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COMMUNITY NOTES

Dear Friends,

My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.
I will sing and make melody.
Psalm 57:7 NRSV

Steadfastness seems to be in very short supply in our world today, and as I write this summer I am very conscious of all the Brexit ups and downs in our national life. Wherever you stand on the Brexit divide, there is no doubting that the country is facing a time of major uncertainty and disruption as we wait to see what the path forward and its results will be. The debate has become polarised, leading to deep divisions within society.

As a Community we are also facing disruption, and it relates, of course, to our building project! I have said a few things about this in Notes over the past couple of years, but now the reality of the project is coming near. As you know, the Convent as it stands has a number of issues which are a problem for us, especially for those Sisters who are now less mobile and find getting around more difficult. Years of development on this property have led to a very long, thin building with a number of changes to floor levels. It is no longer possible for all of us to get to the Common Room or Library, and getting to the front door from one end of the Convent to the other is quite a trek. Anyone who has visited in recent years will have seen the notice on the door asking callers to wait patiently until the Sister answering the bell gets there!

Our architects, MEB Design Ltd, have produced a design which will involve a mixture of both new buildings and renovations. All the ground floor of the Convent will be on one level, and a new wing will house the Library and monastic offices. In the new wing there will be guest accommodation to replace Fellowship House, and new bungalows

within the garden to replace St Seraphim and St Columba. We hope for a building which is more ‘gathered-together’ with a more efficient use of space and a greater sense of enclosure for the Community. On the back cover is the architects’ concept of the new layout from the orchard: the new entrance is on the left at the end of the new wing, with the existing buildings of St Mary’s and the chapel in the background and St Raphael’s to the right. A cloister with views over the garden will link the new building with the chapel and refectory, the whole forming a quadrangle around a formal garden.

Depending on all being well with planning permission, we hope that building will begin during October. But before that we have to clear and pack all our belongings and move out of the Convent completely! We have lived at Fairacres since 1911, so as you can imagine there is quite a lot of stuff to sort into categories: what will we need over the next couple of years; what can be stored; what should we dispose of? We are becoming experts in recycling and re-homing!

We are not going far: four of us will be living in Fellowship House, and the rest living in rented houses in the surrounding roads. Our hope is that we will be able to share at least some of our worship in what is now the Workroom (where our habits are made), which will be reordered as a chapel. Each of the smaller houses will have a room set aside for an Oratory. The architects are expecting the building work to take around eighteen months; but knowing how construction can be delayed, we are planning for at least two years.

All this means that, like the country as a whole, we are facing a time of change and uncertainty, which can cause both excitement and dread. When I wrote my Community Chapter Charge recently, I reflected on the question of where our stability lies when everything is changing, a question not just for SLG, but for many people throughout the world. For Christians, of course, the answer is in God. John Mason Neale’s hymn puts it well:

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and corner-stone
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever,
And her confidence alone.

Times of change and disruption are opportunities for exercising trust in God, as well as realising that our faith is in God, not in structures and buildings which have become so dear to us. The Sisters will need to draw to a large extent on their internal disciplines, and the practices of silence and stability in the absence of the physical enclosure in which we normally live. It will be an opportunity to explore our expression of the Religious Life in very different circumstances.

We also find ourselves in a liminal space as we move from a familiar, beloved space, into a transitional space, and then into our newly ordered buildings. In the Chapter Charge, I quoted to the Sisters something I found on a website called 'Liminal Space':

> The word 'liminal' comes from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold—any point or place of entering or beginning. A liminal space is the time between the 'what was' and the 'next.' It is a place of transition, waiting, and not knowing.
>
> Liminal space is where all transformation takes place, if we learn to wait and let it form us.
>
> Author and theologian Richard Rohr describes this space as:
>
> [the place] where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That's a good space, where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible. … This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. The

threshold is God's waiting room. Here we are taught openness and patience.

That is the challenge that lies before us; not just the challenge of de-cluttering, packing and moving, but the challenge of seeing in this stage of the Community life a liminal space inviting us to growth and transformation. The process will call for steadfastness, as Psalm 57 reminds us. Our hearts need to be steadfast and set on God even as we move into our new circumstances.

To do that we will rely, of course, on the prayers of all who are associated with us. We, in turn, will continue to keep you in our prayers. Perhaps we could also pray that the conflicted and contradictory nature of public life in our country would also become a liminal place out of which real change for good emerges. Most of us find that the only place where our opportunity to work for that kind of change is in our own ordinary, everyday circumstances. But we can all pray for the grace to be faithful to that work—even as we head into the unknown.

With prayers from all of us here at Fairacres,

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG
Reverend Mother

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

SISTER MARGARET THERESA SLG

> *But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'* John 16:5

In this verse from John 16, I wonder if there is an elephant in the room? Jesus has been trying to prepare his disciples for his passion, death and resurrection, but it appears they are not getting it; perhaps he is disappointed in them. They didn't want to know any more about Jesus leaving them, or where he is going, so they don't ask the obvious question.

Jesus is trying to give them the bigger picture, not focussing simply on the Passion, but including what will happen *after* Good Friday, from Easter morning and onwards. He has been giving them good news along with the bad. While indicating what sort of death he is to die (John 12:33), he also tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house (John 14:3). He assures them that he will ask the Father to give them another Advocate who will be with them for ever (John 14:15). It is to the disciples' *advantage* that Jesus leaves them (John 16:7) There is good news within the bad.

'Where are you going?' Perhaps we can ask that of ourselves both as a Community and as individuals. Where are *we* going? 'Where am *I* going?' We could give the simple, but true, answer that only God knows, adding that a few clues are always welcome! Like the disciples, we have to keep our eye on the bigger picture. In its essence our vocation remains the same; it will develop and grow and we may be asked to live it out in different circumstances. We may experience times of diminishment; but as the Gospel tells us, 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it will not bear fruit' (John 12:24). This is not only a teaching point used by Jesus, but is actually what happens in nature. The old grain gives birth to and nurtures the new, but the old has to *die* in order for the new to emerge.

‘Where are you going?’ seems a very pertinent question for SLG at this time. To the best of my knowledge we do not know physically where we are going, by which I mean where we will be living later this year. This is a challenge, as it is for anyone in similar circumstances. In our *Way of Life* document, we read:

> In the ordinary way and most of the time, we expect to stay on the property where we live, and where there is an area set apart for the Community’s use. A Discipline of Place

There *is* a discipline of place within our vocation which we know more familiarly as Enclosure, so this aspect is a particular challenge for us as we must soon move, not knowing where or how we will practice this particular discipline. However, our inner home remains the same wherever we are, for Jesus himself says to us, ‘abide in me as I abide in you’ (John 15:4), or as another translation says, ‘Make your home in me just as I do in you’ (Message Bible). We know that to abide in Jesus we need to go via Jesus, for he himself is the Way the Truth and the Life. So we can pray in the words of George Herbert’s hymn: ‘Come, my way, my truth, my life’.

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Question

Tell me, Lord—
does your blood make holy
the hand of the one
who proffers it?

Sister Helen SLG
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IDEALLY THE WHOLE OF LIFE IS TO BE MADE PRAYER[1]

SISTER SUSAN SLG

Our Community's Rule tells us that 'Ideally, the whole of the life is to be made prayer … but there must be times set apart solely for it.' In other words if prayer is to become a life-style it has to be underpinned by a solid discipline of time set apart for prayer. Many readers will know that very well. Still, you may ask, 'this is an ideal that I want deeply, but how can I expect to get to that point given the life I lead, all the things I have to do?'

Distractions?

Once he became a bishop Augustine of Hippo was a proverbially busy man, so one can assume perhaps that he knew only too well the sense that he was being drawn away from God. Perhaps to counter this he suggests that one of the purposes of the hours of prayer is to bring our attention back to God, to sharpen and rekindle our desire for him. The Community meets in chapel six times a day; it may be possible to be alongside this at home, not by saying the office in full, but, as Augustine says, in some way to rekindle our desire for God. He has reassurance to offer when we seem to fail; he comments on Psalm 85(86).4–5[2], 'give delight to the soul of your servant; to you have I lifted up my soul, for you O Lord are kind and patient', and then goes on to talk about distractions in prayer. There are lots of suggestions in contemporary books on prayer about how to deal with distractions, but Augustine doesn't go into that at all. Instead, he simply concentrates on God's kindness and patience, so that when we do manage to turn wholly to him, even for a fleeting moment, there are no recriminations. God simply accepts the prayer gratefully. Augustine describes that one true prayer as 'one which we ourselves can hardly

[1] This article is a digest of talks given to Associates at their retreat in October 2018.
[2] NB, Augustine's numbering of the psalms is usually one behind that of most Bibles we are accustomed to use.

detect'. True prayer is as elusive as that, and yet it is worth persevering because the psalmist can pray, 'give delight … Our God is kind and patient' (*En. Ps*. 85.7).

In his exposition of Psalm 34, he deals directly with the problem of praying when we are working: 'I can give you a tip that will enable you to praise God throughout the day, if you want to. Whatever you have to do, do it well, and you have praised God. When you are singing a hymn, you are praising God; but what is your tongue's activity worth, unless your conscience is praising him too?' (*En. Ps*. 34.2.16). And in a sermon he adds: 'Let us give praise, but not merely by our words; let us also give praise by our actions. Let our speech give praise,; let us give praise not merely by words, let us also give praise by our actions—let our life not be in conflict with our speech', and interestingly he ends, 'let them both display infinite charity' (Sermon 254.8).

So there are two basic thoughts here. The first is that there is a delight in prayer which God can give if we keep trying to move towards him, and that he is patient and kind and will never give up on us. The second is that in our daily tasks, however busy we are, we can try to co-operate with his will. If he has given those tasks to us, then we are not departing from our desire for him, but spending time doing them well.

You may wonder why I put a question mark after distractions in the heading of this section. Perhaps so that we should ask if distractions are wholly negative, as the word implies, or whether they are in fact the steps or building blocks by which we keep going on, keep returning to God, keep renewing our desire for him.

What is Prayer for Augustine?

Augustine didn't write a treatise on prayer (or if he did it hasn't survived). The nearest he gets to one is a long letter written to a wealthy widow named Proba. She has written asking two questions: 'How should we pray?' and 'What should we pray for?' He does not

really answer the first question, ‘how should we pray?’ That is, he doesn’t respond with a method of prayer. He talks instead about the disposition we should have when praying. He is conscious that he is writing to a widow and an exile, so he counsels that she take that as a starting point her experience of desolation, of absolute need, even if she is still wealthy. And he suggests that this is the starting point for all of us, that we are in some ways all widows when it comes to our relationship with God. We have an absolute need of him. He then turns to Scripture advising us to read it with the eyes of faith; this will bring us to purity of heart which in turn enables us to see God. He tempers the severity of his advice when he answers the question ‘what should we pray for’. His perhaps surprising response is ‘happiness’. But then of course, being Augustine, he immediately asks, ‘What is happiness?’ In Sermon 150 his answer is simply that true, or full, happiness only exists in eternal life. In replying to Proba, however, he tries first to answer her question more simply, more humanly. He says happiness exists in not wanting what it is not proper to want. He goes into some detail, instancing the quest for personal safety and security, and friendship as proper wants. Yet he finds that he cannot really talk about happiness without talking about love, and ultimately eternal life.

Although he appears not to give us teaching about how to pray, later in the letter he does give us a short commentary on the Lord’s Prayer. He treats each petition briefly saying for instance that, ‘When we say, “Thy will be done on earth as in heaven”, we ask of Him that obedience for ourselves, so that His will may be done in us as it is done in heaven by his angels’. He concludes with the advice that it is permissible to use our own words, but the content of our prayer must not differ from the one that Jesus gave us. So, although there is no formal treatise on prayer as such, we find that Augustine teaches about prayer throughout his writing. An instance occurs in his exposition of Psalm 85, when he simply concludes by saying that, ‘When you pray, you are talking to God, and when you read he is talking to you’.

Most of the time, when Augustine talks explicitly about prayer, he is talking about spoken words, or indeed, about singing in prayer, in which he strongly believes. There are prayers of intercession, of petition and of *deprecatio*, the anguished appeal of a person to God when they have recognized their sin. There is also the prayer of *invocatio*, the prayer by which we invite God into our hearts

Augustine does not teach explicitly about wordless prayer, although he does speak about the wordless singing that comes to people when they are very happy, instancing workers in the field at harvest time. However, he doesn't seem to speak about the silent prayer of simply putting yourself in the presence of God and being there. Rather, he talks about *seeing*. He has a vision, not an appearance or apparition, but, as we have seen when thinking about what we should pray for, an inward conviction that at the end of the Christian life there is happiness. You will probably know the quotation from the end of *The City of God*: 'on that day we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise—for this is to be the end without end of all our living, that Kingdom without end, the real goal of our present life' (*De Civ. Dei* xxii, 510–11). The the usual word we use about our relationship with God in prayer is 'listening'. Here Augustine seems to have settled on 'seeing', and it is a seeing that is connected with true happiness, with the everlasting enjoyment of God.

What is this saying to us in the twenty-first century? The fourth and fifth centuries were very different worlds and we cannot put ourselves back there, though we can try to recognize the differences. Peter Brown writes about the pagan experience of the human race as 'the plaything of demons', and all misfortune was attributed to them. With this belief Augustine writes,

> Prepare yourselves for something beyond the power of speech to utter, cleanse your hearts from all your earthly and worldly attachments. We are destined for vision, a vision that will be our beatitude, and that reality will be enough for us.
>
> (*En. Ps*. 86.9)

What do we think now? I believe there is something of heaven that we can approach in this life, and Augustine does seem to believe that too. He knows about a happiness he calls 'jubilation'; it was the peak of prayer for him. Christ and our participation in him is, perhaps, the key to prayer for Augustine. For this to be true for us we need, above all, to remember that we are not alone, we are part of the body of Christ (cf. Matt. 25:31–46; Acts 9:4). Augustine says, for instance, that when we pray the psalms Christ is speaking, but we should always hear our own voice too (*En. Ps.* 140.3). This has implications for how we live, for we are being asked both to see Christ in the other, and to mediate Christ to the other. But above all, we need to recognize that Christ is praying in us.

'Ideally the whole of the life is to be made prayer'

I suspect that most of us would connect this quotation from the SLG Rule with Paul's, 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17). The only modern writer I have found who encapsulates the phrase as it is in our Rule is John Taylor in *The Go-Between God*. Like Augustine he connects it to life in Christ. He wrote, 'to live in Christ is to live in prayer. Prayer is not something you do; it is a style of living' (227). I find that challenging but also comforting.

People may well think that we in community live a regular life, and so we do; but within that regularity our perfectly legitimate plans are constantly foiled. By what? Well, on the whole, just by ordinary, undramatic things: by others' unexpected needs, or unscheduled happenings; by the requirements of current laws of the state or the city council; and ultimately, as one gets older, by our bodies, and indeed by our minds. None of this takes away from prayer if, as Taylor says, one can learn to live in Christ.

> The prayer of the first Christians was, therefore, simply a reflection of the living Christ in their midst. … In all their prayer they joined themselves to the prayer of Christ himself, and knew that it was his spirit which prayed in them. The best worship they could offer was simply his self-oblation in them.

> … To engage in the mission of God, therefore, is to live this life of prayer. … To realise that the heart of mission is communion with God in the midst of the world's life will save us from the demented activism of these days. (226, 7)

He suggests that we make ourselves one with Christ's self-oblation, continually offering ourselves, and that we sustain a style of living that is focussed on God. That will be a very familiar idea to many reading this; but how do we do it?

I am not going to enlarge on Taylor's thoughts in my own words, but turn to Augustine again because, as you will have realized, Taylor's idea of living in Christ is very similar to what Augustine says about prayer. As well as the emphasis on Christ, Augustine's way of understanding 'pray without ceasing' is to connect it with desire. If our desire is for God—however one expresses it—and that desire remains continuous, then it is continuous prayer. (*En. Ps*. 37.14)

He also says time and again, and rather more prosaically, (and as I have mentioned earlier) that it is no good saying the right things in prayer if we aren't trying to live what we say. If we perform our daily tasks, do our work well, we shall be praising God. 'Whatever you have to do, do it well, and you have praised God' (*En. P*s. 34.2.16), and

> you only stop praising God when you swerve from just conduct and from what pleases him. If you never turn aside from what is right your tongue is silent, but your life is shouting, and God's ears are attuned to your heart. Just as our ears are sensitive to our voices, so are God's ears sensitive to our thoughts. (*En. Ps*. 148.2)

The Wings of Prayer

'Do you want your prayer to fly to God? Then make two wings for it, fasting and almsdeeds' (*En. Ps*. 42.8). Augustine has a triad of 'aids' for our journey to God: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. He did not invent them; he inherited them, largely from Scripture, and they were

part of his culture. He expresses the implications very clearly. So what does he say about fasting and almsgiving, and how are they aids, or 'wings', for prayer?

Although fasting wasn't a new idea to Augustine when he became a Christian, he did face misunderstandings of the Christian interpretation of it among his congregation. There were three of these: you could make yourself ill by over-zealous fasting; or some people missed a meal in order to have more space for a sumptuous banquet later in the day, and they claimed that as fasting; or again one could claim to fast from the ordinary foods and wines, but seek out rarer, more exotic ones instead. Obviously these are basic misunderstandings of Christian fasting, and we can find them laughable, but we need to remember that we are thinking about a time which is still relatively close to the beginning of Christianity. What seems obvious to us now, perhaps wasn't so obvious if you were coming from a pagan background in the fourth or fifth centuries. It is worth asking what fasting is for, and how we might misuse it today, or justify not practising it.

Augustine is very firm that we should not fast in a way that damages our health, and we know that eating disorders and unhealthy eating habits are all too common today. He suggests that if you can't fast at least try not to eat between meals—though that presupposes we have regular meals. It may be that it is today's problems that have made Sr Margaret Funk in her book, *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life*, advocate a middle way between not fasting at all and over-doing it. She suggests that we only eat as much as we need, and we eat what is provided (or available) without fussing.

Why do we fast? It has been generally accepted down the ages that it helps us to deal with our baser instincts. If we fast seriously we will feel hunger, but after a while that will drop away and other desires or feelings will rise up, perhaps because we have become vulnerable enough for these things to be revealed. Fasting from food and drink is also practiced to support or strengthen prayer, and to

express penitence. Augustine, however, says clearly and repeatedly that fasting should not only be from food but also from our negative behaviours, 'Above all else fast from strife and discord' (Sermon 205.3). This is quite as important for him (if not more so) as fasting from food and drink. If we really try to practice both, perhaps always eating moderately without being fussy, and trying consciously to fast from negative behaviour —from sarcasm, for instance, or insisting on expressing our own point of view—we may find ourselves in a better frame of mind for prayer. At rock bottom, though, what matters is our motivating desire. Do we want God and the kingdom of heaven, and are we practising fasting to help us towards him, to make space for him?

Augustine also talks about the joyful aspect of fasting, but usually much less than about the difficult aspects. He writes that the consequence of fasting with a right intention, is a 'holy, spiritual delight in truth and wisdom' (Sermon 210.3). Robert Kennedy in *Augustine through the Ages*, commenting on Augustine's teaching on fasting in Sermon 207, writes,

> Fasting enriches the mind … The mind's ability to appreciate spiritual realities increases … and one develops a greater capacity to love. The effects of fasting with a right intention are tranquillity within oneself and unity with the church, especially the poor, through almsgiving. (355)

If with God's help we can control our greed we will be more single-hearted in our desire for God.

If our modern mindset makes us a bit doubtful about that, it does not make it untrue, Augustine himself expresses some ambivalence, and his test question is, 'Who benefits from your fast?' He writes, 'Fasting without mercy is worthless to him who fasts' (Sermon 207.1), That leads us on to almsgiving.

Almsgiving in Augustine's teaching is complex, and I can only look at a very small bit of it here. He points out that the phrase used in Latin for almsgiving is derived from the Greek word for mercy. In

Latin, mercy, *misericordia*, is made up from the words for heart and for wretched, so it could be said to mean 'heart-soreness'. When he talks about almsgiving he is talking about mercy or acts of mercy in the widest possible sense.

Why does he connect fasting with almsgiving? I think it is because he is concerned that fasting should not be purely self-centred, and because of his very deep and pervasive sense of the Church as the body of Christ: 'Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of my brethren, you did it unto me' (cf. Matt. 25:31–46). The two are really very closely connected. If we are really one body, fasting is not and cannot be just for our own spiritual benefit. The consequences of this are practical: if you miss a meal because you are fasting, then give the food you would have eaten to someone who is poor, or calculate what it would cost you and give him or her the money. As we've seen, he believes, 'fasting without mercy is worthless to him or her who fasts.' We may choose to put it into practice in other ways, but it is a penetrating principle.

Augustine also points out that it is not only the rich who can practice almsgiving; the poor can do so through their prayers, for their prayers are their alms. Everyone is needy and no one is without something they can give. Perhaps the emphasis on mercy can make us sensitive to all sorts of ways we can give to others. *Common Worship* has a Eucharistic preface for Lent which includes the words, 'prayer, fasting and acts of service'. 'Acts of service' seems to be the compilers' interpretation of almsgiving. It misses the connection with mercy in any obvious way; or perhaps begs the question, 'What is true service?' All the same, it is clear that almsgiving is not necessarily to do with money.

For Augustine, Christ was really present in every other person and he or she deserved attention. Brian Daly, in an article entitled 'A Humble Mediator', comments on Augustine's Christological writing that, 'Christ is both the way and our destination or goal'. (*Word and Spirit* 9, 1987) He quotes from *the City of God*,

> If there is a way between the one walking and the point to which one is walking, one has a hope of reaching one's goal. There is only one way that is assured against all error: that the very same person should be God and a human being: God as the goal to which we are going, and a human being as the way by which we go. (*De Civ. Dei* 11.2)

That is the purpose of our prayer, fasting and almsgiving. They are practices that can help bring us to God, and, importantly, they are interdependent. Prayer is the centre of the triad, but fasting and almsgiving can act as wings to take the prayer to heaven. Our prayer can pervade our whole life, be our whole life, if our desire for God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, continues steadfastly.

> In the gospel Philip says: 'Show us the Father and we shall be satisfied'. And in one of the psalms it is written: 'I shall be filled when your glory is revealed'. The Son and the Father are one: whoever sees the Son is seeing the Father also. So then, the Lord of hosts, the king of glory, will bring us home, and will show us his face. We shall be saved, we shall be filled, and we shall be satisfied. [But] since we are not yet ready for the banquet of our Father, let us grow familiar with the manger of our Lord Jesus Christ. (*passim* Sermon 194.3-4)

‘TO MY DEAREST SISTER’[1]
Bede and the Educated Woman

BENEDICTA WARD SLG

Sometime before AD 735, Bede received a request from a nun for a book: would he provide her and her sisters with some way of understanding as prayer the more than opaque words which they sang at the Office of Lauds every ferial Friday in the Canticle of Habakkuk? Bede was delighted to respond and wrote for them his most deeply mystical treatise, *In Canticum Abacuc Cantica.*[2]

Who was this nun? There is no reason to suppose that his form of address was a literary artifice by Bede, writing in the genre of letters of spiritual counsel, since his other commentaries on scripture are also addressed to correspondents, mostly well-known friends and colleagues. Bede addressed her as ‘my dearest sister’, a monastic endearment underlining love and kinship in Christ rather than a natural blood relationship. She was part, presumably the head, of a monastery in the first part of the eighth century, that period of which Bede was so searingly critical in his letter to Egbert:

> There are innumerable places, as we all know, allowed the name of monasteries by a most foolish manner of speaking, but having nothing at all of a monastic way of life, some of which I would wish to be transformed by synodal authority from wanton living to chastity, from vanity to truth, from over-indulgence of the belly and from gluttony to continence and piety of heart.[3]

In the familiar Anglo-Saxon pattern of double monasteries, this condemnation included nuns, and in fact Bede specifically says that

[1] A paper first read at the conference, ‘Women, the Book and the Godly’, at St Hilda’s College, Oxford, in August 1993.
[2] Bede *In Cantica Habacuc Allegorica Expositio*, ed. J. E. Hudson, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983), 381-409.
[3] Bede, *Letter to Egbert*, trans. D. Whitelock in *English Historical Documents* 1, 500–1042 (London, 1955), 170.

some of these lax monasteries were in the control of the wives of thanes. Even in the golden days of monastic life recorded in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* all had not been perfect in the monasteries. He had had to recount not only the impenitent death of a brother blacksmith of his own monastery,[4] but the heedless gaiety of the naughty nuns of Coldingham, who spent their time making themselves new clothes and going to parties.[5] Alert to such problems, Bede would have been all the more enthusiastic to receive this request for instruction coming from nuns not at all of this kind, but as seriously concerned with their way of life as he was himself. The sisters who asked for his help belonged to a serious convent, liturgically up to date, with sisters well able to understand Latin and inclined to think deeply about what they read. It sounds very like the convent of the nun Edburga at Minster, where the sisters were serious copyists of texts for the use of Boniface in his German mission, including among their efforts a copy of the letters of St Peter in gold. They may have been among the nuns who had previously attended his lectures and, if prevented from doing so by distance, had taken correspondence courses from him and 'learned the scriptures daily page by page'.[6] Or perhaps it was Wimbourne, under the abbess Tetta, where Lioba, most learned of nuns, was educated, a sister who, they said,

> read with attention all the books of the Old and New Testaments and learned by heart the commandments of God. To these she added by way of completion the writings of the church fathers, the decrees of the councils and the whole of ecclesiastical law.[7]

[4] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. and trans. B. Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1962), v, 14, 503–505.
[5] Ibid. iv, 25, 425–27.
[6] Withhold, 'Life of St Boniface', trans. C. H. Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London, 1954), 31.
[7] Rudolf 'Life of St Leoba', in *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries,* 215.

Any convent is a mixed bag, of course, and Wimbourne was no exception; there were the bookworms, but there were also young nuns who went and danced with rage on the grave of a specially severe nun.[8] It may be that Lioba, when abbess of Bischofsheim, remembered the problems at Wimbourne and made sure that her sisters did not behave badly; she constructed a timetable which allowed them enough sleep in order to be alert for study, and when the young nuns read aloud to her during her afternoon siesta, they found their mistakes corrected by their abbess even in her sleep.[9] Bede himself seems to have had no contact with Minster or Wimbourne, but the scholarship of these nuns is an indication that not all monasteries were as deplorable as the Letter to Egbert suggests. It was from this tradition of learning that the request came. Moreover there was contact between the world of Boniface and the world of Bede, for although Bede did not refer to Boniface at all, Boniface knew his writings and prized them highly.

If the community asking for the commentary was not one of these houses, perhaps the choice should be made within Bede's circle of acquaintance, among communities who knew Bede well enough for them to send him a message and ask for his personal attention. He had contact with the convents of Ely, Barking, Coldingham and Whitby when he received information from them about their histories. The choice can be limited further by the fact that it must have been a community which used the canticle of Habakkuk as a liturgical text. A general suggestion in the Rule of St Benedict indicates the use of Scripture canticles in the morning Office[10] and this particular canticle was also used on Good Friday in the Roman rite. These two facts suggest a convent aware of the recommendations about the Office in the Rule of St Benedict, and also up-to-date in Roman liturgical practice. This further suggests a connection with either Wearmouth and Jarrow after the visit of John the archchanter had updated their

[8] Ibid. 208–9.
[9] Ibid. 215.
[10] Rule of St Benedict, cap. 13.

liturgical practice in the Roman style, or with Ripon and the Romanizing tradition of Wilfrid. This would, however, rule out the obvious candidate, Whitby, since its Celtic ethos may still have affected the liturgy there, and also Barking, where the learned recipients of Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* were also influenced by Irish liturgical patterns. The request came from a convent where religious life was taken seriously, where the meaning of words was both known and questioned, where the sisters had enough Latin to wonder very much what it was all about and knew enough about Bede to ask his help; it is not possible to be more specific.

How was this commentary different from Bede's others? The request of the unknown nun gave Bede a unique chance to respond with a fundamental spiritual exposition of a short but difficult text. The fact that it was for nuns did not enter into Bede's consideration, in the sense that he did not in any way condescend to the sisters as if they were weak or unintelligent women. The commentary on Habakkuk was in Bede's immaculate Latin, and it was as appropriate to men as to women. But another fact gave him a freedom to write for the sisters rather especially from his own depth of understanding. Bede's other commentaries on the scriptures had been intended either for the use of clerics less well-equipped with books to enable them to understand the scriptures about which they were preaching; or else they were his contribution to the study undertaken by his equals, such as Bishop Acca, the abbot Hwatberht, or his brothers at Jarrow. They were for preachers and teachers and therefore contained a good deal about the literal and grammatical sense of the text and about its orthodox interpretation. Even on the traditionally mystical text of the Song of Songs, Bede was aware of his audience and had matters relating to heresy to consider. In this case it was different. He was not instructing preachers who were responsible for teaching the truth of the texts but speaking to co-workers in the art of arts, prayer; he was not therefore constrained to spend too much time on literal explanation.

Moreover, he was breaking new ground. He had one predecessor, Jerome, but Jerome had written for a bishop and in a very different ethos. The difference between their commentaries underlines the way in which the kind of audience expected affects a text. Commenting on the same text and with Jerome under his hand, Bede chose to do something essentially different in approach and in content.

What was there, on the other hand, about this commentary that is in line with Bede's usual approach to women? It was yet another instance, this time a personal one, of a theme that ran through all Bede's work, that of the enabling role of women. They were the life-givers: among the pagan Anglo-Saxons more specifically they were the breakers of bread and givers of life, just as men were the sharers of gold and glory. In the case of Christian Anglo-Saxon women, they were the ones who broke the bread of the Scriptures and gave life to souls. The 'double' monastery system in England meant that the head of the house would be a woman and Bede saw those abbesses, and indeed on a smaller scale, the mothers of families, as breaking the word of God for others:

> It is not only bishops, presbyters, deacons or even those who govern monasteries who are to be understood as pastors, but all the faithful who keep watch over the little ones of their house are also properly called pastors, insofar as they preside with solicitous watchfulness over their own household.[11]

Bede saw women at the centre of education in the vital role of nurturing. The education of Wilfrid at Lindisfarne and later his plan to study in Rome, for instance, were both secured and arranged by Queen Eanflaed:

> He [Wilfrid] went at once to Queen Eanflaed because she knew him and it was through her counsel and at her request that he had been admitted to the monastery. She was delighted with the youth's excellent plan and sent him to King

[11] Bede, *Opera Homilectica,* ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 122 (Turnhout, 1955), i,7,49.

> Eorcenberht of Kent who was her cousin, asking him to send Wilfrid honourably to Rome.[12]

The saintly abbess Hilda at Whitby was another such woman:

> She compelled those under her direction to devote so much time to the study of the Holy Scriptures and so much time to the performance of good works that there might be no difficulty in finding many there who were fitted for holy orders, that is, for the service of the altar.[13]

Bede did not suggest that the great secular or monastic ladies were necessarily themselves teachers, but rather that they assumed responsibility for the education of others. It was within this context that Bede received without surprise this request from the sisters, and in this instance he himself became one of those who were encouraged by them. They caused him to undertake a commentary which he made into a compendium of the whole of Christian theology. It begins with the widest possible programme for thought and prayer:

> Beloved sister in Christ, the Canticle of the prophet Habakkuk which you have asked me to explain to you, sets out above all the mystery of the Lord's Passion … it describes mystically the events of his incarnation, resurrection, ascension into heaven and both the faith of the gentiles and the unbelief of the Jews.[14]

Bede provided the sisters with a thoroughgoing course in theology, based upon words they would recite each week; but it was no cold or distant intellectual exercise. At the end he took up the word 'Habakkuk' and, accepting Jerome's interpretation of it as meaning in Hebrew 'embraced' or 'embracing', applied it with warmth to the affection between himself and 'my very dear sister and virgin of Christ', both being 'embraced' together with Christ in the embrace of the Trinity of love:

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[12] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, v, xix, 519.
[13] Ibid. iv, 23, 409.
[14] Bede, *In Cantica Habacuc Allegorica Expositio*, 381.

> If we strive with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength to embrace him, he deigns to enfold us in the heart of his love. I remember the promise of him who said 'if any man loves me, he will be loved of my father and I will love him and manifest myself unto him'; thus we will deserve to be members of the bride who in heaven will sing with joy 'his left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me'.[15]

Bede was a severe and exacting teacher, but he never wanted a proud academic learning for its own sake for any of his Anglo-Saxon pupils or readers. Bertha, first of the Christian queens, and her daughter Ethelburgh were *literati*, educated women, who received letters from Popes. But their learning held no central role as such in the account Bede gave of them; that was reserved for their prayer. Latin learning mattered to Bede, but it was not an end in itself; indeed in his letter to Egbert he did not make it a priority for everyone, even priests, to learn Latin, which had been to him the treasured way into wider and fuller worlds. 'If they cannot learn Latin,' he said, 'let them have translations into English.' It was the central matter of redemption and life in Christ which was the true learning. The exercise of the mind to its capacity was essential, but it was a tool only as part of the total life of each person in Christ. The reading and writing of books opened the person to wide realms of past and future, but that was not the end. From the first Bede had been cautious about learning for its own sake:

> Better is a stupid and unlettered brother who working the good things he knows, merits life in heaven, than one who though being distinguished for his learning in the scriptures or even holding the place of a doctor, lacks the bread of love.[16]

It was the personal contact which reading afforded with the living God through the sacred page which mattered. Pagan writers therefore

[15] Ibid. 409.
[16] Bede, *In Proverbia Salomonis*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119E (Turnhout, 1983), xii, 9,76.

who did not have this other dimension to their words he considered should be read with great prudence, and replaced by the scriptures wherever possible:

> With much more caution must the rose be plucked from among sharp thorns than the lily from soft leaves; much more securely is sound advice sought in apostolic than in Platonic pages.[17]

Though Bede insisted that teachers and preachers must be sincerely learned, this was only a preparation for insight, for real vision was an uncovenanted gift of God. Drythelm, the visionary who journeyed through heaven and hell, was a simple married man in Northumbria; Caedmon, the first Anglo-Saxon poet, was a cowherd who could not read, write or sing; and there was Owine, an East Anglian thane of Queen Etheldreda who, when he went to join the monastery of Chad at Lastingham, carried with him an axe and an adze to show that he wanted no part in the discipline of book-learning —yet it was he who saw and heard angels who came to take the soul of Chad into heaven, not the more bookish brothers.[18]

Surely education is never a matter of accumulating information which will give the person possessing it more status. The word itself is, after all, derived from *educare*, 'to draw out' the full potential of a person. In the Crewian Oration in 1993, Seamus Heaney referred to the understanding Robert Frost had of education as not being about getting to a higher class by achieving another level of knowledge, but allowing perspectives to be so re-aligned that it becomes possible to establish a critical angle on whatever determines ideas of high and low in the first place. It is this expanding of the mind by discipline in order to know what matters that lies behind Bede's view of education. In the constant effort of the converters of the Anglo-Saxons to transform and transfigure their polished, sophisticated pagan society into a Christian

[17] Bede, *In Apocalypsin sancti Johannis*, PL 93, 133, preface.
[18] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, v, 12, 488–498; iv, 24, 414–420; iv, 3, 338–342.

koinonia, this very change had to take place. This was especially true among the nuns of the royal abbeys of England. Great ladies might become abbesses of their own estates and households and continue their great position unchanged at the centre of things; but attention to brightness, glory, nobility, generosity that shows one's own position, needed re-aligning in the new way of the Cross,

> Where the way up is the way down
> The way forward is the way back
> And where you are is where you are not.[19]

Given the chance to write for the nuns of what was most probably a noble house, Bede at once showed what should be the sisters' concern now: a conviction that the things worth working for were centred on Christ, and not on themselves or their kin. He took for granted a capacity of mind, which included a power of streamlined concentration upon God and his revelation in Christ. Of course, he was aware that the sisters needed to understand the Latin of the text, but it was not *grammatika* in itself which was the aim of their schooling.Ttheir education was meant to ensure that they could, for the whole of life, continue to go as deeply as possible into learning about Christ. They were permanently *famulae Christi*, slaves of Christ, Bede's own name for himself. In his commentary on Proverbs he had urged this approach to learning in relation to the verses 'Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not and she shall preserve thee, love her and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principle thing, therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding' (Prov. 4:5–7).

> In all the goods you get, keep in mind 'in all your getting, get understanding', despising all that you possess on earth when you see the way of wisdom. That is what Solomon himself did; when given a choice he preferred the love of wisdom to all things, and in the gospel he who was seeking a precious pearl sold all that he had that he might find it.

[19] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets.*

In the next phrase, Bede used the same word that he used at the end of his commentary on Habakkuk, 'embrace' *(amplectus)* to conclude with a promise:

> If we embrace wisdom so much more will spiritual grace increase our heads, that is the centre of awareness *(principali mentis)*, that they will be given a crown of life in future.[20]

It was not the head swelled with learning that Bede coveted for his dearest sister but a complete person crowned with the glory of wisdom.

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Eclipse 2018

I went out looking for the moon
—blood moon, wolf moon
they called it—
but found only cloud.
Yet there *was* stillness,
the shrieking vixen silenced
for a time.

The grass is not silver
with moonlight, nor even red
in shadow; instead gloom-grey,
yet soft, gentle, welcoming:
that's enough.

Sister Helen

[20] Bede, *In Proverbia Salomonis*, 19.
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HOSPITALITY IN PRAYER[1]

SISTER JUDITH SLG

As a nun I spend most of my time in the convent simply living, and praying privately in my cell and corporately and publicly in chapel. Therefore I don't have much direct contact with Muslims. This is so even though the convent is only a stone's throw away from the multi-faith context of East Oxford, with the wonderful, cosmopolitan Cowley Road and its shops and restaurants from most Asian and European nations. Yet as a nun, dedicated to opening my heart to the mercy of God, and in consequence, to others, I have found a level of contact through prayer and a shared exposure to the mercy of God which has surprised me by its vitality and its similarity, though the paths be quite different.

In 2003 I was one of a group of sisters who visited a local mosque during Muslim Awareness week. It was newly built; the lower floor was complete, but the upper storey was still bare concrete. Our guide explained to us how this vast space and the dome above it would gradually be made beautiful and, in the course of doing so, he recited the Fatiha (the opening words of the Qur'an and of all formal acts of worship) in Arabic. I asked him for an English translation; and what struck me deeply was the great similarity of its petitions with some of those contained in the Lord's Prayer. This encounter would later prove to be the first small step on a long journey of discovery

Sickened by the London bombings of *7* July 2005, I felt a need to join with the Muslims of the local area to do something positive. It was difficult, both as a Christian, and as a member of an enclosed monastic order, to think how this might be done. But in my favour was the community's charism of silent prayer, so I offered to organize an hour's silent prayer as part of One World Week. Our local

[1] An abridged version of the essay of the same title published in *Fear & Friendship*: *Anglicans Engaging with Islam*, eds Frances Ward and Sarah Coakley (Continuum 2012).

interfaith officer visited to give me invaluable advice and some useful contacts. Out of the blue, I found myself getting in touch with a whole host of people. The result was really heartening, with about thirty visitors. As one of the local Christians left he asked me, astounded to see two Muslims of different denominations, 'How did you get those two men to sit and pray together in the same room?' The answer was simple: I had invited them to share silent prayer together, having no idea that either would find the presence of the other a problem. But there they were, one Ahmadiya and one mainstream Muslim, praying together with Christians, at the invitation of a group of nuns, in response to an act of violence which violated the heart of Islam.

I belong to the Littlemore Group, made up of clergy, religious and others doing serious theological study in the context of their ministry. In 2009 we decided on the title *Hospitality, Anglicanism and Islam* for our next conference. I felt that the only way I could engage with this title was at the level of prayer, so decided to ask one of the imams who had come to the prayer for One World Week to teach me the Fatiha. I would use it and see where it took me. The English translation of the prayer runs:

> In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the Most Merciful
> Praise belongs to God, the Sustaining Lord of all the Worlds
> The Most Beneficent, the most Merciful
>
> The Master of the Day of Judgement
> It is You we worship, it is You we ask for help.
> Show us the right way,
> The way of those whom You have blessed, who incur no anger
> and are not astray.

Knowing that, for a Muslim, the prayer should be said in Arabic I tried to learn it that way. I also asked him to show me the actions that I associate with Muslims praying, and to explain their meaning, as I had a deep sense that I needed to use my body in prayer. So it was that I began my morning period of prayer with '*Bismillah ir rahma nirrahim*' (In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most

Merciful'), and then bent to put my hands on my knees and say, '*Allahu akbar*' (God is greater'), and then got to my knees and touched first my nose and then my forehead on the ground saying, *'Subhan Allah*' (Glory be to God').

This involved a great deal of inner opposition: 'Why are you looking to another faith?'; 'Are you in danger of denying that everything necessary for salvation is found in Jesus Christ?'; 'Are you worshipping and bowing down to some strange god?' There were unhelpful associations too. I have heard that those who flew the planes into the Twin Towers did so chanting the words '*Allahu akbar*'. This, in fact, provided me with a starting point. Perhaps by using the same words which they had used, I could begin to create a bridge between two seemingly irreconcilable views of the world, begin to reclaim those words to convey their truth, which felt very much part of my community's vocation of reconciliation. The Muslim and Christian worlds are frequently portrayed as being at loggerheads, but what this 'hospitality' in prayer revealed to me was much more common ground than many imagine there to be. In a purely Christian way, I found it remarkably helpful to begin prayer with the reminder that God is greater.

The Fatiha goes on to speak of God being the Master of the Day of Judgment, and that was in my mind as I said 'God is greater'. But God is also my redeemer, and I was able to begin my prayers confident in the assurance that God is greater than any of my failures in life or prayer, simply remembering and giving thanks for my redemption. It was useful, too, to be reminded that God is greater than any concepts or imaginings I may come up with, however enlightening they may seem at the time.

A threefold declaration of 'Glory be to God' with my body was a real blessing, giving the whole of my body a chance to express itself prayerfully and with movement. William Dalrymple has suggested in his book, *From the Holy Mountain* that the early Muslims took their attitudes of body in prayer from the Christians around them, and that

Eastern Christians have continued in that tradition (105). Could it be a blessing for both Western and Eastern Christians to be reunited with their roots through contact with the Muslims around them?

It began to dawn on me that because Jesus calls God both 'Father' and 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', the God we call Father is for us, too, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: The God of the Jews and the God of the Christians are one and the same. Jews and Christians may make different claims about Jesus, but they actually worship the same God. Wrestling with the inner accusation, `You are bowing down to some strange god', has brought to light for me the simple fact that 'Allah' is the Arabic word for God. It is not a name for God. The Qur'an describes God/Allah in ways that are extremely familiar to me. As the Creator and source of all being, 'He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth and when he decrees something, He says only "Be" and it is' (al Baqara 117). As being One, 'He is God the One, God the eternal' (al Ikhlaas 1–2). He is merciful and master of the Day of Judgement. So what came to me was that God is indeed One as the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and the Qur'an assert. Islam may be another 'system' for expressing belief and life in God, but it is one and the same God that all three faiths talk about. I have often heard reference to the 'Abrahamic faiths', but would it be more helpful nowadays to assert that all three believe and worship one and the same God—to emphasize this, rather than Abraham, as our point of unity?

Should I, as a Christian, break down my prejudices by theological examination of the nature and qualities of Allah as described in the Qur'an? Might I somehow be able to engage in this in a way that doesn't make me feel I am denying the uniqueness of the revelation we have been given in Jesus Christ? Receiving insights from another faith might be akin to the experience of reading the gospel in a language less familiar than my mother tongue, which can reveal new meanings or emphases.

I found that the exercise of ‘hospitality’ in prayer was enriching and challenging when it was done in the privacy of my cell. But I wondered it if could be done publicly. The imam spoke to me of a project he was involved in at a local school, providing mentorship for Muslim pupils and responding to the curiosity of non-Muslims regarding Islam. He conveyed the relentless sense of pressure he felt; how as he walked down the street, he was aware of people passing him and wondering if he was a terrorist. He said that this was hard for an adult to bear; but how much more difficult it must be for the children. If somehow we could assert publicly that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, and if we could be willing to be hospitable enough in prayer to adopt practices not our own, might we begin to challenge the assumption that all Muslims are fanatics who wish us harm? And might we thus be living out something of Jesus’ costly reconciliation?

I had been planning to organize some more silent prayer with Monowar and Kaz, a local chip shop owner. He had been described to me as ‘a most loving man’, and indeed the chippy is rarely empty; all are welcome there, even if only to exchange pleasantries. He had come to see us on Good Friday to bring an Easter card, and had met me building the tomb for our Easter garden near the convent entrance. I thanked him for remembering our festivals, and he replied, ‘Well, sister, it is like this. If you go into a man’s house and mistreat his children he will get angry with you. And this [said with arms out-stretched and looking up to the sky] is God’s house and we are all his children!’

I fixed a date with Monowar, and went to the chippy to invite Kazem to join us in prayer. As usual, there were several people standing round chatting to Kaz. I issued my invitation and read him an extract from David Scott’s poem, ‘Ibn Abbad Rose Early’. Written in the wake of 9/11, this seemed to articulate so well what we wanted to do:

All three went to Paradise,
Ibn Abbad, Rabbi Schmelke of Nikolsburg,
and Father Louis, and sat to eat
at the same table. They drank the water of life
and ate the meat of friendship. Whenever
their cups ran dry or their plates were empty
a little Nazarene came by and filled them up.

Who are you? they said.
I am Jesus, son of Mary. Can I sit awhile?
Be our guest, they said.

As they sat, the ground beneath them shook,
their faces paled and their eyes were filled
with knowledge, and with grief. *Today*
said Jesus *they will hate more and*
love more, than on any other day since the world began. Hold hands,
and ask our God to speak to us in Spirit. And there they sat
in love and prayer, all day,
Ibn Abbad, Rabbi Schmelke of Nikolsburg,
Father Louis, and Jesus, Mary's son.

and their silence was more profound than words
and their communion was most eloquent
and they willed the world to peace.

As I turned to leave, a man standing by the door said, 'You were speaking about praying with Kaz. Can I come too? I would like to visit the convent.' And so it was that Kamel joined our little group.

Kamel and Kazem arrived together. I explained to them that Monowar had taught me the Fatiha, and I hoped that we could start the silence with a recitation of it and end with the ringing of a little bell. Kaz replied, 'There are so many blessings in that prayer; it is an overflowing of the blessings of the merciful heart of God. There is a story which says that, if you look at it as an ocean, even all the angels couldn't carry the first wave of it because it is so big'.

He went on to explain, however, that it could be misunderstood. The last line, for example, speaks of those who are led astray. This has sometimes been mistranslated as ‘the lost’ implying those who are beyond hope. But those who are led astray can be led back to the right path by example, by love. Even the devil was only misled—led astray by his jealousy on seeing God and wanting to be God. Even the devil was beautiful and good, but misled into doing evil. I said that this reminded me so much of St Isaac the Syrian who speaks of ‘the human heart aflame for all creation, for humanity, birds, animals, demons and all creatures’, and continues:

> As a person thinks of them their eyes overflow with tears. From the great and strong pity that grips their heart, and from the great suffering, their heart is wrung and it cannot endure, or listen to, or look upon any harm or the smallest sadness suffered by a creature. Therefore they pray incessantly in tears for the mute ones too, and for the enemies of truth, and for those who do them harm, that they may be kept safe and be forgiven; and also for the creeping things they pray with great pity, which is roused without measure in their heart, even likening them in this to God.

Kamel recited the Fatiha for us very beautifully, knowing the Qur’an by heart. When he had finished, I noticed that both he and Kaz made a gesture with their hands rather like washing their face. I wondered if this was something I should have done too. As the silence began, I sat on the floor, as is my custom for praying, and placed my copy of the Fatiha beside me. The silence had all the usual depth of silence in the presence of God. I noticed that Kaz was reciting prayers very quietly, but after a while, stopped. At the end of the allotted time I rang the little bell. As I went to fetch us glasses of water, I heard Kamel whisper to Kaz, ‘It is so good to do something so different’.

As we were leaving, Kaz told me he had put my copy of the Fatiha, which I had left by my cushion on the floor, on the highest bookshelf, and he pointed it out to me so that I would know where to

find it. He and Kamel came with me to compline, which they found beautiful. Afterwards they said that they wanted very much to come back for some more silence next month. It wasn't until I retrieved my copy of the Fatiha that I remembered that a Muslim would never put the Qur'an, or any portion of it, on the floor, and I was touched by Kaz's gentleness; he had not reproached me in any way, but had simply guided me by example, just as he had said we should guide others. When I thanked him for that at our next meeting, he smiled and said, 'The name of God always has the highest place'.

At our next meeting, I asked Kaz about the gesture. He took my left hand and pointed to the lines AI on its palm and then showed me the IA on my right hand. He explained that in a certain script the lines on my left represented the number 81, and the ones on my left 18. Added together they came to 99, and stood for the 99 beautiful names of God. The gesture they were making was with their palms upwards at the beginning, to receive these blessings, and then drawing them down, showering this light over them.

When Monawar arrived, he asked me if I had chosen this date knowing that today was a special day for them? I admitted that I had not, so he went on to explain that this was the day they kept the memory of Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael. Somehow this led on to a discussion of Hagar's origins and the question of whether she was Egyptian. As there was a Bible in the room I offered to look it up, and found myself warmed that they were happy to accept what the Bible said. It seemed a bit ironic, a Christian and two Muslims consulting the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, as one of them pointed out, Abraham is the father of us all, so we are all cousins.

Again, the silence was beautiful and I found myself thinking, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I will be with them.' Yet we weren't exactly gathered in Jesus' name. I remembered that the question of conversion had come up at the Littlemore Group conference, and realized that if either of these two had mentioned the thought of converting to Christianity I would have felt

extremely uncomfortable. But surely I should want all to convert to Christ? It made me think that relationship to Jesus leads—or should lead—to growth in holiness. These men exuded holiness; therefore, it seemed to me that God must already be working in them. What possible grounds could there be for conversion? Again they came to compline, and on the way they asked me about our time in chapel. They were interested to hear that sisters meet more than five times a day in chapel, and that our prayers vary according to the time of day.

A month later, whilst we were waiting for the group to assemble, there was some noise outside the room and Kaz asked me in a whisper what the other sisters thought about him and other Muslims coming here to pray. I told him honestly that some would find it difficult and others would be pleased.

Monawar arrived quite excited, with a bottle of Zam-Zam Water which his father had brought back from a recent trip to Mecca. He explained that the water was special, from the well that Hagar's child had unearthed when, in desperation, she had abandoned him under a bush. He invited us to share it. We all drank together, standing up according to tradition, and this sharing of sacred and precious water was more moving than I can say.

The silence was beautiful, and again they came to compline afterwards. They seemed to feel more at ease in chapel and asked me what was special about the chapel opposite where they were sitting (Our Lady chapel, where the blessed sacrament is reserved). I was warmed by their genuine interest and desire for reverence.

I was invited to attend Sunday service at a nearby parish where a local imam was going to address the congregation. His title was 'The close connectivity between Christianity and Islam'. He began by stressing that Islam is respectful of the people of the book and tolerant of the two preceding faiths:

> Islam regards itself as an integral part of the Abrahamic family of faiths worshipping the very same sovereign God of the Torah and the gospels. So, whether you refer to the Lord

> of the universe by the biblical terms of Yahweh or Jehovah or by the Qur'anic name of Allah (which is the Arabic terminology for God), Muslims revere the *identical* Supreme Being that Jews and Christians venerate. In other words, Muslims believe in the *same* Lord of the heavens and the earth, the sole Creator of you and me and everything around us.

I was heartened by his expressing the same conclusion to which I was coming and supporting it by quoting extensively from the Qur'an.

Next time only Kaz was able to come. While we talked, he told the story of how, before his death, Mohammad had prayed for the world, and how the cloak he was wearing had become soaked in his sweat. This was resonant of Jesus in Gethsemane, and as it was Passiontide, it had even greater resonance. Kaz spoke so passionately about his faith, saying at one point, 'I don't want to convert you.' It hadn't occurred to me that he might, but I was glad that we could speak so frankly about this. Each of us was quite clear that our aim was to encourage the other's faith and practice of it.

After Easter, Monowar arrived bearing the gift of a book for the Sisters, *The Sufi Science of Self-Realization* by Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani (Fons Vitae, 2006). A practical book about living the spiritual life, it has much in common with the Christian Desert Father tradition. Having left it out for all Sisters to see, I was greeted by two Sisters in 48 hours who both said how much it had spoken to them.

I asked if there was a Muslim tradition of silent prayer. Monowar confirmed that this was so, particularly in the Sufi tradition. Kaz said that on the Day of Judgement God will only ask one question of each person: 'My servant, I have always been with you, you are always in my presence, who have you been with in your heart?' Just as in the Christian tradition, prayer is regarded as being simply in the presence of God. God, who is limitless, nevertheless offers to make the human heart the throne of God. We all three sat in silence trying to allow that to happen. Prior to this there had been a heated and interesting debate about the wearing of the niqab, with both Monowar and Kaz holding

different opinions. When I said that I always tried to smile at any woman I passed who was wearing one, given that I too wear similar garb, the response was, ‘Ah, the sisterhood of solidarity of the conspicuously dressed!’

This engagement with Islam is a constantly evolving process. Like treading on steppingstones across a river, all I can do is describe each one as I meet it. The monastic path calls us to enlarge our heart by simplicity of life and an attentive to listening to the voice of God through its prosaic detail. I hadn’t expected that this listening would bid me attend to another faith tradition, but I am finding my initial expectations were too narrow. I am enriched as my heart is stretched by attending to what one Muslim prayer can teach me of the mercy of God. As this unfolds, I become more aware that prayer requires me to lay aside my own fears, to draw nearer to my neighbour and to be willing to open my heart to be enlarged, even to the extent of learning about God from another tradition. Then I can see that the God of whom another tradition speaks is the same God who calls me to faithfulness within my own.

SISTER ANKE LANGMAAK
(29 February 1928 – 22 December 2018)

SISTER AVIS MARY SLG

Sister Anke, who died just before Christmas last year, was a Sister of Ordo Pacis, a German Lutheran community of women with which we have had close links for over fifty years. Anke had seemed to be in relatively good health, despite inevitable age-related health issues, but towards the end of last year, investigations led to a diagnosis of cancer which bore her off, mercifully rapidly, within weeks. I had spoken to her on the telephone just weeks before her death; by this time we were having regular conversations, about one of our Sisters in declining health, and just generally catching up with news. Although Anke's leaving us was sudden, she had herself lived consciously towards the reality of death for many years; indeed, the SLG Press publication, *The Creativity of Diminishment* (FP109), based on reflections she shared with us in 1987, ends with reflections on living that final 'diminishment' which is a descent into death.

I was grateful to be able to attend Sr Anke's funeral on behalf of SLG on Saturday 19 January and to spend the weekend with many of the gathered Ordo Pacis Sisters. The funeral service was combined with a celebration of the Eucharist, in the church at Sinstorf near Fleestedt, where Ordo Pacis have their house. Over the weekend, I joined discussions with the gathered Community, as they made initial attempts to name and discern 'Anke's legacy' and consider how best to move forwards into the future. I was glad to be able to contribute my own thoughts and to say how much the links with Ordo Pacis and with Sr Anke were valued by SLG and how much we ourselves had received.

Sr Anke was a remarkable, charismatic person. A native of Hamburg, she had been formed by and in the traumas of the Second

World War and experienced at first hand the horrors of the carpet bombing of her city. She developed a determination to give her life in the service of Christ's peace; in the early 1950s, she came together with other like-minded women to found Ordo Pacis within the Lutheran Church. Soon after World War II, a number of new expressions of Lutheran community life had come into being. These communities have brought great riches to the Church; often over subsequent decades they suffered some time of crisis, as their founders died, with the need to discern what path to take next, a process in which Ordo Pacis has also been engaged over the years.

As a young woman pastor in a male-dominated Church, Anke experienced constant discrimination; parish work was not open to her. Instead she spent a formative time working in the pastoral care of the mentally ill in hospital. Her experience in that field enabled her to build up her profound human understanding and contributed to her gifts of empathy and patience and of accompanying others through times of darkness. She was counsellor and guide to countless people over the years. As Anke grew older, she found herself supporting others, in her own community and in ours, who were facing the challenge of the massive diminishment which is dementia. Spared its ravages, her own mind remained crystal-clear until, with complete clarity, she entered knowingly into her final illness.

When I entered SLG in October 1978, Ordo Pacis was almost a twin community of SLG. Sisters came frequently from Germany, often for prolonged periods, and several of our Sisters and Oblate Sisters visited in return. Sr Anke's name was often mentioned, and although I had no idea what to expect, I was surprised when such a diminutive, quietly-spoken, gracious Sister finally came to stay a few months later.

In the 1960s SLG's strict enclosure had been lifted a little, particularly for inter-community visits, including ecumenical ones. We had recognised a need to provide a lead in opening up relationships between communities, Anglican and beyond. As a result,

Sr Jocelyn Mary attended an international ecumenical conference for religious in Belgium towards the end of the decade, at which she met Sr Anke, who came from a small group which had living for years a common life at the Cella St Hildegard in Hamburg, within the wider Germany community of Ordo Pacis. There was a common blessing as a full Sister after a period of training in Ordo Pacis, but three years after the foundation of the Community, a few had followed a sense of call to live a common life, and subsequently, 'to dare to take the Vows', as Sr Anke expressed it, which she herself did on the Feast of the Epiphany in 1962. The common life group ceased in the early years of this century when vocations were fewer and the decision was taken that they would lay down the common life aspect, remaining full members of Ordo Pacis, living under vows, and in fact in regular and committed contact with each other; four now remain. As Anke recounted in a letter in 2001 to one of her Sisters about meeting Sr Jocelyn Mary:

> We got talking and told each other about ourselves. Their word was 'reconciliation'; ours was 'peace'. And there we met! Then [Sr Jocelyn Mary] made the offer that a Cella Sister could be sent to Fairacres for a time. … Now we might perhaps be able to discover in a 'contemplative' community whether that really was our way.
>
> Our Sister Agnes went for three months in April 1970, already ill with cancer, although we didn't know that. (She died at the age of 45 in the summer of 1971.) It was the first time that they had opened their enclosure to such a guest! And they really let Agnes share in their life. … And Agnes said that as soon as she arrived at the door of the convent, she knew that this was it!

Sr Anke was invited to visit, following the death of Sr Agnes. At first she was only free to come for two weeks and experienced on arrival that same sense of recognition. Our Sr Elizabeth (who died in 1987 at 97 and had accompanied Agnes during her visit) said to Anke that the little community needed a Rule. Anke sat down there and then

and wrote one, returning, to the astonishment of her Sisters, with ‘something resembling a Rule, but only for us in the Cella’. It became very clear to them that what was needed was a Rule for the whole Community, and Anke returned to Fairacres in September 1972 for six weeks to try to write a Rule. She had her own unique ways of expression and her unique spiritual gifts to bring to this task.

For many years Anke was both the Leading Sister of Ordo Pacis and the leader (‘Diakonin’) of the Cella Sisters. As she laid down these roles in the mid 1980s, the two roles were separated, and Anke then had a six-month sabbatical with SLG; a mutually enriching time. She lived fully with the Sisters at Fairacres, working in the kitchen, and then spent a short time at Bede House, the house we then had in Kent. She was now feeling called to a life of greater withdrawal within Ordo Pacis, to a variety of the eremitical life. As she returned to Ordo Pacis, she was given the use of their attic space, which was transformed into a ‘hermitage’; she continued to celebrate the Eucharist, in turn with others who were ordained, and to see people.

Sr Waltraut, then Diakonin, said to Anke that it would be helpful to have a ‘Jesuit father’ to accompany her on this new way. After reflection, Anke decided that her best ‘Jesuit father’ would be our Sr Jane; thus it was that she came regularly to see her. After a few years, and after the Berlin Wall had fallen, Anke experienced a call to become an ‘urban hermit’ in one of the cities of the former East Germany. A possibility came up in the Berlin suburb of Hellersdorf, and so, having said her last goodbye to her ‘Jesuit father’ at Fairacres, Anke moved in early 1993 and lived there until a few years ago. It was a very courageous move. She had hitherto only really known Hamburg and its surroundings and had not travelled extensively, despite the frequent flights to SLG. Now she was faced with a massive culture change: she was in a very secular society, with the shifts in society as Germany tried to unite East and West; she also had to contend with experiencing lack of comprehension about what she was trying to do there. She wrote in December 1994:

> I am trying to listen, and to grasp a bit what is really happening here, without falling prey to western arrogance. But indeed I am formed through and through in a western way—so all that is a great task and requires much sensitivity, which also has to develop for the first time.

To begin with, Sr Anke had to draw fairly rigid boundaries: not only in Hellersdorf, where she had to explain to the non-comprehending that she wanted to be involved with the Church and certain things in the parish, yet would not be taking part in purely social events; but also with her Community and the many people she accompanied. Her phone number, for instance, was only made available to very few for several years. As she got more established, she was able to be more open to visits and phone calls. I visited her myself on several occasions when I was in Berlin and, as was Anke's custom, we always concluded with a celebration of the Eucharist, Ordo Pacis style.

But then Anke started feeling the challenges of how to 'manage', and a few years ago Sr Waltraut, who now lived in Herrenberg, south of Stuttgart, offered that if Anke could come to her, they would find a larger flat and Waltraut would take care of her in her old age. Anke was glad to accept this generous offer, but now was launched on a further challenge, as she had never lived in the south of Germany, with its different culture and mentality. The years proved to be blessed ones, in this new, modified common life. A large contingent attended Anke's funeral from both Herrenberg and Berlin, a long journey in each case. For Ordo Pacis, it was perhaps the end of a long period of 'ambiguous grief', where Anke had 'left' to enter upon the eremitical aspect of her vocation, yet she remained as a full Sister and the last of the founding Sisters. Now begins a new era, which will require much discernment and prayer and discussion for Ordo Pacis.

So much more could be written. Anke gave generously to many, including SLG. When Sr Anne as Reverend Mother decided in 1990 to respond to Waltraut's invitation to send a Sister to their house at

Fleestedt, since there had been a bit of a gap in our visits to them, Sr Anne selected me and also decided it would be good if I could visit the Carmels in Dachau and Berlin, with which I was in close touch. This was a complete first for me, especially visiting the concentration camp in Dachau and the place of execution at Plötzensee in Berlin, with which the Carmels were respectively linked. On Anke's visits to see Sr Jane, she met with me too, to help me to prepare for the trip. When it finally took place in 1992, two years after it was first mooted, I met with Sr Anke in Fleestedt before and after my visits to the Carmels. I am grateful at a personal level for Anke's care and wisdom. When she died, I realised that I had somehow taken it for granted that she would always be there for us. That is of course true, yet now in another dimension.

Sr Anke had a unique use of English, together with a remarkable pictorial sense, frequently using a traditional German picture to expound spiritual truths. She often returned to a picture which came to her in her prayer. It was a picture based on words from Taizé: 'The resurrected Christ celebrates his feast of reconciliation in us without ending.' She wrote:

> There is a wonderful banquet-hall, full of light and joy, a large table, Christ as the Master of the Feast sitting as president at this table. And round the table 'I' am sitting, my whole being with all its parts, which constitute my human existence, some known, some half-known, most perhaps unconscious. They are all invited to come to Christ's feast in me, no one is excluded or expelled. Christ invites them all. I am very often rather horrified that all are allowed to come. And I have to greet them, to lead them to the table and so on. A picture for our being reconciled as a person in Christ! It is a very good exercise to let your 'people' come to this feast of Christ: for example, let your body come, let your fear come, your guilty feeling, your memories, your super-ego.

ASSOCIATES

New FLG

Samantha Harris	9 January 2019
Jonathan Elcock	21 March 2019
John Francis Friendship	30 April 2019

New Priests Associate

Nigel Rooms	6 December 2018
Bruce Duncan	11 April 2019

R I P

FLG

Denise Houghton Brown	12 June 2017
Anne Haines	6 January 2019
Yvonne Smolenski	1 March 2019

Companion

Karin Antonini	24 December 2018

VISITOR INFORMATION

We regret that we shall be closed to guests from
1 August this year until the building project is completed
sometime in 2021.

BOOKS

Christ the Heart of Creation, Rowan Williams, Bloomsbury, Continuum, 2018, £22.50. ISBN: 9781472945549. Available in eBook format.

This is probably the most significant piece of Anglican theology for a generation, and it places Rowan Williams firmly in the mainstream of reflection on the Incarnation that flows from the *Lux Mundi* tradition of Gore, Temple and Ramsey. It is a demanding book to read because the paragraphs are too long always to hold the reader's attention and concentration. It also lacks a bibliography, which is a real weakness, despite relevant references in the notes along the way. Yet to read it is to be graciously let into the mind of a sensitive, learned and reflective thinker, who is endowed with keen pastoral sensitivity as well poetic alertness to the way language functions. In the background is a disciplined and self-sacrificial rhythm of prayerful engagement over many years with the communication of Christian belief.

The book begins with a sustained tribute to the thought of Austin Farrer, who sought 'to embark on the search for clusters of metaphor in Scripture that point towards the presence of the unlimited [i.e. God] within history' (6). As Michael Ramsey used to say about the Atonement in the New Testament, it is 'the juxtaposition of hitherto incompatible images of sacrifice' in the person of the Crucified Christ. The central thesis of Rowan Williams' study is that there can be no competition between God and created humanity: the Incarnation in no way displaces the full human nature of Jesus. God's infinite reality cannot be placed alongside the created world of which we are a part in any comparable manner. The relationship between the two, revealed in Christ, is determined solely by God's 'unconstrained and selfless love'(11).

The opening chapter contains a detailed consideration of St Thomas Aquinas on the nature of being. Some of this is quite technical as Rowan Williams seeks to establish the language by which

the eternal Word of God expresses itself fully in the human person of Jesus Christ, 'by comprehensively shaping the finite actions of a human subject [i.e. Jesus] in such a way that the real and concrete distinctiveness of that subject cannot be spoken of without reference to the Word' (26). He concludes that 'there is no gap between the active, specific presence of Jesus in human history and the active, specific presence of the divine Word' (32). He also notes, though he does not explore, the way in which Aquinas perceived the Word of God 'as the animating centre of all finite intelligibility and interdependence' (38, note 56). His discussion of Aquinas does not allude to the recent important study by Bernhard Blankenhorn, which examines the influence of Dionysian mysticism in the theology of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. This provides a fuller context for understanding what is being discussed here.

One of the great strengths of this book is the insistence that the reality of Christ as the incarnate Word of God determines the nature of the Christian Church. The relationship between the Head and the Body is complete, and Rowan Williams does not duck the profound moral and spiritual significance implications of this belief. He returns to it again and again in all the various contexts of his discussion of the historical development of Christology. The truth of the Body of Christ is that 'other human agents are affiliated to and aligned with the relation of Jesus and the Word of God' (39). His life flows into their lives with transforming effect. In the next chapter, Rowan Williams examines in detail the way in which this is set forth in the theology of Augustine, of which he has great knowledge and understanding. Before he does this, however, he outlines very clearly the trajectory of patristic Christology and what was at stake in its development of appropriate language, demonstrating very clearly how the essential dynamics and challenges of Christology are evident in the New Testament itself.

The most notable discussion in this book revolves around Maximus the Confessor, and it is fortunate that there now exists a

first-class translation of his *Ambigua*, recently translated by Nicholas Constas and published by Dumbarton Oaks. After indicating the strengths and limitations of the language used to define Christology at the Council of Chalcedon, the discussion turns to a minute consideration of 'filiation' as the unique characteristic of the Word of God revealed in the life and suffering of the incarnate Christ. 'The significant point is that we are already looking at a style of speaking about Jesus in which the identifying detail of his human life is understood as inseparable from the communication of the divine which it carries' (118). The important conclusion is that 'the union of finite and infinite in Christ is thus the pivot of a metaphysic in which there are genuinely new levels of integration and reconciliation to be realized in the temporal world' (121). To use a geological analogy, the impact of the heat and pressure of divine presence upon created reality is to metamorphose it, not consume it. In the thought of Maximus, this divine remaking embraces not only humanity but all created reality, transforming it into a sacramental presence that reflects the beauty of divine glory. Rowan Williams concludes Part One of this book with a spirited defence of the relevance of patristic and medieval Christology.

Part Two of this book moves to consider the later medieval reaction to the theology of Aquinas evident in Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, noting how the connection between Christology and ecclesiology became attenuated. In an important footnote, however, Rowan Williams signals the significance of the Nicholas of Cusa as a corrective to nominalist tendencies (137, note 20) and a brilliant heir to patristic and earlier medieval thought. His treatment of first Luther and then Calvin is well-informed and robust. It is also very interesting, not least in the careful justice that he does to Calvin's Christology, which is often misunderstood, concluding that 'the divine image in us, despite all, is an act of God, immune to our sacrilege,' (161, note 48, citing the novelist Marilynne Robinson). All this is discussed with an eye to later Protestant theology, Lutheran and Reformed. Calvin's stress on Christ's 'solidarity in human extremity

takes on an increasing significance as theology itself becomes more conscious of its need to hear and absorb the voices of those living and dying in extremity' (162) Rowan Williams has Moltmann and Bonhoeffer in mind, and he regards Calvin as the bridge between the patristic and medieval tradition and 'the new idioms of a theology shaped by the challenges and nightmares of twentieth century Europe' (165).

Discussion turns to consideration of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noting that 'the Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is still one of the less carefully studied aspects of his tantalizing theological legacy' (169) This book attempts to rectify this situation to some degree. Rowan Williams notes rightly that, for Bonhoeffer, 'the humiliation and self-emptying or *kenosis* of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ is not so much in the fact of the Incarnation itself as in the specific human humiliation of the Cross, the rejection of Jesus as a sinner or criminal' (188). It is the suffering, failure and ambiguity of the Cross that reveals the presence of God in Christ as the hidden light shining in the darkest place. This solidarity with those who suffer and are cast out is what is disturbing to more conventional perceptions of what God is like. 'The stumbling-block is that the incarnate life is as it is, vulnerable and other-directed' (191). This conviction becomes the *leit-motiv* for the ethical application of Bonhoeffer's Christology, as well as his own costly witness, to the complexities of Christian life 'in the world.' The conclusion is that 'the way God is present is as the humiliated and suffering Jesus' (196). God is indeed Christ-like, therefore, and the Church is called to be a Christ-like witness within and for the life of the world. Rowan Williams has much to say in this book about how this can and should occur. For in the famous words of Bonhoeffer, written while in prison in 1944, 'God lets Himself be pushed out of the world on to the Cross' (217), and this is where Christians will find Him.

This book concludes with a fascinating discussion of the significance of the thought of the Jesuit theologian Przywara. It is not

appropriate to try to summarise here what is a quite recondite discussion, simply to conclude that the essence of the matter appears to be the conviction that 'the God whose *quid* (i.e. what) is revealed in Christ is the God who is strictly unspeakable by finite things but who speaks Himself in and as an entirely finite subject (i.e. Jesus), wholly flesh and blood, mortal and vulnerable … and God has invited us into the life that is His self-expression' (234). The concluding words of the prologue of St John's gospel say: 'No one has seen God at any time: God the only-begotten, the Son in the bosom of the Father, he has declared (or expressed) Him' (John 1:18). In the Incarnation, and supremely on the Cross, there is revealed the supreme divine paradox, where apparent opposites, infinite and finite, coincide (236). For Christians, therefore, submitting to the divine patience and participating in Christ's self-giving love become the daily resolution of ethical effort and spiritual contemplation (238). *Kenosis*, the divine self-emptying, demonstrates the self-restraint of God Himself, evident in creation, redemption and sanctification. Rowan Williams points towards the end of this book to the spiritual theology of St John of the Cross, saying that prayer 'is our assimilation into the infinite's self-unveiling in the dark places of the finite world, in the wordless helplessness of the Cross' (248).

This is a rich and many-layered study, the fruit of deep and at times costly reflection. It can be read and reread. Rowan Williams admits that there are gaps: for example, St Anselm is absent, as are Nicholas of Cusa and most notably St Bonaventure. He notes the common ground between Bonaventure and Maximus the Confessor, however (128, note 1), and it is Bonaventure who is the most consistently Christ-centred of medieval theologians. All that Rowan Williams seeks to establish throughout this fascinating study was expressed with great clarity by Bonaventure, who stands alongside St Thomas Aquinas at the pinnacle of Western medieval theology in the thirteenth century.

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