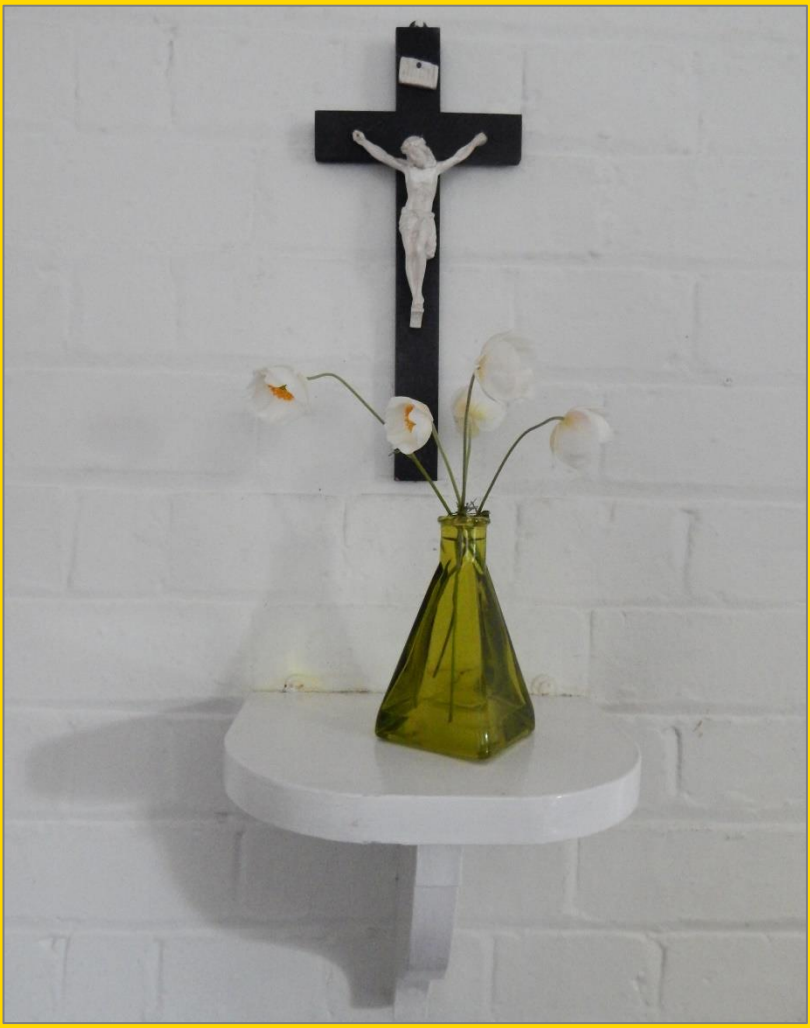
FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



FIFTY YEARS OF SLG PRESS
1967 – 2017

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Cover Picture © Sister Catherine SLG

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COMMUNITY NOTES

DEAR FRIENDS,

I am sitting in my office, St Monica while I write these Notes, with the door to the garden open on a beautiful day. It is good to be reminded of the beauty of God's creation, because—as usual, it seems—the world seems to be made up of either bad news or uncertainty. There have been terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and worldwide—as I write reports are coming in of the attack on worshippers leaving the Finsbury Park Mosque. What is it that makes so many turn to acts of violence towards others? As well, there has been the horrendous fire in the Grenfell Tower in West Kensington, where so many lost their homes, possessions and loved ones.

A lovely old medlar tree with a twisted trunk and thick foliage stands just outside my office window. There is something very solid about it. It is a stark contrast to a picture of an American river full of dead fish which was on the news recently. But whatever destruction we do, God is greater in his mercy. And we are also stewards of this wonderful, wild world in which he has set us. Can we find a source of hope amid the violence and destruction in our world, like that given to me when I ponder the lovely old tree?

The Community met in Chapter during the week following Pentecost. In my Chapter Charge I referred to a verse of Scripture which has been much in my heart over the past months:

> Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Pet. 1:22–23, NRSV)

In a world where popularity seems to be based on talent or possessions, this reminder of where our true worth lies is salutary. The purification of our hearts by our obedience to the truth is the source of our being able to love each other with 'genuine mutual love'. For

people of prayer, it is also a reminder that our ability to love others is fed by our relationship with God, and God's with us. Our dealings with others are based in that primary relationship, rather than in our ego or our neediness, however much those things may remain part of our personalities.

And there is the reminder that we are 'born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God'. Recently, Father Andrew Teal, our Warden, quoted Gerald Manley Hopkins to us:

> I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond.

This outlook is a counterbalance to what Her Majesty the Queen described as a 'very sombre national mood' in a statement for her official birthday.

In the past weeks, we have also seen heroism and concern for the other. One example was the firemen who risked their lives rescuing people from the Grenfell Tower, and the people who flocked to the scene with food, clothing and toys for those who had lost everything. After the incident at the Finsbury Park Mosque, non-Muslim neighbours gathered to give flowers to worshippers entering the mosque. Those are sources of hope.

As Christians we have to learn to see each other as Christ sees us; not simply as 'the other', as a possible threat or competition, but as a dearly beloved child of God. And we have to learn to do that to all our neighbours. We are all 'poor potsherd, patch, matchwood', yet still 'immortal diamond'. It is only as we are able to act lovingly in all our relationships that true peace can come. And we do this in Christ, through his Spirit.

In Community it can be all too easy to see our Sisters as 'the other'; however, we hope that our lives together will lead us to a

deeper union in Christ through his grace, and through our willingness to stay put and let the Spirit work. Our *Way of Life* document says:

> We can learn to trust the good will of all of our Sisters and come to love each other and see God in each other. We need to be prepared not to walk away from difficult situations. These are often the occasion of conversion of heart, liberation and transformation, as, little by little, we learn to lay down our lives for the sake of our sisters and of the Community as a whole. … Called to know God by love, that is by sharing in his own nature, our life in Community can witness to Christ's power to redeem human society as well as individuals.
>
> (The Common Life)

This seems important for us all to hold on to as we seek to bear witness to the Love of God. It is the best way we can help our world.

The Community has had quite a busy time over recent months. When I last wrote just before Christmas, we were in the process of renovation work and the removal of the monastic stalls in Chapel. We returned there for Christmas, after a number of weeks using the Chapter House as Chapel. Early in the New Year we migrated back to the Chapter House for a few weeks, while finishing touches were completed in Chapel. I have been struck by the sense of light and space in the newly-ordered space. We continue to experiment with seating, but hope that we will decide on new Chapel furniture before too long. I was particularly conscious, on her first year's mind recently, of Sr Isabel's absence; how good it would have been to see her shoot through the Chapel doors in her electric wheelchair, unimpeded by the chairs and walking aids in front of the stalls!

We continue to ponder the best way to make use of our buildings, to organise our life, and to discern ways that the Spirit may be leading us as we seek to respond to our vocation as Sisters of the Love of God. Immediately before Chapter we had a 'do-it-yourself' Community Retreat, with a number of Sisters providing homilies and giving talks. We were reminded of the riches and resources we have within the

Community, and of the teaching and tradition to which we are heirs [See page 15 for Sister Clare-Louise's talk].

This issue of the *Fairacres Chronicle* marks the Golden Jubilee of SLG Press, which was founded to share the riches of our life of prayer and to support those who pray. We cannot calculate the influence it has had for the past fifty years, or continues to have; but the original vision of Father Gilbert Shaw and Mother Mary Clare remains the guiding principle of the work of the Press. The following two articles describe its beginning and developments over the past half-century.

There have been various comings and goings. We said good bye to Sue Parfitt on 9 April after her time as a Postulant. We give thanks for her time with us and wish her well in the future. Janet Aidin made her Annual Promises as Oblate Sister Janet of the Transfiguration on Ascension Day, 25 May. Several Sisters have made visits to the United States or Canada to visit elderly parents. At present, this concern for elderly relatives includes a number of us in the UK as well.

Recently two ordinands from Cranmer Hall, Durham did a placement at Fairacres, living alongside for a week. And, as I write, we are preparing to welcome ten Novice Guardians from other Anglican Communities for their annual conference. This hospitality arises from, and is supported by, the everyday life of the Convent. There is a quiet normality in the face of all the tragedy.

But we cannot forget the tragedy, nor should we. We must continue to deepen our prayer, to deepen our loving response wherever God has put us, and to hold to God all the sin and need of the world for healing and reconciliation. This is a task we can all share in.

On behalf of the Community I wish you every blessing in the coming months.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG
Reverend Mother

TRIBUTE TO SISTER MARJORIE*

SISTER EDMÉE SLG

A VISITOR TO THE PRINT ROOM once asked me, 'What must one have in order to start a press?' 'Sister Marjorie!' I replied. I then went on to expand the point until the visitor was fully persuaded that, lacking this prime asset, schemes for opening up small printing houses were unlikely to get off the ground. By way of tribute to Sister Marjorie I shall try to expand the same point here, while giving something of the history of the SLG Press since its inception just over ten years ago with the first *Fairacres Chronicle.*

Gilbert Shaw's association with SLG as one of its regular confessors began in 1962; subsequently he became Warden of the Community and resided at Fairacres until his death in 1967. His meeting with Mother Mary Clare and, through her, the Community, inspired in him an Indian Summer, and during those last years his output of homilies, addresses and retreats was prolific. Sister Marjorie, who had taken a degree in history at Bristol University (her home town), followed by a nursing career until the death of her mother left her free to enter the Community, and who was gifted in artistic as in practical matters. She manually recorded Father Gilbert's discourses, reproducing them with a skill and sense of layout which greatly assisted the reader's understanding. When, therefore, Father Gilbert expressed the wish that the Community should utilise its resources in the founding of a press for the production and dissemination of Christian literature, it was to Sister Marjorie that the venture was entrusted.

By this time Sister Marjorie was herself fully prepared for the charge. But her remote preparation had begun a few years earlier when, contrary to her private aspirations, one of those moments occurred which, in Sister Marjorie's case, swung her on course for the Press. For many years she had been lnfirmarian to the Community and her ultimate hope was that she might test a vocation to the eremitical life.

* Reprinted from *Fairacres Chronicle*, Winter 1977, Vol. 10.3.

One day, however, a representative from Rotaprint called and Mother Mary Clare collected some likely Sisters to attend the demonstration of the hand-operated machine he was selling. Sister Marjorie was present only under obedience. Her sights were set and men extolling the merits of machinery for reproducing the written word were not in its line of vision. But, while the other Sisters stood around silent, in varying degrees of incomprehension, Sister Marjorie's mechanical flair began to operate and, despite herself, she could not help but ask the kind of questions which revealed an immediate grasp of the problems and principles of the piece of machinery under review. Her future was settled.

In later years, men trying to sell Sister Marjorie pieces of machinery became a feature of her life. And while she had an all-round ability for every aspect of the Press, from solving a grammatical, stylistic or terminological problem presented by the compositor, to the correct position of the rollers on the Offset Litho, the full extent of her gifts manifested itself most especially in her astute investigations into the capacities of a machine she had decided it was necessary to buy. Many a representative, after spending an hour or two under cross-examination, must have left mopping his brow and wishing he had taken an advanced course in his subject before venturing to put it over to Sister Marjorie, while Sister Marjorie's comment on the afternoon's work, as she tidied away the thumb-screws and lie-detectors, would be: 'Such a nice man! So helpful!' We have, in fact, two important pieces of machinery which were only bought after Sister Marjorie had devised adaptations on them to meet her particular requirements, adaptations not previously thought of by the manufacturers.

The first four issues of the *Fairacres Chronicle* were produced in a small room in the convent, typed on an ordinary typewriter but 'justified' by adding spaces between words in order to make an even line length—a labour which required the kind of patience Sister Marjorie did not by nature possess. Meanwhile, thanks to the money left for the purpose by Father Gilbert, a large (as it seemed at the time) and airy Print Room was being built, and in the fifth *Chronicle* (Vol.

2, No.1) there was a picture of the St Teresa's Lodge and St Gilbert of Sempringham annexe, and a section in the Community Notes which explained that St Gilbert of Sempringham

> is a memorial to our late Warden, Father Gilbert Shaw, whose generosity made the printing press and its work a possibility. The Community, being his chief literary executors, are editing and printing some of his hitherto unpublished papers. The Press from time to time also prints small pamphlets on spirituality. In addition it produces the *Chronicle,* and prints cards and notelets for Christmas, Easter and various occasions to help it become self-supporting.

'To help it become self-supporting.' In those early days Sister Marjorie undertook many kinds of printing commissions from headed notepaper to the Occasional Papers put out by Westminster Abbey—a marathon with their 3–5,000 copies at a time. But in the space of a few years she achieved the transition from being a printer to being a publisher, and in the last months of her life was able to direct the course of the Press exclusively in this latter direction. The 'small pamphlets on spirituality' had not only become extremely numerous, with a wider and wider distribution, but a number of them were full-sized books. Of these, special mention should be made of the revised edition of *The Face of Love* by Gilbert Shaw in 1976, originally published by Mowbrays in 1959 and now enjoying an equal popularity in a modernised version. Another full-sized book, published in the same year as the *Face of Love*, was *The Influence of St Bernard*, a collection of essays with an Introduction by Dom Jean Leclercq OSB. At the same time, while a number of smaller works were also rolling off the press, we were setting up and printing the revised edition of *Anglican Religious Communities: A Directory of Principles and Practice* for the Advisory Council for Religious Communities.

1976, then, was a year of record production. It was also the year following the doctors' prognosis that Sister Marjorie would not live to see Christmas 1975. Secondaries had appeared two years after an

operation for breast cancer and there were times when she was extremely ill. But whereas most of us would have put our feet up and called it a day, the effect on Sister Marjorie was electrifying. Not only did she rally after every wearing new course of treatment, but she returned to the business of the Press with a courageous determination that certain productions or acquisitions she had planned should be carried through. Her last major purchase was an IBM electronic composer, a brilliant advance on the previous IBM composer (which had itself been a revolutionary advance on the typewriter); and the last publication produced under her aegis was, appropriately, *Solitude and Communion*, the papers of the Hermit Conference at St David's in Wales, which she had attended, and in which she was especially interested. By a most happy timing it arrived back from the binders four days before her death and gave her immense satisfaction. Three days later she was not well enough to open the Press post, and that afternoon she was taken to the new Sir Michael Sobell House for terminal cases where, unexpectedly but very peacefully, she died four hours later.

She leaves behind her a Print Room which has once again become too small (notwithstanding a most valuable addition built as a tribute to the work of Mother Mary Clare on her retirement from being Mother General in 1973), but is equipped with exactly the right kind of machinery for producing publications that meet a need for short but substantial works on spirituality, and—not least for those who carry on this work—a great deal of goodwill among our suppliers and engineers with all of whom Sister Marjorie established excellent relations. Of these it would, I think, be fitting to quote from two of their letters, the first from Mr Hawes of Bocardo and Church Army Press (the binders of all our publications which exceed forty-four pages), who wrote: 'I shall always retain memories of her pleasant personality and of her undoubted business acumen through the years of our association.' And the second from Mr. Gibbs of Lunnons, our paper suppliers: 'I was happy to hear that the end came peacefully as I shall always remember the cheerful reception I had whenever I

called at SLG. Sister Marjorie always seemed a happy person in whatever she was doing and that is how I shall remember her.'

And so indeed will we. Sister Marjorie was unpredictably prone to flashes of sentiment, but she was quite consistent in disliking expressions of sentiment in others; so it would be unsuitable to indulge in anything of the sort here. I shall simply conclude by reflecting on her remarkable achievement, an achievement which on the technical side is, perhaps, most fully appreciated by professionals in the printing and publishing fields, but which on the spiritual side is appreciated by a wide spectrum of Christians wherever they meet with the Fairacres Publications.

Sister Marjorie has bequeathed to her Sisters of the Love of God a vehicle for the word, and thus a responsibility for the future which those who try to follow in her footsteps are all too conscious can only properly be fulfilled in the enabling power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

AND SO THE STORY CONTINUES

Fifty Years of SLG Press

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

AS WE WERE considering the cover design for this issue of the *Fairacres Chronicle*, I thought back to the appearance of the first issue, which was printed on the Convent premises. It was sent out to the Associates with a sense of triumphant achievement. And, indeed, it was a great achievement. Even with Sister Marjorie's expertise, which Sister Edmée has described above so vividly, and the hard work of many Sisters to collate, staple and trim the magazine before it was posted, the conditions were not ideal. There was a state-of-the-art Offset Litho printer, but every other process was carried out by hand in cramped conditions inside the Convent. Although the text was set up on an electric typewriter, it had no automatic justification (spacing the text into neat blocks, as on this page), and headache-producing calculations were involved to make it appear justified, as Sr Edmée

noted. It was not until the room we know as St Gilbert of Sempringham or the Print Room was built that we acquired an electric stapler, an electric guillotine and an IBM electronic typewriter, all regarded as machinery that brought us into the world of modern printing.

Colour reproduction was still achieved by separating out each of the four primary printing colours, black, magenta, cyan and yellow, onto plates, and passing the paper up to four times through the machine, using the appropriately coloured ink to achieve the desired result. For this reason, we confined ourselves to two-colour work; more than that would have been a challenge we could not venture upon. Thus the cover of that first issue was printed with a black-and-white photo of the cloister at Fairacres and the title in blue, on pale grey paper. I have not discovered why the inside text was also blue; it cannot have been very easy to read.

By 1989, when I joined the Press staff, we were well-established as publishers. We no longer did outside printing jobs to pay running costs. However, we were still printing most of our titles in-house, so 'the Circuit' of five Sisters, printing, collating, stapling, trimming and packing the books, continued. Two Sisters were printers, and many were the sighs, groans and discussions of the finer points of printing that arose around me as I joined the Circuit. Eventually I was taught the basics of composing and editing. I also learned how to impose the pages for printing and how to cut and paste. In those days, the latter was literally what one did to rearrange text, or improve the appearance of a page. Computers have simplified this task, though the 'Cut' icon still sports a pair of scissors!

At the end of 1989 SLG Press entered the information technology revolution. The IBM composer (with automatic justification of text) was cunningly adapted and attached to a computer. This computer was another state-of-the-art machine, with 64k of memory and a hard drive. This meant it no longer needed the basic system cards loaded into it every time it was used. Once again likely Sisters gathered round while

Tina taught us how to use this wonderful invention, based on a programme called Wordcraft. Entirely keyboard-based, it was a steep learning curve for all of us. I was detailed to use my work time during the pre-Advent retreat that year to familiarise myself with the programme. The first day I sat in front of this marvel of technology I discovered I had only ever seen it booted up and in action; it was at least ten minutes before I had the courage to turn on a likely-looking switch.

By the 90s words like 'mouse', 'email', 'internet' and 'the web' were current, and technicians were extolling the merits, or otherwise, of Apple versus Microsoft as a 'platform' to work from. 'Desktop publishing' was already a familiar term to us, for the possibilities it presented had led to the adaptation of the composer; but we realised we still had a lot of foreign territory to begin to explore. I well remember walking down the Cowley Road and passing a shop which offered to 'Surf the Net' for us (in the days before we all had automatic access), and wondering what this meant.

When I became Sister-in-Charge in 1992, we quickly had to implement two changes. We no longer had enough Sisters to do the printing on the premises, so it was outsourced to a local printer; and the composer began to show its age. Therefore, we invested in more state-of-the-art equipment (with a mouse, and complimentary mouse mat).

The technological revolution has continued. Early in this century we acquired email addresses, registered our slgpress.co.uk domain and developed our first SLG Press website. This was redesigned in 2010 and 2011 to incorporate online ordering and payment, as well as the capacity to download our publications to personal media devices. A further redesign is in hand, which we expect to complete later this year. For many years we have had full-colour covers for the publications, and more recently have added a barcode to enable easier sales and stock control for retailers. And SLG Press is trademarked to avoid confusion with other businesses using the same name.

In 2016 we purchased a colour multi-functional printer with a booklet-making facility to enable the printing of short runs of our titles in-house. This has already proved a good investment. We are gradually converting our entire backlist into eBook format, and many of the titles are already available via Amazon. We have always had international sales of our publications, but by going online in this way we reach an even wider audience. Recently we have sold eBooks to Japan, Brazil, Mexico, and India; countries we would not have reached before.

I have written at length of the IT revolution as it affects SLG Press. I could say much, too, about the use of language in the past half-century. Early publications used predominantly masculine terminology, on the understanding that 'man' in this context was not gender-specific. God was definitely masculine and all priests were male. Feminists were pointing us in the direction of non-sexist language, but within SLG it was something of an uphill struggle to convince editors to change. I think we have just about caught up with modern society's usage, though I still find myself missing glaring inconsistencies. I expect someone will spot one in this issue somewhere.

Our purpose in founding SLG Press was to make available short works of spirituality to whet the reader's appetite to tackle more substantial ones. Over the years, largely due to the influence of the late Canon Donald Allchin, we expanded our list from titles specifically about prayer to include the Desert tradition, as well as the Orthodox, Anglican and Carmelite traditions. After more than forty years *The Power of the Name* by Archbishop Kallistos Ware is still our best-seller.

However, in our work here we are stewards of a tradition which expresses itself in this Community through a life of prayer for the reconciliation of all people to God, for the unity of the Church, for the priesthood and for the dead and dying. This provides possibilities for a wide range of titles, which we hope encourage our readers to develop their own prayer and reflection. Father Gilbert Shaw endowed the

Press both with its original vision and funds to implement it. But as he often said, 'It is all God's work.' And all for God's glory.

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THE THIRD SPIRITUAL ALPHABET OF FRANCISCO DE OSUNA

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

IN THIS TALK I want to share my enthusiasm for Francisco de Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, which I rediscovered a few months ago. I remember looking at it as a Novice, but the moment for reading it was not right. However, sometimes a book can suddenly become just the prompt you need to move on and into something new. In particular, I want to explore how the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* provides a way into the radical way of living the Christian life, as well as being a doorway into the mystical life which stands open to all. For Osuna the relationship with God is all or nothing if it is to be worth anything. But he is also very practical in his teaching. At present he is beginning to be recognised in his own right as someone who speaks a message relevant to today's world.

First, something about Francisco himself. Very little is actually known about him; he was born around 1492 in Osuna in southern Spain, the town which gives him his name. Nothing more is known of his family or childhood. He was professed as a Friar Minor of the Regular Observance around 1513 and died in 1540 or 1541. He was a prolific author and actually wrote six Spiritual Alphabets. The *Third Spiritual Alphabet* was first published in 1527. Saint Theresa of Avila was given a copy by her Uncle Pedro in 1537, when she was about 19, and the book became her master in prayer for the next important stages in the development or her spirituality. It is the book which she mentions in her *Life*.

To understand The *Third Spiritual Alphabet* properly we need to have a quick look at the context in which Francisco was writing. It was a time when a more deeply interiorised spirituality was becoming popular in many monasteries and amongst lay people. In the process two distinct schools of prayer developed. One method was that of abandon, *dejamiento*, which tended towards quietism, and whose most

extreme practitioners believed that trust in divine grace removed the need for prayer, good works or reception of the sacraments. The other was the way of *recogimiento* or recollection, favoured and taught by the *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. As Mary Giles remarks in the Introduction to her translation of the work (Paulist Press, 1981): 'Recollection typically differs from abandon in that it requires mental concentration and active directing of the mind' (5). Those following the way of recollection valued prayer and exterior works and ceremonies, but with the essential interior attitude of attentiveness to God. As St Teresa noted rather tartly in *The Interior Castle*:

> Vocal prayer must be accompanied by reflection. A prayer in which a person is not aware of Whom he is speaking to; what he is asking; who it is who is asking and of Whom, I do not call prayer—however much the lips may move.
>
> First Mansion 1:1:7

The *Third Spiritual Alphabet* consists of twenty-one treatises, one for each letter of the Spanish alphabet and the final tilde. Each one consists of a wise maxim, which in Spanish begins with the appropriate letter of the alphabet. This is followed by an extended commentary on the meaning of the maxim. The best way to read the text is to take each saying and reflect on it in the manner of *lectio divina*. With pondering, depths of meaning are revealed.

So what can The *Third Spiritual Alphabet* offer us in 2017? Let us consider some of Osuna's basic teaching. First of all, what exactly is recollection? The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines it in the following way:

> Recollection, as understood in respect to the spiritual life, means attention to the presence of God in the soul. It includes the withdrawal of the mind from external and earthly affairs in order to attend to God and Divine things. It is the same as interior solitude in which the soul is alone with God

Mary Giles sums up Osuna's understanding of recollection thus:

> For Osuna, recollection is prayer: it includes vocal prayer, to the extent that mental concentration is employed; mental prayer; and, more importantly, passive prayer. Given the ideal of one's total life being lived out in conformity with God's will, recollection is our constant alertness and receptivity to God, punctuated by moments of intense awareness of the divine, moments when recollection becomes immediate, experiential union between creature and Creator and wisdom is poured into the soul without our understanding how and whence. (29)

Osuna begins with the fact that as fallen human beings we are typically scattered and divided in our innermost being, with illusions of being separated from God and with a tendency to divide body and spirit, forgetting that body, mind and spirit should form a unified whole. So the first maxim is, 'May the person and the spirit always walk together.' Osuna advises:

> You, brother, take heed, mend your heart and adorn it; join together all the bits and pieces of your cares so that you can approach God with your forces united. Protect the vessel of your heart from the dust of vain thought and remember what God said: 'The vessel that has neither cover nor fastening at the top will be dirty.' After you have covered your heart by detaching yourself from empty, superfluous matters, tie it securely with the firm resolve to persevere in recollection, just as our letter advises you to do always. (52)

Osuna wants us to gather together the scattered aspects of ourselves, so that we can be centred on God. This means we must practice guarding the heart and watchfulness of our thoughts. Some of what Osuna says is reminiscent of contemporary mindfulness teaching:

> The meaning of our letter is that wherever you go carry your mind along, for no one should go divided unto himself. Do not allow your body to travel one path, the heart another. (50)

We are all aware of how often our minds and our body can be in different places. Osuna wants us to learn to be watchful of our thoughts and practice the discipline of returning to what we are doing whenever we realise our attention has slipped. One of the definitions of mindfulness is: 'The practice of maintaining a non-judgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.' Or, to put it another way: 'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.'

When we consider this within the Christian context the added ingredient is that we do this with the awareness that we live always in the presence of God. We find in the activities of the moment, whether sacred or secular, the opportunity to respond to God and his will for us in that moment. We learn to pay attention to what is going on in our thoughts, emotions and stimuli from our surroundings. We do not label things as 'good' or 'bad', 'welcome' or 'unwelcome', 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable'. Instead we learn to respond rather than react, and so are more able to act with compassion and wisdom towards others and ourselves. This develops the idea of recollection given by the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which seems to suggest that recollection is only possible when we are withdrawn from external concerns and able to concentrate solely on God.

So, 'may the Person and the Spirit always walk together.' We are learning to integrate the whole self in the service of God by practicing particular spiritual disciplines inspired by love of God. As we do, we learn the truth of something I once read in *Prayer of Jesus, Prayer of the Heart* on the importance of the present moment:

> It is always in the present moment that we offer our will to something. It is here and now that we make a covenant with something, that we give our heart, that we prostitute ourselves

> or are deified. The present moment is neither time nor eternity, but the point at which the two meet, and it is only on this cross, our own, that we exercise our freedom. To whom, to what, do we give ourselves and surrender ourselves? (79)

Osuna would agree. His emphasis on the necessity of inner engagement with God, out of love of God, makes it clear that all of life is to be given to God. As we do this our conscience becomes more finely attuned to being aware of intuitions about what helps or harms the process of recollection, and increasingly to act on them. Our part is to act on our conscience. The more we turn to God, the more Spirit-filled we become, and the more we are open to the guidance of the Spirit.

If we had time and space we could look at what Osuna says about each letter. As we do not, so I will just give a flavour of his teaching.

In the Fourth Treatise, speaking about 'Guard of the Heart', the wise saying is: 'Empty your heart and pour out all created things'. Osuna uses many different images to describe what the heart can be:

> The heart is the rainbow of friendship with God set in a cloud of tears to remind us how much he loves us; it is a small city of God gladdened by the influx of grace … the altar on which we sacrifice our desires to God; the paradise where God and his friends commune and take pleasure … all this, your heart is, if it is pure and unburdened as it should be and according to our advice, guarded with all vigilance. (135)

The Sixth Treatise is central to the whole Alphabet: 'Frequently practise recollection to train yourself.' In it Osuna summarises the meaning of the term recollection, and describes ten movements, or moments, of recollection. These become gradually increasing in intensity as God's 'gathering' activity culminates in a dynamic unity in the heart.

The act of recollection involves body, mind and spirit, and practices of stillness, solitude and silence bring the whole of our being

into unity before God. I am reminded of the chapter of our Rule on Silence:

> Silence must cover all the levels of the conscious life; there must be an outward silence of speech and movement, a silence of the mind for the overcoming of vain imaginations and distractions, and a silence of the soul in the surrender of the will to be still and know that God is God, leading to a silence of spirit which is the preparation for the fullness of contemplation.

Osuna teaches that:

> The purpose of this exercise is to gather together and collect that which is dispersed, and because this devotion collects and brings together so much, the exercise is called recollection. (169)

I recently recalled the saying from Treatise Seven: 'Thoughts start war if the gate is not closed.' At a time when there was a lot happening and a lot to think about, I found myself more than normally distracted—a common complaint for us all when life is busy. We feel 'scattered', 'all over the place', 'out of sorts'—all very descriptive phrases. Osuna's remedy is to close the gate of the heart by maintaining a watchful discernment of the thoughts that arise, and, particularly in silent prayer, exercising what he calls 'the little no':

> Remember, if various thoughts plague you, the one simple cure is to say no if they come during prayer, for this time is reserved exclusively for God. So, let prudence be your doorkeeper who tells everyone that you are not receiving visitors at this hour. Others are not to be admitted because they are not needed, nor have they been summoned, nor do they benefit you; on the contrary, they injure you at this time, and so they are not welcome and must go away. This short little word will bar the entrance to everyone, and with it you can tell them all goodbye. (203–4)

A commentator on the website, spiritualalphabet.org, notes:

> It is not a huge waging of battle with thought, but the simple and clear refusal to engage because you are engaged with something else right now … the 'little no' is really an affirmation of inner life.

We are reminded to guard the heart and watch our thoughts, to take refuge in our faith in the presence of God while the storm of thoughts batters us. Just turning back again and again whenever we notice our attention had been stolen, in daily life as well as in prayer. Gradually we learn to be alert to the inner signals of our conscience about what helps and what hinders recollection in our daily choices.

The Sixteenth Treatise is one of the most attractive. Its wise saying is: 'Apply love to everything and draw love from everything'. It points to the necessity of love to encourage us in this exercise and ground it in reality. Osuna says:

> Since the cornerstone of this exercise is love for God, without which we cannot become perfectly recollected in him, it is absolutely necessary to expend all energy to intensify this love so that we can be not only recollected but sealed in God. (415)

All things can lead us to love and praise God:

> Through our own efforts and with the practise of proper devotion, we can love and bless God for every one of the things which he created. Each one will be a step on the ladder that raises us to love the Lord and whereon we rejoice and thank the Lord for creating even a single blade of grass and endowing it with unique grace. (417)

Love becomes the lodestar guiding our actions:

> Reflecting on this, some compare love to the needle of balance that they see as the heart. If this needle of love is correct, it does not lean more to the side of consolations than that of

> tribulations but regards both favourably and regards them as gifts from the Lord. (425–6)

Osuna counsels us to:

> Awaken your natural love for God so that loving will be no effort and your soul will run after him more eagerly than a child his mother. You can attain to this love if you become accustomed to drawing out love from everything and setting it in that inconceivable God who, though you do not see him, is more present to you than you are to yourself and who governs you and preserves this life that sustains you. What he wishes and desires and orders and begs is that you love him, and he promises that if you do his will he will manifest himself to you in sublime proofs of his love. (440)

You may have noticed an allusion to St Augustine in that last passage. Osuna knew the works of St Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, St Gregory the Great, St Bernard, Jean Gerson and many others, and often quotes from or alludes to them.

There is much more I could say. The *Third Spiritual Alphabet* is a sizeable book, with plenty to be absorbed as you spend time with it. No wonder that for more than twenty years St Teresa considered Osuna her master. But to put it in a nutshell: Francisco de Osuna encourages us, out of love for God, to gather and recollect all the powers of our being—body, soul and mind—in the service of God whom we know loves us and desires our love. He offers practical teaching and encouragement that this is a path open to us all. He also reminds us of the importance of friendship with God:

> Friendship and communion with God are possible in this life of exile. This friendship is not remote but more sure and more intimate than ever existed between brothers or even between mother and child … this communion is more certain than anything else in the world, and nothing is more joyous, more valuable, or more precious … this communion is just as available to you, whoever you are, as to other people, for you

> are no less made in the image of God than others. … I imagine that you still maintain that your age or position, temperament, illness or talent excuses you or precludes you from communion. … I do not quite believe you, for nothing can eradicate your capacity for love. (45–8)

Love is the reason for this exercise; love of God in response to God's love for us. As Osuna reminds us:

> Since we give ourselves when we love God, the Lord wishes to give himself in love … let us build ourselves on love and let us thrust our roots down in love. Built like sturdy structures and rooted like trees, we will be founded on love for God that makes us the dwelling place for him and the temple in which he resides, and rooted in love for our neighbour that makes us fruitful trees, sending up protective leaves and nourishing fruit. (408 & 411)

NOT THAT WE ARE ALL THE SAME BUT THAT WE ALL BELONG

Mass for Christian Unity

SISTER STEPHANIE-THÉRÈSE SLG

OUR GOD LIKES DIVERSITY. He likes variety. Take, for example, the colour green. Have you ever noticed in the garden how many shades of green there are in leaf, stem and flower? Or take community. It does not take long when you live in community to realize the diversity of its members, their individual gifts and traits. And St Paul makes this point in our first reading this morning. 'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one' (1 Cor. 12:4–6). The common denominator in all this is the same Spirit—the same Lord—the same God. In all this variety 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:8).

In several places St Paul uses the image of the body to expound the unity of the diversity of Christians. To the Romans he writes: 'For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another' (Rom. 12:4, 5). But what are the various functions for, what do the members of the body of Christ do in their unity? St Paul tells us this in what he writes to the Ephesians: 'And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ*, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:11–13). When the body works together with love, acceptance and intention, the body of Christ is built up into the fullness of Christ; and what is the fullness of Christ except being one with the Father?

The ultimate aim of Christian unity is the glory of God, manifested in our faith in Him and our love of our neighbour. Our unity is patterned on the profound unity of the relationship between the Father and the Son who give us this glory. As Jesus prays in John: 'The glory that you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one' (17:22). This union with God, and the glory it imparts, shows forth something that the world can see. This glory is the manifestation of God's love, first in the cross, then in our love of our neighbour. They will know we are Christians by our love.

The source of our unity must be Christ, the head of the body. 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5). Let your mind be one with Christ and let your actions be animated by the Holy Spirit. Our unity is in Christ, in the Spirit. As St Paul writes to the Philippians: 'Only let your manner of life be worthy

of the gospel of Christ … that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel' (Phil. 1:27).

And there is that wonderful verse in Ephesians: 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' (Eph. 4:4–6). And elsewhere we are told we are one in the bread. But dare I say it? Our baptism and the Eucharist, however important and precious they are, are still only outward signs, what I would call 'externals'. Our truest Christian unity lies first and foremost in the disposition of our heart—a disposition of faith in Christ Jesus and love of neighbour. The disposition of our heart, the indwelling of Christ. Our unity is not expressed in institutional uniformity. The High Churchmanship of the Anglo-Catholics, the enthusiasm and fervour of the Evangelicals, the silence of the Quakers, the rich tradition of the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox and others—all have something to offer to God. Unity is not a matter of choosing one above the others; it is a matter of changing our hearts.

Our unity is expressed only when we come up against our differences. Here is the place where we witness in Christ—to love, to accept, to acknowledge the uniqueness of every Christian, nay, every human being, as a member of God, a child of the Father made in his image and likeness even if we cannot perceive it or accept it. Where the Spirit of God is there must be love, not judgement or condemnation. It is through the Spirit that we express our unity—unity bound in our faith and our love.

True unity is not that we are all the same, but that we are all included, that we, as various and diverse as we are, all belong in the body of Christ through the Spirit that dwells in our hearts. As St Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians: 'As it is, there are many parts, yet one body' (12:20). And Jesus in our gospel: 'And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd' (John 10:16).

One body, one flock, one shepherd. Not that we are all the same, but that we all belong to one another in Christ.

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT POLYCARP

23 February 2017

SISTER SUSAN SLG

POLYCARP was bishop of Smyrna, a town on the coast of Asia Minor, and we are told in the account of his martyrdom that he died there seven days before the kalends of March. In Roman dating the kalends is the first day of the month, so he died on the 23 February; other evidence indicates that it was sometime between the years 155–160. If we accept it, and I do not see why we should not, it makes him very close; today is the anniversary of his death, his year's mind. But it is also a very long time ago and I wondered how real these people from the first two centuries are to us? I hope if we reflect together Polycarp may become a little more real. My experience is that the more one reads their writings, the more real the people of the Early Church become. The human successes and failures, the challenges they faced, prove to be, yes, hugely different in many ways, and yet basically the same as those we face today.

What do we know about him? Well little enough really but more than about some people. He wrote a letter to the Philippians which we have, and Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, wrote one to him. The chances are that there was a lot more which has not survived. However, we do have the account of his martyrdom. It is contained in a letter from the Church in Smyrna to the Church in a place called Philomelium. This morning at Matins we read the part which tells of his prayer before the fire was lit, and how somehow after it was alight, the fire failed to burn him. Instead the flames made an arc around him, like a billowing sail, so that his flesh looked like bread that is baking. It perhaps does not matter what really happened, and, of course, there

are theories, but what was the writer trying to tell us by relating it? I connect it with his prayer; it is consecratory prayer, and one can at least suggest that the image of bread has come to mind because of the connection to the Eucharist. Polycarp is uniting himself with Christ's offering made, not on the cross, but at the last supper. It may, too, form another link with Ignatius of Antioch who when he is facing his fears about his approaching death visualizes the animals in the arena crunching his bones into wheat flour. They are very vivid images, and people do react against them; and yet for Polycarp and Ignatius it was the logical fulfilment of following Christ their Lord. They seem to have been aligning themselves with what happened to Jesus.

This following of Christ—and following, not imitating—is what I really hope we may take away from pondering on Polycarp's life and death a little. I want now to go on to an incident which is less famous but which speaks to me deeply. When he is told that the Roman guard is coming to arrest him he is persuaded to flee, and goes to two houses in the country. But when the soldiers arrive at their first hiding place Polycarp and his companions have already gone on to the second. One of the young slaves is tortured to tell them where Polycarp is, and they follow him there, taking the slave with them. Taking the slave with them—it makes us remember the young man in Mark's gospel who ran away naked, doesn't it? It is an unnecessary detail which somehow adds truth to the story. When the soldiers arrive at the second hiding-place, Polycarp refuses to flee again, and goes out to meet the guard. He gives them food and drink, a supper perhaps, and then he asks if he might have an hour to pray before they take him away. They agree and he prays, where he is, in the presence of everyone in the house, and they hear every word he says because of course he is praying out loud. Silent prayer was not yet the custom. Furthermore, he prays not for one hour but two; and he prays for everyone he has ever known, and all the Churches, apparently without pause.

What is it that moves me about this episode so that when I think of Polycarp's martyrdom I think not of the scene in the arena, but of this preliminary one? Well, perhaps it is the following of Christ—you will have noticed that Polycarp, like Jesus, is betrayed by one of his household, and was willing to let that happen. Perhaps it is that the prayer was a summing up of all his work, as it is possible that the discourses in St John's gospel are the summing up of Jesus's; perhaps it is that his dignity and frailty (he is 86, after all) make an impact on everybody present, which includes the readers. I do not know. But it is the idea of following Christ which is so strong, and if we can take that from his feast day, include ourselves in his long prayer, and know that we can follow with the same integrity too, then that is what a feast day might be for.

CROSS-BEARING

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

IT SEEMS that whenever Lent begins it is too soon after Christmas and not long enough to prepare for Easter. Yesterday we were exhorted to repent and believe the Good News. Today we begin pondering the way of appropriating for ourselves the fact that this man Jesus is the embodiment of this news, pondering, too, on the faith and tradition that formed the foundation of his teaching.

When I first read today's lections, I foolishly thought, 'Oh, those will be easy to preach on'. Not so! The two seem almost to contradict each other. Moses's summary of the Pentateuch (Deut. 30: 15–20) reiterating the promises of God, and the blessing and bounty inherent in living by the Law, have a certain joyful attractiveness. The Law is life-giving and brings rewards to those who keep it.

The verses of the Gospel are not at first reading so attractive or even full of promise (Luke 9:22–25). They are the hinge point of this chapter in Luke's narrative. They are preceded by the miraculous

feeding of the crowds and Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. They are followed by the account of the Transfiguration, just before Jesus sets out for Jerusalem. Jesus begins to prepare his disciples for the end of his life and for his Resurrection, and to show them how they can participate with him in that journey. After the oration of Moses it seems a bleak following with little to recommend it to the disciples in the face of an uncertain future.

So, what are we to make of taking up our crosses and denying ourselves? The first challenge is to believe that renouncing oneself for the sake of someone else is a good thing. In a society where the individual has innumerable rights and is encouraged to be fulfilled to his or her capacity, to say that we must lose our life if we follow Jesus is a 'hard saying'. And what does losing one's life mean anyway? I cannot presume to tell each of you how to discover this, or even how to do it, although I will offer some suggestions. Losing life for the sake of Jesus is a lifelong task, and a disposition of heart that grows. For each of us it will be a real death every time we are asked to do something or receive something that we are sure is going to obliterate us as a person—and surely that cannot be a good thing, nor what God wants. Unfortunately, it seems to be exactly what God does want! But if we can assent as far as possible in that moment and plunge into the unacceptable situation, we discover that it is a death, a loss of control over our lives, but also a resurrection. Out of the suffering, lovingly embraced for Jesus' sake, comes new life.

Each of us can probably recount a moment when we gave our lives to Christ, when we first knew the love of Jesus for us and found it so alluring that we could do nothing but follow him. When I came to that moment I was given an inner picture of Christ on the cross as his gift of himself to me. It was not a sterile gift; it was his all-encompassing love for me, but with it came the challenge to live my life according to his teaching.

And what about Jesus's statement that we must take up our cross? Not helping him to carry his, but shouldering our own. What does that

mean? I must admit to feeling rather helpless whenever I think of this. To talk about having a cross to bear, said with a sigh and helpless shrug of the shoulders, is too facile. As we begin Lent, it might be a useful exercise to define what in our lives is intolerable, difficult, or just something we would rather not be doing but cannot escape because of current conditions. Quite a lot of my so-called cross bearing lurks in the last category, I find. There are situations in all our lives from which we try to escape: our own personalities, bad or difficult relationships, our health, the people we live with and how they treat us, either deliberately or inadvertently. Anything, in fact, that brings with it the spectre of death. However you define a personal cross, if the burden is not shouldered for Jesus's sake it will be unbearable. But if we do shoulder it, something changes in ourselves or in our circumstances.

So let us pray that this Lent we shall experience the love of Jesus in a new way. We are headed towards the celebration of the new life effected by the Resurrection of Christ. It is the way of the cross; but as Moses advises: 'Choose life so that you … may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days' (Deut. 30:19, 20 NRSV).

ON DARING TO BE LOVED BY GOD

23 March 2017

SISTER HELEN SLG

GOD LOVES YOU. God. Loves. You. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, loves you. As Christians, as nuns, we know this. We have staked our lives on this truth—as Jesus gave his life to impart it to us. Yet notice what happens within you as you take in this reality: God loves you. Put your name in the place of the word 'you': I myself would hear, 'God loves Sister Helen'. As much as I believe it and long to know it with my whole being every minute of the day, there is a part

of me (sometimes big, sometimes small) that says, 'Oh, I don't THINK so!' or, 'How could God be so stupid?' or, 'That's not possible.'

It is easy to understand this reaction by reminding myself that I'm only human. This keeps me safely in my comfort zone, and allows me to stay within the confines of the Sister Helen that I know and have learned to live with. Nothing wrong with that. … But this is Lent, and that is not repentance. It is not the *metanoia*, the costly turning towards God that I have promised.

How often, when God asks to look into your face, do you turn your back? When God longs to offer his forgiving mirror so that you may look into your inner self, see all that you wish to hide, all that you think is faulty, all that is undesirable, all that you think should remain in the dark—to look into those places and discover that God is with you there, sharing that burden with you, and offering to remove it and set you free. So that you may be wholly and freely God's own, no longer keeping any part of yourself from his loving and accepting gaze. This gaze does not remove our faults; but in it God offers us the opportunity to enfold them in his love, that we may more deeply know and come to accept ourselves and one another. God never ceases to make this offer, no matter how many times we do not respond, or even turn our backs. But he is never indifferent, and he lets us know his joy in the aliveness, the wonder, the awe we experience when we accept his offer and allow ourselves to come a step closer to him.

Both of our readings today tell us of the depth of God's longing for us to accept his love, and of the consequences of our reluctance to do so. Jeremiah lived in the last days of Judah and the pivotal time of the destruction of the Temple. It must have been a time of great unrest. We can feel the prophet's hopefulness in this passage (Jer. 7:23–28) as he reminds the people of the Lord's eternal covenant with them: 'Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you,

and you will prosper' (v. 23). And then his anguish as he conveys the message:

> You may say all these words to them: they will not listen to you; you may call them: they will not answer. So tell them this: 'Here is the nation that will not listen to the voice of the Lord its God nor take correction. Sincerity is no more; it has vanished from their mouths.'

Those must have been hard words for Jeremiah to hear and to have to speak to the people whom he loved.

I read that sentence 'Sincerity is no more; it has vanished from their mouths', and I cannot help but recall how often, even in my own lifetime, I have heard variations of 'He/she is so sincere', as though that were one of the worst possible attributes of a person. It would seem that in our own day, as in Jeremiah's, we find ways to side-step the power of the truth of God's love for us, his beloved people.

In the passage from Luke (11:14–23), this tendency is taken further when the crowds witness the goodness of the work Jesus is doing among them. We are told that he cast out a devil, 'and when the devil had gone out of him, the dumb man spoke.' Immediately the crowd labelled this work as coming from the devil, as if that were the only way they could understand the miracle of healing.

In our own day, much as in the time of Jesus, or of Jeremiah, we see the tendency of human beings to try to downplay or to diminish the power of God's touch upon our lives, to take his promises with a pinch of salt. Under the guise of 'sophistication' we may distance ourselves from the impact of his touch, of his claim on our lives.

William Barry, the noted Jesuit writer, has discussed this dynamic at length in his insightful and challenging article entitled 'Missing the Meaning of Religious Experience: Hermeneutics of Suspicion is an Enticing Trap' in the journal *Human Development* (Spring 1987), in which he uses case studies to illustrate a number of ways we may use our understanding of psychology, our intellect, the fear and cynicism

that mask themselves as ‘sophistication’, and other similar mechanisms to distance ourselves from the simple and direct experience of God in our lives. He writes:

> Since every human being is ambivalent about God, there may even be a sigh of relief that one’s religious experience can be discounted as a psychological trick. But there is the other side of the ambivalence to be considered: a longing for intimacy with God may be stifled, leaving the person also feeling a bit empty and sad. Perhaps … another of God’s initiatives has been thwarted. (39)

As Our Lord reminds us in this passage from Luke, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin, a household divided against itself collapses.’ Perhaps what God is asking of us this Lent is to learn to cling to the side of our ambivalence where he is, to cling to it relentlessly and filled with hope, to move through our discomfort at being so deeply loved and forgiven, until we find ourselves facing in a new direction. As Martin Smith puts it in his meditation on Ash Wednesday in *A Season for the Spirit*:

> Perhaps this word ‘surrender’ should be enough for my prayer. … Not the surrender of submission to an enemy, but the opposite, the laying down of resistance to the One who loves me infinitely more than I can guess, the One who is more on my side than I am myself. … Lent is about the freedom which is gained only through exposure to the truth.’ And the truth of God, the truth that both Jeremiah and Jesus staked their lives on, is that God loves you. (6)

THE DEPARTED AND THE LIVING

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

I ONCE HEARD a professional fund-raiser tell this story to a church group: 'A certain vicar never visited his parishioners but spent all his time looking after the churchyard and tending the graves. Challenged about this, he claimed that his first duty was to those who paid his stipend.' The intended point of this little parable was to make us feel guilty that the Church of England relies so heavily on its endowments, the gifts of those long dead, and that the living contribute comparatively little to its upkeep. This may well be true, but the story contains two fallacies: the first is that we could, or should, cease to rely on the contributions of past generations. Rather, we should accept them gratefully. As Wilfrid Mellers reminds us in *Between Old Worlds and New*, 'we all live in and on the company of the dead' (p. 22). We have in consequence a responsibility to the dead. The second fallacy is that this is adequately discharged by keeping churchyards tidy—not in itself a good idea now that they are often havens for wildlife in an otherwise barren landscape.

Even the Neanderthals (our cousins rather than our direct ancestors) buried their dead if not with 'a sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life,' at least with some dim hope that something survives death. However, in preliterate societies it does not take long for a dead individual to be forgotten by the living; a few years, and no one is left who remembers. A known and loved person becomes in time just one of the ancestors. Even for us, most of the dead are anonymous. A walk round a cemetery sadly reveals innumerable gravestones, and some really massive and expensive monuments, intended to perpetuate the memory of people no one now remembers or cares about. In his introduction to a collection of essays called *Ritual and Remembrance* John Davies calculates that a hundred billion people have died in the last ten thousand years. Most of them have passed into oblivion, remembered as generalised ancestors, not

as individuals (24). Yet he also says, 'to destroy a culture destroy its dead, deny its ancestors' (18). Without a sense of continuity with the past, we have no future; but there is today a collective amnesia, a conviction that we have nothing to learn from the past. With more knowledge but less wisdom we repeat the mistakes of the past and fail to apply its lessons. The dead are important to the living, but in contemporary society you would hardly realise it. After a perfunctory funeral, 'as moving as a Tesco checkout' (33), the bereaved are expected to 'get over it' and get on with the business of living in which even the recently dead have no place. There are no longer any recognised rituals of grieving, patterns of behaviour which not only helped the living, but were intended to help the departed, and which kept the two worlds in touch with each other. The eldest son of an Orthodox Jew is required to say the Kaddish prayer every day for a year after his parent's death, and any synagogue he attends recognises that this is both his duty and his privilege. We Christians now have nothing comparable.

Our imaginary vicar manicuring his churchyard has the law on his side. Providing funds for the maintenance of a parish churchyard is treated as charitable by the law. Charitable status has also been extended to the long-term maintenance of secular cemeteries, as David Harte points out in his essay 'Law after Death' in *Ritual and Remembrance* (231). Yet prayer is not recognised as a charitable activity To qualify for charitable status and so reclaim tax on gifts, religious communities have to justify their existence by 'good works'.[1]

Nonetheless, prayer—as Muslims hear proclaimed daily from the minaret—is the best of works, the real justification for the existence of religious communities. Praying for the departed is the most useful thing we can do for them, far more useful than putting flowers on a grave—though that can, of course, be a kind of sacrament of our continuing love and concern.

[1] Cf. Sr Avis Mary SLG, 'SLG Charitable Trust Limited', *Fairacres Chronicle*, Winter 2006, Vol. 39.2, p 50.

As we know, the Reformation deliberately erected barriers between the living and the departed. Monasteries and chantries were abolished and prayers for the dead were ruthlessly excised from public worship, and even from the burial service, for belief in purgatory was denounced as a Popish invention without biblical warrant. The fate of every individual was held to be eternally fixed at the moment of death, so that further prayer was futile and unnecessary; either one was saved and in no need of prayer, or damned and unable to benefit from prayer. However, what the Reformation tried to eradicate lives on in popular culture. Theologians tend to despise 'folk religion', but even at its most theologically naive folk religion expresses real human needs and tries to meet them, especially when official mainstream religion fails to do so. The *in memoriam* notices in local papers have seen described as 'a kind of mass media chantry'. Of the prayer requests left on cards in Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey, a significantly high proportion refer to departed loved ones, and often address them directly. Many people obviously feel a need to go on talking to the dead. Without having even heard of it, it seems that they believe in a kind of purgatory. They do not believe in hell and have only vague ideas about heaven, but they are well aware that neither they themselves nor anyone they know is irredeemably wicked or wholly perfect. If we humans survive death at all, we go on being human, neither saints nor sinners but with plenty of room for improvement, no doubt both needing all the help we can get and only too willing to help those left behind if we can.

The unspoken assumption behind the popular beliefs and practices is that

> the people of this world retain an intercessory interest and competence in the next world and that the people in purgatory (and not just the saints in heaven) retain an interest and intercessory competence for the people of this world.
>
> *Ritual and Remembrance*, p. 35

The Eastern Orthodox churches do not share the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, but they do not question that the dead and the living can, and do, pray for each other, and can even address each other directly. They believe that even those in hell can be helped by prayer.

If only the Anglican reformers, who shared with the Orthodox a veneration for the Fathers, had managed more than the most tentative and unsatisfactory contact with them, they might have been able to curb the abuses and excesses of late medieval religion, and so avoid the rigid categories of Roman Catholicism which divided the departed into saints *to* whom we pray and sinners *for* whom we pray. There would have been no suppression of the natural human need to keep in touch with the dead. As it was, for three centuries English Christians were inhibited from praying for the dead, and when the crisis of World War I hit the modern world, the churches found themselves quite unprepared to cope with it. They offered no real comfort to the thousands of bereaved; it is small wonder that finding no help there so many turned to spiritualism to supply the lack. The churches' failure was the opportunity for others, not all of whom are reliable guides.

What then should the Church do now about changing our understanding about praying for the dead? First of all, be much more positive about prayer for, and contacts with, the dead. At the time of Princess Diana's funeral the Free Church minister of Dingwall in Scotland denounced as 'unchristian' just about the only Christian thing about it, that she was actually prayed for. To my mind, anyone who rejects prayer for the dead is adopting a thoroughly unchristian attitude. In the eighteenth century, both John Wesley and Dr Johnson both thought it legitimate and proper (with certain safeguards) to pray for the departed. During World War I, even so staunch an evangelical as Bishop Moule changed his mind.[2] The late Bishop John Taylor,

[2] See *Requiem Healing*, Michael Mitten and Russ Parker (Daybreak 1991) for John Wesley's view, p. 85; and Bishop Moule's, p. 63. For Dr Johnson's see 'Prayer for his late wife' in *Dr Johnson's Prayers* (SCM 1947), p. 81.

when working with the Church Missionary Society in Uganda, found the Christian answer to ancestor-worship and to fear of the ancestors in an awareness that mutual intercession, the lifeblood of the Church, is not broken by death.[3] We should be bold, rather than hesitant, in encouraging prayer for the dead, and offering opportunities for its expression. In three successive parishes, whose congregations thought of themselves as fairly Low Church, I introduced a requiem on All Souls' Day and invited people to submit names of loved ones to be read out during the service. The idea caught on rapidly; it was just about the most popular thing I ever did.

I want now to consider briefly three areas of interaction between the living and the departed: in the context of worship, in the study of family history, and in ministry to the unquiet dead.

***Worship*:** Some years ago, when the Scottish Episcopal Church revised its funeral service, the Liturgical Committee consulted supposed experts to find out what would be most helpful and comforting to the bereaved. This, to me, is putting the cart before the horse. Surely, the most helpful thing a funeral can do for the bereaved is to give them a sense that they are, by their participation in the service, actually helping the departed. In *Requiem Healing* Michael Mitton writes, 'The funeral has, I believe, a very important role in actually committing the departed to God. In this way, I am ministering to the departing spirit, not to the congregation' (p. 124). All too often at a funeral, and still more in the currently fashionable 'Thanksgiving for the Life of,' the departed are talked about as if they were not present and so they are never directly addressed. Surely the committal should always be addressed to the individual to whom one is saying goodbye and whom one is commending to God.

Funerals are the obvious point of contact between the living and the dead, but every Eucharist joins the two worlds, since it transcends time. When Christ comes, he does not come alone, but brings all the

[3] *The Primal Vision*, J. V. Taylor (SCM 1960), p. 168.

faithful with him. One recalls John Betjeman's poem about the clergy widow in her lonely bedsitter, who goes every Sunday to the early service:

> The veil between her and her dead.
> Dissolves and shows them clear.
> The consecration prayer is said
> And all of them are near.
>
> House of Rest

***Family History*:** Nowadays more and more people are taking up the study of family history, perhaps because they no longer feel rooted in a local community and consequently are aware of a need to rediscover their roots. However, as Sister Avis Mary pointed out a while ago in a two-part article in the *Fairacres Chronicle*,[4] tracing the ancestors can be a spiritual quest. Many cultures and. religions have given attention to the ancestors and recognised that they have affected, and continue to affect, the living family. The ancestors, after all are still alive, albeit on another plane; so as well as being our past they are part of our present, and no doubt help to shape our future. They have not really gone away. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, some are there to help, some need our help. Our part is to remember with compassion and thanksgiving.

Most of us can vividly remember only our parents and grand-parents and others of their generation; further back there is only hearsay and anecdote unless we take the trouble to trace our family tree as far back as we can go—not always very far. Then these people of whom we have been only vaguely aware, if aware at all, come alive for us and perhaps make demands on us. Maybe, like an ancestor of mine who was overseer of the poor in Weymouth in the nineteenth century and committed suicide, they need our help; maybe they have been helping us all along and it is high time we acknowledged it. As Sister Avis Mary said,

[4] 'Tracing the Ancestors: A Spiritual Quest', Sister Avis Mary SLG, *Fairacres Chronicle* Summer & Winter 2008, Vol 41.

> Our forebears are an ongoing blessing to us, and we may need to become more aware of ancestral support for our happiness and wellbeing … At the same time as we rejoice in our ancestors' ministry to us, we have the opportunity to minister to them with our love and prayer. Inevitably many, or all, of them were wounded in life's struggles. There may be entanglements in ancestral issues which still need to be acknowledged and brought before God for healing.
>
> (Part 2, p. 34)

This is an area of ministry which the late Dr Kenneth McCall pioneered and recorded in *Healing the Family Tree*. He found that many of the physical and mental problems of the living could be traced back to forgotten or unacknowledged faults in the past, and his preferred method of healing was to look at the family trees of his patients for possible connections with the problems of the living. There might be disturbed souls from previous generations, or the living may not have allowed themselves an opportunity to mourn the departed properly. Whatever the problem, it can often be resolved, or at least greatly alleviated, by asking forgiveness for or from the deceased, and by far the best context in which this can be done is in the celebration of a requiem Eucharist.

***The Unfaithful Departed*:** By tradition prayers are asked for the faithful departed. It is even more important to pray for the unfaithful departed. The Rule of the Sisters of the Love of God explicitly states:

> The Sisters are committed to pray for the dead and dying, remembering the countless numbers of those who have passed from this life spiritually uncared for and who are in special need of prayer. (Ch. 18)

I have for some years now belonged to the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, one of whose concerns is ministry to the unquiet dead. Many of the problems brought to diocesan advisers regarding the paranormal are found to be due to the activities of such entities. Often they find it difficult to believe that they are

dead, or have no framework of belief into which to fit their new experience. They are lost and unable to move forward. No doubt, as books such as *Testimony of Light* suggest, there are helpers on the other side ready and willing to guide them, but they are themselves greatly helped by the prayers of the living. Raymond. Moody in *Life After Life* remarks, 'If you leave here a tormented soul, you will be a tormented soul over there.' Such souls need a great deal of time and patience for their healing, and meantime they can be a great menace and a cause of distress to the living. However, even those who find their present experience hellish are not necessarily irrevocably fixed in a place of torment; love, compassion and prayer can help them through it. The worst thing one can do to a disturbed and disturbing spirit is to tell it to go to hell. It should not be banished but helped to find its true place. Easier said than done, I know, but it will not be done at all unless we acknowledge that we all, living and departed, belong together, and have a responsibility for each other.

It is wiser not to try to make contact with the dead; it is far better to let them contact us if they wish, in whatever way they can. While a good many alleged communications from the departed need to be viewed with suspicion, some certainly bear the ring of truth, utterly convincing to those who receive them.

It is, of course, not only the unquiet dead who try to get through to us. Sometimes the dead are quieter than they were in life and. have no intention of troubling us.

Let me end with an incident which happened to a friend of ours some years ago, and which she has given me permission to quote. She is a retired teacher; in one school where she used to teach she had a very difficult relationship with a colleague, whom she had subsequently done her best to forget. One day, as she was leaving her garage with her shopping, a forceful image of this man came into her mind and, try as she would, she could not banish it. Strangely, considering their troubled relationship in the past, the image gave her a strong sense of peace and reassurance rather than pain, and the rest

of that day took on a rosy light. About a fortnight later, friends who were due to come to lunch phoned to postpone it because of a funeral which the husband felt he had to attend, as he had already missed two through being away: one of these turned out to be the funeral of that same former colleague, of whose death she had been completely unaware. Since then she has been able to forget all the bitterness and think of him in a positive and reassuring light. She is quite sure that the initiative came from him, and not from her own unconscious mind, and that he wanted to be reconciled. It is for her an assurance that the hypocrisy and petty spite of this world are, as she put it, 'ironed out' in the next, and only the truth remains.

POEM

Small frightened bird,
I am not trying to pry your anxious claws
From the cliff-face;
Only to show you
That you have wings.

Sister Helen SLG

ASSOCIATES

NEW

Priest Associate

Reverend Alastair Graham Low	2 Feb 2017
Canon Carol Smith	2 Feb 2017

FLG

Jennifer Harrison	15 Feb 2017
Sue Sheppy	15 Mar 2017
Rebecca Louise Tobin	14 Jun 2017

R. I. P.

Oblate Sister

Oblate Sister Georgina of the Emptiness of Christ (Georgina Alexander)	7 Dec 2016

Priest Associate

The Right Revd Geoffrey Rowell	11 June 2017

Companion

Maryann Ferrier	11 May 2017

BOOKS

Preaching the Luminous Word: *Biblical Sermons and Homiletical Essays*, Ellen F. Davis, Eerdmans, 2016, £22.99.

ISBN 9780802874238.

Ellen F. Davis is the Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina. She is one of those rare birds who combines being a first-rate biblical scholar with an unusual capacity for illuminating the biblical text. Thus, *Preaching the Luminous Word* is a book which those called to preach will find a godsend. Davis is, first and foremost, a scholar of the Old Testament, though she is no less illuminating on the New. But it is the Old Testament which we moderns find so difficult to understand and to preach, which provides the main area for Davis's particular interpretative insights. Thus she can take a familiar but profoundly difficult story like the 'Sacrifice of Isaac' (Genesis 22) and wade in with a confidence that produces a homily which brings new life to the story.

The book begins with a long Foreword by Stanley Hauerwas, in which he quotes a passage from an earlier book by Ellen Davis, *Wondrous Depth: Preaching the Old Testament,* in which she writes:

> The … essays in this volume address what I regard as the gravest scandal in the North American Church in our time, namely the shallow reading of Scripture. Such reading results from the assumption that we already know just what the Bible says; therefore our reading is a simple rehearsal of what (we think) we know rather than an attempt to probe deeper. The assumption of prior knowledge that is fully adequate to new challenges seems to be widely held by 'conservative' and 'liberal' Christians alike. Ironically that common assumption may account for the sterility of the arguments between them. However heated and divisive those arguments may be they do little to advance the Church's understanding of Scripture, or even to provoke curiosity about what fresh insights the Bible

might offer to the multiple situations that disturb or perplex us, or what new possibilities for our life it might disclose. (xl)

After quoting this passage, Hauerwas goes on to say 'that it should not be taken to indicate that Davis is given to polemics.' No, indeed. But one of her virtues is that she does make her thoughts on such matters quite clear, so that the reader is not in any doubt about them. Moreover this particular passage does not only apply to North America. I suspect that many of our readers will recognize the problem.

This Foreword is followed by a short introductory piece by Ellen Davis, 'On Not Worrying about Sermon Illustrations', in which she introduces herself to the reader. She explains that she took away from her course on preaching the desirability of finding the right story to fill out or carry a sermon. But at the same time she encountered John Donne's 'spectacular sermons on the Psalms'. 'Here was a style of preaching that was theologically probing, emotionally engaged, eloquent, even entertaining—and entirely focused on the Bible.' 'To this day,' she writes, 'I consider that seventeenth-century poet and priest to be the greatest English language preacher of the Psalms.' And thus, Davis writes, 'the Psalms have become my own most favoured preaching texts', and finding a good sermon illustration is no longer sought.

The book contains fifty short sermons, the last thirteen of which are inspired by the New Testament, interspersed by five homiletical essays which are of particular interest. The sermons are on a wide range of subjects, according to the occasion, and are introduced briefly by Austin McIver Dennis.

The first sermon after 'Not Worrying about Sermon Illustrations' is 'Being a Creature Means You Eat'. Davis is a keen and knowledgeable ecologist. The picture she paints of our industrialisation of the land, of animals and of everything we eat, and of the consequences, makes painful if, for many of us, familiar reading. Her biblical reference for this sermon is simply Genesis 1. The text which came to

my mind on reading it, and which remained with me, was Genesis 6: 6–7:

> And the Lord was sorry that He had made human-kind upon the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air for I am sorry that I have made them.'

Davis does not quote this passage, though she does cite it in a couple of places in other homilies, probably because her aim is to arouse hope in those to whom she is preaching, and not to indulge in apocalyptic. But her homily is a terrifying account of our treatment of the earth's produce and what we are doing to it, and this chapter alone conjures up visions of God becoming angry with the humans he has created. And a little further on, in a sermon called 'The Manna Economy' (Exodus 16), God does get angry. This is a particularly worrying sermon. It deals with our disobedience. How do we deal with it?

Thus *Preaching the Luminous Word* is not only a call to those called to preach to probe more deeply into the text, but also a call to the reader to probe more deeply into him or herself. Davis achieves this simply by herself being such a person. As one reads one becomes more and more concerned with one's own limitations and with the way they are contributing to, or failing to combat, some of the world's major problems. Most of us are not called to deal directly with the means of food production, for instance, but we are called to pray about what we cannot do; and those who preach are no less called to this responsibility. And we can become more alert and protest about what is happening around us.

The last page-and-a-half of 'The Manna Economy' (Exodus 16) brings home to us what is happening in the world:

> So the biblical story concerns us for our grossly destructive practices and this is terrible news. But the reason for bringing this story into our worship today, into a place of good news, is

> that it also encourages us, guides us into putting our food production practices on the Church's agenda. (32)

Yes, indeed, but there are too many subjects of greater appeal, of greater apparent urgency, which want to be discussed. We are living in a time of huge changes in thought and practice, and these capture our imaginations and emotions in a way that food—as long as we are not actually hungry—cannot do. And it is not only food production which fails to arouse attention. Using the word 'history' in place of 'ruin' at Exodus 10:7 Davis translates: 'Do you not yet know that Egypt is history?—it's gone!' And she goes on:

> As a member of the reckless generation, I am haunted by those words: 'Do we not yet know that Egypt is history?' Do we not yet know that a large swath of the Gulf Coast is history? That some five hundred mountains in Appalachia, along with their creeks and valleys are history? That the High Plains Aquifer, the Colorado River, countless more rivers and streams are on their way to being history? (32)

But there are many other subjects on which Davis gives us a lovely homily, such as marriage, the baptism of a child, the love which can grow between an animal and a human; and she often faces some personal tragedy, death through illness or some accident. Thus courage to tackle these profoundly difficult situations in the light of God is an important element in this collection. Another kind of courage is revealed in those homilies which tell of her visits to difficult and dangerous spots in Africa where she teaches Hebrew to enthusiastic students who recognize some affinity between it and their own language.

There is much, much more. The last dozen or so homilies are inspired by the New Testament, but before we get there I should like to pause on one of the essays, 'Holy Preaching: Ethical Interpretation and the Practical Imagination.' A quotation from George Herbert, 'The Parson Preaching', is placed at the beginning:

> He often tells them that sermons are dangerous things, that none goes out of church as he came in, but either better or worse; that no one is careless before his Judge, and that the Word of God shall judge us. By these and other means the Parson procures attention; but the character of his sermon is holiness; he is not witty or learned, or eloquent, but holy.
>
> 'The Parson Preaching'

The last section begins with an essay, 'Preaching in Witness to the Triune God', which begins with the question put to Davis asking how she, as an Old Testament scholar, thinks about preaching the New Testament. She answers that she sees no genuine theological distinction, 'because as a Christian I necessarily read the Bible in its entirety … That is, I read the Bible as a single story of alienation and ultimately reconciliation between God and humanity' (245). These last homilies show Davis to be an exhilarating evangelist. They begin with an interpretation of the 'Unjust Steward' which explains why the master commends him. This is a homily to read, enjoy and use—which, indeed applies to the whole of the book. There is a very useful 'Index of Scripture Quotations' (327–332), enabling the reader to consult Davis's thought on a subject, which is often a useful trigger to one's own.

May this book prove to be a useful corrective to shallow reading, while encouraging readers and preachers to take a more active interest in the fathomless depths of what we still call 'The *Holy* Bible'. The forces against this view that the Bible is holy become ever more powerful, but if we succumb to them we shall end up like all those plundered terrains Davis lists—gone! History!

SISTER EDMÉE SLG

Pilgrimage of Awakening: *The Extraordinary Lives of Murray and Mary Rogers*, Mary Cattan, Pickwick Publications, 2016, £37. ISBN 9781498279093.

As the subtitle of this book suggests, it is indeed the record of a remarkable couple, who, from 1946 onwards, lived a life of heroic poverty in India, Jerusalem, Hong Kong, Canada and finally Oxford. But besides being a biography, this book also illuminates the changing history of the church. The second half of the twentieth century saw the growth of the ecumenical movement and an increasing dialogue between the churches and other world faiths, particularly those in the East. Murray played a significant part in both those developments. The key figures of that period, Max Warren, Roger Schutz, Raimon Panikkar, Abhishiktananda, Thich Nhat Hanh and many others all march through these pages. Here also (though rather more painfully) are the tensions created by the changing view of Christian mission in the light of both those movements.

Murray Rogers had a conventional enough background—public school, Cambridge, Westcott House. He was ordained an Anglican priest at the start of the Second World War and married shortly after. But India called, and in 1946 he and Mary, with Linda and Cheryl, aged three and one, (with a third, Richard, to be born after their arrival) set sail on the first passenger ship allowed through the Suez Canal. However, much to the concern of his sponsors, the Church Missionary Society, Murray soon began to be deeply uncomfortable with the conventional missionary set-up. He sensed the gulf between western missionaries, living in their compounds, and the lives of ordinary Indians, who for the most part lived in poverty. Mission life belonged to a different era, in marked contrast to the spirit of the new Indian nation coming into being in 1948. This unease, shared by Mary, eventually led to the whole family moving out of their comfortable bungalow on the banks of the Jumna River, to spend a year in Gandhi's Ashram in Sevagram.

It is hard to grasp the total change of culture involved in this move. They left behind almost all their belongings, and went to live, with young children, in a mud and wattle house, with a bamboo and thatched roof and just a few basic necessities. The day was fully planned, dining was communal, waste absolutely forbidden, the children expected to work in the fields. But the experience of Sevagram, lasting less than a year, never left them. From then on their lives were characterised by the same utter simplicity of living: frugal, vegetarian food, the barest furniture, few possessions. In Sevagram too, the respective roles they were to have within the marriage in the coming years found their beginnings. Murray, extroverted, busily engaged in dialogue with leaders of the community. Mary focussed on the well-being of her children. And it was here, in this semi-religious community, that the idea of a Christian Community, composed of a family and other, perhaps unmarried, women and men, was conceived.

The Christian Ashram that emerged in 1957 was called The Family of The Holy Spirit. They acquired a plot of land between two villages in Uttar Pradesh, India's poorest state. Its name, Jyotiniketan, 'Place of Light' travelled with them until the end of their lives. Over the years members came and went. But its long standing member was Heather Sandeman, who came in 1956 (interestingly, after six months of preparation at Fairacres) and remained with Mary and Murray until the end of their lives. And it was at Jyotiniketan that Abhishiktananda, the second profound influence on Murray and Mary, entered their lives. His arrival was a never-to-be-forgotten moment: after Compline, without announcement, standing in the mango grove. He returned frequently, establishing a path of spirituality that, like the simplicity of Gandhi, never left them. From him they learned of Hinduism in a way that their missionary training would never have envisaged. He would read to them from the Upanishads and ask, 'What echo is there in your Christian heart to what you have just heard?' From this began Murray's deep engagement in interfaith dialogue and Mary's own translation of the Upanishads in conjunction with Raimon Panikkar. Their worship too reformed itself under this

influence. Those of us who read the letters from Jyotiniketan will remember the inspiration and creativity that sprang from this remote village in northern India. For instance, the late Sister Mary Augustine SLG was a regular reader and correspondent. Murray was soon in demand as a speaker at international conferences across the world.

The years 1958 to 1971 were extraordinarily creative. But, as might be imagined, the contradictions involved in all of this were considerable. If they were to live the simple lives of their village neighbours, what were they to do about their missionary salaries? What of the education of three children? (There was, at this point, a difficult separation from CMS that never really healed.) And how were they to cope with the dynamics of a close community comprising both single and married people? The book examines all of this with considerable honesty and perception. Murray was a charismatic figure, with a strong personality. He was intolerant of humbug—a fact that was to lead to trouble on more than one occasion. But he was challenging and attractive, carrying with him an infectious sense of personal freedom. He had, for example, a remarkable impact on the congregation of a church in North America, leading to a close association over many years. And he was equally at home with the ordinary people of a village in Canada, where the community lived from 1989 to 1998. However, throughout the pages of this book, it is Mary who emerges as the quiet, but central, personality. It was she who managed their frugal living, whose fine mind refined Murray's plans and ideas, and coped with the inevitable stresses of such an intimate and disparate community life—and with the fact that Murray was often absent. And it was Mary who, above all, saw to the welfare of their children, and carried the pain of separation from them when they went to England for their education. The most moving moment in this book is when finally the pain of it all became unbearable and Mary, in Canada over the Christmas of 1997 poured out her grief unstoppably. They returned to England and family the next year, to her great joy.

This was not an easy book to write. Murray and Mary left Jyotiniketan in 1971. The long subsequent years, important though they are, do not always have the same creativity. But the book rarely loses its narrative drive. And this is a wise book, pondering as it does on the tensions and pitfalls for those brave enough to seek a radical answer to the call of Christ, creating new forms for a changing age. We need such courage. But how are we to handle the human passions and affections that inevitably arise when women and men come together in close community? How do we respect the freedom of our children in matters of faith? And what too are the implications of that word 'Awakening'—not a usual Christian word—in this book's title? To the end of their lives Murray and Mary, along with Heather, found meaning in the Hindu scriptures alongside the Bible. Their worship was a fusion of both because in both they met Christ. Are we yet ready to understand that, and absorb such an approach into our own Christian understanding? The breadth of vision that underlies these two lives is a challenge to our all too limited horizons.

DAVID BARTON

Hidden in God: Discovering the Desert Vision of Charles de Foucauld, Bonnie Thurston, Ave Maria Press, 2016, £9.99.

ISBN: 9781594716591.

Hidden in God is a testimony to the enduring fascination Charles de Foucauld continues to exert. Bonnie Thurston's book is almost a retreat, giving reflection points at the end of each chapter. She builds her reflections around the distinction Charles made between Jesus's three lives—Nazareth, the desert and the public life—seeing them as metaphors for our own spiritual journey, with their graces and challenges. She situates his life in line with the Gospel and a long tradition of saints.

Charles considered every Christian called to one of those three states, his own being Nazareth. It was indeed a *hidden place*, where he lived in intimacy with the holy family but he was led to discover the

apostolic dimension of Nazareth. The Incarnation is not just about God's kenosis, but about his self-emptying in order to be close to us. Charles came to understand that his Nazareth-inspired self-emptying must also lead him to people, especially to the poorest. He is quite the opposite of the desert fathers fleeing the world. He goes to the desert to seek people out.

The centenary of Charles de Foucauld's death (1916–2016) has given rise to numerous publications, foremost among which is *Charles de Foucauld: une Biographie* by Pierre Sourisseau, for the past thirty years archivist for the postulation, the process for Blessed Charles's canonization. The English-speaking world needs a similar reference. Beyond Little Sister Annie's *Charles de Foucauld: In the Footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth*, which is a very good introduction, too many biographies either ignore facts that do not suit the author's purpose (*The Sword and the Cross* by Fergus Fleming) or embellish them to make for a better read (*Charles de Foucauld: Charles of Jesus* by Jean Jacques Antier). Additions then get passed on as facts. How could Abbé Huvelin have *commanded* de Foucauld to confess his sins? (p. 16) Antier has invented their conversation. Charles de Foucauld was never a military chaplain (p. 20); Mardochée Aby Serour was no 'peddler' but ex-director of the Israeli school of Algiers (p. 14), etc.

Charles de Foucauld is not an easy subject! Thurston's passion for her subject and her personal involvement in what she says probably speak more to readers than a lot of scholarly detail. However, she has a tendency to take a hagiographic approach to her subject, seeing the saint but not the man. Charles's life is very much a process as he moves from Trappist to hermit, to missionary-monk in Béni Abbès before finding his balance in Tamanrasset where he lives an 'apostolate of friendship' with his 'Muslim parishioners'. It is precisely in that process that he can encourage us as we struggle in our Nazareths of today to become brothers and sisters to all, crying the Gospel with our lives. LITTLE SISTER KATHY MCKEE

Parable and Paradox, Malcolm Guite, Canterbury Press, 2016, (paper and e-book), £10.99. ISBN 9781848258594

It so happened that I was rereading and reflecting on Malcolm Guite's sonnet sequence on the Advent Antiphons in *Sounding the Seasons* when his latest collection of poems arrived for review. I had bought this book, after hearing him preach. He preaches brilliantly, and invariably ends each sermon with a specially-written sonnet which sums up tersely and memorably the substance of what he has been saying. These sonnets, tried and tested in a liturgical context, form the substance of *Sounding the Seasons*, subtitled 'Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year', and of this new book as well, the core of which is a set of fifty sonnets on sayings of Jesus. Neither book is intended to be read straight through: each poem is to be read slowly on an appropriate occasion, to be savoured and pondered.

The poems in the first book come in clusters, grouped round the major turning-points of the liturgical year, with very few suitable for use in the long stretch of 'Ordinary Time' from Trinity Sunday to the Feast of Christ the King. Therefore, I propose to use the new collection primarily to provide material for meditation on the Sundays after Trinity. A sonnet is provided for every saying of Jesus recorded in the gospels, shirking neither the familiar and hackneyed, on which he has always something original and illuminating to say, nor the 'hard sayings' which all preachers tend to avoid.

Unlike many modern poets, Guite has deliberately accepted the strict discipline of rhyme and metre and demonstrates just how subtle and flexible the traditional sonnet form can be. His use of language is epigrammatic, each line tightly packed, and, within the brief compass of a relatively rigid formula, contributing to the total meaning. He opens up a wholly new way of looking at the Church's teaching, providing thereby ample material for prolonged reflection. He is at the same time utterly orthodox and totally original.

Guite stands in a long succession of parson-poets, with whom the Church of England is particularly well-endowed: his greatest debt,

perhaps, is to Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, particularly the linked sequence 'The Corona', which has inspired several sets of themed sonnets such as the Advent and Holy Week sequences in *Sounding the Seasons*. In this book he has focussed them on the Lord's Prayer and the great I AM sayings in the fourth gospel.

Guite's work reinforces two convictions of mine: the first, that tradition is not the dead hand of the past, but a living thing, capable of constant refreshment and renewal; the second, that poetry is often a better medium than prose for theological discourse. I know, for instance, no better expression of the meaning of the Eucharist than George Herbert's couplet from 'The Agony', for which Guite himself has expressed admiration:

> Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
> Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.

MICHAEL PATERNOSTER

The Living Flame of Love, St John of the Cross, trans. David Lewis, introduction by Baroness Caroline Cox, SPCK, 2017, £9.99.
ISBN 9780281077113.

This attractive small paperback edition will be ideal for those who wish to keep St John of the Cross's *Living Flame of Love* close at hand. The translation by David Lewis is clear, readable and dignified, and Baroness Caroline Cox provides a brief introduction describing some of the imagery used in the poem. Baroness Cox's own appreciation of the saint and his work comes across in the introduction and provides guideposts for our own reading of the saint.

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

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

Convent of the Incarnation
Fairacres Parker Street
Oxford OX4 1TB

email: charityoffice@slg.org.uk

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An Anglican Contemplative Community

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