

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



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Cover Picture
Fairacres Chapel at Christmas
The 'Wantage Crib',
sculpture by Mother Mirabel CSMV

Photo © Sister Margaret Theresa SLG

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COMMUNITY NOTES

It seems quite appropriate to be writing these notes during the Kingdom Season and soon after All Saints and All Souls, since I need to begin with news of the deaths of four Sisters over the summer months.

When I wrote in May, Sister Mary Kathleen was dying very peacefully, and she passed away on 31st May. Her funeral was held on 14th June. We were joined by members of her family from as far afield as Trinidad, Jamaica and Canada. Sister Isabel had a fall and died ten days later in hospital, in the early hours of the day of Sister Mary Kathleen's funeral. Her death, of course, was much more unexpected and more of a shock. Despite having to deal with the problems caused by increasing disability, Sister Isabel was very much engaged in the daily life of the Community and retained a very thoughtful and sharp mind. Her funeral was held on 1st July.

Only two months later Sister Helen Columba died on 20th August. She had had a number of years of poor health, and at her funeral, held on 2nd September, it was good to be reminded of the depths of her thought and spirituality over the years of her Community life. Finally, just three weeks after Sister Helen Columba's funeral, Sister Mary Margaret died in St John's Home where she had been lovingly cared for over several years. Many will remember Sister Mary Margaret's time living at Burwash, and her loving, and patient care of Sister Anna when she lived with us. In this *Chronicle* you will find the sermons preached at all four funerals, which I hope will give a portrait of the Sisters and their contribution to SLG over the years.

For all of the funerals family and friends came from great distances to be with us; although the circumstances were sad, it was a delight to deepen our friendship with them. The deaths also mean that we have lost most of our Scottish contingent, since Sisters Isabel, Helen Columba and Mary Margaret were all Scots. At the latter two

funerals the sound of strong Scottish accents among the funeral guests was a particular delight.

The loss of four Sisters had made quite a change in our numbers; we are now 24 Sisters, with 21 of us resident at Fairacres. Of course, we don't actually 'lose' our Sisters at death, and the sense of a strong SLG presence in heaven is very obvious when we come to the Requiem for SLG Sisters which we hold each year during November. This year it will be on 21st November at the beginning of our pre-Advent Retreat week, and 89 departed Sisters and 37 departed Oblates will be named aloud during the intercessions. As the letter to the Hebrew tells us,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Heb. 12:1–3)

The Saints and the departed, whom we remember especially during November, continue to inspire us by their lives and support us by their prayers. In the last *Chronicle* notes I asked you to share with me memories of SLG Sisters, Father Gilbert, Father Donald and others connected with SLG who have inspired or encouraged you; I was delighted to receive so many responses to that request. It is a reminder of strong roots and foundations, which we need to both lay claim to and build on. Those of you who are gardeners will know the importance of a strong and healthy root stock for a plant, but you will also know that the plant itself is unique, nourished by its roots and shaped by its circumstances.

The Community is just like that; the circumstances of the past months have been challenging, but we have strong roots with which to nourish ourselves in the challenges of the present day. I will continue

to meditate on the responses sent in. 2017 is the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Gilbert Shaw, and of SLG Press, which was his legacy to the Community, so it is a good moment to assess his importance. As Jesus taught:

Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. (Matt. 13:52)

We have the good fortune to have the witnesses of many past Sisters and friends of SLG to encourage and inspire us in our own journeys. Like the scribe, we have treasures both new and old.

As well as losses over the past six months, there have also been gains. We welcomed Sue Parfitt into the Novitiate as a Postulant on 23rd June, and Oblate Sister Mary Hannah of the Holy Trinity made her Life Promises on Sunday, 25th September.

One of the major events of the year has been the decision to adapt Chapel by taking out the monastic stalls. Many of us have found them increasingly difficult to get into, or to sit in over any period of time. Added to that, the entrance to Chapel lays great constraints on access for wheelchairs, because of the angle of the stalls near the door. Increasingly, we have found ourselves with a Chapel that is meant to be central to our life and yet not easily accessible to all.

Having said that, it is also true that seeing the choir stalls sitting in the cloister after their removal from Chapel, waiting to be taken away, was a very sad experience and there is some mourning for us to do. The Chapel had been in its current form since the 1920s (an old *Times* newspaper from October 1925 was found under the stalls during the work) and has been the place for all major Community events over that time. Although change was needed, it is important to give thanks for what has been, and for what has occurred in the Chapel over the years. The work is not quite complete as I write, but we are already aware that we now have a surprisingly large space to worship in. You may be glad to know that the wood from the Stalls will be reused by

our builders in other building works, and that our ‘new’ parquet for those parts of the floor formerly covered by the Stalls is second-hand and dates back to the 1920’s.

So, for the Community there is a great deal of change going on, which includes loss as well as new opportunities. I am very conscious that our world is also experiencing a great deal of change and uncertainty in the wake of Brexit and the American election. In a changing, uncertain time in world history the coming of Advent and Christmas reminds us that our hope lies in the unchangeable truth of the Gospel. Our departed Sisters based their lives on the hope given to them by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so can we.

Our world is badly in need of hope and of good news. Both are given to us in the Gospel. As we approach Christmas, let us continue to pray, work and keep vigil for that true peace that only God can give. As the carol, ‘It came upon a Midnight clear’, puts it:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

On behalf of us all, I wish you a peaceful Christmas and New Year.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG
Reverend Mother

ASSOCIATES RETREATS 2017

26th – 30th July 2017

Llangasty Retreat House

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LD1 6DN

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Fairacres, Parker Street
Oxford, OX4 1TB

www.slg.org.uk

Led by
Sister Christine SLG

We aim to provide comparable facilities to 'bed and breakfast' accommodation; we would recommend £35-£40 per night as a guide price.

Limited places available

For more details, contact:
Ferrol Brown

To book a place, please forward application forms and payments to:

Ferrol Brown
Bursary Office
Email: bursary@slg.org.uk
Tel: 01865 241849 (Option 2)



**SISTER MARY KATHLEEN OF THE
HOLY GHOST SLG**

(Kathleen Eileen Oxley)

14 June 1924 – 31 May 2016

ADDRESS AT THE REQUIEM MASS

14 June 2016

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

Your work is standing—holding things without being deflected
by your own desires or the desires of those around you.

Gilbert Shaw

We come together today to celebrate the life and mourn the loss of our Sister Mary Kathleen. It is good to do so surrounded not just by her religious family, but also her own family and close friends. It seems almost a contradiction, that someone who spent such a long period of her life in silence and solitude should at its end be known and loved by so many. But the closer we get to God, the closer we come to each other as well.

While Sister Mary Kathleen was living as a hermit at Bede House, Sister Eileen Mary was also living the solitary life there, and the Chaplain called them ‘hermit right sociable and hermit right silent.’ ‘Hermit right sociable’ was Sister Eileen Mary, who once told me that she felt that God made some people hermits because that was the only way he could get them to shut up! ‘Hermit right silent’ was Sister Mary Kathleen. But I am not entirely sure about the title; many of us will have had the experience of going to see her for a quick word, and finally getting away again an hour or so later!

Hermits leave the world for the sake of the world, and as I look around chapel, and recall the many people with whom we have been in contact since her death, that ‘for the world’ nature of the hermit vocation is made visible. There will be many others, known and

unknown, standing behind us, so to speak, as we remember Sister Mary Kathleen.

When we look back over a life, what we see are snippets and fragments of the whole. Sister Mary Kathleen was from Trinidad, had taught and worked in the Gambia, and came to this country to follow her vocation. She served in many ways in Community. She loved cricket and the Royal Family, and was a great fan of Michelle Obama. She could be determined, even unyielding, had a beautiful smile and an infectious laugh. Though she loved music and had a good sense of rhythm, she was usually a beat behind us in choir! Many will remember the perpetual bonfire she kept burning at Bede House, or her lawn-mowing around the hermitages at Crawley Down. Snapshots of a person much loved over a lifetime, but only snapshots. Only God can see the whole picture, and when the person concerned followed the call to be even more withdrawn in the hermit vocation, the fundamental mystery of who a person is becomes even more hidden.

Sister Mary Kathleen followed the teachings of Father Gilbert, and, as a Sister commented to me, part of her legacy was her ‘standing’, in the spirit of Father Gilbert’s teaching. She took to heart the word given by Father Gilbert in what we call ‘Father Gilbert’s Last Homily’: *your work is standing*. And that is what she did, both in the Common Life at Fairacres, as well as in her hermit years. Conversations with her revealed her knowledge of the ills and evils of our world and the needs of individuals, all taken into her work of standing before God. As the prophet Isaiah says:

Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth.

(Isa. 62: 6-7)

Or as another translation for verse 7 reads: ‘You who are the Lord’s Remembrancers’.

She was set apart in particular form of the SLG vocation in order to stand before God in prayer as one of the Lord's Remembrancers. She was faithful to this vocation until the end, even when she returned to Fairacres after to her years in a hermitage on the property of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down.

Anyone who is dedicated to a life of prayer and intercession is liable to find they face spiritual conflict to at least some degree. As the light of Christ penetrates our hearts ever more deeply, all the murky corners of our souls and of the world are revealed ever more clearly and painfully. Increasingly we find ourselves called to stand before God, to hold those unreconciled areas of life to redemptive love for healing. This is costly work, and even more so for the hermit who draws apart from the normal affairs of the world to stand before God. The hermit meets these things head on, having withdrawn from communal living in order to be more available for this work. As the section titled 'Our Share in the Work of Christ' from our *Way of Life* puts it:

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 the vocation to which Sister Mary Kathleen was called.

It is probably significant that her final attendance at Chapel was on Holy Saturday, that moment poised between Crucifixion and Resurrection, the day of burial in the tomb and of the descent into hell. From then on she was largely in bed and on the spiritual journey to death. Peacefully, in her own bed, cared for by her sisters and familiar infirmary staff, her dying was the sort of end we might all wish for ourselves. I was conscious that she was still doing her work of standing. From her bed she could see a selection of icons, and photos of her family. She was still, and surprisingly strong, as she made that journey, letting go of more and more as she prepared to meet her Lord. Death is the final mystery in our lives, a final passage and

transition into the nearer presence of God. We were privileged to be near her in that journey; but in the end, like the moment of birth, it is something we do alone, surrendering into the unknown.

As I was looking for a quote from *The Undistorted Image*, Father Sophrony's book about Saint Silouan, I came across the account of the Saint's death. Several times he was checked on during the night, but after matins when 'the infirmarian looked in again, the Staretz had passed away. Nobody had heard a sound, not even those who lay near him, so gently did he go to God' (p. 111).

'Peaceful', 'gracious' and 'gentle' were all words which we could apply to Sister Mary Kathleen in her final months. She had very little discomfort, and our experience of the final night of her life was of her just slipping away. She was checked on several times; then a Sister went in early in the morning, and she was gone. Nobody had heard a sound, so gently did she go to God.

I will conclude with another quotation from Saint Silouan, a prayer I feel sure Sister Mary Kathleen would both echo and understand:

O Lord, how Thou hast loved Thy creature! Thy soft gentle gaze the soul can never forget. My soul, O Lord is busy night and day with Thee and I seek Thee, and the remembrance of Thee makes glad my mind. My soul came to love Thee and rejoices that Thou art my God and my Lord, and I yearn after Thee until my heart is filled with tears. And though all the world be beautiful no earthly thing can occupy my thoughts: my soul desires only the Lord. (p. 206-7)

Sister Clare-Louise referred above to 'Father Gilbert's Last Homily'. This was given to a small group of Sisters during his final illness in August 1967, and consists of notes made by one of them at the time. It is a distillation of the teaching he gave the Community during his years as Warden. Many of our readers will already know it, but it is reprinted here for those who want the full text for reference.

FATHER GILBERT SHAW'S LAST HOMILY

THE HOLY SPIRIT will never give you stuff on a plate—you've got to work for it.

Your work is LISTENING—taking the situation you're in and holding it in courage, not being beaten down by it.

Your work is STANDING—holding things without being deflected by your own desires or the desires of those round you. Then things work out just through patience. How things alter we don't know, but the situation alters.

There must be dialogue in patience and charity—then something seems to turn up that wasn't there before.

We must take people as they are and where they are—not going too far ahead or too fast for them, but listening to their needs and supporting them in their following.

The Holy Spirit brings things new and old out of the treasury.

Intercessors bring the 'deaf and dumb' to Christ; that is their part.

Seek for points of unity and stand on those rather than on principles.

Have the patience that refuses to be pushed out; the patience that refuses to be disillusioned.

There must be dialogue—or there will be no development.



SISTER ISABEL OF JESUS GLORIFIED SLG

(Isabel Armstrong)

12 September 1933 – 14 June 2016

ADDRESS AT THE REQUIEM MASS

1 July 2016

SISTER ROSEMARY SLG

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

Sister Isabel had this verse from Bilbo's Song in *The Lord of the Rings* displayed on a large poster behind her desk in the SLG Press in the 1980s. She looked at it each morning as her father's life moved slowly towards its close; it also reminded her of her novitiate with Sister Jane, and Sister Jocelyn Mary, their much-loved Novice Mistress, who had read *The Lord of the Rings* aloud to them. So I have been remembering it too, in relation to Sister Isabel herself. As we pause today at this turning of the road we can affirm that for her, now, the Road does join 'some larger way'. What I recall of her life may be fragmentary, bits and pieces only, but the whole is now being gathered into God, where all 'paths and errands meet'.

The 'door where it began' was a family and a home which at every point informed her life and deepest love. When she entered the Community in the 1950s enclosure was strict and neither her parents nor her sisters, Helen and Ann, could begin to understand why Isabel, not long after graduating from St Andrew's, young and bright and full

of fun, decided to vanish down a cat-run and bury herself in a Convent. It was so hard for Isabel to tell her parents what she was about to do that she could not say it face to face. She wrote them a letter, but she was en route either to or from Italy, and left it too late to post her letter before the train left. So she thrust it into the hands of a bystander on the platform in the hope—or dread—that it would be posted, and her parents would receive it before she got home.

Home is where one starts from....

‘East Coker V’, T. S. Eliot,

...And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

‘Little Gidding V’, T. S. Eliot

Sister Isabel had, I think, an inner point of reference, a touchstone and source of safety and delight, which was like home. How she loved Beatrix Potter, picturing Peter Rabbit tucked up in bed after his adventures with Mr McGregor, home again, while ‘Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail had blackberries and milk for supper’. How she loved Bede House, the lanes and hop fields, the tits snug in their letterbox nest, and, in the chapel, the altar, the red cross, the icons, all signs of home; and Jesus at home in the tabernacle. How she loved the well-lived-in countryside round Burwash, and, later the Pfarrhaus at Schlöben in East Germany where she spent such a significant time with Ursula and Brigitte, Sisters of Ordo Pacis. She spoke of the underlying sweetness of the land and of a time of refreshing while she was there. Later still, it was the homeliness of the convent of the Society of the Sacred Cross at Tymawr that she loved when, eventually, I persuaded her, against her will, to have a sabbatical there. She loved cooking and baking and bottling, and growing cottage garden flowers from seed. I still try to make scones ‘with purple, ice-cold, hands’ as she instructed and will never eat vegetable spaghetti marrow without thinking of her. Homely things.

It is easy to understand why at the very end of her life Sister Isabel was dwelling on Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. When she told me once how she skipped up and down the zig-zag Jacob's Ladder path to the beach in Folkestone, her face lit up as if it were yesterday. She remained in touch with joyous moments in her own childhood and 'the vision splendid' that comes naturally to those new to the world—and to grown-ups who have not had that first perception educated out of them. This was not childishness, but good theology; her abiding love of home presaged and promised our heavenly home and was a foretaste of its beauty.

A few years ago when we revised the Community collects, Sister Isabel emphatically welcomed the new opening: 'O God, our heavenly Father, you have sent your Only Son Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world and to restore in us the image of your glory.' Such fundamental Christian optimism about the nature of the world and human beings within it made in the image of God, accords well with her dedication to Jesus Glorified, and the mystery of the Ascension, the feast day on which she made her Profession. Just as Jesus at the Ascension returned home to the bosom of his heavenly Father, so we, in him, are called and destined to return to our true self, which is his image in us. There we find our own true home. And there, too, is union with God in the Blessed Trinity, and new creation. 'The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started.'

Although Isabel had a loving and secure home, the larger context of the time was much darker and more puzzling: it was wartime. The three girls followed reports of World War II assiduously and plotted its progress with pins on a large map of the world. That must have been how Isabel first became familiar with the shape of Europe, its changing borders and names and places which later became so important to her. In the Community, under the leadership of Mother Mary Clare, she would have imbibed an understanding of prayer

which includes another, related, level of warfare, of ‘taking part in the underlying spiritual conflict’.

Today we can easily become paralysed by a sense that there is nothing we can do in the face of so much suffering, such lack of love and justice in man’s relationship with man, but the Cross of Christ stands at the heart of it all, and the prayer of Christ, now as always, is the answer to man’s need.

Mother Mary Clare, *The Simplicity of Prayer*

Sister Isabel knew about this. She knew her Father Cary and Father Gilbert. She knew, by her extensive reading and because she knew their language, in every sense, Bonhoeffer and the von Trott family. She knew, by her translation work with Alex Popescu, Petre Țuțea, the Romanian Christian dissident and philosopher. She knew with some intimacy, through translating a selection of his poems, the Romanian poet Paul Celan. The poet Kathleen Raine greatly admired her translations and published them in the journal *Temenos*. Sister Isabel herself regarded translating these poems of Paul Celan as the most important piece of work she had done. She loved language and was meticulous in her accurate use of it, but it was the meaning that she sought. Recently, when she could hardly speak at all, she made a remark to Oblate Sister Jane about the Cross, ‘Of course,’ she said, ‘the Cross is the Epiphany of Christ’. Who knows from what deep wells of experience and prayer that comment came?

Hers was a long, rich and many-sided life; others will be remembering all sorts of things about her. Those of us who were there will most readily remember Sister Isabel as the star of many a Community entertainment, transforming effortlessly into, say, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, or a summoning presence with a lily, or a devout Anglo-Catholic lady. She could get us all helpless and doubled up with laughter. It was wonderfully therapeutic and liberating. She was a brilliant mimic: ‘It just came’—and always had. I used to hope she’d never imitate me as I knew she’d get it exactly right, and wasn’t sure I was ready for such exposure. She was also quite a tease, which could

be hilarious; but it could be confusing or misconstrued if you were not quite on the same wavelength. That too was simply her, and when things were tough or she was hurt, she would get by with a joke.

Sometimes quirky, sometimes infuriating and obstinate, scatty and not to be cowed, witty, and with that ‘wit’ which is knowing and wise, Sister Isabel leaves a large gap in the Community and a large legacy. She died without ever getting the new community room and step-free access the length of the convent which she had so long hoped for; without regaining speech, mobility or consciousness—‘sans everything’. But as she lay in hospital relieved at last of the frustration of trying to speak, trying to eat, trying to move, trying to keep going, I thought what lengths God goes to in order to show how much he loves us. Not our gifts, achievements, foibles, star quality or anything else. He made us, he loves *us*, and he welcomes us home. ‘See how he loved her.’ And loves her still.

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with weary feet,
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

The Road goes ever on and on
Out from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone.
Let others follow, if they can!
Let them a journey new begin.
But I at last with weary feet
Will turn towards the lighted inn,
My evening-rest and sleep to meet.

Still 'round the corner there may wait
A new road or secret gate;
And though I oft have passed them by,
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run
West of the Moon, East of the Sun.

Bilbo's Song from *The Lord of the Rings*,
J. R. R. Tolkien

RESONANCE OF HEARTS¹

In remembrance of Sister Isabel SLG

ALEX POPESCU

Glossolalia is part of the prayer language of the Pentecostal churches in New Testament times. It re-emerged, throughout history as loosely-structured, predominantly lay, movements, most notably in the sixteenth century in communities of Anabaptists, and in the last century as Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Renewal Movements. Ronald Knox, an English priest, classicist, writer and BBC broadcaster, wrote a splendid book on this subject. Entitled *Enthusiasm, A Chapter in the History of Religion, with special reference to the XVII and XVIII centuries*, this study explores the origin and development of such various movements of Christian rebels, often denounced as heretics, who have tried to live a less worldly life than other Christians, claiming the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, and eventually splitting off into separate sects.

Thus *glossolalia* has confusing connotations, even for some believers who practice speaking in tongues as a private prayer language. It often conveys a sense of ambiguity or even superstition. So, what does *glossolalia* mean for us?

¹ Extract from a homily preached at Evensong in the chapel of Balliol College, Oxford, 8 June 2014. A full copy of the text is available from the SLG Press website, or write directly to SLG Press.

I do not think *glossolalia* at Pentecost can be fully understood simply as a linguistic phenomenon. Human language cannot fully describe the all-sharing experience of Divine gifts at Pentecost. God's manifestation ultimately transcends our human understanding, allowing us to interpret only imperfectly such a revelatory experience. The account of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9), where God scattered a humanity which had been united by a common language through confusing their speech and allowing everyone to speak in self-centred parallel monologues, symbolises our total confusion as forgetfulness of God.

Christ's disciples become apostles and missionaries, not only by using language and spreading the Good News through narrative discourses, sermons or letters. They go beyond the realm of linguistics and interpretation, by becoming Christ-like in their lives, in an unconditional manner; this includes their own witness even unto death. In this way, *glossolalia* has to do more with resonance of meaningful being in Christ, as a result of shared revelation between people who are living out their faith as unique and sacrificial truth.

This trans-lingual resonance of being is in my view at the root of any personal and interpersonal communication, for Christians and non-Christians alike. Pentecostal 'gifts' and 'fruits' are the fulfilment of Old Testament revelation. St Paul sees *glossolalia* as the least of the gifts, and attributes to it very little value without interpretation.

I experienced this trans-lingual resonance in my friendship with Sister Isabel, one of the people who, over several years, helped me to put into good English theological and philosophical ideas conceived in my native Romanian. It was a language she did not know, although she had a good level of Latin, German, and French. We worked together on translating my study of the late Petre Țuțea, my spiritual father, which work entailed strict attention to the meaning of his words in Romanian, a Romance language of Latin origin. In the first instance it meant looking words up in the dictionary, to find all elements of their meaning. But then we felt the need to enlarge our

understanding by reflecting on anecdotes about Țuțea and my personal experience with him, so as to get right inside the text of his aphorisms.

Their content and his personality were often strikingly similar to those of the late Father Gilbert Shaw, a former Warden of the Sisters of the Love of God. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge who had practised as a barrister, Father Gilbert started his ministry before World War II in a poor area in East London beset by unemployment, in a time of increasing economic and political crisis.

Țuțea was a former diplomat and lay Orthodox Christian who spent thirteen years as a prisoner of conscience in Communist Romania. Similarly, in his ministry of over sixty years Father Gilbert strove to meet the needs for social justice while practising faithful contemplation in prayer. Thus Sister Isabel felt that she was actually able to help with a translation into English from a language she was not familiar with. In communicating between two souls, two different languages, and two ways of experiencing Christian spirituality, the words were only a part and not the whole. The essence of understanding one another came from elsewhere.

* * * * *

How does personal spiritual experience relate to the revelation of God's Word in the created order? And how do we 'discern' what revelations are of God—very God—as opposed to, simply, experiences of the immanent power and infinitely mysterious and wonderful activity of the divine in all areas and times of creation, from the everyday to the sublime?

I do not want to end in a false doctrinal rectitude. We tend to sit too lightly to the actual disunity and sinfulness of the Church. This makes the proclamation of the 'official' work of the Holy Spirit unconvincing. We need to confess the agonising experience of the Church's failure *to be* what it is all too expert at merely proclaiming. We are spending much energy in trying to express political correctness, and to distinguish what is morally right from what is wrong. But we often forget that obsessive endeavours towards

accurate translation of words, even of biblical words, can become foreign to doxology as affirmation of God's glory, even to the point where our lament becomes habit. What is 'the Truth' on its own, other than a sterile apotheosis of Chronos, of Time, favouring quantity of competitive microseconds, over time as the quality of incarnational substance? Narrative Truth does not matter as such if it is not our shared Truth as root and fruit of personal experience and proclamation of Good News.

I hope I have suggested that though the phenomenon of 'speaking in tongues' can entail an initial eruption of incomprehensible noise, angst, and broken communication, it also encompasses artistic creativity and 'ordinary' language, as in Sister Isabel's translations. Such a shared earthquake or confluence of inner worlds can shake and purify human beings to the core, transforming them into witnesses to the redemptive mystery of Christ's dialogue with us, and within us, in preparation for a fruitful resonance of hearts, opened and inspired by the gift of peace which Jesus has offered us (John 14:27).

In the 1970s Sister Isabel gave the Novices several addresses on the Vows. The following is an abridged version of the first of four reflections on Obedience.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE EARS

SISTER ISABEL SLG

Obedience is directly related to the will, that power of choice which determines our actions as human beings. The will is 'the whole man organised for action' (William Temple). But we have another very direct, very obvious and well-trodden short-cut into the mystery of Obedience, and that is the self-evident truth that Obedience starts at the ears. If ever it becomes the consecration of the whole person, it begins with the consecration of the ears, and in support of this claim we might briefly rehearse a few well-known facts.

The brain is the seat of the rational powers, memory, understanding, will and all the powers derived from them which constitute the mind. The mind, being immaterial cannot be reduced to a diagram; it can only be described in words. It is not the brain itself but its due functioning depends upon the brain, which is material. Not only does it depend on the health of the brain in order to function, but it depends on the brain to supply it with matter for its functions to work upon. And the raw material for memory, understanding and will to work upon, to transmute into thought and action are brought in turn to the brain by the nerves transmitting messages from the bodily senses.

Of all our sense faculties, the auditory is perhaps the most complex, the most mysterious of all. The anatomy of the ear is not less wonderful and delicate than that of the eye, and it is at least as complex if not more so. We might pause a moment to consider in a very elementary way the mechanism of the ear.

This mechanism is hidden and protected within walls of bone. Our ears do their work in the dark, unnoticed, unmarvelled at, but also, protected from damage. Deafness and disorder of any kind in the ear is a very desolating affliction. Our ears start with well-designed, even ornamental porches for collecting sound which is then conducted like a visitor down a passage where it knocks on the ear-drum and is admitted into chambers, along corridors with windows and staircases that are part of the labyrinthine internal architecture of the head.

It is possible to think of the ear mechanism as a very quiet and orderly house, because all these words, chamber, vestibule, labyrinth, passage, staircase, window are the anatomical terms used to describe the ducts, sacs, nerves, canals etc. by means of which sound is taken to the brain. It is worth pondering on the fact, in however simple a way, that the secret, silent, delicate work of our ears goes on without an atom of help from us, inside our heads; that birds, animals and babies come into the world with this complete mechanism in working order.

Broadly speaking the ear deals with whatever enters its porch, a volume of sound of infinite variety. Within its operating limits the ear uses no discrimination. It is a servant who asks no questions. The work of storing the sound in the memory, relating it, deciding as to its value and its use, is the work of the mind. And the mind reaches decisions about the sounds brought to the brain according to principles that are quite outside the range of any bodily mechanism. The ear doesn't know whether it is presenting the mental faculties with a lie, a blasphemy, a prayer or a cry for help. It is not its job to know; it is simply a conductor of sound.

So it is up to the mental powers to protect the brain from what they don't want it to receive by controlling the operation of the ear. Provided the ears are in good working order, the person who owns them has a large measure of choice and can decide up to a point what he will or won't hear, what use he will make of his ears—not complete control, but a working control.

(1) We can free our attention for certain sounds by excluding others. Some tasks demand special auditory conditions. While many manual and some mental tasks can be carried out to the accompaniment of transistor music, there are others that demand the elimination of all perceptions that would divide the senses in their operations (distraction means literally the state of being pulled apart and divided): the task is of such delicacy or such importance that the senses must be left free to receive only those impressions which can guide the brain to perform it successfully.

There are also sounds which must be rejected because of the painful effect they have on the feelings, by activating certain memories. Quarrelling voices, sounds of menace, the insistent crying of a child, sounds too painful to be ignored which all require some means of control. The noise can be shut out, it can be drowned by setting up rival noises or, if it has the effect of a warning, it can stimulate positive action which will silence the noise by dealing with its cause.

(2) Another measure of control is the training of the ears. This consists in learning to separate sound, to single out, without always necessarily excluding. It is a way of making a fuller use of the ears by employing them deliberately instead of just letting them work. This activity is called listening and, according to the definition supplied in Webster's dictionary, it engages the ear to work with the mind in this way:

When we have occasion to listen and give a more particular attention to some sound, the tympanum is drawn to a more than ordinary tension.

The Bible is aware both of the distinction between the hearing of the ears and the understanding of the mind and of the intimate connection between them. For example, the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:4–8, 18–23) is all about degrees of hearing. We find the words 'ear' and 'hear' used with perfect confidence in this double sense of auditory perception and inward understanding, with the clear recognition that the two functions are different but intimately related.

Scripture uses the same word 'hear' to mean 'listen'. Listening is still a function of the ear, but in this case it is connected with the will. It is hearing stimulated by desire to hear rather than the mere passive reception of sound. Once the will is engaged in the act of hearing, there is a greater likelihood that what is heard will be stored and organised by the memory and understanding. Thus 'hear' means both to listen and also to understand as a result of listening. 'Hearken,' a word favoured by the Authorized Version, is perhaps rather stronger because it means quite unambiguously to listen, even to 'listen hard' and as the word is frequently used in connection with the word of the Lord and his commandments or his purposes, it carries with it the sense of intention to act in accordance with what has been heard and understood.

In hearkening one is already moving beyond listening into action. St James says that hearing without action is meaningless, a form of fantasy or self-deception. 'Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers

only, deceiving your own selves' (Jas. 1:22). The union of hearing and doing is obedience. Obedience comes about when the ear has listened, the memory has recorded, the understanding has related, and the will has acted.

In Hebrew the word *shamea* is used both for hearing in the auditory sense and for hearing inwardly with understanding, also for listening or hearkening, and finally for obeying which is the completion of the whole process.

In the Latin the prefix *ob* indicates a motion towards. The word *obey* suggests a leaning forward in order to hear, an inclining of the ear to make sure that what is heard is heard accurately and none of it is lost. Therefore the very word contains the idea of expectation, of active receptivity rather than passive reception of sound.

So when I give my attention to hear and to listen I give more than my ears and my understanding, I give also my expectation of receiving something; I give my willingness to believe, in fact my belief, that from this source to which I have directed my attention something is coming to me which requires a response that is in my power to give. If I know for certain (or think I know) exactly what it is that is coming to me, I am not so likely to listen to it or to listen for it. I know already, but what I express in the attitude of my whole being when I decide to listen is an expectation of receiving something whose possibilities I have not yet fully explored.

What this thing—let us call it the Word of Obedience—asks from me personally, is something that is essentially mine to give and no one else's. When therefore I choose whether to stop my ears and go away whistling, or to wait and listen and act, I am in either case exercising a freedom which belongs to the very core of my endowment as a being made in God's image. This power and freedom to respond to a Voice is what Adam enjoyed before his fall. The breach in relationship which followed from his rejection of the word of obedience left him alone, in undefended isolation, in which he could no longer answer the Voice, but only hide from it in terror of its next word. The whole of

the Old Testament is about a people's painful recovery of the freedom to listen and to respond without fear. Abraham and Moses both learnt by repeated encounter with God to recognise his voice as a direct call to act in obedience for the sake of love. Little Samuel was drawn into direct relationship with God as a result of his obedience to the voice that called him, even before he knew whose it was. Elijah learnt to hear the word of God in 'a sound of thin silence.'

Hearing and listening may not bring us very near to what we might call the practicalities of obedience in this life, to its problems or its cost, all of which are very real and solid. We have only suggested a starting point. At her final profession a Sister is asked: 'Do you promise to devote every faculty of mind and body to God's service forever?' She has had a long time to think it over, seven years or more in which to find out if she's really able to make that promise from her heart. Because the promise cannot be made until the practice of obedience has rooted the choice of obedience in the heart as its most fundamental and abiding desire. When that happens obedience has become love itself, it has become love's most characteristic and complete expression.

We can let the word in at the porches of our ears; we can let it travel into the departments of the mind which are like a sort of administration block. It can be detained there for a very long time and it may even be sent out again the way it came without receiving an answer. But if it is invited at last into the inner chamber of the heart and allowed to rest there, it has reached the only place where it can be welcomed and embraced in love. The heart is the final arbiter, and once it has opened its door to embrace the word with love, no processes of the mind, no feelings of pain or revulsion can inhibit its response in an obedient deed.

The word is received in openness and expectation and it is answered and fulfilled in faith, hope and love. These gifts are part of our baptismal endowment, they are the powers conferred upon the heart, the core of personality, the innermost seat of freedom. What we

do then when we let in the Word of God to be embraced by the gifts of his Holy Spirit, is to discover our own strength. For it is the exercise of faith, hope and love in the heart which changes it, which enables it to recover its dominion over all the powers of thought and feeling, and to unite them in an obedience which is, quite simply, listening love in action.

The process needs our whole lifetime to complete, but at every stage, it is a process of healing (or if you like, salvation, in the New Testament sense of soundness, integrity received straight from God) and it is what Isaiah is talking about when he accepts his own vocation and prophecies:

Hear ye indeed but understand not and see ye indeed but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they *see* with their *eyes* and hear with their ears and convert and be healed. (Isa. 6:10)

It is from this beginning that we shall go on to discover that the learning and practice of obedience by which we ourselves are healed is, quite specifically, our part in the work of ‘healing the ills of humanity and the world’s disorders’ in which God has called us to share.

ASSOCIATES

New

FLG

Reverend Graham Low, 21 November 2016

R.I.P.

FLG

Reverend Lesley Hyde, 22 June 2016

COMPANION

Rozanne Colchester, 17 November 2016



**SISTER HELEN COLUMBA OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT SLG**

(Helen Shepherd Stevenson)

30 November 1927 – 20 August 2016

ADDRESS AT THE REQUIEM MASS

2 September 2016

DAVID BARTON

We have come here for a Requiem, and to acknowledge a death. And that is what we do. But first and foremost, we celebrate a life, a life lived in response to God, and lived deeply in tune with the heart of this community. This is a Eucharist of gratitude for who Helen Columba was.

She was born and brought up in Glasgow. In her teenage years she had the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings because of their mother's illness. The family, I discovered, have always thought of her in maternal terms. Then Canada, with, I think, the intention of staying there. But after eight years she came back to be on Iona, as secretary to the Church of Scotland minister. Perhaps there was a growing awareness of a call. And Iona was for her the beloved place. She found herself held by it. She would walk on the far side of the island, and, in a way that was entirely hers, feel close to the spirit of Columba and the early monks as she sat among the remains of their beehive huts.

But in the end, though she loved it deeply, and never in the subsequent years lost touch with it, Iona only intensified the call. It was the discovery perhaps, that what matters is not so much the call—and she was very aware of this—as coming to understand that we have been chosen, loved and chosen by Christ long before, for a task that we can barely understand, but are compelled to explore in all its God-given depths.

It was Bishop Richard Holloway who saw that Helen's unusual gifts of perception would be understood and contained within SLG. So

she came in 1972, and knew it to be her place; though with, I have no doubt, that half-apologetic, half-defiant statement of hers, 'I'm mostly Church of Scotland, and only recently an Episcopalian.' Thirty years later she was still saying it!

She came knowing she had to let go, to sacrifice. But she confided to her sister that the unexpected sacrifice, and by far the hardest, was her voice. She had a fine, trained, operatic voice, a soloist's voice. Restraining it, to blend with others, scaling it down to the narrow range of plainchant, was unexpectedly tough. Despite that though, she flourished in the novitiate. And it was Sister Isabel, on the novitiate team with Sister Anne, who led her into the charism of the community. They were both from Scotland, and were capable of lapsing into a dialect conversation that no one else could possibly understand! (And Robbie Burns. Throughout her life, Robbie Burns mattered.) But it was the way Isabel opened the gates to the inner life and led her into understanding the Community's Rule that was of profound importance to her. She looked back on that time and on Isabel with gratitude and affection. How good that later this morning their bodies will share the same grave.

And so, from the training of her novitiate, and living out the Rule in the daily life of the community, she became the remarkable sister she was. It was, as *The Imitation of Christ* reminds us, a life that centred round and embraced the cross. When I came to know her she was so clearly someone who had learned to live between the great paradoxes of cross and resurrection, penitence and forgiveness. She stood faithfully before God in love and intercession.

But that raised problems that were not easy for her. She felt the suffering of others acutely. She could easily be sucked into the horrors of the Shoah. She sensed the suffering of the Bosnian war, long before the atrocities became an item on the news. Mother Mary Clare, with a similar gift, understood that, and helped her, and her death was the loss of an anchor to Helen Columba. The balance she found was, I think, in her awareness of the community of Saints. St Columba

always mattered, but now Our Lady, Seraphim of Sarov and Thérèse of Lisieux became the inspiration for her ever-deepening life. And they were more than inspirations: she found companionship with them. She prayed *with* them, and they with her, at a depth most of the rest of us can't quite imagine. Their images decorated the prayer desk in her cell. She called them 'the Gang' and it was with pleasure and relief she knelt to pray among them.

And their company gave her prayers and intercessions a distinctive edge. Knowing her own double belonging, Presbyterian and Episcopalian, she now found herself sharing in their Orthodoxy and Catholicism. She saw that Ecumenism mattered because it would unlock the spiritual depths of the churches to combat what she increasingly came to see as the destructive nature of contemporary society. She looked at Russia, falling into an uncertain disintegration. She worried about the increasing secularity of the West. Importantly, her prayer never left out politics. And it all brought her back to her own dedication, Helen Columba of the Holy Spirit. 'All our hope is in Christ and the Holy Spirit,' she wrote.

But in all of this seriousness we must not forget just what fun she was. I cherish a memory of her in the kitchen of our house in Parker Street, not long after we moved here, talking to me and our twelve-year-old daughter. 'Don't think of us as serious neighbours' she said. 'Oh, no! Teresa of Avila used to say, "Bring out the castanets!"' And before we knew where we were, there she was, feet tapping, arms in the air, fingers clicking, habit swinging, humming a tune and demonstrating a Spanish dance! That is until we all collapsed with laughter at the ridiculousness of it all! Fun mattered, skits with the sisters were important. Once, clad in a tartan shawl, she sang a very un-nun like song to the Bishops' Cell meeting here.

So I suppose that it was all of this that she took with her when she became Sister in Charge at Bede House. That was her big, external job for the community. She loved it there, the countryside, the life of the chapel, the library, the guests, her contacts in the village. And she had

a powerful and important effect on so many people who came for retreat. She was once more a mother, loving and inclusive. Her remarkable intuition enabled her to stand alongside people. She understood. She drew people back to the centre, because she was so centred. She was wise and deep. There are many who have cause to be grateful to her for that period of her life.

And then back to Fairacres and her time as secretary to Sister Anne. It is from this time that the remarkable retreat she gave to the Fellowship in 1992 comes. In it she lays out the depths of her extraordinarily profound spiritual understanding. But when her time as secretary to the Reverend Mother came to its natural end, she never quite found another place in which to be herself. And then it was as if the shadowy areas of her mind began to assert themselves more strongly over her. Old age and ill health meant that she did not have the strength to mount a defence as she might have done in the past. I think we wondered how much was a psychiatric illness, and how much a profound trial of the spirit, in a world that she saw as increasingly dysfunctional. But she retreated from us, and the old difficulties of chapel and singing reasserted themselves.

This last decade has been hard, and painful for many of us who loved her. But we need to remember that nothing is ever outside God; that, even in the last confused years, God held her, was in her, and in ways we do not understand, wrapped her into the economy of his love. Again, the cross matters here. The cross is the place from which we receive and care for the broken body of God. Broken and wounded, beyond communication, but no less is it the body of God.

But, as the *Imitation* says, 'If thou be dead with him, thou shalt also in like manner live with him.' So darkness is driven away by light, the Cross flowers into the tree of Resurrection. And we can imagine her in the heavenly places, surrounded by the Gang once more, with laughter and fun and dancing and singing. And love will clothe her in all its fullness.

As David Barton noted, in March 1992 Sister Helen Columba led a retreat, The Hidden Love, for Associates at Scottish Churches House in Dunblane. She reflected on the lives and teachings of St Seraphim of Sarov and St Thérèse of Lisieux. In the final address she drew together common elements in their thought. There follow some extracts from this address.

COMMON GROUND

SISTER HELEN COLUMBA SLG

It has not been my intention to make a comparative study of the lives of St Seraphim and St Thérèse, but rather to see where they might converge in relation to the common ground of the two traditions embodied by them, and it is upon this common ground that I wish to focus in what follows.

The methods employed by each of them in reaching their goal differed. Seraphim lived as a representative of the Orthodox tradition in the forests of Sarov, and Thérèse in the desert of Carmel. But as mystics I believe they trod their respective paths in the same attitude, that of humility, in knowing they were children of a God of love and of their willing surrender to be exposed to the fire of that love.

Participation in Suffering

It has been said that there is hardly a family in the former Soviet Union that has not known at least one of its members to suffer as victims of the KGB, and in this sense the whole people, not only the dissidents, have suffered from the evil of the regime. Julia de Beausobre, who suffered thus, said in her essay *Creative Suffering*:

Evil can be overcome by man only through knowledge, the knowledge of evil; and it seems to the Russians that man can know a thing, as man, only through participation ... The intuition is that evil must not be shunned but first participated in and understood through participation ... and then, through understanding, transfigured.

This understanding has been described as ‘a part of the common wisdom of the Russian people, it is indeed part of the common wisdom of Christendom but we have forgotten it’. Perhaps we need to be reminded that any suffering we may be called upon to endure can be made redemptive simply because we do not suffer in isolation, but in union with Christ and as a member of his mystical Body.

In the Orthodox tradition there is what has been referred to as ‘a loving preference for the icon of Christ’s Descent into Hell, rather than the icon of the Cross’ and the Descent into Hell gives cause for great rejoicing, inasmuch as Christ in his descent into hell raised the dead to life and thus won the final victory of good over evil.

This descent into hell and participation in evil was certainly known to St Seraphim. There seems no doubt that he was engaged in spiritual warfare of great intensity; and while he maintains a strict silence on the subject, nevertheless in answer to a question about demons he replied: ‘They are hideous; their conscious rejection of divine grace has transformed them into angels of darkness and unimaginable horrors.’ This would suggest that Seraphim met evil at its very source. It is also recorded that ‘in his confrontation with the devil he experienced heavy anxiety and deep depression. He saw himself ‘damned, in anguish abandoned by God ... and it was then that his agony approached despair. ‘He who has chosen the hermit life’, he said later, ‘must feel himself constantly crucified ...’ A far cry indeed from the image of the staretz radiating joy and light.

Seraphim must have known suffering in his role of prophet for as such he uttered constant warnings and predicted the Russian Revolution when the crosses would be removed from the churches and the monasteries destroyed. His prophecy was of a mystical nature and identifiable with these words of Berdyaev:

Prophetic mysticism is that of the Holy Spirit. It is Russian mysticism *par excellence*. It is inherent in the Russian people and it springs from the spiritual soil of Orthodoxy.

Such was the way of St Seraphim. Of St Thérèse and the state of continuous aridity from which she suffered Ida Görres has this to say:

In hours of insight however, she understood that this terrible and, as she so often repeated ‘incomprehensible’ state was not a fault but a task, that she was required to participate in the sins of the world outside the convent walls, where violent attacks raged against the existence of the soul. ... she grasped that she was atoning not only by praying at a safe distance for those poor godless souls, but by being right in the midst of them, sharing all their torments and their blindness, being one of them and having to appeal to God’s mercy. She was ‘participating’ in the unfathomable Passion of Our Lord when His Father abandoned Him. And wholeheartedly Thérèse committed herself to this suffering.

It was a suffering that was to increase in intensity as she drew nearer to death and the darkness closed around her. I find in this understanding of suffering as participation in Our Lord’s Passion a point at which Russian Orthodox and Carmelite spirituality converge and I base my thinking on the following text from Romans:

Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God ... The Spirit himself and our spirit bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children we are heirs as well; heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, sharing his suffering so as to share his glory. (8:14, 16–17)

In Rublev’s icon of the Trinity the focal point is the chalice, underlining the truth that sacrifice is not only a law of life but central to it. At the heart of the Trinity is the cup of sacrificial suffering and this means therefore that we are called to share not only in the love of the Trinity but in the suffering of the heart. For both Seraphim and Thérèse this suffering, this participation, took place at the deepest level in the silence and hiddenness of the heart. Chapter 3 of the SLG Rule, ‘Reconciliation’, states:

To participate in Christ's reconciliation means to open the whole being to God in the common life to which he has called each one, and it will be through this stripping of self that the order and discipline of the individual life will bear the fruits of Christ's victory over sin and death, which is the true end of Christian asceticism.

In this way of participation we are moved by the desire that 'all should be drawn to respond to his mercy, to acknowledge and accept the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ' (Ch. 3). For Seraphim and Thérèse 'the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ' was to be realized by their sanctification 'through their union with the life of the Incarnate Son of God' (Ch. 2).

The Renewal of the Mind

The way to union with God by passing through the three classical stages of purgation, illumination and union is unknown in the Orthodox tradition, where, says Berdyaev, 'man is transfigured and deified only by an inward reception of the Holy Spirit'. And of the Jesus Prayer he says, 'The Holy Name contains within itself that divine Energy which, when it is diffused through a man's being, penetrates and changes his heart'.

The whole subject of differences between Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox spirituality is very controversial and could never be gone into without a great deal of time and study, but for our present purposes there is one factor that must be stressed, namely: that in the Orthodox tradition great emphasis is placed upon *the mind being united with the heart*, if there is to be any spiritual unity within.

In her book, *The Jesus Prayer*, Mother Maria says of the Fathers, that 'their greatest concern was directed towards the regeneration of the lower faculties of the soul, the psychological sphere ...' This psychological sphere is what St Paul termed 'flesh' and in his Letter to the Ephesians he exhorts them to counteract this fleshly principle by the 'renewal of the mind' (4:24).

In her study of how the Fathers coped with the regeneration of the psychological sphere, Mother Maria says that ‘their aim was to put this whole middle sphere to death, in order that it might rise again as unceasing repentance and compassion.’ For St Seraphim asceticism and the Jesus Prayer were the ways in which he fulfilled this aim.

Mother Maria then goes on to consider two saints of the Western tradition, one of whom she maintains went to ‘the furthest limits in the regeneration of the psychological sphere, but by a way independent of the Jesus Prayer tradition’. She is referring to St Thérèse of Lisieux. She then describes the vision experienced by Thérèse in her profession retreat, which showed her what her monastic way was going to be seen from inside:

She was led into a basement, further and further down, and it grew darker and darker, so that she could just see her divine guide sufficiently to follow closely behind Him, but nothing else ... This darkness gave her the chance to concentrate completely upon Christ who was the only reality in it. She came to consider it as a simplification of her life.

How did she get so far? ... On the deepest level ... nothing but the deep silence of a bare endurance, in the firm trust of the unfelt presence of her Lord. Bare endurance, bare prayer, bare sacrifice, hidden and unceasing.

Thérèse’s asceticism was of a different kind from that of Seraphim—there were no heroic feats, although obviously there would be that which was built into the life—for example, there was no heating of any kind in the convent. But I believe that for Thérèse it was in fidelity to the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood that ‘the spiritual principle of the mind acquired a new youth’. But, like St Seraphim, she also experienced in her heart an inward reception of the Holy Spirit by her complete concentration on Jesus and by the ‘wound of love’ which she received a few days after making her ‘Act of Oblation to Merciful Love’. Of this ‘wound’ she said:

I cannot explain it; it was as if an invisible hand had plunged me into a fire; and what a fire, burning yet full of sweetness! I was burning and I thought that if this were to last one minute, one second longer, I would not be able to bear such ardour without expiring ... I experienced this just once, and only for one moment, but immediately after that I fell back into my habitual aridity.

But however many different ways there may be to God, there must always be a surrender of the will if there is to be unity or renewal within. And by that surrender, the promise often quoted by Seraphim, ‘My son, give me thine heart and all the rest shall be added unto thee’, can become a reality.

Humility and Hiddenness

The virtue which perhaps shines most luminously in the lives of Seraphim and Thérèse is that of humility. Meister Eckhart says: ‘Nothing disfigures the body before men so much as suffering, yet nothing beautifies the soul before God so much as to have suffered. The securest foundation on which this perfection can rest is humility’. It seems to be part of our worldly conditioning to be self-assertive, and according to Bultmann it is this ‘self-assertion or desire for recognition’ that is the one basic sin. He goes on to say: ‘We must know our own weakness, our own lack of wisdom, helplessness and powerlessness—in the end it is those who do who are the strong and wise’.

Berdyayev takes up the theme of humility as a Russian characteristic exemplified in the martyrdom of St Boris and St Gleb, in which, he says, ‘there was no heroism, the prevailing idea is that of sacrifice. The exploit of non-resistance—that is the Russian exploit. Simplicity and humility—these are the Russian traits.’ Indeed, it is these qualities in Thérèse which appeal to the Russian heart and link her in the minds of the people with St Seraphim as we learn through the daughter of a former Russian ambassador to France. She had made

an enquiry for *Carmelite Studies* concerning the devotion of Russians to Thérèse, and reported:

Most of them amongst whom I enquired said that the Little Way of St Thérèse and her Spiritual Childhood made a very real appeal to Russian piety. It reminded them of their beloved St Seraphim, who also preached the way of humility.

In both Seraphim and Thérèse their humility is marked by their desire for hiddenness: Thérèse in Carmel asking not just to be ignored, but forgotten; Seraphim by his hermit life in the Sarov woods where he held communion with the beasts of the forest, including the bear. And that is enough to remind us of something else—the lightness as well as the darkness that characterises the way of the saints.

By God's grace Seraphim and Thérèse found their way through the forest, and although their lives remain hidden in Christ, it is in that hiddenness, the heart of the mystical Body, the Church, that they are now seen to be strong and wise.

Ministry of Comfort

I believe their hidden work continues and their strength and wisdom are now at the service of the world in what I would term their *ministry of comfort*, as it is outlined in II Corinthians 1:3–5.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

For Seraphim, whose prayer was 'like a beacon shining in the darkest hour of night,' this ministry actually began on earth in his role of *staretz*, and the following words of his affirm the title of 'Guardian Angel of the Russian People' accorded him by Evdokimov. The saint urged his disciples thus:

Whatever is weighing upon your heart, whatever has been happening to you, come to me, and bring your sorrow to my grave. Tell me everything as if I were alive. Talk to me as you used to. For you I am alive and will be for ever!

The same ministry was to be given also to Thérèse, who said before her death:

Yes, I want to spend my life doing good on earth ... I do not want to rest as long as there are souls to save. But when the Angel says, 'Time is no more', then I will take my rest.

Thérèse lived her life in anticipation of the glory to come and thus was very much at home in the Orthodox tradition, to the extent that not only is she invoked for her intercession throughout Russia, but photographs of her are apparently to be found alongside the icons which adorn the homes of Russian believers.

Relevance for Today

We have traced the common ground of Eastern Russian Orthodoxy and Western Carmelite spirituality made effective in the lives of St Seraphim and St Thérèse and of their relevance for the present age. St Seraphim points us to the aim of the spiritual life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit and St Thérèse gives us the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood. Seraphim is renowned for the 'rediscovery of the real presence of the Holy Spirit active in the world and in mankind today'; and also for his message of peace. But does he have any other message? Shortly before his death when asked by another monk why they fell short of the ancient discipline and what conditions they lacked that were necessary to produce the same fruits of sanctity, he replied:

There is only one condition lacking—a firm resolve. If we had the power of decision we should live as the ancients did. The grace and help of God are the same as ever for those who faithfully and wholeheartedly seek the Lord. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and for ever.

Seraphim doesn't say these words lightly; his message of hope that Christ is the same, yesterday and for ever, is accompanied by criticism of the lukewarmness of his age when he says:

We have reached such a degree of lukewarmness almost everywhere, in the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, such an insensibility towards communion entirely from the true Christian life.

What is the cause of this lukewarmness, greatly increased in our age? I would hazard a guess that the answer lies in the sphere of mysticism. Berdyaev defines mysticism as 'the soil on which religion flourishes and without which it withers and decays'. Was it lack of this soil which prompted Seraphim's words as far back as the mid-eighteenth century? All our hope is in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, a hope that is given expression in the following words from Berdyaev:

It is only during periods when custom and external tradition are obstinately insisted upon that religion lacks a mystical element. This is inevitably recovered during periods when tradition and custom are being subjected to catastrophic disturbance. It is then that mysticism of the type associated with the work of the Holy Spirit becomes dominant. A period of revived spirituality within Christianity is bound to be one in which there will be hitherto unprecedented manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Dare we hope that the world can move from the period of 'catastrophic disturbance' to the 'unprecedented' manifestations of the Holy Spirit? If so, then we shall have to take seriously Father Gilbert's words: 'The Holy Spirit will never give you stuff on a plate—you've got to work for it.'

Both Seraphim and Thérèse recall us to our destiny as children of God and demonstrate that the full Christian life is open to all, monk, nun and layman alike. All are called to sanctity through baptism in Christ; and that implies our complete surrender to God's grace. The

key to defining a saint lies in the word ‘surrender’, a surrender which implies the Cross and our willingness to embrace it. It is surrender to the reality that ‘existence is our being loved of God’ as Mother Maria says in *Spectrum Regale*.

In the Communion of Saints we see a body of people who have lived this concept during their earthly pilgrimage and who have entered even more fully into its mystery in the life of heaven, where hidden in Christ they await with us the final consummation.

Behold the Lord will surely come and all his saints with him and there shall be in that day a great light.



**SISTER MARY MARGARET OF
THE HOLY CROSS SLG**

(Mary Patricia Jenkins)

20 February 1926 – 10 September 2016

ADDRESS AT THE REQUIEM MASS

20 September 2016

SISTER ADRIAN SLG

May the blessing of God be upon us all as we remember with love and thanksgiving Mary Patricia Jenkins, Auntie Mary, and our Sister Mary Margaret of the Holy Cross.

We knew Mary as kind and loving, gracious, gentle, generous and courageous. She had a quiet sense of humour which could trick you into thinking she was being serious. But there were times when she was troubled, anxious and fearful. Some years ago she wrote a letter to us telling of what it had meant to her to suffer from a mental illness, and how she felt it much harder to bear than a physical illness.

Shortly before she went to live at St John's Home, I used to take breakfast to her in her cell. She would be just waking, and there were times when she felt overwhelmed by darkness. She would ask me to lay my hands on her and we would say a prayer. Then she would be ready to get up and face the day.

In the Gospel for today Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. For Sister Mary Margaret her way was the way of the Cross, which, as Father Andrew Teal said in his sermon on Sunday (18 September), she knew to be 'both a deep trial and a light burden'.

She loved her family deeply, entering into their joys and sorrows, worrying about them, rejoicing with them. I think she had a special bond with her sister Mollie, and her death was a great sorrow to her. And she had many friends, as her address book witnesses. There is a note in the front of the book saying, 'When I die please, inform all

those marked with a red star.’ This was typical of her careful attention to detail.

Mary came to the Community from Glasgow in 1955 and made her Life Vows as Sister Mary Margaret of the Holy Cross on St Andrew’s Day in 1962.

Her gifts soon became apparent. She had a lovely voice and became one of the chief singers. I can picture her now, standing beside Mother Mary Clare on Christmas night singing the solo parts at the opening of Matins. Then there was her skill as a stenographer, busy with shorthand during sermons and talks; and her amazing speed at the typewriter. It is thanks to her that the work of Gilbert Shaw has been preserved. She worked tirelessly under the stern and watchful eye of Sister Marjorie. The Community at Crawley Down has acknowledged their debt to her for this work. When we changed to using the American Psalter, it was she who did the typing and got us all proof-reading and collating the pages. She was also a good cook and a keen gardener, a careful and dedicated worker with high standards for herself and for others.

I would like to share a few memories with you:

1990: We were engaged in closing the convent at Burwash. Four of us were left to deal with this. Sisters Mary Margaret, Josephine, Margaret and myself. As the one ‘in charge’ I did the big stuff, like selling furniture, and planning how to disperse the things we were keeping. Behind the scenes Sister Mary Margaret beavered away clearing cupboards and drawers, sorting out all the small things and being a quiet back-up.

Eventually Sister and I were left to mind the property while it was empty and remained unsold. We moved to the Chaplain’s House where we set up a chapel. Sister Mary Margaret was the cook; I did the washing in the garden shed with a copper and an old fashioned ringer. There was no question of casual meals. The table was laid and the food was served in dishes. It was a very happy time.

An amusing incident occurred there, involving her nephew David, who was a policeman at Staplehurst, about a half-hour drive from us. Sister Mary Margaret asked him to buy a second-hand bicycle for us as our only means of transport was a single old bike. He duly arrived with one and then we were able to get to church. Sometime later it was discovered, presumably by David, that the man who sold him the cycle was selling stolen bikes. We still have the stolen bike here at Fairacres.

2003: Sister Mary Margaret and I were both living here. The Community had decided to give a home to Sister Anna, who had been closely associated with us since the 1970s, but wasn't a member of the Community. So she came from Northern Ireland where she had done important work for integrated education for 30 years. By this time she was in her 80s and totally blind. Sister Mary Margaret and I volunteered to be her carers, which we did for five years. This was no mean task as Sister Anna was a strong and energetic character who had lived an eccentric and remarkable life. She was a force to be reckoned with.

Sister Mary Margaret undertook to deal with her correspondence, her finances and all the complications of visits to and from family and friends. We had good times, and many battles. When Sister Anna died, and Sister Mary Margaret could no longer deal with such things, I found careful records of all the addresses I needed, and archive material of Sister Anna's time in Northern Ireland.

When I visited Sister in St John's Home, she would always light up with a welcoming smile. Although she would much rather have been here, and loved coming back to Fairacres on special occasions, I never heard her complain or express any resentments at being at St John's, where she was very well cared for.

Thinking about Sister Mary Margaret during the past few days I was reminded of a verse from a hymn we would have sung today if it had not been the day of her funeral.

Give us your light that we may learn
To walk with care the path of life;
May all our ways and actions show
The gifts which God on us bestows.

Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.

As she used to say when we left her:
‘Good-bye, darling.’

The teaching of Father Gilbert Shaw formed the basis of Sister Mary Margaret’s life and prayer. Over the years she made a compilation of the aphorisms and homilies which were most helpful to her. These extracts are a very few of many.

We must remember that the face of God Incarnate was wet with tears: ‘I would have gathered you’—and here is the tragedy—‘and ye would not.’ The disobedience was open and flagrant, stupid and without any thought except for immediate gain and the carrying on of custom.

* * * * *

We must guard against anything that would steal our attention away from God. We must open ourselves in humble penitence as the Light of God penetrates and makes visible the inner caverns of our unconscious to purify our memories and to quicken our understanding.

* * * * *

The total gift of the heart is prayer. The power of evil is never overthrown except by prayer.

* * * * *

Today the greatest danger to the recovery of true vision is to fail in the recovery of prayer, to fail in the loss of self that we may be united with God. The human powers of service and sacrifice for others are in their own order good, but are often self-expressive and sometimes nothing more.

* * * * *

We are here to open ourselves in the stillness of prayer.

LOVE (AGAPE) IN THE LETTERS OF ST PAUL

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:1, 2)

In his letters Paul uses the word *agape* to mean primarily two things, either God's love for us or our love for our neighbours. Interestingly, he rarely uses the word love to refer to our relationship towards God, only in Rom. 8:28, I Cor. 2:9–10, I Cor. 8:1–3, Eph. 6:24 and possibly II Thess. 2:10 ('...who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.'). In I Corinthians 2:9–10 Paul is quoting an Old Testament text, Isaiah 64:4, which has come down to us not as 'those who love him [God]' but as 'those who wait for him [*chakah*, to wait earnestly]' Did Paul know a different manuscript than we do, or is he deliberately paraphrasing? Is he intentionally linking love and hope, which he does elsewhere?

Romans 8:28 seems to be a familiar adage, as it is also is quoted in James 1:12, so possibly it is not original to Paul. Ephesians 6:24 is the final salutation of the epistle: 'May grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, in life imperishable.' In my opinion this simply isn't Paul; he would have phrased it along the lines of '... faith in Jesus Christ and love of the brethren', as he does frequently elsewhere. The authorship of Ephesians is disputed; perhaps this is one of the smaller reasons why. I Cor. 8.3 reads: 'But if one loves God, one is known by him.' This is the one sentence of Paul's where he uses love as loving God, and it cannot easily be dismissed. It does, however, underline Paul's understanding of love as relationship: 'is known by him.'

In his letters it is faith alone that justifies (Rom. 5:1f, Rom. 3:27f); but this faith that justifies is not alone. It is faith made effective through love (Gal. 5:6). Love for Paul is always, first and foremost,

God's love for us, which He manifested in his Son, Jesus Christ. 'God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' (Rom. 5:8; cf. Rom. 8:32f, Gal. 2:20)

In his understanding of love, Paul makes a radical break from his Pharisaic background, for to love God was the essence of the Law of Moses (Deut. 6:4a–5). But in Jesus, whom Paul encounters on the road to Damascus, love becomes a gift and an example, not a command or regulated response through the precepts of the Law. Paul's understanding of love begins with his conversion, when he was converted not from sin to righteousness, but from righteousness to love. Before his conversion, Paul, without a doubt, was upright according to the Law, a well taught, impeccably practicing Pharisee, manifesting his love for God through keeping the commandments of the Law (Phil. 3:3–6, Gal. 1:14, Acts 22:3).

After his conversion, Paul equates the loving of one's neighbour as the fulfilling of the Law. The whole of the Law is summarised in one commandment: 'you must love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal. 5:14) and all the other commandments that there are, are summed up in this single phrase. 'Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law' (Rom. 13:9–10). This seems to contradict the Gospels, which relate that Jesus said: 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets, too' (Matt. 22:37–40: cf. Mark 12:29–31, Luke 10:26–28, and the Farewell Discourses in John). Paul does not contradict the Gospels, because faith and love are so closely linked in his thought. By using the word faith instead of love to represent our relationship with God he is emphasizing the pre-eminent place that Jesus Christ, through his life, death, and resurrection, has in our relationship with God. It is only through faith in Christ Jesus that a believer truly loves God.

In responding to Jesus through faith, Paul finds that love becomes a way of (to?) life and not a command. ‘Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph. 5:1–2). Christ lives in a person through faith (Rom. 5:5) making the believer a new creation (Gal. 6:15, II Cor. 5:17), and love is the manifestation of the reality of that new creation, of the new relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus. Faith enables Christ’s love to be manifested in the world through the believer. Responding to Christ in faith manifests not the echo of God’s love in the Law, but God’s love itself, namely Jesus Christ living in the believer. ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). For Paul the relationship between faith and love is symbiotic—neither existing without the other. In his epistles Paul frequently rejoices in both the faith *and* love of those to whom he writes: ‘We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints’ (Col. 1:3–4; similarly Eph. 1:15–16, I Thess. 1:3). So Paul can say the law is fulfilled in loving one’s neighbour because genuine love of neighbour is only possible with a genuine faith—a complete response to God’s love in Christ Jesus, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

God’s love calls each of us to faith, and in that faith we receive through the Holy Spirit the love that has called us. We are changed by this love, and living by/in/through it our relationships with others are built up into the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:15). Our love for others is proof that we are authentic servants of God (II Cor. 6:4). Love is not one of the special charisms of the Spirit differentiated in the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:4–11). No, love is given to everyone equally and given abundantly, so all have the responsibility of responding to its demands. If we are the Body of Christ and Christ is the head, then perhaps Paul’s image can be extended so that love is seen as the blood

which nourishes, sustains and relates each individual person in their function or charism for the whole. As blood is the unifying element of a living body, so love is to the Body of Christ.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself with love.

(Eph. 4:15–16)

Paul expounds the fifteen attributes of love in his famous hymn to love in I Corinthians 13:4–7. These tell us that love is patient, kind, never jealous, not boastful, not conceited, never rude, never seeks its own advantage, does not take offense, does not store up grievances, does not rejoice at wrongdoing, finds joy in truth, makes allowances, trusts, hopes, endures whatever comes. These overlap considerably with the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. Love or faith, in Paul’s understanding, is the first fruit of the Spirit in us, which enables all other good fruit to flourish. Without love, all the other fruits are worthless (I Cor. 13:1–3).

It seems to me that Paul has Jesus himself in mind when he writes this passage. In describing Jesus in this way, he describes what we must aspire to in our relationships with others. You cannot really read I Corinthians 13:4–7 *backwards*; that is, as a description of our love towards God. It works only as a description of God’s/Christ’s love for us or our love for others—and this is Paul’s meaning in his use of the word *agape*. ‘Make your own the mind of Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 2:5). Paramount to Paul is that our faith manifests a genuine love of our neighbour and builds up the Body of Christ. ‘Neighbour’ is defined in the broadest sense, not just referring to our fellow Christians. As Christ’s love embraced all people, Jews and Gentiles, so must our love embrace all people. For Paul, even the love between a husband and wife’s must be patterned on *agape*.

Paul rarely speaks of brotherly love, *philadelphia*. For him love of the brethren is simply subsumed in love, *agape*. If *agape* is in place, *philadelphia* is taken care of: ‘As for brotherly love, there is no need to write to you about that, since you have yourselves learnt from God to love one another’ (I Thess. 4:9). ‘We are called to freedom in the Spirit through faith, a freedom not for self-indulgence, but through love [to] be servants of one another’ (Gal. 5:13). ‘Let all things be done in a way that will build up community’ (I Cor. 14:26). ‘Love is what builds up’ (I Cor. 8:1). ‘Each must consider his neighbour’s good, so that we support one another. Christ did not indulge his own feelings...’ (Rom. 15:2–3). ‘Make love your aim’ (I Cor. 14:1).

Love is learned by imitating love, and Jesus is the example for our love. First we imitate God’s love by imitating Jesus, love incarnate. We are to become ‘the ones destined to be moulded to the pattern of his Son’ (Rom. 8:29; also Eph. 5:1–2, Phil. 2:5). Paul bids us to imitate himself: ‘Brothers, be united in imitating me. Keep your eyes fixed on those who act according to the example you have from me’ (Phil. 3:17; also I Cor. 4:1–6, II Thess. 3:7–9). Paul frequently speaks of his own love towards those to whom he is writing (cf. II Cor. 2:4, I Cor. 16:24, II Cor. 12:15, 11:11). And finally we are to imitate one another and be examples ourselves (I Thess. 1:7, 2:14). It is interesting that in Philemon Paul appeals not to his authority but to the witness of love: ‘Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is requested, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you’ (Philemon 8). Love is given by God, learned through Jesus Christ and from each other. This underlies the unifying power of love in the Body of Christ mentioned earlier. ‘One in love, one in heart, and one in mind’ (Phil. 2:2). ‘Put on love, the perfect bond ... it is for this that you were called together in one body’ (Col. 3:14–15).

Love is not about abstract feelings or a principle understood. Paul writes to the Corinthians, ‘I urge you to give your love towards him definite expression’ (II Cor. 2:5), which in this case was forgiveness. For Paul, love is manifested in concrete expression. He writes the

hymn of love in I Corinthians 13 in verbal phrases, not abstract nouns, giving impetus to the concept that love is manifested in action and not feelings. Paul demands proof of love: ‘So give proof, before the churches of your love’ (this time in almsgiving). All the fruits of the spirit are active proof of one’s love—or perhaps better phrased, one’s faith made effective through love (Gal. 5:6).

Paul writes to the Church at Corinth:

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.

(II Cor. 9:6–8)

We sow love and we reap love. Our good work is love, and we must not stint; love of neighbour as Christ loved us. Love that is self-sacrificing (Eph. 5:2), forgiving (II Cor. 2:7–8, Col. 13:13), the power of God (I Cor. 2:5, 4:20–21), the true motive for doing something (Phil. 2:16), as well as all the attributes in I Corinthians 13:4–7. Our love is tested by being challenged to act (II Cor. 8:8), often by hardships. Its proof is in the generosity of our love towards others (II Cor. 8:24).

Paul asks in his letter to the Romans: ‘Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ—can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food or clothing, or threats or violence?’ (8:35). His answer is interesting, both encouraging but also embedded with a subtle warning:

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A careful review of all he lists, and an inclusive list it is, reveals that all the things enumerated are external to the person. This implies that only an internal disposition could separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and I suggest that these would be either a lack of genuine faith or a lack of genuine love of neighbour. These two are so closely related in Paul's teaching as to amount to, in this case, the same thing—severance from the love of God known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is Paul's teaching on love. The source of genuine love is God, and it is manifested to us now not in the Law, but in his Son Jesus Christ. Our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ enables the Holy Spirit of God to live in us, making us a new creation. Newly created, we ourselves manifest God's love in loving our neighbour. The link is faith, and our love of others is the realization, and Paul's proof, that God's love is truly in us. It is only a genuine faith that enables genuine love; the response is our free choice—and no externals can alter our relationship with God if the Spirit of Christ lives within us. 'Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love' (I Cor. 16:13–14).

Love suffuses Paul's writings because love suffuses Paul. When he encountered love on the road to Damascus, the entire course of his life changed. From that point on, all that mattered was telling others about that love, life in Christ Jesus. Paul tells us that we, too, can be changed, we, too, can know this love of God in us, be made a new creation in Christ Jesus—in faith made effective through love.

BOOKS

The Psychology of Christian Character Formation, Joanna Collicutt, SCM Press, 2015, £25.00 (paper and eBook). ISBN 9780334051794.

In *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation* Joanna Collicutt has written a rich and remarkable book. She has used her understanding and experience as priest, psychologist and theological educator fully, giving her readers a skilled and multi-layered work that is uniquely useful in its perspective. In the past twenty years, there has been a growing literature bringing together spirituality and psychology, but the depth and range of Collicutt's book create a new category of exploration altogether. The thoroughness of her research is extensive, and she uses it insightfully to illustrate and complement the points she is making. There are footnotes judiciously placed where they will be useful, as well as an excellent bibliography, lists of sources of quotations used, and an index organizing biblical quotations from the text, as well as a thorough index of names and subjects—all of which is most impressive for contemporary publishing.

But this book is far more than a well-researched treatise, for Collicutt's imaginative use of graphics, in the form of tables, diagrams and highlighted quotations, along with useful exercises and suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter, enhance clarity and illustrate the complexity of the matters she is laying out before the reader. The book is organized into three sections, entitled 'The Nature of the Endeavour,' 'Insights from Psychology' and 'Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit.' The fifteen chapters in these sections include such titles as 'The F-word – what is Formation?', 'Growing up into Christ,' 'Understanding Ourselves: from Temperament to Character', 'How Growth Happens', 'Intimacy with the Holy Other: Taking the Lord's Prayer Seriously', 'Humble Power: Having the Mind of Christ' and 'Wisdom: Inhabiting Uncertainty with Confidence'.

An example of the consistency and expansiveness of her thinking comes, first in the chapter ‘Understanding ourselves: the shape of our story’, where she states,

...there seems to be reasonably good support for the theory that divine attachment can work in two ways: our relationship with God can correspond to the secure relationship we experienced with our primary caregivers *or* our relationship with God can compensate for the insecure relationship we experienced with our primary caregivers. (p. 70)

Then, in the next chapter, ‘Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit,’ she quotes Ellen Charry:

Theologically speaking, Christian Formation is the work of the grace of God. Practically speaking, it requires the intentional care of pastoral leadership and the willingness of the believer to allow God’s grace to be transforming. The constant exhortation throughout [the New Testament Epistles] attests to the challenge that Christian formation poses to other lifestyles. Christian excellence requires concentration of mind and heart.

To this, Collicutt adds:

This tension between allowing an organic and ultimately mysterious process to do its work and taking some responsibility for helping it along seems to me to be well summed up in the phrase, ‘cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.’ This paints a picture of formation as a kind of horticultural, or perhaps agricultural pursuit in which, like the flourishing plant, we bear fruit, but also, like the fit body, actively participate in the enterprise. The *process* of cultivation is as important as its outcome. (p. 95)

In the next section, we read:

However, working on developing self-awareness should never turn into an exercise in navel-gazing. Its purpose is to enable

us to place our properly identified resources at the disposal of God, and to pay attention to aspects of our individual and corporate personalities that habitually get in the way of God.

(p. 95)

A few pages later, she writes, ‘The existential predicament of the human race is that it finds it difficult to trust in the goodness of God’ (p. 100).

In these brief sentences, we see the author’s skill at synthesizing the psychological and spiritual in the ongoing process of becoming fully human. Collicutt’s ability to be succinct, articulate, and to hold the individual, the corporate, and the existential in her theological gaze characterizes each section of this book, and she is not afraid of exploring the importance of becoming like Christ in our discipleship, nor how difficult to accomplish and how off-putting to others this may be, for the counter-cultural nature of God’s Son is as fundamental to her understanding as are its life-giving qualities.

SISTER HELEN SLG

Holy Men of Mount Athos, edited & translated by R. P. H. Greenfield and A-M. Talbot, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA & London, 2016, \$29.95/£19.95/€21.00. ISBN 9780674088764.

This most welcome edition places an English translation of these Lives opposite the Greek text; the book is very well presented, being bound in hard covers with a lucid introduction. It contains the Lives of the earliest known saints on the Holy Mountain: Euthymios the younger; Athanasius of the Great Lavra; two Lives of Maximos of Kafsokalyvia; Niphon; and Philotheos. The select bibliography at the end of the book reveals what a significant event it is to have these Lives critically presented in Greek and also so well translated into English. Each Life is supported by a double apparatus of notes to the texts and to the translations. The later Life of Peter the first known hermit of Athos is not included, however, as being an unreliable

pastiche of semi-legendary character. This cannot be said of the Lives included in this book.

Euthymios lived in the mid-ninth century and his life was written by his disciple Basil, who later became a bishop and who knew the saint well in the last part of his life. Euthymios had a varied career before becoming a monk and then, during his professed life, living in Bithynia and Thessaloniki before finally settling on the Holy Mountain. Although a hermit, he sought to unite his scattered brethren in something approaching a common life.

Athanasius needs no introduction, being the founder of the Great Lavra and the father of coenobitic monastic life on Athos. He lived fifty years or so after Euthymios, abandoning a distinguished intellectual career as a teacher in Constantinople to become a monk, arriving on the Holy Mountain in 957. After some time as a hermit, he was persuaded to found the monastery which became the Great Lavra at the tip of the peninsula. In this he had the active support of the then Byzantine emperor, Nikephoros Phokas, who died in 969. This Life complements well the *typikon*, the book of the liturgical rites of the monastery, giving a vivid picture of the early years of the community and of the style of leadership provided by Athanasius. He led from the front and died as a result of a tragic building accident around the year 1001. It appears that this Life B is probably closer to the original, but lost, Life of the saint than the other early Life A. It was written at the Lavra sometime after the middle of the eleventh century.

The two Lives of Maximos are complemented by the Life of his near contemporary Niphon. They all date from the Palaiologan period and these Lives of Maximos were written by younger contemporaries who knew him in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. As a trio of hagiographies, they amply convey the singular charisma of eremitic life at that time; they also interpret each other as the memory of the saint was developed into a tradition. The first Life was written by Niphon himself, for a time a disciple and companion of Maximos. His style is simple, immediate and devoid of theological language. The

contrast with the second Life by Theophanes is sharp: this is more sophisticated in style and language. Theophanes became abbot of Vatopedi before serving as a bishop in Thrace. He derives some of his material directly from Niphon's Life, reordering it where necessary into a definite progressive structure, as Maximos moves from being perceived to be a holy fool to become venerated as an ascetic visionary and teacher. The Life of Niphon is a much simpler affair, punctuated however by fear and experience of Turkish raids. But it is ignorant of the great theological controversies and crises of the day, notably the Hesychast crisis and the efforts of Gregory Palamas.

These two Lives of Maximos give a vivid and authoritative picture of one of the most powerful spiritual figures to have arisen on the Holy Mountain. He was born between the years 1272 and 1285 and felt the call to monastic life as a teenager, making his way finally to Constantinople, where he was regarded as mad, living as a vagrant. He migrated to Athos via Thessaloniki and was formed as a monk within the Great Lavra. At some point he broke with the coenobitic life there, spurred on, he believed, by visions of the Theotokos herself, including one on the summit of Athos. He then led a wandering life, burning his flimsy huts whenever his solitude was threatened. According to Theophanes, Maximos was pulled up short by an encounter with Gregory of Sinai, perhaps early in the 1330s. Gregory endorsed him as a genuine mystic but persuaded Maximos finally to settle down somewhere more permanent. He lived in a cave and then in a hut near to the Great Lavra. His reputation spread, to his dismay, and around 1350 he was visited by the two reigning emperors and a decade or so later by the then patriarch, Kallistos I. The Lives paint a vivid picture of his life among the other hermits: he died sometime between 1367 and 1380.

The Life of Niphon provides a parallel picture of eremitic life near the Great Lavra. He was born in Albania around the year 1315, arriving on Athos after some years as a monk elsewhere, but drawn to the contemplative life. This he pursued at the hermitage of St Basil

before settling in a cave overlooking the island of St Christopher near Kafsokalyvia. He was with Maximos towards the end of his life and duly inherited his cell when he died. Niphon himself died in 1411.

The last of the Lives in this volume, the Life of Philotheos, is more learned in style and allusions. Some of it is clearly derivative from an earlier saint's life. It was written sometime after his death in 1450. He and his brother were driven from their homes by the Turkish invasions of Asia Minor and were pressed into the Ottoman child levy at the end of the fourteenth century. They escaped, guided they believed by the Theotokos herself who appeared to them as their mother, to whom they were eventually reunited under the roof of a double monastery near Kavala. She had become a nun there. After her death, Philotheos migrated to the monastery of Dionysiou on the Holy Mountain, becoming towards the end of his life a hermit with a small body of disciples who revered him as a saint.

In terms of theology, the 'Life of Maximos' by Theophanes is an outstanding testimony to the distinctive vision of Athonite Hesychast spirituality. While a young monk at the Great Lavra,

during the holy readings he was always astounded at the meaning of Scripture and amazed by Christ's love of mankind, which has been given to us so that we may understand such things through the Spirit while still in our bodies. (p. 465)

Theophanes' description of the spiritual significance and stature of the Holy Mountain is especially striking and memorable.

The conversation in Chapter 15 between Gregory of Sinai and Maximos is of central importance to the theological meaning of this Life. Gregory elicited from Maximos the secret of his inner spiritual life and endorsed its wisdom and authenticity:

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the man of prayer, at that time 'the prayer' ceases, because the mind is consumed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and it cannot deploy its

faculties, but is completely subservient. ... For this reason the Spirit takes the mind, not in order to teach it again its customary thoughts, such as things to do with this reality, but to teach those things that are above reality and transcendent.

(p. 497–9)

Asked about how to discern genuine approaches of the Holy Spirit from delusions, Maximos testified that

the signs of grace are as follows: when the holy light approaches, it focuses the mind and makes it thoughtful, humble and modest ... it makes the heart contrite, sorrowful and tearful, and the eyes meek and full of tears. As it approaches, it calms and comforts the soul through the venerable sufferings of Christ and His infinite love of mankind. ... The mind, when seized with the rapture of the divine light that never sets, is illuminated in the Spirit in this divine and exceptionally bright light.

(p. 501–3)

It was testimony such as this, anchored in costly experience on the Holy Mountain, which underpinned the witness and insistent teaching of Gregory Palamas and those who supported him. What these Lives reveal is the constancy of spiritual experience and vision upon the Holy Mountain. This edition sets these lamps on a stand so that their light may illumine all who look to Athos as a focus of Christian spiritual life and witness today.

DOUGLAS DALES

BOOKS RECEIVED

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Life in the Psalms, Patrick Woodhouse, 2015,

£12.99 PB, ebook £10.99. ISBN: 978-1-4729-2314-1.

From Canterbury Press

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