is

a verse not just to know by heart, but one from which to draw strength and hope.

LISTENING

Sister Raphael SLG

Today I want to say a few words about listening. The Alleluia verse for today, Wednesday in the third week of Easter, reads:

> The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice, says the Lord; I know them and they follow me. (John 10: 27)

We heard last week about the advantage of learning by heart and of being able to recall passages of Scripture, poems or rhymes appropriate to a given occasion. I well remember learning verses of Scripture, rhymes and sayings while in the Infant Department of the village school I attended. Today I quote one you have probably heard many times:

> The wise old owl sat in an oak;
> The more he saw, the less he spoke.
> The less he spoke, the more he heard.
> Let's emulate that wise old bird.

So often we hear things, read things, but have not really heard; we have not truly *listened*, that is, listened at a deep level with uncluttered minds. We cannot hope to understand anything that the Lord may be trying to show us, tell us, or give us, if we are only listening with half an ear, the other half being concerned with what to have for dinner, or the weather, one's work or a host of other things. In Jeremiah 7: 23–4 we read:

> These were my orders. Listen to my voice, then I will be your God, and you shall be my people. Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you, and you will prosper. But they did not listen, they did not pay attention.

That resonates with me. Does it with you?

How often one can miss the point by not paying attention, not really listening, allowing one's thoughts to wander, then realising, 'Oh, I missed that; I've lost the thread.'

Pope Francis when speaking about prayer says that 'The Lord tells us the first task in life is this: prayer. But not the prayer of words, like a parrot, but prayer of the heart; gazing on the Lord, hearing the Lord.'

By calling for attentive listening to the word of God, I seek to stress the primacy of listening to God's Word. We need to give time to this question of listening with our whole being. As our Rule says, we must listen 'with the attention set wholly on God'.

We hear, but have not really listened, so we don't get the message. It takes time to be still and quiet, with hearts open, ready to hear and listen, listen in a deep place of inner silence.

Be still, O my soul. Be still and LISTEN.

WHERE TRUE RICHES LIE

Sister Christine SLG

Textile manufacturing in the ancient world is a fascinating subject. If there were time, and these thoughts had a different setting, I would treat you to an exposition on purple dyes—which took 8,000 murex shells to produce one gram of dye—and the construction of fine linen. Suffice it to say, 'purple and fine linen' went into the most expensive clothing, because both were so difficult to produce, and had to be imported. If you imagine the rich man of Luke's gospel (16: 19-31) in a bespoke Savile Row suit, or dressed by Armani, who has all his food flown in daily from Harrods or Fortnum and Mason, you will have some idea of his wealth. It would be no hardship to give the poor man at his gate the leftovers from the banquets. And this man is very poor indeed: he seems to have no visible means of support, he is very ill, and is repulsively unclean. To add to his woes he is so helpless that dogs, one of the unclean animals, come and lick his untended body. However, the

poor man has a name, and the rich man does not. He is Lazarus, which in Hebrew means ‘God helped’.

Lazarus is indeed helped by God; he is taken into the place of the patriarchs and prophets after death, while the rich man stays in the place of longing and desire when he dies, from which there is no means of escape. The sad thing is that, apparently, the rich man knew about Moses and the prophets, and had, on the surface, been an observant Jew despite his wealth, perhaps even because of it. He would have been able to fulfil the requirements of the Law easily—providing animals for sacrifice, paying the Temple tax, and so on. But he lacked compassion or any real interest in the wretched man he passed daily. Perhaps he was afraid of the stigma of being unclean if he engaged too intimately with this pauper. In fact, his self-interest is so great that even when he sees Lazarus in the better place he is a complete opportunist, demanding the same benefits for himself and his family.

What is it about Lazarus that earns him the favour of the best that God has to offer? Despite his abject poverty, somewhere within himself he believed God’s promises unconditionally. Like the rich man he was a Son of Abraham: he had heard Moses and the Prophets read, heard the promises they make, and held God to account to fulfil them, even in these terrible circumstances. And God has been faithful to his child. The rich man had heard too, and become complacent because of his comfortable and blessed way of life—a way of life also promised by God to his people. However, such a life was never to be lived as something taken for granted.

I suppose all societies venerate wealth and the privileges that come with it, and few societies count the poor or the ill as of any worth. Even in societies based in Christian principles, the poor have to fight for a just portion, or others have to do this for them. And I wonder how often the poor have been fobbed off with the hope of a ‘better life after this’, to allow the wealthy to live with a comfortable conscience?

This parable is addressed to the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection. So the plea to Abraham to send someone from the dead to

convert the brethren is a bit of wry humour on Jesus's part. 'Would you *really* believe differently, or act any differently, if someone *did* come back from the dead?' is the implicit question. The truth is that all the tools for belief and for resurrection-life are already to hand; all that God wants to give is already present. It is how the tools are received and used that matters.

What can we take from this Gospel for ourselves, then? I expect all of us try to live simply, to give some of our money or goods to those less fortunate than we are; in other words to be good stewards of God's gifts. And those of us who have made a vow of poverty are bidden to have a complete dependence on God for everything. The thing is, even an ascetical life becomes habitual and something one can live out fairly comfortably. I think we need to pray that we shall notice and engage with the poorest, whether it is people in dire circumstances, or the neglected parts of our own beings, both the parts we would rather not were there, and the parts that have fitted themselves into a smooth and unchallenging groove. We need to use Scripture as our touchstone, continually to remember the promises it contains, and to appropriate for ourselves all that the Bible shows us about the faithfulness of God to the first promises he made to Abraham (Gen. 22 16–18).

We must also hearken to the one who *has* come back from the dead, with the life-changing news that God's mercies are infinite and ours for the asking. We no longer live in the realm of theory or parable. Jesus offers us entry into the eternal kingdom, a share in the totality of his life and his death, now and forever. Let us grasp at it as greedily as Lazarus did the scraps from the rich man's banquet, in the knowledge that this is the only way to know God's love and faithfulness towards us.

GEORGE HERBERT REVISITED

Ann Ridler

The poems of George Herbert that appear in every anthology of devotional verse ('The Elixir', 'Vertue', 'Love bade me welcome') have a deceptive simplicity, which perhaps partly accounts for the varying estimates of his status as an English poet over the years since his death in 1633, and in the long period during which his poems were thought of chiefly as Sunday School gift-books. We know that his contemporaries rated him highly, and editions of 'The Temple' were frequently reprinted until the end of the seventeenth century, but in the eighteenth William Cowper was unusual in admiring the poems, though he thought their language gothic and uncouth.

It was Coleridge who revived respect for Herbert, printing three of his poems in the *Biographia Literaria*. He described his conversion in a letter to William Collins in 1818, saying that he used to read the poems for amusement at their quaintness, but now found more substantial comfort in them than 'in all the poetry since the poems of Milton'. He and Charles Lamb disagreed: it was Coleridge's sensibility to language that made him perceive Herbert's greatness, especially the purity of his diction. He read the poems with close attention, sometimes making comments in the margin of his copy, which bring him very close to us as readers. 'I do not understand this stanza,' he remarks of some knotted lines in 'The Church Porch'; and he suggests the word 'nest' as an emendation for 'box' in the margin of 'Vertue' (A box where sweets compacted lie).

All the same, it comes as a surprise to read that John Ruskin found Herbert 'useful beyond every other teacher', and that George Eliot admired him. And indeed he continued to be thought of by the Victorians in general as a poet to be read for his piety rather than any literary quality; for instance the article on him by Simon Lee in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, said that his work as a whole 'merits no lofty praise'.

The twentieth century saw the beginnings of a change of opinion. After the First World War Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century*: *Donne to Butler* (OUP 1921), and the third centenary of Herbert's death in 1933, produced many critical essays by writers of different types. A straightforward assessment by Basil de Selincourt in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1933 is typical of one approach, and William Empson made a more recondite analysis of Herbert's subtleties in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Chatto and Windus 1930). T. S. Eliot at this time classed Herbert as an admirable but definitely minor poet (see his essay on 'Religion and Poetry' of 1934); later he came to think that if the work is considered as a whole, as an *oeuvre*, we cannot deny Herbert the status of 'major'.

F. E. Hutchinson's magnificent edition of *The Works of George Herbert*, worthy of a major poet, published by OUP in 1941, enables us to read Herbert's poems alongside his biography (together with some letters which vividly illustrate his personality), helping us to understand how he became the poet of 'The Temple'. A letter to his stepfather, written during his apprenticeship as a scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, shows him as at once greedy for learning and burdened by it:

> You know, Sir, how I am now setting foot into Divinity to lay the platform of my future life, and shall I then be fain always to borrow Books, and build on another's foundation? What tradesman is there who will set up without his Tools? I even study Thrift, and yet I am scarce able with much ado to make one half year's allowance shake hands with the other. And yet, if a book of four or five Shillings come in my way, I buy it, though I fast for it; yea, sometimes of ten Shillings: But, alas Sir, what is that to those infinite Volumes of Divinity, which yet every day swell, and grow bigger.

We see Herbert pulling all possible strings to obtain the post of Cambridge Public Orator, which would gain him privileges 'and such like Gaynesses, which will please a young man well'. In this post, which he occupied for seven years, he had access to the king, and might

have hoped for political preferment. But his life took a different course. That he underwent some conflict between worldly ambition and the claims of learning and God's service, he tells us in 'Affliction' (1):

> Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
> The way that takes the town;
> Thou didst betray me a lingring book,
> And wrap me in a gown.
> I was entangled in the world of strife,
> Before I had the power to change my life.

Another poem, 'The Pearl', complains passionately of the price paid by his senses to the vocation of a man who would follow Christ:

> I know the wayes of Pleasure, the sweet strains,
> The lullings and the relishes of it; …
>
> My stuffe is flesh, not brasse; my senses live,
> And grumble oft, that they have more in me
> Then he that curbs them, being but one to five:
> Yet I love thee …
>
> Yet through these labyrinths, not my groveling wit,
> But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me,
> Did both conduct and teach me, how by it
> To climbe to thee.

'Yet I love thee.' Herbert wrote no love poems to any human being (or at least he left none), but in March 1629, when he had recovered health to some extent from one of the recurrent bouts of illness which plagued him all his life, he married Jane Danvers, his stepfather's cousin. He had been ordained deacon in 1623; a year after his marriage came the offer of a parish, Bemerton with Fuggleston, or Fulston, near Salisbury, which after some hesitation he accepted.

It was certainly no splendid offer—John Aubrey describes Bemerton as 'a pitiful little chapel of ease'; but Herbert's hesitation will have sprung from the doubts of his own strength, spiritual and physical, not from any thought that it was unworthy of his birth and talents. The

parish had the advantage of being close to Salisbury Cathedral, where Herbert could take part in the music he so much enjoyed, and to Wilton Park, where he acted as chaplain to the Earl and Countess of Pembroke.

Only three years of life remained to him, but in that short time Herbert acquired a reputation as a loving and holy pastor which lived after him, attested by several writers. The ideal he aimed at is set out in his Rule for a country Parson, 'A Priest to the Temple', written at this time. His vocation was now clear to him, and it is easy to imagine the frustration he felt when his health again broke down. The agony is conveyed in his poem 'The Crosse'. Amy Charles, in her biography *A Life of George Herbert* (Cornell 1977), assigns this poem to an earlier date; in any case the mood of frustration must have been a recurrent one.

> One ague dwelleth in my bones,
> Another in my soul (the memorie
> What I would do for thee, if once my grones
> Could be allow'd for harmonie) …
>
> To have my aim, and yet to be
> Further from it than when I bent my bow;
> To make my hopes my torture, and the fee
> Of all my woes another wo,
> Is in the midst of delicates to need,
> And ev'n in Paradise to be a weed.

The poem ends with resignation, however, and this was the mood in which the two friends who visited Herbert in his last illness found him. To one of them, an associate of the religious community of Little Gidding, he entrusted the 'little book' containing the poems of *The Temple*, for his friend Nicholas Ferrar to dispose of as he thought fit.

None of Herbert's English poems were printed in his lifetime, and the copy from which the first edition of *The Temple* is taken (the title is not his own), printed at Cambridge very soon after his death in 1633, was clearly made at Little Gidding from his own 'little book'.

Nearly half these poems are also contained in a second, and obviously earlier, manuscript preserved at Little Gidding, which had the

holograph of the Latin Poems and first versions of the Temple poems, with revisions in his own hand. There are six further poems which Herbert omitted from the book sent to Ferrar at his death. I shall return to this later; but first I consider the poems of *The Temple* as a single work.

The intellectual range of the poetry is felt as remarkable, and so is the metrical variety, always kept under perfect control, diction matching thought, with that forcible plainness which Cowper found uncouth. In an apt phrase, Aldous Huxley described Herbert as 'the poet of our inner weather,' and this variety of mood, as well as the scope of his imagery, forbids us to see him as simply a devotional poet. The unity of his book is strongly felt, even if the arrangement of the poems does not emerge as a single pattern.

Anyone who reads the poems in the order Herbert intended will think at first that there is to be a clear progression from the entrance—that is, the long didactic poem 'The Church Porch', which is set apart from the rest—through the calendar of the Church's year. But this proves not to be the case, as Basil de Selincourt well describes it in the essay mentioned earlier:

> Parallel references [i.e. between the calendar events and the religious experience of the individual] are clearly indicated at the start: and one imagines that Herbert had in his mind to achieve construction on a triple principle—to build the Church and the soul together and to set both in a frame of revolving seasons, a calendar of holy days.
>
> But this disappears, and the rest is frankly kaleidoscopic, a litter of stained glass, in fragments of the first lustre, but patternless, or at best occasionally paired. Toys and fancies jostle in the box against intimate and impassioned pleadings and confessions, the artifice is sometimes transparent, sometimes subtly concealed … the very perfection of the pieces isolates them.

Yet Herbert did arrange his poems with care, as we can see by the change in order between the early and the final manuscript. The open-

ing part follows the same order in both, and then the final one proceeds entirely differently. I suggest that one principle underlying the arrangement depended on his ear, that wonderfully sensitive instrument (not necessarily the same as a musical ear, but often connected, as we know by many examples, from Thomas Wyatt to Gerald Manley Hopkins). I suggest that just as a musician arranging a programme will be careful not to dull the ear by putting consecutive pieces in the same key, so Herbert ensures that there will be metrical variety in his sequence. Moreover, we should not assume that the variety of mood, which de Selincourt noted, was accidental; and some poems are not only paired but grouped, so gain from being read together. An instance is in the late group beginning 'The Search', through 'Grief' and 'The Crosse' to 'The Flower', which describes Herbert's recovery from deep despondency.

Recurrent imagery, too, is a unifying force. Images drawn from music are among the most pervasive: the sinews of Christ are also the strings of a musical instrument; the Holy Spirit joins in a counterpoint and, most remarkably, in 'Deniall', the whole poem imitates the discord of an 'untuned' breast, with a duff last line to each stanza:

> My breast was full of fears
> And disorder; …
>
> Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
> Untun'd, unstrung: …
>
> O cheer and tune my heartlesse breast,
> Deferre no time;
> That so thy favours granting my request,
> They and my minde may chime,
> And mend my ryme.

Then there is recurrent bird imagery, drawn from observation:

> But as birds drink, and straight lift up their head,
> So he must sip and think
> Of better drink
> He may attain to, after he is dead.

This is from ‘Man’s Medley’, a poem about man’s dual nature, earthly and heavenly. And the form of the ‘Easter-wings’ poem (both admired and ridiculed by the critics) has an added point because it imitates the diminuendo and crescendo of the lark which sings in the poem.

And the wonderful invocation in ‘Whitsunday’ speaks of the Holy Spirit *hatching* a soul:

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread the golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender soul so long,
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee.

Imagery drawn from light is pervasive, and in one poem, ‘The Starre’, it is carried through the whole, until it combines at the end with another of Herbert’s favourite images, of a laden bee:

Bright spark, shot from a brighter place,
Where beams surround my Saviours face,
Canst thou be any where
So well as there? …

Get me a standing there, and place
Among the beams, which crown the face
Of him, who dy’d to part
Sinne and my heart:

That so among the rest I may
Glitter, and curle, and winde as they: …

Sure you wilt joy, by gaining me
To fly home like a laden bee
Unto that hive of beams
And garland-streams.

In ‘The Glance,’ light is combined with another striking image of God’s direct gaze at man, which cures all grief:

If thy first glance so powerfull be
A mirth but open’d and seal’d up again;
What wonders shall we feel, when we shall see

Thy full-ey'd love!
When thou shalt look us out of pain
And one aspect of thine spend in delight
More then a thousand sunnes disburse in light,
In heav'n above.

Louis Martz has written of Herbert's 'immense skill and art held under firm control; the craft revealing itself in a crafty management of the reader.' Yes, but the feeling is spontaneous, and though its direct expression is often withheld until the end of a poem, the movement onward is so strongly felt that the windings of the journey (through recondite references and ingenious comparisons) only make the ending when it comes, simple and passionate, seem more inevitable.

Take a few lines from 'Confession', which winds through many images descriptive of grief, to the brilliant relief of the climax.

No scrue, no piercer can
Into a piece of timber work and winde,
As Gods afflictions into man,
When he a torture hath design'd.
They are too subtill for the subt'llest hearts;
And fall, like rheumes, upon the tendrest parts.

We are the earth; and they,
Like moles within us, heave, and cast about;
And till they foot and clutch their prey,
They never cool, much lesse give out.
No smith can make such locks but they have keyes:
Closets are halls to them; and hearts, high-wayes …

Yet, he continues,

… since confession pardon winnes,
I challenge here the brightest day.
The clearest diamond: let them do their best,
They shall be thick and cloudie to my breast.

Like Shakespeare, Herbert delighted in puns—or call them a play on words—and thought them not incongruous in a serious context. For instance, in ‘Grief’, a poem whose subject is heartbreak, he plays on the meaning of feet as units of metre, combined with feet for running —the running of tears:

Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise
For my rough sorrows: cease, be dumbe and mute,
Give up your feet and running to mine eyes,
And keep your measures for some lovers lute,
Whose grief allows him musick and a ryme:
For mine excludes both measure, tune, and time.
Alas, my God!

His grief did not exclude ‘both measure, tune and time’. That is the point where the technical power is such that there is no barrier between the thought or emotion and its expression. Just occasionally you can detect that a complicated rhyme-scheme has vitiated the content. I think myself that the final stanza of ‘The Flower’ is unworthy of the rest, and R. S. Thomas has questioned the last lines of ‘Vertue’. But these are very rare blemishes. And Herbert’s command of diction is unsurpassed; he can make every kind of word work for him, grand or colloquial. As an example of the last, take ‘versing’ in ‘The Flower’, where after the tempests of sorrow

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I lie and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my onely light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

A number of poems tell stories, and here Herbert’s sense of the dramatic is unsurpassed. Take the poem ‘Redemption’, a sonnet which proceeds in a prosaic narrative, using legal terms, until the surprise

ending. The speaker is searching for the lord of the manor, wanting to change his lease, and finally finds him:

At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, & died.

To return to the other manuscript I spoke of earlier. It, too, seems to have been deposited at Little Gidding, and found its way through various hands to Dr Williams's Library in London. This is interesting, not only because it enables us to distinguish between the Bemerton poems and those written earlier, and shows Herbert changing the order in which he wanted them to be read; but also because the revisions he made give us some insight into his craft at work.

The most remarkable revision was of 'Teach me, my God and King', whose original first verse was extremely flat:

Lord teach me to refer
All things I doe to thee
That I not onely may not erre,
But also pleasing bee.

Among other improvements Herbert composed a new final verse, with the image of the philosopher's stone, which gave the poem its title of 'The Elixir'.[2]

Another fascinating change occurs in 'Employment', which in 1633 has a stanza in which Herbert, bewailing his uselessness, wishes he were as fruitful as an orange tree. The earlier version had:

O that I had the wing and thigh
Of laden Bees:
Then would I mount up instantly
And by degrees
On men dropp blessings as I fly.

[2] For a full study of the evolution of this poem see *From Perfection to the Elixir* by Ben de la Mare, Fairacres Publication FP153.

Herbert must have realised that there was something ludicrous about those bee-droppings, and sacrificed a favourite image.

Six of the poems he discarded altogether from the Ferrar book, and some of these omissions are understandable—for various reasons, which Hutchinson suggests in his edition. But one exclusion of the poem called 'Perseverance', I cannot understand at all, for I find in it, with its direct cry of longing, one of the most moving of all the poems. I make amends to the poem by quoting it in full as my end-piece:

My God, the poore expressions of my Love
Which warme these lines, & serve them up to thee
Are so, as for the present I did move,
Or rather though movedst me.

But what shall issue, whither these my words
Shal help another, but my judgment bee
As a burst fouling-peece doth save the birds
But kill the man, is seald with thee.

ffor who can tell, though thou has dyde to winn
And wedd my soule in glorious paradise;
Whither my many crymes and use of sinn
May yet forbid the banes and bliss?

Onely my soule hangs on thy promises
With face and hands clinging unto thy brest,
Clinging and crying, crying without cease,
Thou art my rock, thou art my rest.

IN MEMORIAM

JAMES COUTTS
(1935 – 2016)

James Walter Cargill Coutts, who died in April, had a long association with SLG. He joined the Fellowship in 1967, and became one of our first Priest Associates in 1975. Most of his ministry was spent in South Wales. In February 1982 he gave addresses to the Community during the pre-Lenten week of retreat. We have taken an extract from them by way of paying tribute to an unusually holy priest.

* * * * *

> And Jesus came down … and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples. And a great multitude of people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all. (Luke 6: 17–19)

This was the army of the troubled, the guilt-burdened, the lonely, the incurably ill, the outcast. And they gazed at Jesus with patient, inscrutable eyes that can be fathomed only by the Saviour himself. You and I have never seen such an army of the miserable. In our civilisation this army is hidden away in lonely rooms, or in mental institutions, in general hospitals and in homes for the incurable. But in the Palestine of Jesus' day there were no such places. Could we bear to look at such a crowd of crippled and mutilated people? People without hope, without loving care? So all these people gather around Jesus, for in some mysterious way he attracts to himself all these poor people. Like a magnet Jesus draws to himself sinners and sufferers out of their hiding places. In Jesus they recognize something they do not find in any other person. For one thing we see that Jesus stands among us as one of us. He does not behave as if he were one of the great and powerful in the world, who build for themselves exclusive residences from which they cannot

see the world's misery. No, Jesus stands among the poor as a poor man himself. Jesus stands utterly vulnerable and exposed to the pain of the world. Paul writes: 'You know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been; he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor. 8: 9). So these people are grateful to this man who comes amongst them, who closes neither his eyes not his heart to them.

But they see something else in Jesus, something far more incomprehensible. What they notice is that the destructive powers of guilt, anxiety and suffering in which Jesus stands do not touch his inner being, but they withdraw before him. Yes, Jesus visibly shudders under the attacks of the power of evil, but evil does not enter and possess Jesus' heart as it possesses their hearts. It withdraws, powerless and defeated before him. So, all these people seek to get near Jesus. They gaze at his hands which can do so much good, which never tire of healing and blessing. But now these hands are at rest. Now Jesus is sitting down, and he begins to speak. Are the people disappointed? Would they have preferred some practical Christianity? Preferred Jesus to satisfy their hunger, bind up their wounds, drive their anxious mad thoughts from their minds? Why does he *speak* to them when their misery cries out for action? Perhaps they think they know what Jesus will say to them. He is going to speak like John the Baptist. He is going to tell them that their misery and suffering represent a judgement upon them. He is going to urge them to change their behaviour. 'The axe is laid at the foot of the tree: repent!' 'It is your fault you are the way you are. Get a grip on yourselves.'

But here is a man who says to them, 'Blessed are you poor.' Matthew, in a related text, tells us that the crowd were 'astounded at his teaching' and perhaps somewhat frightened, because 'he spoke as one having authority' (Matt. 7: 28). That is what always happens when God unveils his unexpected goodness, his great tenderness. It is so immense, so utterly beyond what we can give or expect that we are bewildered by it. It is the awareness of the sheer goodness of God that leads us to

repent; it is the sight of the outstretched arms of the Father that breaks the prodigal's heart.

RALPH MARTIN SSM
(1930 – 2016)

In the late 1970s when I lived at our convent at Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead, local religious communities met several times a year for day conferences on some topic pertaining to the religious life. I was delegated to attend one of these, and the Priory of the Society of the Sacred Mission at Willen was approached to provide transport for me. I was given £5.00 and bidden to offer it to the chauffeur for petrol. He turned out to be Ralph Martin, and rather diffidently I mentioned that we were prepared to share the driving costs. He looked at me in a kindly manner, and said, 'Naw, that's OK. We're all in the same racket.' The Canadian accent and the humour were a surprise and a delight, as I had not known that there were any other Canadians living in English communities, other than in SSJE. When we compared notes we discovered we had attended Trinity College in the University of Toronto, though some years apart, as he never let me forget. The implication was always that I had preceded him there and therefore *much* older than he; it was a typical example of his dry wit and the loving humour he brought to his encounters with others.

Over the years we met on and off for further meetings, and after his return from Ghana in 1989 he came to Fairacres to give a memorable talk about his work as Rector of St Nicholas Seminary. He was, as always, modest about his own part in strengthening the fragile Anglican Church in that country, and his contribution to the training of priests. But he had obviously loved the work and the people, and was justifiably proud of the shirt, trousers and *kufi*, or hat, made of *kente* cloth that he was given when he left. Before the years in Ghana he had been the UK Provincial of SSM, at the time the mother house and theological college at Kelham were closed. He had a vision for SSM of an inclusive community of monks and dedicated men and women, single persons

and families. This he implemented at the Priory at Willen, which was regarded by the rest of us either as an experiment that would probably not last, or as an exciting way forward for the Church if the religious life were to survive. With his quiet conviction that this was, and is, a valid expression of the Church's life, and his unwavering determination, he made the 'experiment' a long-term reality.

Ralph was a Greek scholar, and claimed that Greek is the language spoken in heaven. For several years, before a severe stroke forced him to live in a care home, he worked on a translation of *The Spiritual Meadow* by John Moschus. In 2013 SLG Press published extracts from this as *On Tour in Byzantium*, and he was well enough to attend a book launch for it in Oxford, a very happy occasion. In 2015 his autobiography *Towards a New* Day, was published by DLT.

In more than fifty years in Profession, Ralph worked in an impressive number of countries to carry out the aims of his order, especially after retiring as Provincial: Japan, Ghana, Kuwait, Italy, Lesotho and Australia. In 2010, at the time of his Golden Jubilee, he summed up some reflections on the profound changes in SSM over these years in the following words:

> We work not so much for the conversion of the heathen (especially abroad!), as for the healing of divisions and the creation of one worldwide family. Our ideal is not so much a life of utter purity, as a life laid down in the service of others. We are not so much concerned with reducing the money spent on our own upkeep, as with leaving behind as small a carbon footprint as possible through a lifestyle that is simple and sustainable.
>
> Indeed these fifty years have been a veritable kaleidoscope of ever-shifting people, places and policies, and yet it would still not be true to say that everything changes. There are two factors that have remained the same throughout, the same today as they were in 1960. The first is the God who called me then to a completely unexpected and surprising destination. He is the

> very same God who calls me today to unknown and equally surprising destinies. Secondly, that stumbler who tried amidst doubts and fears to respond to that call in 1960 is the same stumbler who still amidst doubts and fears tries today to respond to a new call, to a new destiny.

A stumbler he may have been in his own eyes, but for so many he was a leader and shepherd of those entrusted to his care. I have been blessed to have known him, and I suspect there are many others who will echo that sentiment.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

BOOKS

Frances M. Young, *Construing the Cross: Type, Sign, Symbol, Word, Action*. The Didsbury Lectures, 2014, Cascade Books 2015, $27.00 (US & Canada) ISBN: 978-1-4982-2002-6; SPCK 2016, £16.99 (UK) ISBN: 978-0-2810-7550-8. Available as eBook.

Advent Sunday 1979 was snowy, so unexpectedly snowy, in fact, that people in the Midlands could not easily commute to church. That day BBC Radio 4 broadcast a service from the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, where the preacher was Frances Young. I know a man in Christ, to adopt a phrase of St Paul, upon whom that made an immense impact. Hearers in search of slick, categorical answers, or theories *about* the incarnation, finding the 'correct' language to describe Christ, and the atonement, may well have been overwhelmed and disappointed. Even then, Frances Young would not descend into *theories about* the atonement, and offered, instead, a nuanced and multi-dimensional, grown-up encounter. Her approach to texts, religious understanding, and experience seemed integrated, even to a fifteen-year-old ill-equipped to grasp rather sophisticated vocabulary. He found himself encouraged to look for the biggest answers in theology by that initial radio-encounter, at the beginning of a (so far) thirty-seven-year friendship.

Young was and remains a gifted speaker, with a clarity which is never populist or simplistic, but refined by generations of Methodist preachers and ministers. She wears her scholarship lightly, but that itself is a mark of profound humble engagement with texts and themes over a lifetime of scholarship and discipleship. Indeed, it's hard to see where one stops and the other starts; they are, rather, the warp and weft of a seamless garment. Young's engagement with early Christian authors' explorations of the atonement was the core of her PhD thesis, *Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writings from the New Testament to John Chrysostom*, and presented in a popular form as *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (Westminster Press 1975). If you want a succinct and useful precis of *theories* of atonement, they are presented in

Chapter 2 of *Can These Dry Bones Live? The Excitement of Theological Study* (1982, reprint SCM Press 2013). In the Chapter, 'Outstretched Arms', she outlines classic Anselmian and Abelardian models through popular hymns, and then reaches into Gustav Aulén's presentation of *Christus Victor* in key patristic texts. Even at this point she then moves on to explore labouring and bringing to birth as an interpretative key to understanding the Passion and its achievements.

But this new book, based on the 2014 Didsbury lectures, is more radical. She moves from 'theories' *about* the transaction of the atonement in human redemption and sanctification, and instead mentors her readers to move to *theōria*,

> a kind of insight or spiritual discernment that comes through imaginative engagement or storytelling; through liturgy and living, rather than legal transaction; through poetry and preaching, rather than rationalistic system. (p. xvii)

So this work integrates ancient writers (notably Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Ephrem the Syrian) with art from across the ages, Young's own poetry, and modern and post-modern readings of sacrifice from social-psychological and anthropological insights of Girard and others. Girard's understanding of scapegoating arises from his observations that human culture 'arises from mimetic desire'—we see what others want and want it ourselves. Out of this arises jealousy and, eventually, violence.

> These rivalries, as they multiply, create a mimetic crisis, the war of *all against all*. The resulting violence of all against all would finally annihilate the community if they were not transformed in the end into a war of *all against one*, thanks to which the unity of the community is re-established.
>
> (Girard, *I see Satan*, p. 24)

Liturgy is opened up as a structured journey through these layers, literature and poetry and art a means of appropriating the meaning of sacrifice.

This sophisticated mix is presented thematically at an accessible pace, taking the reader into contemplation of the darkness of human life, into scapegoating. Young presents multi-layered and vivid encounters with the cross which lead, like the *ankh*—the hieroglyph for *life* adopted by the ancient Egyptian church as its form of the cross—into human flourishing. Images lead the reader into juxtaposing the tree of life and the cross visually and poetically. Any Christian wanting to explore the cross fully should read this, even if you thought that you knew Young's writings and perspectives. She achieves something both humble and immense, walking beside the reader with a gentle clarity. As she remarks:

> Unlike theories, which purport to control and explain, such overlaying of images, along with metaphor, enigma, and paradox, can stimulate *theōria*, generating creative insights whereby to construe the cross, and this despite the 'extremes' and the elusiveness. And this is fed by the fitting response of joy, thanksgiving, and praise. For 'in my end is my beginning,' and death proves to be birth to newness of life. (p. 124)

ANDREW TEAL

Boundless Grandeur: *The Christian Vision of A. M. Donald Allchin*, edited by David G. R. Keller, Pickwick Publications, 2015, £18.00. ISBN: 978-1-4982-0319-7.

To an older generation it can come as a surprise that people widely-known and admired among their contemporaries are often unknown to subsequent generations. Even theological students now in their twenties have often not heard of such once well-known figures as Donald Allchin. This book is therefore the more welcome, as a tribute to Donald from some of those who knew him well, and an introduction for others to an Anglican priest and theologian who was an influential friend and teacher, speaker and writer.

David Keller, a priest of the Episcopal Church in the USA, met Donald through his writings before knowing him in person. He has brought together personal appreciations as well as expositions of

Donald's theological, ecumenical and monastic interests. Three years before Donald died, Keller conducted three interviews with him, in which Donald reflects on his life and theological vision. Their transcript forms the book's fitting conclusion. Rowan Williams, whose doctoral thesis at Oxford Donald supervised, contributes a Foreword; and in an Introduction Metropolitan Kallistos Ware surveys Donald's life and ministry, providing a concise account of his many interests and numerous friendships across the borders of divided Christianity.

Three of those friends, Barry Orford, James Coutts and Esther de Waal, contribute personal appreciations of Donald. Kallistos Ware, a close friend of Donald's from their school days, writes of his deep interest in Eastern Orthodoxy and its influence on his thinking. The Romanian Orthodox priest Ciprian Burca examines Donald's friendship with Fr Dumitru Staniloae, the outstanding Romanian theologian of the twentieth century. They met on several occasions, and maintained a correspondence for many years. Geoffrey Rowell writes of Donald's 'intuitive ability to enter into different Christian traditions, cultures and languages, and discover their riches.'

Inheriting from the Tractarian movement a keen interest in the Fathers of the early church, Donald warmly embraced the patristic belief that Christians are called to be 'partakers of the divine nature', and was delighted to discover that faith in the hymns of the Wesleys. He was fascinated, too, by the theology of the nineteenth-century Danish Protestant theologian Grundtvig, whose work he thought had ecumenical implications that needed to be explored. To explore them Donald learnt Danish, and wrote the first major study of Grundtvig's theology. He found a kindred spirit in the Roman Catholic Trappist monk Thomas Merton, of whom he said that 'Merton was and has been terribly, terribly important for me'. Donald became honorary president of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain, and Fiona Gardner writes of their friendship. Another ecumenical friendship that meant much to him was that with the Russian émigré theologian Vladimir Lossky, who was also an important influence on Merton.

Charles Miller, another friend of Donald's, contributes an appreciation of Donald's interpretation of Anglican tradition and theology, which for him 'finds validation in so far as it carries within both an "orthodox consciousness" and a properly proportioned orthodox content.' Miller's chapter includes, as do others, extensive quotations from Donald's writings, which much increase the value of the book as an introduction to his theological vision. Central to that vision is the concept of divinisation, to whose importance for Donald David Keller contributes an evaluation, quoting extensively from Donald's book *Participation in God*. Martin Smith, an English former member of the Society of St John the Evangelist, writes of Donald's involvement in the revived monastic tradition within Anglicanism. Donald's first book, *The Silent Rebellion*, was a study of that nineteenth-century revival, and he was intimately connected with contemporary Anglican monasticism, not least as Warden for many years of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God.

Later in life Donald became enthusiastic about the Welsh spiritual tradition. He settled in Bangor, and learnt Welsh in order to study it more deeply. Ruth Bidgood writes of Donald's prayerful approach to Welsh poetry, not least that of Ann Griffiths; Patrick Thomas looks at Donald's interest in Welsh holy places, those '"thin places" where the witness of past holiness had left an indelible influence'. Among them Donald had a particular affection for Bardsey Island at the end of the Llyn peninsula.

Donald Allchin had a great gift for friendship, and an equal capacity for making connections among diverse Christian traditions both eastern and western. This book records and celebrates the life and thought of a remarkable Anglican priest and theologian whose joyful enthusiasm for the Christian faith enriched the lives of many. For all who knew him it will be a lively reminder of his personality and achievements, while for others it will be an introduction to a vision of Christian believing and living that reflects the catholic tradition of Christianity.

HUGH WYBREW

The Only Mind Worth Having: *Thomas Merton and the Child Mind*, Fiona Gardner, Cascade Books, 2015, £18.00.

ISBN: 978-1-4982-3022-3. Available as eBook.

Many books appeared during the centenary of Thomas Merton's birth. Fiona Gardner's is one of the most creative. A psychoanalytic psychotherapist, spiritual director, active member and past chair of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, her fourth book explores 'the adult mind uncovering, discovering, recognizing, and then integrating the eternal child—the Christ child—who is present and within the psyche of everyone' (p. 3). Her thesis is that this spirit of the child is critical for understanding what Merton meant by the True Self, which involved both unselfconsciousness in the present and a movement toward trusting simplicity in one's relationship with God.

The book is organized as a journey in three stages. In chapters 2–6 the reader is led from 'Understanding' the elements of the child mind; to 'Re-finding' the spirit of the child in chapters 7–10; to the process of 'Becoming' in chapters 11–15. Each chapter juxtaposes psychological studies and insights (frequently from Carl Jung), theological and spiritual literature across a wide spectrum, and material from Merton's writings to illustrate aspects of the child mind and the process of re-engaging it. Gardner provides a sometimes bewildering number of examples, but always in the context of her knowledge and careful interpretation of Merton's life and thought.

The book is a theme and variations on the words of Jesus, 'unless you change and become like children' (Matt. 18: 3). Not just a study of Merton's own tortured childhood and struggle toward psycho-spiritual wholeness (though that material is treated incisively and fruitfully), the book exemplifies the rich complementarity of the disciplines of psychology and spirituality. Gardner highlights both her own and Merton's insights about the need to recover aspects of childhood spirituality precisely in order to mature. To accompany those undertaking such a paradoxical journey, her work provides helpful insights and significant information from an amazing array of fellow-travellers.

BONNIE THURSTON

Turning the Diamond: Exploring George Herbert's Images of Prayer, Dennis Lennon, SPCK, 2002, £9.99. ISBN: 978-0281-05470-1.

As you might expect, our Community Rule has something to say about prayer. 'Ideally the whole life is to be made prayer'; and it continues 'but there must be times set apart solely for this purpose. In the morning the prayer should be orison, whether the actual form be simple petition, pondering meditation, or affective or contemplative prayer'—which is clear enough. As a novice I had more trouble with the guidance for the afternoon hour ('a greater liberty is allowed …'). Often I couldn't settle to more of the morning's prayer, and got myself into unhelpful rebelliousness about just what was allowed. Hand-colouring flower notelets for sale was encouraged, but reading poetry or novels, and other activities I had hitherto used to 'deepen and enlarge my spiritual life,' seemed to be frowned on. Was I missing a 'door left on the latch' that would open to whole-life prayer?

It's a pity I didn't make a connection with George Herbert's sonnet, 'Prayer': perhaps it was too familiar to me as an example of metaphysical poetry for me to put my mind in my heart and actually pray it. Dennis Lennon's book, given us by a community friend, intrigued me. The cover picture (Gaughin's *Matamae or Landscape with Peacocks*) seemed to sit strangely with exploring a seventeenth-century work of Anglican devotion. Odd, too, that the chapter headings, as set out on the contents page, are the poem in its entirety, one chapter to each of the fourteen lines. Once drawn in and having responded to the author's suggestion to read the poem 'a couple of times, and slowly if you will,' I was disarmed by his comment 'doesn't it leave you feeling just slightly scalped?' Lennon's direct style made me feel that he and I had just met and are going to enjoy sharing his reverent and delighted participation in George Herbert's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ: 'robust, sincere and transparent, as between two dear friends'.

'Prayer' consists of twenty-seven closely-packed and seemingly random metaphors in a single sentence. Lennon uses the figure of a cut diamond to represent the poem and line by line, image by image, looks

deeply at and into each facet, pointing us towards its manifold resonances. Other works of Herbert are cited and illuminating reference is made to other poets and writers: above all to scripture. Lennon clearly has a mind and heart well-stocked with the fruits of reading widely, and of varied ministry in Thailand (a 'land of spices') and Great Britain. He chooses generously and carefully what will help us to see what he sees in Herbert's poem—and in prayer as the way of living in God to which the poem points. Lennon's exploration ends:

> [the diamond] has shown many extraordinary aspects of prayer, dazzling and enigmatic, ecstatic and contemplative, delighting and puzzling. Each of them is an encouragement that we go on with prayer, do the experiment of faith, follow the promises into God, bring the world to him for his healing. … At last, the distressful fragmentation of the contemporary vision of life is healed, reconciled, unified in Christ. (p. 113)

Or as we remind ourselves in the work-in-progress we call 'The SLG Way of Life:'

> turning continually to the gaze of God as we meet it in Jesus aligns us with his mind and his peace, and draws us more and more to engage with him in the overcoming of evil and the work of unity and reconciliation. This is God's work—in us, in our Community, the Church and the world at large.

SISTER CATHERINE SLG

Dennis Lennon, who died in 2007, wrote for the Bible Reading Fellowship and published a number of other titles.

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