

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE



FIFTY YEARS OF SLG PRESS
1967 – 2017

Vol. 50 No. 2

£ 2.50

Cover Picture © Sister Catherine SLG

CONTENTS

COMMUNITY NOTES	1
<i>Sister Clare-Louise SLG</i>	
NO CHEAP COMFORT	5
<i>Andrew Teal</i>	
IN MEMORIAM	8
<i>Richard Holdron Buck (1937–2017)</i>	
ASSOCIATES	9
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO GILBERT SHAW STUDY DAY	10
<i>Sister Clare-Louise SLG</i>	
FATHER GILBERT’S TEACHING	12
<i>Father Peter CSWG</i>	
HOLINESS	15
<i>Father Colin CSWG</i>	
FATHER GILBERT & THE ORTHODOX TRADITION	21
<i>Mother Helena</i>	
NAZARETH IN NORTHERN IRELAND	39
<i>Sister Judith SLG</i>	
CHRISTMAS IN PROVENCE	46
<i>Gila Margolin</i>	
BOOKS	52
<i>Bonnie Thurston David Barton Sister Christine SLG</i>	
ASSOCIATES RETREATS 2018	58

COMMUNITY NOTES

Dear Friends,

This past year has seen the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Father Gilbert Shaw on 16 August 1967. He was Warden of the Community from the early 1960's until his death, working closely with Mother Mary Clare at an important and formative time for the Sisters. Father Gilbert was also deeply involved with the life of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down. To celebrate the anniversary, three members of CSWG joined us on the 15 September for a study day on Father Gilbert and his teaching. Material drawn from that day is printed in this *Chronicle*. It was especially good to be able to share the thinking of members of both Communities and to spend time together.



As I remarked, Father Gilbert and Mother Mary Clare were both very important to the developing life of the Sisters of the Love of God. At this Kingdom season it is good to think back to some of the saints, recognised or not, who have been important to us. In the New Testament, all the believers were referred to as saints, *hagios*. Ephesians 1:1 puts it clearly: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints, *hagios*, who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.'

Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible* defines *hagios* as implying something 'set apart' and therefore 'different' or 'other' because 'special to the Lord'. That is an interesting concept for us all to ponder. We are 'set apart' to be 'special to the Lord'! That should give us cause for rejoicing, and for the faithful living out of our vocations. This is not just for the canonised saints or the spiritual experts, it is us too.

Oxford has recently gained a massive new shopping complex, the Westgate Centre. I must admit to having very mixed feelings about it. First, because the ruins of the medieval Oxford Greyfriars Friary were

destroyed during the development; but secondly because it does seem a shrine to consumerism, especially when I meet the many homeless people sleeping rough on the streets of the city centre. And I wonder how such a shrine fits in with the call to be set apart, special to God. Father Gilbert had a very strong social conscience and worked tirelessly in Poplar, East London, for the wellbeing of the unemployed and those living in substandard or slum accommodation. He helped to organise rent strikes to bring about improved housing conditions. He was able to see that all people are made in the likeness of God, called to be saints, *hagios*, and to act with due respect for their welfare. He was also deeply committed to the life of contemplative prayer, and saw the necessity for turning to God in penitence and petition for the needs of the world. As it says above the intercession Board here at the Convent,

In stillness nailed, to hold or time, all change, all circumstance
in and to Love's embrace.

This is the task with which we are gifted by the Lord; to be among those who hold the needs of the world to Love's embrace for healing and renewing.

The final one of Father Gilbert's Mass intentions, which formed the basis of our study day, is 'to stand and go on standing in our Lord's overcoming and in his reversal of evil'. He was well aware of the need for God in our world, and the reality that only by the Cross and Resurrection would real healing and wholeness come. He taught that the task of those who pray was to be united with the intentions and activities of Our Lord. As Jesus teaches—and warns—in the Gospels, 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot' (Matt. 5:13–14).

Shortly after the study day, the Sisters talked together about Father Gilbert; it was clear that his writings spoke to some and not to others. His talks were full of humour, which, sadly, was edited out when they were transcribed, and what is left can be quite dry and

difficult. But for those who do not find his teaching congenial, there are many others who have been important to us, both as individuals and as a Community to whom they can relate, among them Father Hollings SSJE, Father Cary SSJE, and Canon Donald Allchin.

Chapel always feels rather full on All Saints day, especially when we sing the Vespers antiphon that names the different types of saints and martyrs! Those who have gone before us encourage us by their teaching, example and fellowship. Inspired by them, we take our place among those set apart to be ‘special to the Lord’, giving our hearts to prayer and service in the place where the Lord has placed us.

Recently we have been privileged to have Bonnie Thurston staying with us for a couple of months. During that time she was able to give us some fascinating and thought-provoking talks on Thomas Merton and Prayer. She is a gifted speaker and New Testament scholar, as well as a founding member and past president of the International Thomas Merton Society. Thomas Merton was one of many people whom Father Donald (a former Warden of SLG, and definitely a *hagios* in his own right) met and with whom Merton corresponded. It is a reminder that the Community has been, and is, richly blessed in the teachings it has received and the contacts made.

Another former Warden died in the past year. Canon Richard Buck had the daunting task of following in the footsteps of Father Donald, which he did wisely and well. I remember, especially, his sagacity and sense of humour. His later years were marked by poor health, and we were sad to receive the news of his death. A memorial to him appears in this *Chronicle*.

There are some other items of Community news to pass on. Sister Edmée has had responsibility for links with our Priest Associates for a number of years now, and I am aware that she has been highly valued as a wise and prayerful friend. Sadly, she is now suffering the frailties of old age, and is no longer able to fulfil that role. The Community is very grateful for the generous way she has carried out this responsibility over the years, and I know she will be missed by those of you

who have been in touch with her regularly. Be assured however, that her prayers will continue.

Sister Susan will be taking over links with the Priest Associates when she returns from a sabbatical in May 2018, and will be in contact with them to introduce herself. In the meantime, please would Priest Associates continue to make bookings to visit through the Guest Sister, and for other matters to contact me?

Sister Judith has spent the past two years living with the Little Sisters of Jesus at Bishops court in Northern Ireland, where the Sisters live out the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld in a house on an estate located on a converted RAF base. She returns to Fairacres in time for Advent, and an article about her time with the Little Sisters is included in this edition of the *Chronicle*.

Other news of Associates is that Helen Bush, who has been a Companion for a number of years, was admitted as a Postulant Oblate on Saturday, 5 August, the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration.

The *hagios*, the saints, are all of us, as I said before, and as the First Letter to the Corinthians reminds us; we are all ‘... called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours’ (1:2).

In our lives as Sisters, Associates and friends of the Community we share a mutual calling to recognise and live out the fact that we are ‘special to the Lord’. Let us rejoice and take heart in that calling!

I am writing these notes shortly before the Community begins its pre-Advent retreat; how quickly time passes! However, amongst all the change and uncertainty of our world, one thing stands firm: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’ (Heb. 13:8).

On behalf of all the Sisters I wish you a peaceful Christmas and New Year.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG
Reverend Mother

NO CHEAP COMFORT

Homily for the Fourth Sunday before Advent 2017

ANDREW TEAL

AS WE APPROACH the end of another year of the Church's lectionary, our readings naturally begin to shift our focus. Christmas advertisements have started. The economic money-go-around is ever desperate to exploit our desires. But the teaching of Jesus in today's gospel (Matt. 24:1–14) points to a rather different something around the corner from sugary treats and a winter wonderland.

Jesus' disciples are often longing for the security of an answer, of a fail-safe plan, of authoritative explanations and teaching. And the Lord does teach them with power, but not in the way they always want. Our quest for certainty is indicative of our brittleness, our fear, our lack of trust and prayer in all circumstances. We want, so much of the time, to stand behind the power of the strong leader, or the assertions of the rhetorical, or the certainty of the sharp teachers.

That is understandable. I asked a final year Medic who is in the choir at Pembroke College if he had any preference for the branch of medicine in which he wanted to specialise. 'NOT surgery!' he immediately responded. He explained that, in his experience, surgeons are almost impossible to be with because they have to be right and to be sure that what they are doing is correct. We thought about that for a moment and recognized that if you are confronted with a naked, anaesthetized body in front of you, and you have a scalpel, you have to be one hundred per cent sure of what you're doing. And were I being operated upon, I would be a lot happier and feel more secure with a confident, even arrogant, surgeon than with one always re-assessing and exploring!

Religious communities across the ages have likewise looked for 'authoritative teaching'. In the Nag Hammadi gnostic library there is even a book with that title, a book offering esoteric, secret knowledge, teaching and reassuring people that they are 'special' at the expense of

the ordinary people doomed for material decay. Such quests for sectarian certainty prompt a different *flavour* of authority in emerging orthodox Christianity.

In today's gospel Jesus does not offer cheap comfort. He picks up the familiar features of Jewish apocalyptic and Stoic ideas about the end of matter in a coming conflagration, and presents it as stark historical reality. It is not only the destiny of the Messiah to suffer persecution and to be martyred, but the destruction of the Temple and widespread persecutions are foretold as signs of the End of the Age.

Suspicious scholarship sometimes uses these passages as a sign that they must have been written after AD 70, when Jerusalem was besieged. This may be the case, but I do not think there is any 'must be' about it. Jesus is perfectly able to see the brewing conflict between Israel and Rome and its likely end, even as he also knows he will have to suffer for the people.

So the gospel today moves from teaching in parables, moves from a sense of faith being a trusting rejoicing in the beauty and order of creation which reflects the wonder of God's providence and love, present in the restoration of human health and relationships, to the looming darkness and terror ahead. Rumours of wars, instability and natural disasters and apocalyptic human conflict will infect us all with fear. From desperation we will be led astray and possibly be fooled into falsehood and violence. Between confident stability in God's love, and the radical dislocation of everything as civilization and identity threatens to collapse, he says, *quietly* and without arrogance, but perfectly seriously and gently, 'see that you are not alarmed ... *endure* to the end and you shall be saved, and the good news will be proclaimed' (Matt. 14:13-14).

So how are we to be stable in this transitory world, to embody confident hospitality and openness even as we see change and decay around us and within? How can we face the erosion of all things, even our self-confidence and the norms we took as permanent in religious and social life?

The Cambridge Historian, Herbert Butterfield, (1900–1979) concluded his lectures on Christianity and History with the phrase: ‘Cling to Christ. Hold to Him, and, for the rest, be totally uncommitted.’ Perhaps clinging to Christ is the only way to answer the question that Mark’s Gospel places before us on every page: ‘Who is this?’ Who is this who forgives sins? Who is this who speaks and teaches with authority? Who is that that even the winds and sea obey him? And Jesus keeps the answer hidden. He forbids the devils to reveal it. Only at the end, as he hangs dead, on the Cross, does an outsider, a Roman centurion, give the answer openly: ‘Truly this man is the Son of God’ (Mark 15:39). Then ‘the good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world’ (Matt. 14:14).

This is God: this is Man. Clinging to Christ alone all circumstances gives us stability, though all things fail. We are at all times and in all places—in conversation, silence, worship, working together, and in the stillness of our cell—to be rooted in the courage to pray to the God who is Man, through the Man who is God. That is our destiny personally and what we can contribute most significantly to the world’s good. We are like those whom the author, poet and politician, Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), described as

Those who invented neither gunpowder nor compass
Those who tamed neither steam nor electricity
Those who explored neither sea nor sky
But those who know the humblest corners of the country of
suffering ... *(Return to My Native Land)*

In toil and torment and amid human suffering of every sort, the calling of the Church, and of each of us, is the courage to pray and partake of the pain of creation, knowing we cannot change the ‘damned facts’ or make everything better, but, if we dare, to accept the intimate heartbreak that will come. Prayer does not restrain or constrain the language or experience of suffering. Rather it extends it immeasurably, ineffably, even to the aching heart of Christ.

Hold to him, take all things to him.
Bear whatever he shares with you.
Love him and love in his stead.
Cling to him:
 And for the rest—be totally uncommitted.

*Canon Andrew Teal is Fellow and Chaplain of Pembroke College,
and Warden of the Sisters of the Love of God.*

IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD HOLDRON BUCK

(1937–2017)

WE FIRST got to know Canon Richard Buck around 1991. He had already spent some years living in an experimental urban monastic community jointly founded by Worth Abbey and the Diocese of Southwark, based at St Peter's East Dulwich, where he was priest-in-charge. When he moved on to other work, he had a fund of knowledge about community living which stood him in good stead when he became Warden of SLG in 1995. At that time we were in the midst of discerning with Sister Barbara June whether she should go forward for ordination. In due course we agreed to this, and at Michaelmas 1997 she was ordained to the priesthood in the chapel at Fairacres. As I left chapel quite soon after the clergy procession, I was deeply moved to see Richard kneel before her for the traditional first blessing from a new priest.

Before becoming Warden, he had been confessor and spiritual director to several Sisters, who found him a wise counsellor. In addition, he shared his own interests with us, especially his love of reading and of music, especially opera. We were grateful recipients of much current fiction which would not have otherwise come our way. I once did some research into the Man Booker shortlists for the 1980s

and 90s, and discovered that most of these books were on the lists. He must have been a voracious reader.

When Richard first came to Britain from Australia, it was with the intention of testing his vocation to the religious life. Instead, he trained for the priesthood at King's College, London. Many benefited from his wisdom and humour, for he had a capacity to make friends and host parties wherever he went. He served in several noted High Church parishes in London during his years of active ministry. For nearly a decade he was vicar of St Mary's, Primrose Hill; during those years he encouraged three young men to pursue the foundation of a new Benedictine community. After forming a 'double' community with the Benedictine sisters at Burford Priory, they were professed and others came to join them. Eventually the now-thriving community moved to a new monastery at Mucknell in Worcestershire.

Although he himself never actually joined a community, he retained a deep concern for the welfare of those who become monks and nuns, and helped many of us to live out our vocations to the full. We are blessed to have known him. May he rest in peace.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

ASSOCIATES

NEW FLG

Sandra Verney	28 August 2017
The Revd Nigel Rooms	21 November 2017
Clare Gardom	3 October 2017

R.I.P

FLG

Aileen Taylor	
The Revd Barbara J. Smith	19 July 2017
Joyce Hugget	19 August 2017
The Revd John Pragnell	21 August 2017
Mary Veazey	2 October 2017

THE GILBERT SHAW STUDY DAY

The next four articles are contributions made to the Study Day on 15 September. We had as a background theme to the talks Father Gilbert's Mass Intentions, which were written on a card placed on the altar whenever he was celebrant. These are:

- ❖ To be in our Lord's drawing of all things to the Divine Unity.
- ❖ To pray for and teach the recovery of the Great Tradition of Prayer, and especially to support and instruct contemplatives in the world and the Religious life.
- ❖ To pray for the increase of vocations to the priesthood and the Religious Life, especially for CSWG and also for SLG.
- ❖ To pray and suffer for holiness for all people everywhere but especially for the priesthood.
- ❖ To stand and go on standing in our Lord's overcoming and in his reversal of evil.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

SISTER CLARE–LOUISE SLG

RECENTLY we have been reading an article in refectory by Father Matt Blake OCD on St Teresa as a founder, and he points out that a founder is not necessarily the person who begins a Community (the Carmelite Order existed well before Teresa's time), but it can also be the person who incarnates, expresses or teaches the charism and vocation of a Community. We know that Father Gilbert Shaw was a foundational influence on both our Communities. The Community of the Servants of the Will of God and the Sisters of the Love of God existed before Father Gilbert came on the scene; but in both our cases he was able to help interpret and put into practice the teaching we were already receiving. And he drew more widely from what he called the

Great Tradition, that golden line or lineage of teaching passed on down the ages through the Church Fathers, St Teresa and St John of the Cross, the *Philokalia* and so many other sources. His many years of experience as a person of prayer, priest and spiritual director allowed him to guide others in the ways of prayer.

I suspect Father Gilbert's teaching was not the easiest to follow. I wonder whether he was trying to pass on as quickly as possible, to the two Communities which meant so much to him, and where he had found a lively reception of his wisdom, everything he had learnt and experienced. The result is that we are left with a treasure trove of sermons and addresses, retreats and books, to say nothing of letters and notes kept by individuals, as well as their anecdotes and memories.

It is important that those who succeed a founder or a teacher of the spiritual path should follow, interiorise, and pass on the founder's teaching. The way we do that is through living it out, allowing it to flow through us. Having sat at Father Gilbert's feet, Father Gregory CSWG was able to do this *par excellence*. Most of us are now at one remove from his experience, but we have various sources to aid us, and the lived tradition of our Communities, our Brothers and our Sisters. That is one of the aims of today—to reflect together on Father Gilbert's teaching. What is his legacy for us? How do we take that forward? How do we interpret and live it in this century?

In his homily for the Feast of the Holy Cross, Father Andrew Teal made two particular points which spoke to me about today. First, we find the gifts of grace because they are already there to be found, just as Helena was able to find the True Cross because it was already there. The gifts are there; we need to dig deeply in the teachings we have received in order to unearth them. Secondly, the gifts of grace are there for sharing. Again that is true of Father Gilbert's teaching—it is there for sharing. Father Andrew reminded us that there is a slightly cynical statement which says that enough fragments of the true Cross have been found to build the ark! The thought came to my

mind that the five loaves and two fish were broken into enough fragments to feed the five thousand and fill twelve baskets with scraps. Grace multiplies.

Although the Church seems to be in terminal decline, today's world is full of seekers looking for spiritual depth. We have the gift of a source for them to draw on. It may need translating or reframing. There may be parts of it which we would challenge or with which we would disagree. But we can explore Father Gilbert's teachings as a source of life in the Spirit to renew our Communities and share with those who come to us.

FATHER GILBERT'S TEACHING

FATHER PETER CSWG

MY FIRST VISIT to Fairacres in 1972—arriving in time for the second Vespers of Candlemas—occurred less than five years after Father Gilbert's death in August 1967. That seems very close now from the perspective of forty-five years on. His name was much on the lips of Mother Mary Clare and other Sisters I encountered. Four of them the Lord called to himself within a few months last year: Sister Isabel and Sister Mary Kathleen whom I met at Bede House, Sister Mary Margaret at Burwash and Sister Helen Columba, again, at Bede House.

In talks given to us by his daughter, Pat, and his granddaughter, Caroline, we were given a picture of Father Gilbert within his family circle. He had a wonderful sense of humour which, on the whole, Sister Marjorie edited out of his addresses and homilies when they were transcribed. This is a great loss to those who never knew him, for when you are looking at intense, spiritual writing imbued with the highest aspirations and goals, it is very important to come down to earth from time to time! Humour is the guaranteed, sure-fire way of reminding ourselves that we are all frail and weak. We are ordinary human beings—not gods—struggling to flow with the mainstream of God's energising life and bring our own lives into a harmonious response with His. However, with such vast swathes of verbal

material to be transferred from recordings to paper, we can readily understand that there was no space for jokes and asides.

In truth, my first encounter with Father Gilbert's teaching was accompanied by a certain terror. I felt myself a raw, ignorant youth, totally out of my depth, like being shoved into the fifteen-foot end of the swimming pool with nothing more than a doggie-paddle to keep me afloat. However, I have come to regard this as a salutary experience, not a negative one. When we are being granted powerful spiritual knowledge or vision, it is a way of being reminded of our frailty, our vulnerability, our weakness, our utter dependence upon God. His writings contain much spiritual light, for there are manifold unknown and uncertain places you would rather not go, all uncomfortable, when you are new to prayer. However, they lead you on to discover that there is not only a silver lining to the dark clouds, but many silver linings.

More than anyone, Father Gilbert helped me to understand that unity is not primarily about ecclesial organisation and relationships, but about our own human unity. It is about my becoming unified as a person through relationship; it is a participation in the mutual interaction of the Persons of the Trinity. As monks and nuns we have a significant role to play in this. He reminded us that our salvation is first of all a *corporate* one; we are saved *with others*. Individual salvation comes from within that corporate salvation. That truth becomes something visibly demonstrated through communities of people who have consecrated their lives to God for the sake of the Church.

In his retreat, *Consecration*, Father Gilbert states, 'We can always start again.' As well as typifying his own humility, it is comforting to all of us called to the monastic life and subjected daily to the wiles of those who subtly oppose us, who are always ready to accuse us, to point out our failings, to tell us we will never be any different, and so on. This teaching comes at least twice in his writings, but it is the answer to all those subtle accusations against us which we experience. God is so much bigger than our hearts, than our conscience, than all our present circumstances or our own condition 'for God is greater

than our hearts and he knows everything.’ (1 John 3:20). God is always more than our limited, and limiting, present understanding of them.

The Church is constantly in need of spiritual vision, of the grace of contemplation, of the prophetic voice coming from God; for ‘without vision the people perish’ (Prov. 29:18). The vision of life in the Holy Trinity bestows upon us this prophetic view of the world and all that is happening in it. This perspective enables the Light of Christ to shine constantly into the dark places, and shows up our defects and all that needs to change in us. God will not allow us to settle down, or be content with less than we can give. We are, one and all, on ‘such a long journey’ as Father Gilbert once said. We all need the Divine Light to illuminate the darkness. Like the zoom function on a computer, it magnifies areas that need our focus and attention. His writings emphasise this truth, repeating it almost like a psalm refrain.

We may ponder on how different the world of 2017 is from that of 1967, especially with the revolution in information technology in the past twenty or thirty years, which has made us much more aware of the apocalyptic struggles, violence and terror that so many know day by day. Gilbert’s teaching relates us to this world in a prophetic way in order to pray effectively for it. We can offer it hope at its weakest, most vulnerable points.

In his spiritual, theological vision of salvation, Father Gilbert holds before us a wholly positive and hope-filled end, where the resolution of conflict and division can come to fruition through the Church’s ministry of reconciliation. Here her true, authentic purpose and calling is discovered—to be a reconciler and healer, and to cease from being an oppressor. With his clarity and forthright annunciation, Father Gilbert shows this not as some pious hope, a vague sense of euphoric good-will and optimistic expectation that all will be okay, but as a substantial effecting of what is to be: ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the reality of things unseen (Heb. 11:2). It is the making-present of the future; it is transfiguration.

This positive teaching, expressed through a life of contemplative prayer, through sacrifice and service, is a recurring theme. We are given an understanding of God as self-giving love, an understanding that manifests the goodness of God in the midst of the often partial and limited notions we can hold. Gilbert's writing is intense and frequently needs to be summarized to be comprehensible. As well, it needs to be profoundly meditated upon and contemplated, so that it can become the truth of our own life and being.

His last testament to us is that life is not simply about 'penitent dependence', one of his favourite phrases, but is something to be recreated, transformed and transfigured. The radiance of his body after death, the transfiguration which several Sisters remembered and commented on, was a visible message of his convictions. It was and is a sign that gives final purpose and meaning to life, and remains a possibility for each one of us.

Father Peter CSWG is Prior of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down, West Sussex.

HOLINESS

FATHER COLIN CSWG

To pray and suffer for holiness for all people everywhere, but especially the priesthood

OUR Community Rule, written by Father Gregory CSWG, and much inspired by Father Gilbert as well as by other monastic rules, has as its central chapter 'The Common Life'. It begins:

The unity of the common life depends, first of all, upon all the members being united in a common purpose—that purpose for which God has called the Community into being.

It then goes on to explain what this common purpose is, using two verses from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians about holiness and unity.

This is the very same purpose for which ‘God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’ (Eph. 1:4)—‘the purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.’ (Eph. 1:10)

Holiness and unity: these two basic aspirations are clearly connected. Holiness can only be realised when each person is seeking to become whole, united, and complete and seeks that wholeness for others, expressing that desire in love. Unity, either personal or corporate, cannot come about without the work of holiness which requires obedience, repentance and prayer. In relation to Father Gilbert’s mass intention, I would like to focus on holiness.

To be holy means to be set apart for the purposes of God. It means to be dedicated, consecrated, a word used by Father Gilbert for one of his most significant retreats, *Consecration*. For an object or a place to be holy it needs to be prayed over and blessed, and then used for its dedicated or consecrated purpose. For a person to be holy, it requires the co-operation of the person with God, the source of holiness. This work of co-operation involves, on our part, the giving over of the whole self in order for it to be refashioned in accordance with the will of God. The active part of this is to keep going, with joy, in the right direction, following the commandments of Christ in order to align our will with the will of God. The passive part involves waiting, in patience, whilst God does his work within us. These two themes are frequently used in the teaching of Father Gilbert. One of each will suffice to make the point.

The first is from a homily preached at the profession of Sister Rachel Mary SLG on 7 February 1965.

Prayer holds the restless heart of man until he can know and find himself in God, and it is this function of holding all to God in prayer which is the primary work of the Enclosed Community. The Enclosed Religious come to be stripped of

all selfishness, all self-love, all self-expression, so that, completely empty in order to be filled with God, they may with his love, love one another, each seeing God in the other, and realise something of the Love of God for the world.

The transfiguration into the likeness of Christ is a work of love and a work that takes time—a growth from the simple faith of the child to the fullness of adoption of sonship in the Suffering Christ, so glorifying the Father and being glorified in that which is received. In [the writings of] St John of the Cross there is a parable illustrating this growth. Our human life, particularly that of the Religious, is like a rough log brought in from the forest with cracked and rugged bark. As soon as it is put on the fire, little creatures—all the crawly-crawlies—come bustling out. These are things which quite obviously ought not to be there. Then gradually the fire takes hold of the timber and out comes the adder and smoke and the general mess—what we might call ‘the me-ness of me’, the pride that puts self in the first place. Then there is flame and light, but that is not the end. The end is when the log is completely fire, the fire in the log, the log in the fire, there is no distinction. That is holiness, that is the end for which man was created.

Man is, however, mostly full of ‘crawly-crawlies’ or is noisome smoke. We must not be afraid of the crawlies nor terrified of the smoke, but hold all in both hands to God that he may heal, holding it to God as we praise him day and night in the ordered life. It is in the ordered life that Religious support each other to endure what otherwise they could not bear, in that ordered life that foreshadows heaven as it comes down to earth.

That is the livingness of holiness—to hold all that is deformed, all that would be antagonistic, to the Unity of God that he in his mercy, through our participation in Christ’s

Victory may heal that which we hold. That is the great vocation he has given to his Church, a vocation which the Religious as a function in the Body must make perfect, both for the Church and for the world.

I think it would be right to say that for most of us we are not too good at staying in the fire. Much of our work of co-operation is to keep putting ourselves back in, through obedience to the gospel. Our work in dealing with the stuff that comes out is to repent of it, to be sorry for our part in it, and to let go. In this way we support each other. In this active aspect, as we shed the things that should not be there, we also seek to put into practice distinct ways of behaviour in relation to others: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another in love, forgiveness, harmony and thankfulness. Here, of course, is the struggle: keeping our attention on the things of heaven and repenting of our failure when we give in to earthly temptations. It's life.

Father Gilbert was fond of the horizontal and vertical illustration, wherein we keep our attention on the life that comes to us from God and reflect that in all the relationships on the horizontal. This goes for each individual, as well as the Community as a whole. The vertical and the horizontal meet at the place in which each one is required to stand. It is not always an easy place to be. It is not easy because we feel the pressures of the world telling us to give up or to give in to pleasing ourselves. We struggle with our own internal conflict, with all our failings constantly coming to the surface; but our place is to trust and leave the fruit-bearing to the Holy Spirit. The steadiness of prayer and of offering is what is required, and God will do with it as he sees fit.

The passive part of this pursuit of holiness is waiting on God, a phrase frequently used by Father Gilbert and taken up by Father Gregory. I suppose the problem for us is that we do not regard waiting itself as important. We find it frustrating and a waste of time. The waiting we are considering here is a disposition, an attitude that expects

something to happen and to come from God. Waiting must be practiced in trust and expectation, otherwise it just becomes hanging around. A good example of Father Gilbert on this subject is found in a homily for the Sunday after Ascension in 1966:

There must always be the waiting for God to act. The soul stripped of self in the humility of the discipline of waiting, open to God, becomes a channel of healing, willingly accepting the suffering of the strain of the diversity both in itself and the world outside which seeks to drag it into the restless activity of some immediate satisfaction. We learn the humility of self-loss, which is the heart and secret of the contemplative way, as we wait for all the unconscious tensions in ourselves to come up so that we may offer them in penitence to God, waiting also in complete dependence on him when the pressures from the world outside close in upon us.

Here Father Gilbert sees waiting as a channel for healing, so that all the resistances to God's way, often suppressed by activity, can come to the conscious mind for repentance. Waiting is an opportunity for self-loss which helps to keep us humble and located in the present, so that God may act in and through us, removing the distortions and the resistance and making us channels of his grace. Waiting is not just hanging around. It is a time of reception and opens us up. Two further quotations from that homily illustrate this further:

In this we see the distinction between the active and the passive. In the first there is the deepening of our rational life—we are pondering the reasons for seeking and for finding. In the second is the strengthening of our will by endurance, waiting until God opens to our intelligence. Both ways are of love, for the obedience of the will is love's answer to love. The emotions are deceitful for they are always turned back on self; they satisfy the temporal moment. Every passion is a movement of self-will and their expression is a release from

the tension of the conflict. Passion always seeks completion even in trivialities.

Let us never forget, when we give ourselves to our Lord, it is not that we should be taken out of the world, but that we should be in the world, delivered from evil, that we may more perfectly interpret God to the world. We are his witnesses, his captives, and our love for the world, our distress for it, is increased, and we hunger that it should be drawn into the unity. God loves the world and we must express the divine love to it, standing, as it were, outside the world that we may see it in its true perspective. In these dark days we stand with our Lord in his overcoming of death on the cross, the death which by his resurrection he annulled, and we are with him in his ascension by which he declared the glory of that resurrection. In the words of Saint Silouan of Mount Athos, ‘My heart looks up to God and is warmed; I look on the world and I weep.’ It is a conflict, a conflict of love, a conflict of endurance—that love may be made perfect.

In pondering this intention—to pray and suffer for holiness for all people—I have deliberately focused on our own holiness, for in suffering the change in us that this produces, we become a channel of healing and compassion. In seeking our own holiness, we discern the fruits of it and express in prayer our desire for all to receive that same gift. We, too, echo the words of St Silouan, ‘My heart looks up to God and is warmed, I look on the world and I weep.’

Father Gilbert’s Mass intention for holiness adds, ‘and especially for the priesthood.’ If life for the clergy was challenging in the mid-1960s, it is more so now. There is a lot of anxiety about and it tends to land on the parochial clergy. It comes in one way from the parishes and congregations, who wonder how they can keep going, and wanting the clergy to produce more people and financial viability; and from another direction from the bishops and the national church, with

initiatives and strategies to which the clergy try to respond. They are caught in the middle.

What gets squeezed out is personal life—family, friends, rest, leisure, fun, doing nothing in particular—and spiritual and devotional life, prayer in all its aspects. As personal life gets less and less, with the continual temptation to Make Things Happen, so the priest finishes up running on empty. Without the pursuit of holiness, the capacity for discernment becomes atrophied, so that when presiding at worship the priest ceases to be a channel of healing for the flow and reflow of the love of God.

In praying for holiness for the priesthood, it is the priest's prayer that must be secured and practiced. If the local church is to discern what it must do, it is the priest's discernment which can help to bring this about. This discernment has its anchor and its source in patient prayer in the presence of God.

Father Colin CSWG is Father Superior of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down, West Sussex

FATHER GILBERT & THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

MOTHER HELENA

ONE phrase which immediately comes to mind, and which underlies all the teaching which Father Gilbert gave to the Sisters of the Love of God between 1962 and 1967, is 'the Church's One Great Tradition' as it applies to both the East and the West. By this he meant the practice of Christian life as we have received it from the Old and New Testaments, pre-eminently in the Gospels. He focused especially on the words in Christ's High priestly prayer, 'This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3), and the statement in John 7:16–17, 'My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone wills to do his will, he shall know concerning the doctrine' (KJV). Bearing in mind the definition

of a theologian as one who prays and knows God, from the days of the early Church a body of teaching concerning Christian faith and life has been distilled and purified by great minds and holy lives. The Seven Ecumenical Councils have clarified the essential dogmatic tenets of the faith.

There have been byways, cul-de-sacs and dead ends within the development of Christian doctrine, but through the One Great Tradition we discern how, through Christ, the whole of humanity has been refashioned. In response to Baptism and in co-operation with the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of the Church, we become heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God and partakers of eternal life here and now in some measure, and fully in the resurrection life to come. We are all ‘on the way’ and this does not deny that the church is made up of sinners; but, as we struggle, we look to the Mother of God and the Saints as our guides and examples who support us with their prayer.

Those years shortly before and during the time Father Gilbert guided the community were greatly enriched by the publication in English of a number of texts from the Eastern Orthodox tradition which opened it up in a new way to Christians of the Western traditions: Roman Catholics, Anglicans and other churches of the Reformation. In 1957 Vladimir Lossky’s magisterial work, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, was published. The translation was done by a small group within the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, an Anglican-Orthodox fellowship in which Father Gilbert had taken a leading part from the time of its inception. One paragraph might be singled out which enjoins us to embrace in one action the teaching of the Orthodox Church and the experience of God. It illustrates the heart of what Father Gilbert understood by the Church’s one Great Tradition:

Personal experience and the common experience of the Church are identical by virtue of the catholicity of Christian tradition. Now tradition is not merely the aggregate of dogmas, of sacred

institutions, and of rites which the Church preserves. It is, above all, that which expresses in its outward determinations a living tradition, the unceasing revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Church; a life in which each one of her members can share according to his capacity. To be in the tradition is to share the experience of the mysteries revealed to the Church. Doctrinal tradition—beacons set up by the Church along the channel of the knowledge of God—cannot be separated from or opposed to mystical tradition: acquired experience of the mysteries of the faith. Dogma cannot be understood apart from experience; the fullness of experience cannot be had apart from true doctrine. (p. 236)

A little earlier a first selection of texts from *The Philokalia on the Prayer of the Heart* was translated into English by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer. The Foreword explains that these texts devoted to the Prayer of the Heart represent the essential lines of an ancient tradition of training in what the Fathers called ‘the art of arts and the science of sciences’. It points out that some historical misunderstandings and attacks had led to ‘distortions that have gained currency in the West’ and

have created a false picture of the meaning of the practice of the Prayer of Jesus. ... It has not, in consequence, been realised in the West that this practice dates from the start of the Christian era and has been kept unchanged through the centuries in the East. (p. 6)

A few extracts from the words of Abba Philemon illustrate the need for sobriety, absence of greed and ambition, the centrality of the Psalter and the necessity of the Jesus Prayer.

Silence gives birth to endeavour, endeavour gives birth to mourning, mourning to fear, fear to humility, humility to opening of the eyes, opening of the eyes to love; and love makes the soul sound and passionless, and then a man realizes that he is not far from God. ...

Follow diligently upon the footsteps of the Saints. Abandon all care of your appearance; wear poor garments and humble attire. Keep your disposition simple, your speech without guile, your walk without arrogance, your voice sincere. Love to live in scarcity and to be disregarded by all. Above all, strive to guard your mind and to practise sobriety, be patient in strait circumstances and try at all costs to preserve unharmed and unchanged the spiritual blessings you have already acquired. (p. 403)

A brother asked, ‘Why is it that of all Divine Scriptures you take the greatest joy in the Psalter, and why, when reciting the psalms ... do you seem to be talking with someone?’ The Abba replied: ‘God has engraved the force of the psalms in my soul ... for they embrace everything in the Divine Scriptures.’(p. 408)

Another asked: ‘What should I do, Father, to be saved? For my mind wanders hither and thither, where it should not be?’ ... And he replied: ‘Go, practise sobriety in your heart and in your thought repeat soberly, with fear and trembling: “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me!”’ (pp. 403–406)

The source for the above English translation was the Russian translation from the Greek of the *Philokalia* made by Saint Theophan the Recluse (1815–94). Saint Theophan, after seven years serving as a bishop, retired in 1866 to a provincial monastery where he lived in complete solitude, celebrating the Liturgy every day, ‘all alone, in silence, concelebrating with the angels’. He spent his time in prayer and in literary work. The well-stocked library which he took with him into solitude included works of contemporary western philosophy, though it consisted mainly of writings from the Fathers, including the complete *Patrology* of Migne. An anthology, translated by Elizabeth Palmer, entitled *The Art of Prayer*, is comprised, for the greatest part, of the writings of Saint Theophan the Recluse. These are two brief but key examples of his teaching:

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life. (p. 63)

When inner prayer gains power, then it will control oral prayer, gaining dominion over external prayer and even absorbing it. As a result, the zeal of prayer will take fire, because then Paradise will be in the soul. If you content yourself with exterior prayer alone, you may cool in the work of prayer, even if you practise it with attention and understanding. The principal thing in prayer is a feeling heart. (p. 67)

When one remembers the way in which Father Gilbert celebrated the Eucharist, with long silences and clearly deep in prayer, he possibly had a great affinity with Saint Theophan. Perhaps this can be seen most accessibly now in the series of addresses, *The Increase of Prayer*, in which he takes the Letters to the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation and relates them to the seven mansions of St Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and to the writings of St John of the Cross. But in very large measure he also relates them to the teaching of Saint Theophan the Recluse, with quotations taken from *The Art of Prayer*.

The book which perhaps affected Father Gilbert most deeply, as a living encounter with the Saint, was *The Undistorted Image*, containing some of the writings of Saint Silouan of Mount Athos (1866–1938), compiled by his disciple the Archimandrite Sophrony, who founded the monastic community of St John the Baptist in Essex in 1959. The book was translated from the Russian into English by Rosemary Edmonds. A revised edition, with much additional information, entitled *St Silouan the Athonite*, was published in 1991. Saint Silouan speaks to us with such lucidity and straightforwardness that one's heart is challenged by what one reads on any page of the book. It is almost as if he is in the room speaking directly to us.

The Father so loved us that he gave us his Son; but such was the will of the Son too, and he became incarnate and lived

with us on earth. And the holy Apostles and a multitude of people beheld the Lord in the flesh, but not all knew him as the Lord; yet it has been given to me, a poor sinner, through the Holy Spirit to know that Jesus Christ is God.

... The Lord is made known by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit pervades the *entire* man—*soul, mind and body*. After this wise is God known in heaven and on earth.

... I write out of the grace of God. ...The Lord himself is my Witness. (p. 353)

Filled with love the holy Apostles went into all the world, preaching salvation to mankind and fearing nothing, for the Spirit of God was their strength. When Saint Andrew was threatened with death upon the cross if he did not stay his preaching he answered: ‘If I feared the cross I should not be preaching the Cross.’ (p. 355)

The Lord is love; and He commanded us to love our enemies; and the Holy Spirit instructs us in this love. ... The man who cries out against evil men, who does not pray for them, will never know the grace of God. (p. 356–7)

Father Gilbert deeply empathized with these words from *Saint Silouan the Athonite* and experienced them within himself:

Blessed is the soul that loves her brother: the Spirit of the Lord lives manifest within her, affording peace and gladness, and she weeps for the whole world.

My soul remembered the Lord’s love, and my heart grew warm. ... My soul surrendered to profound and sorrowful weeping, that the Lord might have mercy on every soul and take each one into His Heavenly Kingdom.

And my soul weeps for the whole world. (p. 371)

When Archimandrite Sophrony visited Fairacres in November 1964 and was asked about this spiritual experience, he spoke of

weeping because we see in the light of the Holy Spirit the deformation of God's image in God's work, which is the beginning and ground of our compassion for the whole world. It is the direct result of the Holy Spirit's action and the ground of our compunction. (Unpublished paper)

He reminded us of what Saint John Climacus, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, calls 'the blessed and joyful sorrow of holy compunction' and his saying that, 'If God in His love for the human race had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find' (Step 7). Saint Silouan's prayer for the world epitomises this teaching in words that are shown on his icon: 'I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the earth, that they may come to know Thee by Thy Holy Spirit.'

In Lent 1962 Father Gilbert invited an old friend of his, Father Derwas Chitty, author of the book *The Desert a City*, to come and talk to us about his own first-hand experience of Eastern Monasticism and the tradition of the Desert Fathers as it is still lived today in Egypt and Palestine. He said that as a young man he had been completely overwhelmed and a little scandalized by the frequent, fast, repetition of *Kyrie eleison* innumerable times in the services. But then he found that the repetition of just these two words took him to a deep level of prayerful attention. In years to come Father Chitty had a great responsibility for the spiritual care of SLG solitaries who lived in Wales.

In that same Lent Father Gilbert gave several long talks around the theme of 'Recovery'. He presented to the Community the way in which, through our study of Biblical theology and the Fathers of the Church—and how these should form our liturgical practice—we could make explicit in our lives and experience what St Paul meant in Romans 8:14–17 that we are 'heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ' by our cooperation with the Holy Spirit. In the challenges of the time in which we live, he stressed the need to attend to those who 'speak and teach out of knowledge'; if we cannot be in direct contact with a living person, then we need to turn to the writings of those who have

this spiritual quality of first hand personal knowledge of God and real holiness. He pointed to the growing literature of the first importance, and to the increasing number of translations of the devotional treasures of the Orthodox, citing the books I have mentioned above.

Father Gilbert was brought by God to the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God in the final years of his own life; a time of flowering and fruitfulness, when he could impart teaching and himself ‘speak out of knowledge’ to those who were eager to hear, absorb and put his teaching into practice. For him it was a kind of home-coming. When he spoke about the Community’s life it was not to criticize but to help it grow and develop into the fullness of life in Christ. He observed that at that time Anglican writers and teachers had been slow in recognizing the remarkable advance and change of emphasis in Roman Catholic writers—such as Père Garrigou-Lagrange—who made it clear that all Christians are called to union with God and that ‘contemplative prayer’ or ‘prayer of the heart’ is not the gift of a chosen few but an essential part of true Christian life and experience. This understanding accorded well with the riches of the Orthodox tradition which were becoming available. In the revision of the SLG Rule which he oversaw during his time as Warden, he stressed that, as the foundation of their monastic life, the Sisters had the duty to undertake

The study of Scripture to form the basis of their prayer. ...
And in addition the study of the writings of spiritual masters in the Great Tradition, doctrine and books which may help to a more intelligent participation in the Liturgy and Divine Office. (Ch. 17, ‘Lectio Divina & Spiritual Reading’)

He taught that they should read and keep up-to-date with their reading and, importantly, pray what they read into the Church as a whole.

Father Gilbert spoke of the need to study the real meaning of ‘integral Gospel Christianity’; how we actually experience living inside the history of the Church, not just to understand it with our mind, but to know in our heart and soul that we are a living member

of the Body of Christ. He felt it was important for the Anglicans to understand what the Orthodox mean by their insistence on their being able to ‘express a full theology’. He observed that

We have been so accustomed to base on *continuity* our claim for being of the Church, that we have not appreciated fully the necessity of the theological expression of it. ... After the first age of Pusey (1800–1882) and the whole Oxford Movement, and Father Benson SSJE (1824–1915) who looked to Scripture and the Fathers, and from whom we inherit the recovery of the Religious Life, and because of the natural turning to the continent, Anglicanism imported the concept of the *cultus*; that is, the thing done; an emphasis on custom and external ritual, rather than integrity of life and dependency on the Holy Spirit.

He introduced the Sisters to some twentieth-century prophets of the recovery of the Great Tradition, especially Dr Neville Figgis CR with his challenge that ‘Christ calls us not to peaceful days and quiet nights, but to the heights and depths of sacrifice’; and Father William of Glasshampton who, by his faithful perseverance in what turned out to be a largely solitary monastic life, made possible the recovery of the contemplative life for men in the Anglican Church. Father Gilbert said that Father William ‘saw, as did the holy man of Athos, the Staretz Silouan, that the increase of vocations of those called to contemplative prayer in the world was a mark of the time; a salting of the world’s confusion with souls waiting on God.’

He reminded us that the Western monastic tradition is dependent on St Benedict of Nursia and, through him, on St John Cassian whom the Orthodox *Synaxarion* refers to as ‘chosen by God to bring the illumination of Eastern monasticism to the West’. Father Gilbert rejoiced in what he perceived to be a renewed meeting in our own times of the traditions of East and West. He spoke movingly of his own visit to the Orthodox Monastery in Essex and the way in which he was received there by Archimandrite Sophrony. He called it a

crowning moment of his life when he took the Archimandrite, who had been a staretz on Mount Athos, to see Father Robert, the founder of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down, himself a disciple of Father William. He delighted to quote the Archimandrite's comment after their visit to the monastery: 'Here is the spirit of Mount Athos in the depths of Anglican devotion.' But Father Gilbert warned: 'This shows how all the fields of the Spirit come to a unity, but let us remember that though East and West are meeting it is not a question of copying, always a danger for the English, but of getting back to the One Great Tradition.'

In an address given in 1963 on 'Perfection: a study of its meaning in the disciplines of Christian living', Father Gilbert speaks of the need to see that Christianity is a great experience, *an experience of living* rather than a philosophy or, even worse, an idealism. There can be a frequent Western tendency to imagine that God and the spiritual world are 'abstract,' and, as Alexander Schmemmann points out in his book *The World as Sacrament*, we can create an

opposition between religion and life which makes life ultimately unredeemable and religiously meaningless. ... The 'original' sin is not primarily that man has 'disobeyed' God; the sin is that he ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone, ceased to see his whole life depending on the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God. The sin was not that man neglected his religious duties. The sin was that he thought of God in terms of religion; that is, opposing Him to life. (p. 18)

Father Gilbert describes a genuine theology as 'living with God' and how the monastic way of life has been practical in enabling one to live for God and to live for Eternity. He quotes Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh:

There is not a here and a hereafter: there is just life in its plenitude, in its totality, in its integrity, and the fact that we are in the Church means for us that we are already *in patria*.

We are already at home, in the kingdom which is still to come—a grammatical impossibility but a factual tension. Yes, we are in what is to be and in that respect Orthodoxy has both a sense of time and of history, a dimension of Eternity already present, because Eternity is a Divine NOW and not a human later on.

Father Gilbert says:

We see that for the Orthodox there is just oneness of life; there is not ‘a here and a hereafter’. In passing I must mention how remarkable it is that in recent years, through our growing contact with the Orthodox, we have had our roots strengthened. We may learn much from a study of Orthodox tradition and devotion, but as Bishop Anthony says, it must be used as a complement to our tradition and not as something alternative to, or better than, we possess in our own spiritual inheritance; for our roots, like the Orthodox, go back to the fundamental experience of the Early Church and the great Fathers. Through our contacts with the East, however, those roots are strengthened and, as Father Sophrony so delightfully put it, ‘The Holy Spirit does the rest.’

When one reads Father Gilbert’s words, one cannot help but feel that, with the passing of fifty years, they are even more relevant today:

These days are especially dark because man as a whole has left God out of consideration in the application of his intelligence to secure mastery over the world in which we exist. Religion has become more and more relegated to be a private matter, without social or cosmic significance. Material gain and personal advantage are predominant interests that dictate the pattern of life. Therefore this is an age of crisis. The ages of crisis in Church history have always been answered by the oblation of souls of prayer. In reading the many historical studies now appearing, particularly in relation to the recovery of the great tradition, we perceive that what has held, and is

now holding, the natural breaking-apart of the ordered Christian life is a continuing stream of those given to sanctity through self-oblation. If we give ourselves to God with complete abandonment, the flame of His love will burn on the dust of our humanity.

In almost everything Father Gilbert taught he articulates and emphasises the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation with the Spirit. Often, without making a particular point of the fact, he will quote from both Eastern and Western sources in illustration of his teaching. To underline the importance of ‘brooding on the Scriptures’ he uses the Catholic Dom Columba Marmion in *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, who is commenting on a passage in the *Moralia* of St Gregory the Great: ‘When the soul is recollected the Holy Spirit enlightens it little by little and fills it with these *Verba Verbi* which become well-springs of life and principles of action.’ Chapter IV in *A Pilgrim’s Book of Prayers* is, in Father Gilbert’s words, ‘an introduction to the use of the Psalter as a storehouse of material for affective acts,’ those few weighty words which may hold our loving attention to God and which ‘give God time and silence wherein to speak to you and draw you to himself.’ He observes that

The Western church has lost much of the sense of the Holy Spirit as a Person. Just as the Father is Love and the Son is Love, so the Holy Spirit is God’s love regenerating us in Christ. ... Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit each one of us, and all the faithful, are built up in the ordered sacramental life of the Church to the perfecting of obedience and living the saving Dogma. We see how the early Fathers received and lived by that Dogma, for all they wrote was the result of their brooding on the Scriptures.

One of Father Gilbert’s frequent phrases was ‘looking to the End’, by which he meant not only the consummation of all things at the end of time when Christ shall be ‘all in all’ and everything and all people shall be gathered up into the Heavenly Kingdom. But he meant also

our own *theosis* as the Orthodox call it; that is, the way in which, by our personal co-operation with the Holy Spirit, our lives may be transformed. We deeply believe in, and prepare ourselves for, resurrection-life with God, progressing, as St Gregory of Nyssa reminds us, ‘from glory to glory.’

One of the greatest Russian saints to whom Father Gilbert introduced the Community was Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833). The saint’s life and teaching, particularly concerning the Holy Spirit, has become even more widely known during the past fifty years, and many translations of the Russian sources are now in circulation. The following extracts are taken from the ‘Conversation with Motovilov’ in Harry Boosalis’s *The Joy of the Holy*:

One must begin by truly believing that it is our Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God, Who came into this world to save sinners, Who brings into our hearts the Kingdom of God and opens for us the road that leads to the blessings of life everlasting through our personal acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit. (p. 95)

The grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God ... turns our passion-filled animal-like flesh into true Temples dedicated to God, into brightly-lit bridal chambers where we can enjoy the abiding presence of Christ Jesus, our Lord, the Creator and Redeemer and Eternal Bridegroom of our souls ... This is why the Scriptures tell us to, ‘Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation’, lest we be deprived the Spirit of God, for vigilance and prayer bring us into His grace. (p. 98)

It seems to me that one of the most important fruits of Father Gilbert’s reflection on the Orthodox tradition and practice was his introduction of the ‘Fairacres Rite’ for the celebration of the Eucharist, which so enriched and brought the Community’s liturgical worship and prayer into the heart of the One Great Tradition. Until that time the Community used ‘The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion’ from the Book of Common Prayer with

its somewhat limited emphasis on the Last Supper and the memorial meal. In the Fairacres Rite Father Gilbert introduced an *Anamnesis* following the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom:

Remembering therefore this saving commandment, and all those things that have come to pass for us: the Cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting on the right hand, and the Second and glorious Coming.

Most importantly, he also included an *Epiclesis*, an invocation of the Holy Spirit to come down upon us, the people praying, and upon the gifts of bread and wine that are being offered in the Eucharist. As the revised SLG Rule states:

In the Eucharist the people of God thank God for what he has done and revealed to us through Christ ... and in the eucharistic action all are drawn by the Holy Spirit to be offered by, with and in Christ. (Ch. 15, 'The Eucharist')

A genuine Eucharistic Prayer contains these three essential elements: instruction and declaration of what God has done for us; the meal instituted by Christ made present by the action of the Holy Spirit; and the universal intercession which links the whole of human history and humanity past, present and future, to the transfiguring power of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Father Gilbert's liturgical initiative moved Anglican Eucharistic life from the late medieval individualistic piety of Cranmer, which had eliminated entirely the great intercession for the whole creation within the Eucharistic Prayer, to a restoration of the one great tradition of the Church's eucharistic experience. We should remember and recognize, with great thankfulness, the significance of Father Gilbert's work. The Fairacres Rite preceded and may have influenced all the later Anglican liturgical revisions which culminated in the eucharistic prayers in Common Worship.

Father Gilbert drew attention to the fact that the West had undoubtedly missed until recently the fullness of meaning in the patristic understanding of the transfiguration into the manhood deified, of which the East had never completely lost sight. In the Homily for the Feast of the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ that he gave to the Community in 1967, only eleven days before his death, he said:

It is the Divine mercy which shows us the fullness of the human nature in Christ so that we may know how far we are from the perfection God wills to bring about in each one of us. It is the Divine mercy that we are called to contemplate in the Transfiguration in which we are allowed to perceive what man ought to be. It is in Christ, and only in Christ, that it is possible, for it is only in Christ that the created and the recreated are perfectly united. On the mountain the three chosen apostles were allowed to see what man should be in the fellowship and radiancy of the Spirit, and permitted to hear the Father's voice: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, the chosen one, listen to him.' What they saw, heard and experienced in the mountain could not be perfected and brought into time until, through the Passion, Cross, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, the perfect union of human obedience to God had been re-created by Christ.

Our sure hope is not in seeking or achieving a state of spiritual rest. It lies in our incorporation into the living energy of the re-creating Person who is Christ; the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Jesus to show them to us and inflame our heart to follow more obediently. ... We must learn from the Transfiguration that the whole of our body and soul is to be sanctified.

We come to the altar where all things are gathered up by the eternal obedience of the Son into the Love of the Father, and made glorious in the vibrant Light of the Holy Spirit. God

created man for the eternal end whose perfect image, vision and reality he shows us in the Mount of Transfiguration, that we, continually looking into the mystery of Christ may, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, perceive, receive and reflect that mystery, being re-made from glory to glory as the Spirit wills.

Those who witnessed the unforgettable radiance of Father Gilbert's own body as he lay in Saint Columba in the days between his death and the funeral cannot doubt that this work of transfiguration had been taking place, and we saw in some measure 'the glory of God in a living man'.

While Father Gilbert was alive the Community was blessed to receive teaching in the Orthodox Patristic tradition from such people as Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia and the Archimandrite Sophrony. In later years this has continued with the memorable visits of the Romanian Orthodox theologian, Father Dumitru Stăniloae and many others. On a number of occasions the Sisters also learned to be the choir for the celebration of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in Fairacres Chapel.

As I mentioned above, Father Gilbert was an enthusiastic member of the Anglican-Orthodox Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius which came into being as an indirect consequence of the Russian Revolution one hundred years ago. Since 2008 the Fellowship has broadened its scope to pray and work for unity between the Christians of East and West, rather than just between Anglicans and Orthodox. It publishes the journal *Sobornost* twice a year which has substantial contributions in line with its aims. In addition to an annual conference there are local branches of the Fellowship, not only in Britain but also in other countries, which have their own programme of meetings.

There is a prayer, written by Father Sergius Bulgakov, which it is customary for the Fellowship to use when the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is celebrated and shared with other Christians.

O Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, Thou hast promised to abide with us always. Thou dost call all Christians to draw near and partake of Thy Body and Blood. But our sin has divided us and we have no power to partake of Thy Holy Eucharist together. We confess this our sin and we pray Thee, forgive us and help us to serve the ways of reconciliation according to Thy will. Kindle our hearts with the fire of Thy Holy Spirit. Give us the spirit of wisdom and of faith, of daring and of patience, of humility and of firmness, of love and of repentance. Through the prayers of the most blessed Mother of God, St Alban and St Sergius, and of all the Saints. Amen.

Looking more widely, we may thank God for the continuing work of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue. The Buffalo Statement of 2015 entitled, *In the Image and Likeness of God: A Hope-Filled Anthropology*, provides much food for thought. It would be a worthwhile task to find examples of Father Gilbert's teaching which correspond with the primary doctrines set out there and which are held in common by our two communions.

In the booklet, *Seeds of Love*, the revised edition of the *Glastonbury Series of Short Prayers*, Father Gilbert says

We do well to form our personal prayer upon the prayer of the Eucharist. Both should contain the same elements of meditation upon the word of God: petition, penitence, self-offering in union with the supreme oblation of Christ and thanksgiving. In both the Eucharist and personal prayer, through remembrance (*anamnesis*) of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ and our calling down (*epiclesis*) of the Holy Spirit, we have access into the heavenly sanctuary 'by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened up for us through his flesh' (Heb. 10:19–20). ... It is above all in the Eucharist that we experience also our fellowship with 'angels and archangels and the whole company of

heaven’, which is to be realised likewise in our personal prayer and in our lives. We are never so alone that we are not surrounded by the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ to faith who support us. (Heb. 12:1)

Father Gilbert had a great love for and devotion to the Saints of Britain. These are some of the saints he addresses in *Seeds of Love*:

David of Wales and those who missionized the West, pray for us.

Columba of the Isles, whose gentleness proclaimed
the love of God, pray for us.

Margaret, whose place of prayer still crowns the rock of Edinburgh,
pray for us.

Cuthbert, monk, bishop, evangelist and solitary, pray for us.

Gilbert, whose dying words proclaimed the mercy of God,
‘He does not sell, he gives, and gives to the poor’,
pray for us.

Edmund, most faithful unto death, pray for us.

Theodore, Dunstan and Thomas of Canterbury, pray for us.

Richard of Chichester, faithful shepherd of scattered sheep,
pray for us.

It is evident that the Orthodox Church has come to value our British holy places and the relics of early British saints which have been treasured even after the destruction wrought at the time of the Reformation. Many Orthodox parishes keep the feasts of the Celtic and Saxon Saints of this land. Anglican parishes are beginning to have icons of the local Saints in their churches. People are aware of miracles happening through the prayers of those Saints today. Here in Oxford, each year the Orthodox have a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Frideswide in Christ Church Cathedral on her feast day in October. On a Sunday in July there is also a pilgrimage to Saint Margaret’s holy well at Binsey. The Orthodox Calendar and the *Synaxarion* include a large number of British Saints; in 2008 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church established the Third Sunday

after Pentecost as a celebration of the Saints of these Isles which have their own particular icon. The Pan-Orthodox Assembly of Bishops for Britain and Ireland has now established its own committee for the veneration of the Saints of Britain. The Assembly of Bishops comprises hierarchs of all the Orthodox Churches present in the British Isles and it works for wider veneration of British Saints amongst the Orthodox living in these islands. It is humbling that these Saints were Christianising this country hundreds of years before Christianity reached the land of Russia, and now the Orthodox Church offers equal veneration to the Saints of both countries.

Through the prayers of thy saints, Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy upon us. Amen.

May Father Gilbert continue to pray for us and may his memory be
eternal!

*Mother Helena, a former member of the Sisters of the Love of God, is
a nun in the Russian Orthodox Church.*

NAZARETH IN NORTHERN IRELAND

SISTER JUDITH SLG

AUTUMN seemed an appropriate time to be leaving Northern Ireland. Apart from five months spent at Bede House in 1999, I had never lived in a rural area. But there in a deeply rural part of County Down, I found myself surrounded by tractors and signs of harvest. I cannot yet tell what the ‘crop’ from my sojourn in Northern Ireland will be, but the smell of damp earth and mist in the air resonate with the inner sense that it has borne some kind of fruit which is ripe for harvest and ready to be used.

When I first enquired about being a nun I was lent Carlo Carretto’s *Letters from the Desert*, a book which has been deeply formative for my sense of vocation and which introduced me to Blessed Charles de Foucauld. I am immensely grateful to SLG and the Little Sisters of

Jesus for the opportunity of the past two years to live out my SLG vocation to reconciliation and unity in the context of the Fraternity of Little Sisters of Jesus at Bishopscourt. The following are reflections on that time.

A potent parable of these years is my violin. I had great fun doing some Irish fiddling. I spent years training as a classical violinist and used every aspect of that training in playing traditional Irish music. They are both ways of making music and of fiddling, just different styles. Likewise I went to Ireland a Sister of the Love of God who had spent the last twenty-five years learning to live a contemplative monastic life. I continued to live as a Sister of the Love of God and a contemplative religious life with the Little Sisters of Jesus. I used every aspect of my monastic training, and I quite simply could not have done it without that formation. It was just a different style, like the two forms of fiddling. I found that in some respects my vows needed to be even more vigorously lived, and that has been a great gift. I shall miss the radical simplicity of life at Bishopscourt, as well as at the coal-face work of reconciliation, for I was perceived as an English Protestant in our Nationalist Roman Catholic area. Downpatrick is said to be the town with the highest percentage of Roman Catholics anywhere in Northern Ireland.

Despite loving the life there, it was far from easy. In different ways I carried the weight of history and injustice through hearing stories, seeing the lives which are still scarred, noting the obvious continuing social inequality, living with the rising tensions caused by Brexit and by the failure of the power-sharing Assembly. Above all, day by day I was unable to make my Communion at the altar with the people I had grown to love and with whom I was identified. Choosing to go on living in this context, simply being present as leaven in the dough, as Little Sister Magdeleine, foundress of the Little Sisters, puts it, I hoped would incarnate the reconciliation for which I have long offered my life.

When asked as a Postulant why I wanted to stay in SLG, my answer was ‘Where else could I go to live out “the urgency to love God for [Godself] and also the desire that all should be drawn to respond to God’s mercy, to acknowledge and accept the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ?”’ (Rule, Ch. 3 ‘Reconciliation’)¹ That sense of call to reconciliation persists, so when it got tough in N. Ireland I would think that God had just taken me at my word and was getting me to put my money where my mouth is.

Living with difference is a deliberate choice for the Little Sisters. Difference is welcomed, accepted and celebrated. In the Fraternity we were two French, one Japanese and me, perceived as English. Unity is central to the Little Sisters, as universal brotherhood was what Br Charles sought to live and bring about by his simple life in the Sahara. Thus it is not similarity or uniformity which makes the fraternity, but common aims and values. These are frequently articulated both informally and more formally at set points in the day when the Prayer of Abandon is recited to close the day and begin the silence of the night, and the Prayer of Offering is said at the end of Morning Office. I remember well that the Prayer of Abandon was printed in the Order of Service for Sister Edwina’s Requiem. The values expressed in the Morning Offering prayer, which comes from their Profession service, are, first of all, the offering of the life of the sister in union with the offering of Jesus to the glory of God, just as the SLG Morning Oblation renews the consecration of the life of the sister that day for the glory of God. Secondly, there is prayer that all suffering from poverty and oppression may find freedom in the justice and charity of Christ, and prayer for the unity of all believers. Finally, there is the desire expressed that we may learn to respect one another despite differences in temperament, age, background or nation all for the love of Jesus, our brother and Lord.”

¹ Altered to inclusive language. The Church of Ireland Book of Common Prayer (2004) is careful to avoid the masculine pronoun when referring to God and exposure to this has made me sensitive to it.

The common aims informally expressed are more difficult to articulate, but I have been struck by how simplicity and poverty are practiced. For example, we each took it in turns to do the shopping and we did not buy more than one week's supplies at a time. We would have one tin of tomatoes, say, and one to spare in the cupboard, but not buy three tins when they are on special offer. Or if someone gave a Sister a new piece of clothing, she would automatically give another item of clothing to the charity shop next time she was in town. During Lent our parish priest actually advocated 'giving up' by saying, 'Look in your wardrobe or kitchen cupboard; those tins you have not used or clothes you have not worn, they are not yours, they belong to the poor. Give them to the food bank or the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.'² All the Sisters commented appreciatively on how that chimed with their style of living.

There is an emphasis, inherited from Br Charles, on Nazareth, the lowest place (cf. John 1:46, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'). It is the place where Jesus lived an ordinary life, working with his hands in the carpenter's shop. The deliberate choice of the lowest place and the emphasis on the smallness and vulnerability of Jesus as a baby has taught me much about humility and the *kenosis* of Jesus in the Incarnation. The Little Sisters choose to imitate this by the choice of jobs they undertake and by an entire way of thinking. I became painfully aware of how generally I did not make this choice.

I was invited to participate in their preparation for their Chapter which is held every six years. One of the communications which formed part of this exercise spoke of being aware of the power we all have. It named four types of power: power from having a skill (in my case music or skills with a computer); from experience (having lived in the UK all my life); from knowledge (being a native English speaker); and from authority (having been appointed to a role). I was unaware I had such power and consequently could make others feel

² This organization does a vast amount of work in the area and has charity shops in most towns in Northern Ireland.

powerless. Becoming aware of the power I have and choosing to lay it aside, to let others use or learn skills, is to follow Jesus of Nazareth. Not to do so can lead to being dominating. Nazareth also represents the ordinariness of life, finding God in the everyday—something with which we are all familiar.

My experiences of the workplace, both of a poorly-managed kitchen and of a well-run kitchen team in a different venue which was a delight to work in, have been informative, as have been my experience of the mental and emotional effects of unemployment, which I suspect might be familiar to anyone when they find they cannot work for any reason. My last job, as a carer with the Hospice at Home team, was deeply rewarding, an extension or incarnation of SLG's call to pray for the dead and dying (Ch. 18, 'Intercession'). Most of my shifts were at night to give family members a chance to get a good night's sleep. Sitting with the dying, attending to their needs, and being present to them was very akin to being in the Presence of Jesus in adoration in the simple, beautiful chapel at Bishops court. Work is also part of living in Nazareth, a sort of inverse enclosure, a deliberate engagement with the secular world in order to pray in imitation of Jesus of Nazareth, who spent more of his life in the carpenter's shop than in ministry.

I have spoken much of difficulties; I should mention signs of hope. Between Ascension and Pentecost this year the Church of Ireland clergy organised a pilgrimage walking among all fourteen churches of the Lecale Area Mission Partnership (LAMP) team. They held a brief service in each and prayed in or outside any other church they passed on the way. I was touched that our RC parish priest actually announced this and advocated people should join us, adding that he was going to for a brief time himself. The information had been passed to him by a parishioner (not myself), and this was the first time I had heard him speak in this way in the eighteen months I had been there. Church of Ireland parishioners are now quite used to having an Anglican Sister in the area. One or two have expressed the hope of

having a Church of Ireland community and spoken of the void they will feel now I have left. They will miss not a particular person, but something vital which they perceive a Sister brings to their situation.

Being able to experience different forms of worship, especially within the Church of Ireland, has been refreshing and expanded my heart, just as having to burrow to try and find the goodness of styles of RC worship (which can feel to be almost what the Reformation was about) has had exactly the same effect. I think we should be aware of the culture of worship anyone entering a community might have experienced and ask ourselves how we can arrange our worship to reflect what we want it to, and whether ‘outside practice’, if adopted, could enhance ours? And this can happen in reverse. This year the Church of Ireland introduced the Imposition of Ashes in Down Cathedral for the first time, an example of how practice can change while the intention of worship remains constant.

On a personal level the time has allowed me to live a style of life I have felt drawn to since I was sixteen. I have rejoiced to choose to live deliberately as an Anglican on the sharp edge of the Reformation among Roman Catholics. It has been harder being British. A recent conversation about how my accent would make some people on the Falls alert and apprehensive reminded me of the old Polish sister I met a few years ago at an international conference. She said it was the first time she had heard German spoken without panic arising in her; she had been a little girl during the Nazi occupation. The experience of being a foreigner in what I had considered ‘home’, a part of the UK and my own family history, has perhaps created a capacity—a sort of echo-chamber—that resonates with others’ experience. This has enabled me to live, to simply be and be present to the deep divisions. And it is this simply being and being present in the very ordinary things of life that is the ‘stuff’ of contemplative life whether it is lived in the convent or in the world as most people experience it.

It has been a bonus to have met people who knew both Sister Eileen Mary and Sister Anna. I suspect that it was more than a

coincidence that on my first day in Northern Ireland I met someone who had kept a letter from Sister Eileen Mary which spoke about the need to pray in the places where the Church was undivided. One of the fourteen LAMP churches we visited in the Ascensiontide pilgrimage was Saul, St Patrick's first Church in Ireland. It has been a place of continuous Christian worship across the denominations since AD 432. Knowing that as a Community we have lived in Northern Ireland before, has enabled me to realise that my experience was, and continues to be, part of SLG's story.

The witness of living cross-community in a very simple way, just living together, seems to have been appreciated by all, church-goers and non-church-goers alike on both sides of the sectarian divide. I know it has deeply enriched and fulfilled me, and trust that it has been an equal blessing for those among whom I have lived. Northern Ireland is an amazing place. As someone said to me before I went there, 'It is a different country.' Its scenery is stunning; its culture is beautiful; its people could not be more welcoming. I can only commend it to your prayers as it faces Brexit, which poses unique challenges for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The lack of government since January continues. It faces the approaching centenary of its creation in the aftermath of civil war, which led to the sad division of the island that is Ireland. There is still much to be reconciled, and the breaking of silence and the hearing of the truth on all sides seem a long time in coming.



CHRISTMAS IN PROVENCE

The Foundation of the Little Sisters of Joy

GILA MARGOLIN

‘GO FORTH from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’ (Gen. 12:1). My current story started much like the call of Abraham. I had seen this verse on the wall of the Great Synagogue in Rome, where I had gone in October 1998 to apply to become a member of an already established Religious Community. But they had told me, ‘Your gifts can be better used elsewhere.’

Ten years earlier, while in Toronto, I had made the final decision to enter the Catholic Church, as a result of feeling the overwhelming presence of God the Creator, in the enormous pine trees of the Canadian Shield. My own ‘Genesis’ experience took place amongst the pre-Cambrian rock and lakes, the oldest landscape in the world. I could not possibly have imagined that my pilgrimage would eventually lead me back to this city.

On the 15 December 1998, with the blessing of my former husband and his feelings of joy accompanying me, I became one of the *Bienaventurados*, one of the Blessed who embark on a fruitful journey, and set off for the Luberon region of Provence, where I had a close friend, Emanuelle. At the end of three days she told me that her little summerhouse would be too cold for me, so she had booked me in as a guest with the Sisters of the Communauté de Pomeyrol, a small and interesting Protestant group who had been founded, I was to discover, at the same time as the Sisters I had wanted to join in Rome. Their community nestles at the foot of the Alpie mountains, in a small village called St Étienne-du-Grès, St Stephen-of-the-Sandstone; this is a building material familiar to me from the days when I lived in Glasgow with my Jewish family. The region was abundant with plane trees and I spent my days praying with the nuns and their guests in the

woodland chapel, and reading the life of their foundress, Antoinette de Butte, her diaries and the account of how she founded the community. She taught her Sisters that

It is most important not to search for something to do. It is God who does the doing. Don't try to do good except in God, and then good will automatically fall from your life, like fruit falls from a tree.

It was through my stay at Pomeyrol that I began to receive the grace to found something of my own.

The French theme was to continue when I finally left Pomeyrol on the Feast of the Epiphany 1999. The year had turned and I was sure God was asking me to form a new religious community within the Catholic Church. Later that month I met Cardinal Lustiger, a Polish Jew who became the Archbishop of Paris. He must have thought that my basic idea was sound as he recommended a spiritual director in Israel, where I was planning to travel the following May. Then on the 7 March 1999 a friend from Brittany came to visit and realised that something important was happening. Together on that date we formally created The Little Sisters of Joy as a community of Prayer, Peace and Reconciliation. Later that day, as my friend suggested, I held the project in my heart during the last Sunday Mass. As I knelt down to pray after Communion, I saw in my mind's eye the Lord offering me the Heavenly Banquet and I knew that I had 'come home'.

As the year progressed I started travelling to Israel, where I met Father Jean-Baptiste Gurion, a Moroccan Jewish Catholic. At that time he was head of the Benedictine community in Abu Ghosh, the only Arab village to remain neutral in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. He told me that how the Little Sisters of Joy had come about was a 'miracle', but that it would be impossible to obtain residency as a Jewish Christian in Israel at that time due to the political climate. An unintended stay in a Jerusalem psychiatric hospital in Jerusalem convinced me, with the help of the aide to the British Consul, that I should return to England. Once back in Cambridge, Benigna, my

Anglican landlady, kindly agreed for me to continue living in her house and we set about converting a studio at the bottom of the garden into a chapel. Mass was said there on three occasions. We also welcomed many people of diverse backgrounds who came to sit or pray peacefully in the woodland chapel. In 2002 Benigna and I began Concerts for Peace and Reconciliation, singing and playing classical music with other friends.

When I moved to the north side of Cambridge to a flat near the river, the concerts continued but, with a different emphasis. For the first time since the 1970s I took up my guitar and went back to the music of my troubled youth, singing songs of the 60s; this time combining them with a programme of Jewish music as well. As I had grown up in a religious Jewish family in London and Glasgow I knew many liturgical and contemporary Hebrew melodies.

In the Spring of 2004 I gave the first ‘Concert for Peace’ in Clare College Chapel in Cambridge. I was rehearsing ‘Donna, Donna’, written for the Yiddish Theatre in New York, a poignant song about freedom, when a Jewish lady from out of town said that she had not heard that song for 40 years. I took it as a favourable sign and performed it two-thirds of the way through the concert. During the song, I stopped singing and carried on playing—but the audience continued to sing. I knew something important was happening. When I knelt down to say my night prayers that evening, the final prayer read, ‘Let what I have done today be sown for an eternal harvest.’

In the autumn of that year I presented the Rule of Life and the Constitutions of the Little Sisters of Joy, commissioned by Bishop Peter Smith in August 1999, to the new Roman Catholic Bishop of East Anglia. I had already begun to suspect that they would not be accepted. Finally he said, ‘There is no hospitality in this Diocese for such a project.’ However, I had no idea of what wonderful things lay in store for me and the Little Sisters of Joy.

Five nights after receiving his letter, I woke up in the middle of the night, feeling I must have a piece of music in my hand. I stumbled

into the living-room, where my hand fell on *The Canadian Book of Catholic Worship*. It contained all the hymns and melodies from around the world that I loved most. I wept for a long time, becoming dimly aware that through the tears, in wordless pictures, images and symbols, all the seminal moments in my life were converging to a single point, the city of Toronto. After wrestling with the Divine through the night, I assented to this call in the depths of my being. Over the next few weeks I wrote a simple Mission Statement, for what was to become a 'Foundation for Peace', under the name of The Little Sisters of Joy. Friends of different traditions enabled me to adopt it. In part it reads:

And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those
who make peace. (James 3:18)

Our Mission

- a) To build bridges of peace among all men and women, as our common humanity is the most precious gift we have.
- b) To build bridges of peace between Jews and Christians, for it is from the same stock that we both come.
'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.' (Deut. 6:4)
- c) To build bridges of peace between Christians of every denomination ... being all in one body, that is Christ.
- d) To build bridges of peace between all faiths, for we all have one Master.

Our inspiration

- We believe that God provides for us and guides us.
- In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. (Gal. 3:28)
- The work of the Holy Spirit empowers us with JOY.

Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart.
(Ps. 97:11)

Over the next few weeks it became clear that the vehicle for peace and reconciliation would no longer be a religious community, but that something more all-encompassing was emerging. The form of an International Foundation where people could offer their gifts and skills and feel they would be contributing to a communal humanitarian enterprise seemed more appropriate.

Since that momentous night, I have returned to Toronto seven times, from September 2005 onwards. In June 2013 I stayed at the international guesthouse of my 2008 visit, which is in a most vibrant neighbourhood of the city. My host said to me, 'I knew you would come home.' I returned again in 2015, to do what I always do—making friends, especially chatting and eating with people from the First Nations community and the local Jewish community, whose Centres are near each other on Spadina Road. The spot which I have always considered to be the global and spiritual heart of The Little Sisters of Joy is a nearby park with the sculpted head of the Toronto poet, Gwendolyn MacEwen (1941–1987). Below the sculpture are some of the lines from her poem, 'Late Song', the last few words of which speak meaningfully to me:

... under silver trees, we are still dancing, dancing.

These words express the beauty of the silver birch, which is especially loved and used by First Nations people, who are calling for reconciliation with their fellow Canadians. It has become the natural emblem of our Project for Peace.

In 2006 the first volume of my memoirs, *The Moving Swan*, was published and the second, *Where the Woods meet the Water*, in 2014. After the book launch at Lucy Cavendish College in Cambridge, I travelled across the Pond for a second presentation and concert in the George Ignatieff Theatre at Trinity College in the University of Toronto. It was attended by a First Nations friend and my Jewish cousin, among others. On the plane, I mentioned to the lady beside me that if the plane went down at that moment I had my guitar and my

books with me she replied, ‘Yes, my dear, you are all ready for the next life!’

On 4 September 2018 *Where the Woods meet the Water* will be launched in a French translation. On this occasion I will sing three French pieces, to mark different periods in my life when France or someone French has been important. The venue is the new theatre at the Alliance Française in Toronto, which nestles between the Native Canadian Centre and the Jewish Community Centre.

The Project for Peace now encompasses 700 Friends in 35 countries, and expresses the Joy and Unity of all the Little Sisters and Brothers, who support the Project in Friendship and Prayer, facilitated by the Love of God. This work of peace and reconciliation, dialogue and encounter includes Jews, Christians from the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, and Muslims.

The concerts are still at the heart of everything I have been called to do for Peace. Meditating several weeks after that first concert in 2004, I remembered a concept of the Rabbis that my parents had taught me, *Tikkun Haolam*, ‘repairing the world’. When the audience sings with me those Songs of the 60’s, which are the voice of the People and of the Gospel, they are praying, regardless of their backgrounds, and the common prayer rises up and is received by God. Thus he heals the world at the *moed*, the Appointed Hour.

None of us knows exactly what the future will bring. But we can say with our fellow Christians, throughout the world, ‘We look to the future with confidence, for He is Risen.’

For more information contact margogila61@gmail.com.

The Moving Swan, Where the Woods Meet the Water, and a CD of a concert programme are available from:

The Little Sisters of Joy, The Haven, 61 Edgecombe, Cambridge, CB4 2LW.

*Books £10 each or two for £15. CD £10. Please make cheques payable to
The Little Sisters of Joy.*

BOOKS

The Magnitude of Meekness: Christmas for Twelve Days, Charles Miller, Window Press, 2017, £9.95 (paper).

ISBN: 978-1-999-75520-1.

In Oxford Christmas lights went up in the Cornmarket before All Saints. No wonder people are ‘burned out’ by Christmas. Charles Miller’s winsome little book is a healing corrective to ‘the commercial take-over of Christmas and the ludicrously superficial, indeed trivial ways’ (4) it is celebrated. It reminds us ‘that Christmas is more a season than a day’, and helps us ‘take stock of its rich spiritual meanings’ (3).

The book presents twelve reflections, one per day of the season, days often themselves ‘lesser feasts’: St Stephens’s, St John’s, Holy Innocents, the Holy Name of Jesus. An Anglican parish priest and sometime academic, Miller is well placed to unpack the Biblical texts and events of the season.

Each reflection begins with a brief thought that invites pondering. The variety of source material is delightful. Music and children’s books are quoted alongside classic theologians. For example, Dr Seuss and Gian Carlo Menotti share day three of Christmas; Loek Koopman, St Paul, and St Augustine day four. Miller employs well- and lesser-known hymns and carols, a wide range of poetry (frequently T. S. Eliot), as well as novels and contemporary film to ‘ponder more deeply what it means’ that ‘God came down at Christmas’ (3). Nevertheless, he insists that ‘the first Christmas ... was far more about worship than it was about words’ (83).

Familiar Christmas traditions are re-examined with what I call ‘baptized eyes’, described with new meaning and significance. Gentle and challenging wisdom is rooted in our ordinary domestic and work lives as parents, partners, solitaries, the lonely, lost and last. Miller compares our world with the one inaugurated at the Incarnation, noting ‘in the first world we get only what we earn or grasp (with

occasional gifts along the way); in [the] other world we have what we receive, because everything is a gift' (82).

Speaking of gifts: Miller's beautifully produced, approachably written book makes a good Christmas one. And you won't have to brave crowds of frantic shoppers to procure it!

BONNIE THURSTON

The Pattern of our Calling: Ministry Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, David Hoyle, SCM Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-334-05472-6.

Every Maundy Thursday in the Diocese to which I belong, as in others, the clergy gather together in the Cathedral with the Bishop for the Chrism Mass. It is important, and large numbers of us turn up. But while I value it, and always go, it always raises some uncomfortable questions. We are an extraordinarily diverse bunch of characters. All of us people of consequence in our particular worlds, but here reduced, uncomfortably perhaps, to being just one of a crowd. And is it, I sometimes wonder, that brought together we cannot quite hide from ourselves the fact that both we are contested and our ministry is contested? Contested by a secular world which bewilders us, and between ourselves because of the various stables we emerge from, catholic, evangelical and all our sub-variants. What is it that unites us all?

Colleagues whose jobs take them from parish to parish often wonder the same question aloud, so great is the variety of worship and style in the Church of England today. Can the centre hold? The speed in which this has come about is considerable. Now in the fiftieth year of my ministry I find myself in a church quite different in liturgy and ways of working than the church in which I began. Secularization has ensured we have a quite different place in society now, forcing us to rethink so many of our pastoral strategies, affecting so much of what we say and how we say it. In a religiously pluralistic society our public utterances no longer have the resonance they once had. So David Hoyle's book is timely in its examination of 'Ministry Yester-

day, Today and Tomorrow' (and nowadays tomorrow is only ever just round the corner). While Hoyle acknowledges that the question of ministry is a question of the whole ministry of the church, lay and clerical, he nevertheless writes as a priest for priests. And for that I am grateful.

So this is a book to root us back again into the tradition that reaches deeply into the past. It is the literary equivalent of the person-to-person laying-on of hands at ordination, linking us with our contemporaries and back through the ages to our many, many predecessors. Hoyle writes carefully, always sensing the vulnerabilities. He knows what it is to have a bad start (don't we all?). I was grateful to learn that Gregory Nazianzus, giant of the Cappadocian Fathers, also had a bad start. Ordained by his Bishop father in 361 at Christmas, in a place that was definitely a mission field, he found it all too much and ran away. He returned by Easter explaining, 'I have been defeated and own my defeat.' Gregory had thought about ministry and it terrified him. The likes of Clement, Irenaeus and Cyprian had by then defined what the church asked of its clergy and Gregory feared it. Thankfully for us all he recovered himself to become one of the greatest thinkers and defenders of the early church. But he recognised always that his return was one of obedience. It is an important lesson. Hoyle is good on the balance between what we know and are properly trained to do, and the fact that ministry in the end comes from God. It is gifted to us, as it were, unexpectedly out of God's future, and not out of the past. What we do lies, uncomfortably, wrapped in the mystery on which we must always fix our gaze. In the end the only response is a kind of obedient service.

So vocation is a lifelong encounter, as Hoyle says, and it has a voice that cannot be ignored. But we need the collective wisdom of our predecessors to know what the tone of voice sounds like, to turn our eyes and ears in the right direction. This book gives us a rich collection of pastoral guides: John Chrysostom, Clement of Rome,

Michael Ramsey, John Keble, Cyprian, Ambrose, J. B. Lightfoot—the list could go on.

But it is more, far more, than a compendium of quotes from the past. Hoyle's wise commentary itself contributes substantially to the inheritance, gently steering us into the areas where we are most tested. His chapter on preaching for example—and I could have chosen others—is one to read regularly for the wisdom he brings to it. It is an awesome task we are given: to find words at a funeral for the grief people feel, and words at a wedding that will properly reflect both the joy of the event and the gospel we believe, usually to a crowd of people who rarely, if ever, go near a church. We have the words of life. But how, in a fractured culture, do we find the right words for the hearers in front of us? Our own experience? Pithy illustration? He tells a story against himself as a student in training. He drafted a sermon with an illustration drawn from Winnie the Pooh. His tutor, Richard Holloway, fixed him with a baleful stare. 'I looked for the wildness of grace, and what did I get? Winnie-the-bloody-Pooh.' It is a book that brought me to my knees and made me laugh in equal measure.

Ministry today is under pressure. There are fewer of us and we are stretched far—in rural parishes particularly so. I am lucky enough to work in a parish that 'does well', and there are enough retired clergy about to share out the tasks. But the administrative burden that comes from a reasonably sizeable budget and ancient plant to maintain can easily dominate. It is all too easy for churchwardens considering new appointments to look for the one who is most likely to keep the show on the road. We look for those who will deliver growth, minister effectively to families, or whatever the local priority is. 'The wildness of grace' and the seriousness of the inner life can easily be missed out in the process.

Hoyle, subtly and gently, returns to the inner life again and again in this book. Easily squeezed out, it is the place from which we are renewed and where we will find the balance between parochial demands and the mysterious but insistent voice of God. That voice

lies at the heart of everything we do. And it is the voice of a God whose ways are not our ways. In a chapter, interestingly entitled ‘Keeping your balance’, he quotes Bishop Lightfoot. Lightfoot, too, ministered at a time when all was in flux and clergy struggled with the process of change. Speaking to his future clergy on the eve of their ordination, he reminded them that their model ‘is Christ, who failed in every purpose of his heart.’

This is a gem of a book, bringing us back to our calling in the depths of God. Buy it and treasure it.

DAVID BARTON

The Naked God: Wrestling for a Grace-ful Humanity, Vincent Strudwick with Jane Shaw, DLT, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-232-5326-2.

The origin of this book lies in one of Canon Strudwick’s many creative ideas to enable people to engage with each other in thinking about life and faith. These chapters are the fruit of discussions by a group which gathered in the local pub in the author’s village, in response to an invitation in the parish newsletter to wrestle with some of the more knotty theological questions. This group is termed ‘the Wrestlers’, and the matters to which they try to bring to some resolution are indeed ones to tax any Christian who cares about the Church and ways of making it a vehicle for the love of God. They explore the Incarnation, the use and abuse of Scripture, living the Gospel radically, racism and immigration, our understanding of our humanity and sexuality—and what the Church’s response can and should be.

The story of Jacob’s wrestling with God is a leitmotif to the book. God gave his opponent a new name and a blessing, even as he wounded him. Jacob saw God as naked as God is ever likely to be to our eyes and understanding, and lived. These chapters examine how we too can peel off the layers of ‘clothing’ we have donned to prevent us meeting the God who ‘is’, and who bestows upon us a promise and a blessing.

The author gives us innumerable leads as to how to engage in this process. He reviews the theology and social teaching of the Anglican Church over his own lifetime, especially from the early 1960s onwards. It has been a richly-blessed life, and he draws on a wealth of resources, setting them in the context of his own intellectual and spiritual development. Herbert Kelly, the founder of the Society of the Sacred Mission, and George Every SSM were early influences, as well as some of the great churchmen of the twentieth century. He draws on the writings of earlier theologians who formed the Anglican ethos, especially his beloved Richard Hooker. But he does not confine himself solely to the writings of either Anglicans or theologians. The wisdom of a wide range of poets, novelists, economists, sociologists and politicians is called upon. Seamus Heaney's poem, 'The Rain Stick', begins and ends the book, and indeed, it is like 'entering heaven/through the ear of a raindrop'.

He reminds us that although the Church is an institution, it was never meant to be exclusive, and its structures constantly need examining, especially those that hide God from the ordinary person. Those concerned for its present and future state always live with the challenges of how it can become more 'Kingdom-shaped' (213). For

the Church ... exists in the reality of everyday life, and needs markers (not walls) to ensure that being 'porous' to the real world does not mean that its fundamental nature is destroyed either by secularization from without or religiosity for within. The markers of Baptism and the Eucharist are important for wrestlers if they risk the faith journey, for they represent commitment to the journey and belonging to the community.

(p. 175)

This book offers a way of thinking constructively, of wrestling with God over complex problems, until a blessing is received.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

ASSOCIATES RETREATS 2018

4th – 8th July 2018

Llangasty Retreat House

Llangasty, Brecon,
Powys, LD3 7PX
www.llangasty.com

Led by
Canon Andrew Teal
Sister Clare-Louise SLG

Cost £300.00
Deposit £100.00

Forms & Information:

Judith Lloyd Thomas
32 Holcombe Drive
Llandrindod Wells
LD1 6DN
Tel: 01597 823020

19th – 21st October 2018

Convent of the Incarnation

Fairacres, Parker Street
Oxford, OX4 1TB
www.slg.org.uk

Led by a Sister SLG

Accommodation includes self-catering breakfast, catered midday and evening meals. Some disabled accommodation. Loop system in meeting-room and chapel. No set fee, but donations welcome

For more details, contact:

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

Are you thinking of making a financial contribution
or leaving a legacy to the Community?

We are a registered charity: No. 261722

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FAIRACRES CHRONICLE

The *Fairacres Chronicle* is the journal of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God and is published twice a year, summer and winter. The subscription runs from January until December. Customers who subscribe after the publication of the summer issue will receive the summer issue, plus the winter issue when published.

SUBSCRIPTION (*Summer and Winter editions*)

The subscription rates for 2018 (inclusive of shipping) are:

Area:	£ Sterling	US \$	Euros
UNITED KINGDOM	£ 6.50		
EUROPE (Airmail)	£ 8.00	\$ 14.00	€ 10.50
OUTSIDE EUROPE (Airmail)	£ 10.00	\$ 17.50	

*Subscription forms are available from SLG Press and from the website
www.slgpress.co.uk
We also accept orders online.*

Sisters of the Love of God

~~~

Visit our website at

[www.slg.org.uk](http://www.slg.org.uk)

to find out more about the Community

*or*

write to the Reverend Mother for information

**COMMUNITY OF THE SISTERS  
OF THE LOVE OF GOD**

*An Anglican Contemplative Community*

**Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres  
Parker Street, Oxford OX4 1TB  
www.slg.org.uk**

Telephone: 01865 721301(press 1) Fax: 01865 250798  
**sisters@slg.org.uk**

Guest Sister: Telephone: 01865 258152; Fax: above  
**guests@slg.org.uk**

***TELEPHONING THE COMMUNITY***

Best times are 10:30-12:00 noon; 3:30-4:30 p.m.; 6:00-7:00 p.m.  
Messages left on voicemail are picked up regularly.

***Sister Anne SLG:***

St Isaac's Retreat, PO Box 93, Opononi 0445, Northland,  
Aotearoa/New Zealand Telephone: 00 64 9 4058 433

**SLG PRESS**

**Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres  
Parker Street, Oxford OX4 1TB**

Telephone: 01865 241874(press 3) Fax: 01865 241889

General matters: **editor@slgpress.co.uk**

Orders & accounts: **orders@slgpress.co.uk**

Website: **www.slgpress.co.uk**

***TELEPHONING SLG PRESS***

Best times are Monday to Thursday 9:00 a.m. - 2:45 p.m.  
Leave a message on voicemail if there is no-one currently in the office.

***SLG Charitable Trust Limited***

Registered Office: Convent of the Incarnation, as above

Tel: 01865 241849(press 2) Fax: 01865 250798  
charityoffice@slg.org.uk

Reg. in England No. 990049; Reg. Charity No. 261722