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Cover photo: the orchard, 2023
(credit: Sr Clare-Louise)

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COMMUNITY NOTES

Dear Friends,

Greetings on a sunny day at the beginning of June! Before I sat down at the computer, I took a cup of tea out into the garden. The new landscaping is beginning to look established now, particularly in the Quad where the shrubs are flourishing, and it has become a wonderful hiding-place for the cats. The apple trees have finished blossoming, and we hope for our usual bumper crop of apples; we have already enjoyed the first of the rhubarb. The gradual re-establishment of the gardens mirrors the gradual re-establishment of the Community in our newly-refurbished and rebuilt buildings, a process that continues to unfold as time passes.



On Pentecost Sunday I came out of office at the end of a term as Reverend Mother, and on the following day was re-elected for a third term of office. It leads me to reflect back on the past years; what a lot the Community has experienced since the last election, in particular the whole building project. In fact, our last election was held under Covid restrictions while we were living out of the Convent, with Sr Judith travelling between our various houses on her bicycle with the ballot box in the basket! It was good to be back in the Chapel for this year's occasion.

Leadership in any context is challenging; I am very conscious as I look towards the coming three years of how dependent I am on the grace of God, and the prayers of Communities and friends, to meet that challenge. At the same time, to be a sister in the Community is an enormous blessing. We continue to seek to discern the way forward for the Community in this period of its life, and in response to the needs of the Church and the world. That is a constant task; we have always to be aware of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be pushing us towards growth and change as well as

the challenge of faithfulness in the ordinary and the everyday.

On 1 August we will be celebrating the centenary of the dedication of the Chapel in 1923, with a special Eucharist followed by lunch. As we celebrate 100 years since the dedication, I find it salutary to ponder how life must have been for those early Sisters taking possession of, and worshipping in, their new Chapel.

Several years ago, when the wooden choir stalls were removed, we found an old newspaper dating from the 1920s hidden under the stalls. It was a tangible, if rather dusty, connection with the men involved in the original work on the Chapel. The 1920s were, of course, between the two World Wars; one thing that has not changed is the dangerous and troubled state of our world. At Vespers on a Wednesday the Community includes a prayer for Ukraine. For some time, the Diocese of Europe invited people to join in prayers for Ukraine on Wednesday evenings at 6 p.m. Although that initiative has come to an end, we, like so many others, continue to hold the needs of Ukraine and its surrounding countries in our prayers and make that explicit during Wednesday Vespers.

We continue to receive many requests for intercession, and Sisters often return from a trip out having had an encounter with someone who has asked for their prayers. The form for the blessing of a Reverend Mother into office includes the following:

The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God has been called and set apart within the Church to serve God by a life of prayer and self-oblation for the life of the world.

This remains true for the Community, even as we explore how that life is lived out in our current circumstances. Remaining in touch with the world and its needs, while cultivating a heart set on God, is an important part of our vocation.

One of the delights of the past months has been the return of guests to stay with us for retreat. We have seen both old friends and new faces. The



opportunity to turn aside with God is an important part of the spiritual life, perhaps even more so in our frenetically busy and over-connected world, so we have a steady stream of guests coming to stay.



SLG Press has, over the past few months, published two particularly exciting new books. *Doors* is a beautifully assembled collection of Sr Raphael's thoughts, prayers and reflections, gathered over the years of her Community life and enhanced by illustrations of various types of doors. It is published in full colour and makes a wonderful book for dipping into and pondering.

Also newly published is *Love Will Come With Fire*, an anthology of poetry written by Sisters. Extracts from both books are printed in this *Chronicle*. The Contemplative Poetry Series from the Press is a new departure but seems to be finding a ready audience, and this is the first time that we have published an anthology of poetry by members of the Community. It is a particular delight as a Sister to be able to appreciate the poetry of other Sisters. Many of you will agree that poetry and prayer are closely intertwined, regardless of the faith, or not, of the poet. The poet explores the depths of human experience and leads us into our own reflections. The introduction to the book is taken from some writing by Mother Mary Clare, and she makes the link between poetry and *lectio divina*:

We must take it slowly. When a line, a verse, a word, speaks to us we can hold it gently in the heart, knowing that God can speak to us through it and meet the need of the moment. (p. v)



The process of *writing* poetry too, is a form of *lectio*: the slow pondering of the thoughts and experiences of the heart, caught in words.

A very much appreciated event was held here on Thursday 25 May, to launch the poetry series, and in particular the Sisters' anthology. A large gathering of friends, associates and SLG Press authors joined the Sisters to hear poetry

read by the poets from the series, John Gallas, Edward Clarke and James Ramsay, as well as several of the Sisters whose poems appear in *Love Will Come With Fire*.

This seems to be very much a time of looking both back and forward: together we look towards a new term of office of the Reverend Mother, while at the same time we look back to those early Sisters in their new Chapel a century ago. We also look forward in our troubled and troubling world to discern the leading of the Spirit. Fortunately, our hope is not in our own strength, for ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’ (Heb. 13:8).

The Community has its roots in the tradition of monastic life and in the lived experience of the first Sisters. Above all, we are rooted in the Love of God to which we are dedicated. In that Love I send you our prayers and best wishes.

With prayers,

CLARE-LOUISE SLG



SISTER FREDA OF THE GUARDIAN ANGELS

15 July 1927–15 December 2022

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

I am aware that Sr Freda probably would not be very keen on someone preaching about her; I do not think she would want someone praising her life and her achievements. What she would want proclaimed is not herself but her Saviour. However, it may be that in preaching the Gospel, I can say something about Sr Freda and her life as well, and vice versa.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:11–15)

A number of themes underpinned Sr Freda's life. She was first Professed in the Community of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd, and the passage about the Good Shepherd above was the one she chose for her funeral; she had a devotion to, and love of, the Holy Guardian Angels; she had a love for St Alban and the cathedral city that bears his name; and she came to join us as a Sister of the Love of God with a commitment to a life of contemplative, intercessory prayer.

Sr Freda herself wrote in a note to Sr Rosemary who was Reverend Mother at the time of her transference to SLG:

Some people consider things happen by chance, but I am more inclined to think that they are meant. I have always had an awareness of the Holy Angels and their concern and care for us and so I found that without any prior arrangement my first community Mass at West Oghwell was the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels. Likewise, my Profession Days. My home parish where I was born and brought up had St John the Baptist as its patron saint and we lived in the diocese of St Albans. It happened without any deliberate planning that I made my Profession on St Alban's Day and my Life Vows on the Beheading of St John the Baptist. This came to me as a confirmation of what I was doing and that it was meant, whatever the future might hold.

Sr Freda's first arrival at West Oghwell was in 1951, and her Life Profession was in 1954; she transferred to SLG on 8 March 1998. Those bare facts certainly tell us that Sr Freda lived the religious life for seventy-one years; but it is the themes I have outlined that give shape and substance to the bare bones. I will focus on just two here.

The Community that Sr Freda entered at West Oghwell was dedicated to Jesus the Good Shepherd, that image so familiar to us. In John 10:14 Jesus tells us that 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.' Years of Christian life, even years of the religious life, can blunt our remembrance of this basic fact of our faith: Jesus is our Good Shepherd – he knows us, and we know him. When we ponder that fact, by rights it should lead us to a sense of awe and amazement. 'I know my own and my own know me.' For someone vowed to God in the religious life, and for anyone living out

their Christian vocation, our Lord's recognition and individual calling of each one of us is a fundamental fact. For Sr Freda's first community this was the Christian mystery that underpinned their life and vocation, but for all of us, the truth of Jesus our Good Shepherd, who knows and calls his sheep, is a mystery of faith that sustains us in our discipleship. All of us have, in one way or another, responded to the call of God, whether it is as religious, as priests, in our work and home circumstances, or any combination of those things. As St John says later in the same chapter. 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.' (John 10:27).

Answering the call of God is not a one-off thing but continues throughout our lives. For all of us the challenge is living out that truth and response in the humdrum everyday circumstances of our life. In Sr Freda we saw someone who was faithful to that call. It was not easy, and it took her to places and into circumstances that she might not have expected, but it was part of her being, reflected in her daily life.

Going to the public library on Saturday I passed a street preacher inviting people into a relationship with Jesus. We might find ourselves, especially those of us who are introverts, a bit embarrassed by that, even passing by on the other side of the road. But he was right: that relationship with Jesus, who knows us and calls us, is at the heart of our journey of faith. We might find ourselves more comfortable with the saying attributed to St Francis: 'Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.'

A fundamental and deep-rooted trust in Jesus the Good Shepherd sustained Sr Freda and, while she also would perhaps have been embarrassed by street preaching and not inclined to do it herself, certainly St Francis's comment was true of her life. All of us will remember her smile; rarely given but lighting up her whole being and giving us a glimpse of her joy in the Lord.

Her devotion to the Guardian Angels likewise remained firm throughout her life, including in the 'God-incidence' which I referred to above. Again, this happened in an understated way, but it was a way that was deep and meaningful to Sr Freda. The presence of the Guardian Angels, as Sr Freda discovered, is about the awareness of the real presence of spiritual realities in our lives, and the concern of the saints and angels for those of us still on earth. We no longer use the terms 'Church Militant' and 'Church Triumphant' very often, and I found some very odd things when I searched for the

terms online, but there is a hint of a reminder of All Saints and All Souls to be found, and of the concern and care of those in the heavens for the Body of Christ still on earth. Our spiritual life is not limited to certain holy times and places but pervades the whole of our lives, and the influence of spiritual realities is present for us all.

I began by suggesting that I did not feel Sr Freda would appreciate a great deal said about her. In fact, she does have a lot to say to us. Not by amazing achievements or by noticeable activities, although she certainly had some of those (in her service overseas and her time as Reverend Mother of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd), but by a solid and deeply-rooted faith that fed her life. As we celebrate her life, we can give thanks for that faithfulness and stability that carried her through a long life to her death. Our Rule on Profession states

All shall endeavour to unite themselves with our Lord's offering by the daily dying to self, that all their actions, thoughts and words may be permeated with the spirit of sacrificial love ... the offering continues until it is consummated in death. (*Rule*, Chapter 8, 'Profession').

That sort of lifelong commitment can only be sustained by the grace of God. It is that promise, that Jesus is our Good Shepherd, our Saviour, and our Lord, which forms a firm foundation for us as we follow the call of God, as Sr Freda did.

Those of us who were privileged to see Sr Freda after her death will never forget the transformation of her face in death. She had suffered from anxiety a great deal throughout her life, but what we saw was someone at peace, as if she had heard those other Gospel words:

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.

✠ RIP ✠

Canon John Woodley (Priest Associate)

25 November 2022

Sylvia Huber (FLG)

6 December 2022

FAIRACRES GARDEN

Magical misty morning
trees appear like ghosts
daffodils glow.

Sunrise steals across the sky
lighting up the West
place of its setting

under clear blue sky
damson blossom dazzling
white
look up.

clouds are artists
sky their canvas
what pictures do you see
there

minus three degrees with fog
sun tries to break through
no luck

fussy floppy fuschias
some love them
some don't.

let go of yourself
God delights in emptiness
Wisdom from Eckhart.

Sister Adrian

THE EXPERIENCE OF STROKE AND THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT¹

BEN DE LA MARE

In this essay I would like to try, in the first instance, to describe the experience of stroke, and to set my own story in the context of more general observations on strokes and on the care of stroke patients. My own stroke brought my active working life to an abrupt end, but I am keen to stress that, in my case at least, the thinking went on (this essay offers a test of this last proposition). It does not attempt to survey my whole working-life, mainly as a Church of England parish priest, and its interaction with my faith; but it does try to explore some of the consequences for faith, and for prayer, prompted by the stroke.

There is a personal story of sometimes bewildering complexity behind every stroke. Why is stroke any different from other serious illness? Although I can identify some of the distinctive characteristics of strokes, I leave it to others to answer that question more adequately. It only needs to be stated here that all strokes, in some measure, affect mental processes – sometimes profoundly – and we easily underestimate the extent to which our performance is affected by our state of mind.

I am not the only stroke patient who hates the intended sympathy of ‘I know just what it feels like’. We have all lived before and after stroke. We know very well the effect it has on energy levels, staying power, getting things completed, appetite and zest for life, mood and much else. For some of us, these all culminate in the effect of stroke on faith, prayer, and moral urgency. If our interlocutor has travelled all these by-ways of the human spirit, and others too, then perhaps they do know what it feels like.

¹ This article was originally published in *Fairacres Chronicle* 38/2 Winter 2005, and has been reprinted here by request. It was also published in the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, December, 2005, and we are grateful to the BMJ Publishing Group for permission to include it in the *Chronicle*. It was reprinted in Jennifer Tann, ed. *Soul Pain: Priests Reflect on Personal Experiences of Serious and Terminal Illness* (Canterbury Press, 2014), 25–36. References and statistics have been updated to reflect current information.

My title invites the attention of a wide range of readers. For some, who are already experts in the field, I can only offer the testimony of personal experience set alongside a more hidden and elusive human discipline. Certain stroke victims who have made good recoveries have set it all down before, in books or in interviews. One, Rosemary Sassoon, most helpfully mixes her own experience with valuable advice from experts in the field. Many other people lack direct knowledge or experience of this condition; and it is for them that I shall include some general information about the impact of strokes.

My brain surgeon, Peter Crawford, was a little surprised when I raised the question of ‘spiritual impact’.² He had plenty to say about the process of physical recovery; and was even more interested in stimulating a revival of mental appetite. But he left it there. I took his point; and so I shall attempt here to begin to answer my own question. My training was in theology, which is why I believe that all pastoral ministry within the Christian church should come under the searching scrutiny of theology. That scrutiny ought to extend to cover the personal experience of the minister.

I begin with the trauma itself. Bad things had happened in the past, but this was something quite new. It might help to describe this as a brain attack. That does convey something of the violence of the impact. For it affects everything, especially that decision that has to be made: *should* life go on? During that shadow time when consciousness was allowed to return, I was dimly aware of a choice still to be made: to live or not to live. Was it as simple as that? Perhaps, perhaps not; though I do distinctly remember a period when, to me, extinction really did not matter. The raw experience of existence was so awful. Even then, however, I could still understand my value to those who were closest to me. This may go some way to explain my reported response to the innocent question: ‘What shall I tell them in church tomorrow?’ following my restoration to consciousness. I replied: ‘Indestructibly hopeful’. I do not remember saying this; but others have said

² Peter Crawford was a senior neurosurgeon at the Regional Neuroscience Centre based at the Newcastle General Hospital. He was the Northern training programme director for neurosurgery for many years and promoted the research pursuits of trainees.

that it is authentic, and I would like to think that those two words brought a smile. They also offer just a hint of a life sometimes disciplined by the study of theology and, with hindsight, I suggest also that the decision not to give up might have been shaped by the words of Jesus beginning: not *my* will, not *what I want*, but...

In those early days of returning awareness, and right through my two months in hospital – nowadays it would not be so long – I seemed to be faced with the withdrawal of God. I have said to friends that ‘I was reduced to praying, because that was almost the only thing I could gladly do’. That sounds odd, but then the circumstances were strange and unfamiliar; and bodily weakness may have made my mind more alert. Let me fill in the picture. I did not eat for a fortnight. I could not read. I was uninterested in the radio, and I even lost my taste for classical music.

In spite of my immobility the determination to focus mind and heart together on the task of prayer prevailed. It was a prayer of the utmost simplicity. Often, just a single word repeated. I think that it sought to drain off lingering self-pity and make more room for the love of God. God’s absence was real enough, but His love was conveyed through the constant care that surrounded me. There is a paradox for tidy thinkers, and here is another: over all those weeks of rehabilitation, God’s providence was strongly felt, but not His presence.

I alluded earlier to other bad experiences in my life. One at least relates to the matter in hand. Almost exactly seven years before the stroke I had become seriously ill; and on that occasion I had to endure two weeks in hospital before the doctors decided that the rigors and a violently fluctuating temperature were being caused by a heart infection (sub-acute bacterial endocarditis or SBE). The illness had already sapped my energy; but after two months I had to face the further blow of not getting better once the infection had been driven out. At this point, on my first encounter with the cardiologist, I was offered a drastic remedy: open-heart surgery *in a fortnight*, with mitral valve replacement. I can still remember how this decision came to me as welcome relief but to my wife as another brutal shock.

In the early stages of this illness, I did not have much appetite for reading or for prayer. But, on my first trip into hospital I took with me a copy of the

poems of George Herbert, and I tried to read one poem a day. My instinct must have told me that he would best nourish the spirit when more conventional prayer dries up. When the awesome day of the operation came round, with the inevitable two-hour delay, I had arrived at ‘Obedience’; and these lines leaped from the page and imprinted themselves on my memory:

O let thy sacred will
All thy delight in me fulfill!
Let me not think an action mine own way,
But as thy love shall sway,
Resigning up the rudder to thy skill.

At that critical juncture, Herbert spoke to me as one who is thoroughly at home in the language of prayer (often in the robust style of the Psalms). Once his words had sunk in, I knew that I must neither seek nor claim any special favours from God. Still, the operation was successful and, after another four months off work, I resumed the full round of my duties, until this second blow struck.

For the general reader, it is necessary to emphasize that stroke comes in many forms; and that it leaves its survivors with very diverse outcomes. Doctors do not need telling this, but lay people do: in some encounters with those who have suffered a stroke the condition is obvious, but in others, because the signs are far from evident, the actual disabling effect of a stroke may well be underestimated. I imagine that some readers will come to my description with medical expertise and others with a particular concern for the life of the Spirit, but I assume each reader shares an interest in pastoral care and in the practice of empathy; but, especially with the latter group who do not have medical expertise in mind, I have set down some basic information.

At the time of my stroke, after cancer and heart attacks, stroke was the third commonest killer in this country.³ What is less well known is that it

³ Figures published by the World Health Organization in 2020 stated that ‘The world’s biggest killer is ischaemic heart disease, responsible for 16% of the world’s total deaths. ... Stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are the 2nd and 3rd leading causes of death, responsible for approximately 11% and 6% of total deaths respectively.’ Source: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/the-top-10-causes-of-death>, accessed 1 June 2023.

leaves more people disabled than any other condition.⁴ It should not be difficult to think of people known to us who are clearly affected by a stroke; but few are aware that children suffer strokes, along with a thousand cases a year affecting the under thirties and some ten thousand a year among those of working age.⁵

We must distinguish between two very different ways of arriving at similar outcomes. Strokes are most often caused by blood clots in the brain. But many, like mine, are caused by bleeding in some part of the brain, cerebral haemorrhage, to use the correct medical description. If the victim survives the stroke its lasting effect will largely be determined by the particular part of the brain affected by the trauma. In my case, the bleeding took place in the cerebellum. Some of the effects of strokes cannot be concealed, as when a degree of paralysis brings consequent disabilities and varying degrees of loss of mobility; the same is true when there is a slurring of speech with facial disfigurement. Even though an erratic sense of balance, which follows a trauma in the cerebellum, will make walking problematic, this is less evident to casual observers. Many other transient or temporary effects may be experienced; there will often be an unpredictable pattern of recovery, much influenced by the presence, or absence, of willpower. Stroke recovery brings with it complex, sometimes stormy moods; all in all, an intriguing psychology.

Stroke therefore presents a varied picture, mixing visible and less-visible effects. However, stroke patients will be quick to remind you of important common characteristics such as the loss of feeling or sensation, and tiredness. ('Tiredness becomes a fact of life.' Rosemary Sassoon).⁶ Another characteristic that should not be overlooked is an often well-concealed anger or frustration. I stress that we are not only required to care for the survivors but also for the suddenly bereaved, for many are killed outright by stroke,

⁴ A fact-sheet published by the British Heart Foundation in 2023 stated that 'Stroke is the single biggest cause of severe disability in the UK.' Source: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/for-professionals/research/heart-statistics/bhf-cvd-statistics-uk-factsheet.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2023.

⁵ Figures from April 2023 state that over a third of strokes occurred in adults aged between 40 and 69 years. Source: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/stroke-tia/background-information/prevalence/>, accessed 7 June 2023.

⁶ Rosemary Sassoon, *Understanding Stroke* (Pardoe Blacker Publishing Ltd, 2002).

which represents a severe shock to the system. ('It is like being hit over the head with a sledge-hammer.' Peter Crawford, neuro-surgeon)

Before we can seriously address my main theme, I need to focus on the experience of recovery from stroke; and initially this was dominated by physical recovery. Early on, I had to persuade myself to eat: sweet things were a particular problem and even the familiar cup of tea lost its appeal, and had to be drunk in the hope that its charms would return. Throughout the first six months I battled hard to regain mobility. Once home, my regular visits to the neuro-physiotherapist played a crucial role; before that, equally important, was the help from the hospital physiotherapist. They made sure that the physical structure was put in the way of best functioning. Therefore going for short walks, twice a day to begin with, was more than mere bodily exercise. Stroke patients with potential for improvement thrive on perceptible signs of progress. Equally, we are wise to fear those who talk knowingly about our impending arrival at a 'plateau'. Both patient and carer have to resist the very idea of a plateau; instead, they must foster the ambition to go on getting better – whatever that means precisely.

My first conscious encounter with the consultant neurosurgeon marked a critical moment in my recovery. This was four months on and after two months back at home. He was watching me closely, more closely than I realized, and in response to my enthusiasm for walks, the effect of his comment was 'Yes – but! To what end? Where is the mental stimulation?' He had caught me on the raw, and I knew it. So, a whole new field of endeavour opened up before me and, after another two years, I am more than ever determined to look for new challenges and to discover areas of life with which I can engage effectively. With reduced mobility and limits on energy, thinking and writing play an important role in my daily routine; often a heavy mood limits the fruitful time, especially for the very physical activity of writing.

After that meeting with the surgeon, I began deliberately to read more demanding books. I tried to make myself write more letters, but I found this surprisingly difficult, as well as the routine of keeping on top of communications in general. I am shocked that tiredness can provoke the unheard, 'Oh, I can't be bothered'. Good things, however, have been achieved: a lecture

on my grandfather, the poet, was written up. A paper on George Herbert was revised and, more amazing, I wrote and delivered a new paper on Herbert to a conference. I begin to realize that each of these bursts of mental toil offered me targets that I could achieve; and, more importantly, they have given me possible evidence of the life of the Spirit reviving. The testing of my spirit is made clearer when I offer this summary: after a year of recovery and rehabilitation, I had to cope with retirement after thirty-seven years mainly in parish ministry. For the two months before I retired, I went through the motions, doing only 'light duties', which has to mean 'doing just what you want to do'. Retirement came as a huge relief; but it was not total.

Thanks to the generous attitude of the Principal of my college, an avowed agnostic, I was enabled to continue in part-time chaplaincy among students. This gave me the sense of a continuing pastoral role, just when I had to let go of my established position; it was a time when reading and writing did not come easily, but sociability was returning. In the three years since, much has changed in my condition. I am ready now to bring my chaplaincy to an end. This continuing of a small piece of work has also had a part to play in understanding the life of the Spirit. In such a secular institution, you might well ask: 'Where is God in this set-up?' To me, God has shown himself as the giver of inner freedom. Being somebody, and yet in institutional terms rather an unimportant cog, has helped me to keep my eye on God. The unfulfilled potential of the role has strengthened faith, which is never the worse for a sharp dose of self-knowledge.

I return to weighing up the testing that followed retirement. Its severity only struck us when, after a six weeks' extension, we finally moved house in mid-January. We were lucky to be moving less than a mile across the centre of Durham. At the beginning, we had to pick our way around some 150 packing-cases, many of them laden with books! Some of our friends thought that we would never get them all opened, but we did. We more or less put the new house in order in the first four months, in spite of the distraction of having to complete the clearance of our very spacious vicarage in which we had lived for more than twenty years. I do not really know how we did it. I had so little energy; and at first, so little strength. I could not leave *everything* to Clare; but we should never underestimate the potential of collective will-power, even though it has its dangers.

This dramatic conclusion to the year of my stroke may seem to focus chiefly on physical testing; but that only tells half the story. For I came to realize that this great upheaval in *my* life, but also in *our* life together, had much to say about the life of the Spirit. An unsought break in my life's pattern did not provoke a spiritual crisis; but it did make me face the reality of change, and gave me glimpses into the meaning of resurrection.

During the long weeks in hospital it was one thing to have to make myself eat, but I had also to rekindle my appetite for life, my zest, my *joie de vivre*. I could, and still can, be very negative. A black period would settle on me like a cloud. I had to work hard on stretching my stamina and staying power and I needed to mix with other people. I often spoke of my need to rejoin the human race. Later, there were things like not being allowed to drive, which I accepted, reluctantly. I also became aware of a longing to make myself reconnect with God. I know it cannot be done just like that; and yet something changed. I shall return eventually to the question of the life of the Spirit, and to the ways in which it may be reshaped by the upheaval of a stroke; but first there is a little more to say about the practical effects of recovery, and their implications.

Throughout that first year I was busy relearning some very basic skills, like walking, and sustained reading, and being sociable. These three not-so-random skills represent three essential strands in the rope that holds our human nature together. You may prefer to regard them simply as three facets of our human make-up.

The first concerns the fact that we are *embodied*. In learning again how to move across a room, and then how to re-appropriate the practice and the pleasure of walking, we are attending to the most basic needs of our bodies. I am more aware now than I was before the stroke of the necessity to maintain a good level of bodily health. This does not, must not, constitute an end in itself; but after a major trauma, we know all too well how much our physical form and our bodily functioning shape and influence all aspects of our human being. So the recovered enjoyment of walking stands for the complex realities of embodiment.

What then of intellectual activity: of the kind of thinking that might lead me back to writing? In the early months of recovery the surgeon had helped

me to accept that the activity of walking needs to be complemented by the activity of thinking. This humble word covers so much that is common to human experience; but it also has a privileged place in the work of philosophers. I am trying to find the means of setting down in words and images what belongs to everyone. Most people rightly shy away from defining ideas like *mind* and *intellect*. I am now much more aware of the physical effort that goes with these apparently non-physical activities. For now it may be enough to say that an interest in ideas has come back with increasing force. As I have been looking for new ways of testing my stamina, I have realized that thinking must lead on to writing. It may be obvious to others, but for us stroke cases, trying to find our way back into life, all that goes with thinking, is much more deliberate. ‘Do we want to expend energy on *that*?’ More than two years on, writing, with all the mental and physical labour it entails, has become a key activity, but it was well over a year and a half before the ability to focus my mind effectively for writing came back.

There remains a third and crucial strand waiting to be woven into this picture of our human makeup. A fragment of personal history gives us a way in. We already owned a house in Durham, but much work needed to be done on it before we could move in. The work on the new house involved both of us in the business of planning and decision. It also entailed complex and rewarding human relations. If, at this critical juncture, I had not regained the art of being a sociable creature, I would not have been much help. Instead, the urgency of the work to be done, and the need to plan and talk through a variety of different projects drew me in. In this critical hour, I had rediscovered my love and care for buildings, *and* the pleasure of engaging with people, which is also a hard-learned skill; and it is much more than mere sociability. I prefer to say that we are *relational* creatures. Our creativity, our very humanity, thrives on our engagement with others.

It can be argued that the best of our notions, that is the fruits of our mental activity, benefit from being challenged and even from being proved wrong by others. Where there is no relationality, we are truly disabled. It is like losing a limb, or being paralyzed. In the early days of my recovery, random visitors were not made too welcome. They, unwittingly, showed up my need to learn again how to relate. I could only gauge its importance

from the experience of having to ration my sociability. I can see now that an excuse was available: 'I'm weary.' But, in time, that had to be challenged and then overcome. It is not quite the same as losing your taste for sweet things; and yet, like that, it can be relearned.

There is more to be said about those so-called random visitors. I knew then, and now I know better, how much care was taken in bringing visitors to my bedside. Clergy in hospital can easily be overwhelmed by well-meaning colleagues, but this did not happen to me. On the contrary, some visitors sensed the need to come alongside me in my undiagnosed *spiritual* isolation. It is unlikely that they knew precisely what they were doing for me, but it is as though they represented God; and at the time, I was not thinking of there being any *spiritual* significance in their presence. This is what makes any talk about 'the life of the Spirit' so difficult to articulate. Nevertheless, while I was going through a real experience of desolation, the reality of God was mediated to me by people. It was chiefly by their presence and by what they did; much less by what they said.

From friends and family, and from many expert carers in the hospitals, I was being made to think anew about the character of God. 'If there is a God, then what is he like?' One part of me seriously doubted whether I could come up with an answer, but another voice would not let me give up; for this second voice, the clue may have been found in the unshakeable conviction that I was still a *Christian*. I can see now that, as for other thoughtful Christians facing a crisis, it was the person of Christ himself who stood across my path – like the angel who barred the way for Balaam's ass – saying to me: 'I have been here. Don't be afraid of the darkness'. The mysterious alchemy of faith must originate in a stirring of God's love; but still this rediscovery of the importance of relationality – of valuing people and being valued by them, and of being moved by the love of others to return their love – all of these very human exchanges offered me a way back to God.

The stroke patient who is trying to fight back and to join in some of the hurly-burly of so-called normal life, ought to be aware of those three strands in our human make-up. Most people take them for granted, but we have had to work at them. That much applies to all who suffer a stroke, but this essay springs from the further question that began to press on me during my apparent recovery and return to sociable life. By now, I seemed to have accepted

that *God is*. (I hesitate to define the meaning of those two small words!) But this very practical question remained: ‘How do I re-connect with God?’ For I had experienced a real severance – loss – emptiness – vacancy. I never forgot the core language, that is the language of prayer. However, it is one thing to be able to convince (and to comfort) others that I have an answer, and quite another to convince myself!

The passing of time is beginning to confuse my tenses. Three years have passed since my stroke. My immersion in the life of the Spirit is closer now to where it was before the stroke. Habits of thought about God *have* reconnected with earlier knowledge and practice, yet the actual practice of prayer has moved on. There is more time, and there are fewer pressures, but those gains are balanced by the real loss of energy. Now I know that physical tiredness affects me to the spiritual centre of my being. Therefore an inner discipline requires that I learn to wait. For God? Not precisely; but I must wait for the gift of prayer. I have known what it is for this gift to seem to be withheld, but now confidence – and with it, faith – grows stronger. I am willing to wait.

In those first weeks, it was reassuring to find that I still knew my way around the spiritual classics. I would welcome the arrival in my head of lines from Mother Julian of Norwich – ‘All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well’; or a phrase from *The Cloud of Unknowing* – ‘short prayer pierceth heaven’; or just a single, repeated word from St John of the Cross – *nada, nada, nada, nada, nada* (‘nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing’); or even the closing words on the bookmark belonging to St Teresa of Avila – *solo Dios basta*. (‘God alone suffices’.)

To my increasing surprise and delight, this now seems to be where I want to spend my time. The day ought first to make room for my pondering the deep things of God and the real difficulty of living a recognizably Christian life; only then should I direct mind and heart to the world’s mess and all its anguish. I am learning to cope with enforced retirement, and in my daily routine I seldom need to rush around in expense of nervous energy. Instead, more solitude makes me attentive to an insistent inner voice, which asks, ‘Are you for God?’ And in spite of all my agony of spirit, I hear my prompt reply: ‘Yes!’

Out of this story of a life restored, does it make sense for us to try to *locate* the life of the Spirit? Part of my answer has already been given: ‘in solitude’ and ‘as an unsought gift’; we might fill that out by saying ‘in a setting of God’s choosing’. For me, however, another answer must also be offered. For, in spite of all its faults, its follies and its failings, the Church must be the first place for me to seek evidence of the life of the Spirit. I have tested the truth of this assertion. Not only can I say with honesty that I still love the Church, but I also understand well that the Church has been good to me. Now, as time goes on, I relish more and more the recovered status of lay Christian; but even this status is qualified, since from time to time I still enjoy the privilege of presiding at the parish communion. It is a pleasure to be just a part of a praying community again, and I greatly value those around me in a village congregation, where it is evident that Christian love and care, respect and lightness of heart are all at work.

It seems as though, after stroke, I have been stripped down, could it be to essentials, in regard to the life of the Spirit? Now I am spared most of the burdens of administration. Now, in all my engagement, and disengagement, with or from people, I shall try to give a more complete response to that inner voice. For I want to say in body, in mind and in all relations (not only human!) ‘Yes to God, in all the mystery of divine being’; ‘Yes to Jesus Christ, who is that mystery made visible’; ‘Yes to the Spirit of God, whose energy informs our prayer and shapes all the good in our lives’. And with slowly increasing conviction, I try to say ‘Yes to life, in all its unexpectednesses’.

To conclude: I *see* a little less (the bleeding affected the optic nerve); but perhaps I hear more acutely – noticeably birds. And much that was always striking and beautiful now moves me more. ‘A greater intensity?’ That sounds good! But when it comes to human suffering and the spoiling of the natural world, I sometimes experience a closing-down of emotions. (I referred earlier to a loss of moral urgency.) Unless that is nothing to do with the consequence of stroke?

It may be relevant to this paper to report that a long-standing interest in the seventeenth-century poet George Herbert seemed to be switched off for at least a year and a half; and then it came back to life, as evidenced above. (He has a phrase for every twist and turn of life: ‘in age I bud again’.) Herbert is the master of metaphor and of the anatomy of the spiritual life, and he

prompts me to make an ending with the suggestion that the life of the Spirit is a great river. It flows on with a strong current. It carries us in a certain direction, but it does not depend upon me or you. It speaks to us of the strength and the continuity of God's love for us, and for all that he has made. We may find it harder to accept that the stirring of the Spirit brings disturbance into our lives; and that includes the disturbance of death. But, uniquely in my experience, the Spirit of God takes away fear, and replaces it with love. That I now know to be true, with a knowledge wrung from the experience of faith.

Revd Benedick de la Mare (d. 2009) was the grandson of Walter de la Mare. He studied the clarinet at the Royal Academy before reading Classics and Theology at Oxford. Ben followed in Runcie's footsteps as one of the six curates of All Saints', Gosforth (1965-68). From there, he went to be a Chaplain at Trinity College, Cambridge, while John Robinson was Dean. After that, he returned to the north-east. In 2002 a major stroke forced his early retirement from ministry in Durham; he recovered up to a point, but in February 2009, another stroke left him disabled and increasingly fragile. He was the author of *From 'Perfection' to 'The Elixir': How George Herbert fashioned a famous poem*, published by SLG Press and described in his obituary as 'a little jewel of literary criticism'.



15 JUNE, COMMEMORATION OF EVELYN UNDERHILL (1875–1941)

TONY DICKINSON

In the cemetery at Staglieno, among the elaborate memorials to members of Genoa's English community, there is a more modest monument: a cross on top of a truncated pyramid bearing the words 'In loving memory of Annie Frances Rowe Harvey, widow of the Rev. T. W. Harvey, Vicar of St Agnes Bristol and Bosbury Herefordshire, who entered into rest 22nd April, 1934 aged 72 years.' Whether the wording was Annie Harvey's own choice, or that of her family, it singularly fails to do justice to the life of a woman who played a significant role in English church life between the World Wars of the last century, in partnership with the woman whom we commemorate on 15 June.

Annie Harvey, recently widowed, was appointed as the first Warden of Pleshey, the Chelmsford Diocesan House of Retreat in 1919, after the end of the First World War. It was the first diocesan retreat house in the Church of England. From the beginning she tried to keep a balance among the retreat givers between ‘secular’ clergy and religious, and from 1924 she included women – one woman in particular, whose name was to become closely associated with Pleshey over the next decade.

Evelyn Underhill, the daughter of a Wolverhampton-based lawyer and sailing enthusiast, had been married to the barrister Hubert Stuart Moore (another sea-faring lawyer) for seventeen years when she led her first retreat at Pleshey. For the next decade and a half, until failing health set serious limits on her activity, she led retreats there, usually turning each year’s addresses and meditations into a book. Unusually, she came from a family with little or no religious commitment. Even more unusually for a spiritual teacher, writer and director, she came to the Church through an interest in mystical prayer, rather than coming to mystical prayer through the Church.

As a young woman she had flirted with atheism and with membership of the Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society devoted to the study and practice of occult Hermeticism and metaphysics during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, to which W. B. Yeats and several other literary figures of the period, including Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Williams, belonged. The Order’s interest in magic and the occult seems to have led her to investigate the world of pagan mysticism and from there to move into a study of Christian mysticism and the beginnings of her own practice of contemplative prayer under the direction of the Catholic contemplative Friedrich von Hügel, who encouraged her to develop a spiritual life that was more centred on Christ.

Her style as a retreat leader and as a spiritual director might be described as ‘brisk’, down-to-earth and immensely practical. Like Jesus, she had little patience with displays of piety:

Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt. 6:1–6)

What mattered was not the outward appearance but the inner reality of a life that was centred on God in Christ – and that was not something to be forced. What mattered, too, was the corporate nature of that life. Through her relationship with von Hügel, Evelyn Underhill came to realise that religion is not about ‘the flight of the alone to the Alone’, but about participation in the living Body of Christ and her writings on Christian worship are still worth reading.

Evelyn Underhill died on 15 June, 1941. What she had written in her tribute to Annie Harvey in the *Church Times* seven years earlier could equally well be applied to her:

With [her] death, there passes away one of those rare personalities who possess and are able to communicate to others something of the radiant delight of Christianity.

In giving thanks for their partnership, we pray, in words which Evelyn Underhill used of the faithful departed:

Grant to us, Lord, in our pilgrimage, the help of their prayers. Grant us the assurance of the Communion of Saints and the joy of their community, that they and we may be forever one in you.



THE BISHOP'S BEADS

TONY DICKINSON

Bishop Martin Lönnebo died on 26 April 2023 in Linköping, the see city of the diocese which he had served as bishop from 1980 to 1995. He was 93. He was born in Storkågeträsk, a tiny lakeside village in northern Sweden, about twenty miles inland from the western shore of the Gulf of Bothnia. After studying theology at Johannelund School of Theology, a theological seminary in Uppsala, he was ordained in 1954 as a minister of the Swedish Evangelical Mission, a low-church movement within the Church of Sweden.

Ten years later he was awarded a doctorate by the University of Uppsala for his thesis on Albert Schweitzer's Ethical-Religious Ideals.¹ During the same period he worked in Uppsala, combining work as a student pastor and cathedral chaplain with diocesan roles until, in 1977, he was appointed Dean at Härnösand Cathedral, about half-way between Uppsala and his native north-land. Three years after that, he was elected Bishop of Linköping, 125 miles south-west of Stockholm. There he remained until his retirement in 1995.

During both his ministerial career and his long retirement, Martin Lönnebo was a prolific author. His last book, *Pärlälven: andlig pärlfiske* ('The Pearl River: Spiritual Pearl-fishing'), was published in 2022, less than a year before his death. In addition to his doctoral thesis on Albert Schweitzer and books on Christian leadership, he wrote a number of devotional books and books on prayer, many of them inspired by the spiritual traditions of northern Sweden and by the spirituality of the Eastern Church. He was a leading Lutheran interpreter of the art of praying with icons.

About a year after his retirement Martin Lönnebo wrote the book that made him a significant figure beyond the Church of Sweden.² He had been celebrating his retirement after nearly fifteen years as Bishop of Linköping by spending several months travelling in Greece, exploring Greek culture, enjoying a time of relaxation and renewal. While he was island-hopping across the Aegean his boat was overtaken by a storm and he and his fellow-passengers had to take refuge on a tiny island with forty-seven inhabitants and one small guest-house.

It took several days for the storm to blow itself out and during that time Bishop Martin spent his enforced leisure, as he put it later, 'freezing in a rented room with a notebook'. Martin Lönnebo had long been interested in the spirituality of the Eastern Church and fascinated by the mixture of formality and informality in Orthodox worship, with its candles, icons and prayer beads, and he set about designing what he described as a 'prayer ribbon'.

¹ 'Albert Schweitzers etisk-religiösa ideal', PhD dissertation, University of Uppsala (1964).

² *Frälsarkransen: övning i livsmod, livslust, självbesinning och i att leva nära Gud* (Verbum, 1996). An English version translated by Carolina Welin and Carolina Johansson was published by St Andrew's Press as *Pearls of Life: For the Personal Spiritual Journey* (Augsburg Books, 2006).

After a certain amount of trial and error, he finally decided on a set of eighteen beads in which he summarized the Christian faith, and which he named *Frälsarkransen*, which in everyday Swedish means a life-belt but split into its component parts means ‘saviour’ (*frälsare*) and ‘wreath’ (*kran*). In English they are normally known as ‘Pearls of Life’ (less often ‘Beads of Christ’), while Germans call them *Glaubensperlen* or ‘Pearls of Faith’.

The individual beads, or ‘pearls’ as they are usually known, form a sequence. That sequence begins and ends with the large, gilded pearl, the ‘God pearl’. God is the origin of all there is, including the ‘Pearls of Life’. It was with the God pearl that Martin Lönnebo began his exploration of the possibilities of a prayer bracelet. When he was working on the Pearls of Life, he realized that his schema had become too complex. Like Martha in Luke chapter 10, he had become distracted by many things:

... a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42)



So, taking a leaf out of Mary’s book, the bishop re-focused on what was essential. He removed all the superfluous pearls until he was left only with the God pearl, from which he began again. The final version comprises (anti-clockwise from the top) the God pearl, the I pearl, the Baptism pearl, the Desert pearl, the Serenity pearl, the two Love pearls and the three Secret pearls, the Night pearl and the Resurrection pearl, a sequence punctuated by six pearls of Quiet.

As a Lutheran, and more particularly a Swedish Lutheran conscious of the Church of Sweden’s tradition of using the visual arts to convey the Gospel message, Bishop Martin was aware of the importance of ear and eye working together in communicating faith, but he also wanted something that was tangible, and from his studies of eastern spirituality he knew something of the ways in which beads are used as aids to prayer, not only in other branches of Christianity, but also in other world religions.

In Islam, a rope of thirty-three beads enables Muslims to focus their prayers on the ninety-nine beautiful names of God. A similar function is performed in Hindu and Buddhist devotion by the *mala*. In Western Christianity the Rosary holds pride of place, and has a whole literature devoted to it, with significant contributions by Anglican writers such as Austin Farrer and by the Methodist, Neville Ward.³ In the eastern church ropes of ‘prayer knots’ are an aid for those who wish to fulfil St Paul’s injunction to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17), running through the rhythms of the Jesus Prayer and supported by the control of breathing.

In each case, an important role for the beads is to occupy the hands and to occupy the front of the mind, so that real prayer can go on in its depths. It is a way of physically recalling the spirit from external distractions to what is central, an aid to recollection. A similar function is fulfilled for those who use the Rosary by the repetition of the Hail Mary on each bead and the Lord’s Prayer on the spaced single bead in between each group of ten ‘Mary’ beads.

Martin Lönnebo’s ‘Pearls of life’ are very different from the Rosary. There is no single prescribed way of using them as there is for the Rosary (even allowing for the variations proposed by Farrer and Ward). They are, Bishop Martin insisted, ‘a lifebelt, not fetters’. Those who have sufficient leisure can work their way in prayer round the bracelet. In other circumstances it may be more appropriate to focus on a single bead or group of beads. They are not only a way of praying: they can also be used as a framework for teaching. The beads can be linked to stages in the life of Jesus, as well as opening up Christian experience. A North American website dedicated to promoting the use of the pearls has catalogued some of the ways in which they are being used in a variety of settings.⁴ In the Church of Sweden, in North Germany, and in Scotland they have been widely used as an aid to catechesis. Larger beads, normally made from wood, are used as teaching aids in work with young children. The diocese of Oxford’s partner diocese

³ Austin Farrer, *Lord, I believe: Suggestions for Turning the Creed into Prayer* (Faith Press, 1958, repr. Cowley Publications, 1989), which looks at the Rosary as a framework and a means of entering prayerfully into the mysteries of the Creed; Joseph Neville Ward, *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy: Meditations on the Rosary* (Epworth Press, 1971, repr. Church Publishing Incorporated, 2005).

⁴ <https://www.pearlsoflife.org/> accessed 1 June 2023.

in Sweden, the diocese of Växjö, has used the pearls for some years now as a basis for preparing young people for their confirmation.⁵ One Church of Ireland diocese developed use of the pearls as an aid to prayer during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶

In a letter, written in 2002, Bishop Martin wrote these words:⁷

The prayer beads are known as the Saviour's Wreath (*Frälsarkransen*) or the Christ Wreath (*Kristuskrans*), sometimes the Life Wreath (*Livskrans*), because most of the beads describe the way of Christ and our way as we follow in his footsteps. I've written many books based on this spiritual foundation: *Frälsarkransen* is a general introduction, *Skatten* (The Treasure) is for the youngest, *Själen* (The Soul) for adults who don't have much time, *Ängeln* (The Angel), *Spegeln* (The Mirror), *Dopängeln* (The Baptismal Angel) and *Konfirmandängeln* (The Confirmation Angel) are for leaders, *Väven* (The Tapestry) is for adults who are serious about wanting to get closer to the heart of their faith.

The Saviour's Wreath is now, I would imagine, in a hundred thousand homes, on wrists, in pockets, above children's beds, under pillows, in prayer and confirmation groups. It is growing rapidly, though obviously it does not suit everyone. But if it helps us both to pray and to act in the spirit of Christ, it can happily be spread more widely; if it does not, it is just another unnecessary toy to be forgotten. The future is the judge.

With affectionate greetings,
Martin

Karl Martin Lönnebo, 27 February 1930 – 26 April 2023

Revd Canon Tony Dickinson is currently chaplain to the Anglican/Episcopalian congregation in Genoa and a Canon Emeritus of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He is a spiritual director and occasional retreat leader. He is the author of *Dante's Spiritual Journey: A Reading of the Divine Comedy*, *Lent with George Herbert* and *Four Ways to the Cross*, all published by SLG Press and *Redeemed from Fire: the Story of Holy Ghost Genoa* (Genova: KC Edizioni, 2022). His extended essay on Bishop Lönnebo's prayer beads will be published by SLG Press in 2023.

⁵ The Diocese of Växjö was carved out of the original diocese of Linköping in the latter half of the twelfth century.

⁶ <https://www.pearlsoflife.org/post/covid-and-the-pearls-of-life>

⁷ <http://mansus.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/L%C3%B6nnebos-brev-1.pdf> (my translation).

THE 650TH ANNIVERSARY OF JULIAN OF NORWICH'S *REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE*

FATHER BRUCE BATSTONE

One of the ways in which the Companions of Julian marked the 650th anniversary of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* was by hosting an online conference that deliberately coincided with the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, a day that, in 1997, Pope St John Paul II declared a special day of prayer for those who are leading different forms of consecrated life.

The seed of the idea for this conference came from a book published by SLG Press in 1977: *Solitude and Communion* is a collection of papers prepared for a meeting of solitaries held in 1975 to mark the revival of the hermit life in the church. The meeting gathered together people who felt drawn to consider solitude and its value, and what it has to contribute to the ministry of God's church in the world of today.¹ The papers were about the experiences of a people of prayer, saying important things in a world that often struggles to see silence and solitude as much more than an unproductive waste of time.

Being drawn to solitude is an experience shared by Companions of Julian, and this mark of our calling takes different forms in different lives. Julian of Norwich is a model for us, as a woman who brought a great kaleidoscope of different experiences that formed a substantial life spent even before she came to dwell in her cell next to St Julian's. The way that God revealed his love to her, in Jesus Christ, through sixteen visions, is another nourishing well around which Companions and Friends of Julian gather. The three wounds of which Julian speaks in *Revelations of Divine Love* Chapter 3: longing for God, the call to repentance, and compassionate service, still speak to us all today.

Papers from this conference will be published as a book by SLG Press in 2023. The authors are people we believe will help us to consider the

¹ The authors were: A. M. Allchin, Sr Benedicta Ward SLG, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Dom André Louf OCSO, Roland Walls.

call that Julian received through her visions, to make Christ's presence known in fourteenth century Norwich. They discuss what this has to say to us 650 years on.

Sister Elizabeth Obbard is a Carmelite nun, and a previous trustee of the Friends who contributed to the vision that became the Companions of Julian. She focuses on the wound of compassion, so important in this increasingly unkind world.

Bishop Graham Usher has made Julian's *Revelations* something of a hallmark of his episcopal ministry in the city and diocese of Norwich. He reflects on ways that the lessons Julian learned from the crises she herself lived through and that contributed to the wisdom of the *Revelations of Divine Love*, can inform the ways in which we deal with our climate crisis.

Fr Colin is superior of the Servants of the Will of God, a contemplative Anglican religious community, which beautifully reconciles the breadth of the Christian tradition, East and West. Julian and her talk of 'even Christians' would no doubt have been delighted by this school of unity and generosity. Fr Colin helps us to reflect on what a consideration of the monastic tradition might reveal about Julian presence.

Mother Hilary, whose contribution is given below, is Guardian of the Order of Julian of Norwich, another Anglican contemplative community, based in Wisconsin, with affiliates all over the world and steeped in the writings and prayerful example of Julian. Julian's robust and deeply theological message is able to hold so much, especially those contradictions and opposites that all lives contain.

Fr Bruce Batstone is a founding Companion of Julian, and lives the vowed single consecrated life as an Oblate of Julian of Norwich. As well as being a parish priest in North London, he is a spiritual director and giver of retreats, a director of an Ignatian programme of spiritual director training based online and in person at the London Jesuit Centre, and as far as possible divides his time between his London parish and another home in Norwich.



IMPATIENCE AND DESPAIR IN JULIAN OF NORWICH

MOTHER HILARY CRUPI OJN

For a long time I have been fascinated by the fact that, despite Julian's frequent queries to Jesus on the subject of sin, the only two sins that Jesus specifically names, and that he says most afflict his lovers, are the sins of impatience and despair. Here is Julian from Chapter 73 of the long text:

God showed two kinds of sickness that we have: one is impatience or sloth, because our trouble and our suffering are heavy for us to bear; the other is despair or doubting fear, ... He showed sin in general, in which all sin is included, but he showed only these two in particular. And these two are the ones which most trouble and disturb us, by what our Lord showed me, and the ones from which he wants us to be reformed.¹

Compared to the more spectacular sins of avarice and pride, you would think impatience and despair would not even rate a mention. But then again, if you are CEO of Evil Incorporated, these two sins offer a perfect return for investment. Consider what an energy drain impatience is; consider the dragging weight of despair. For the sheer numbers of people afflicted it is maximal dismay, maximal disruption with no pleasurable trade-off whatsoever.

Where I come from I hear the term 'dumpster fire' being used increasingly to describe the state of many of our world affairs, and the large impersonal forces deciding – or worse, *not* deciding – matters that affect everyone but which ordinary people have little ability to influence. There are the dumpster fires going on in our various governments, the wilful ignorance of what is driving climate change and the lack of urgency to make substantive adjustments. Added to this are all the flaming fragments of social and cultural disintegrations and dislocations that we can see happening nearly everywhere we look.

In the face of all this, impatience and despair do seem especially of our time, and if we were so inclined we would have ample reason to surrender to the temptation. From the look of what is on offer from news

¹ Chapter 73, para. 2 in Barry Windeatt, trans., *Revelations of Divine Love* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 148. All citations from the *Revelations* are taken from this translation, referred to hereinafter as 'Windeatt'.

outlets and the digital media, everyone is all worked up, feeling as if they are going nowhere, and all this all at once. Impatience and despair, your time has come!

However cathartic it can be to shout at the radio, or at one's electronic device, it only gets you so far – no one can hear you and it is not really going to move anything forward. So what interests me is something much closer to home, much more within our power to influence. That is, what is happening with these two sicknesses of impatience and despair in the midst of the everyday, hidden mattress-fires of our own minds and hearts. It is this very local ground, our own ground, where the real, substantive spiritual work gets done. When it comes to societal change we are accustomed to thinking in terms of large numbers of people acting together: if only a whole bunch of people would just get together and do such-and-such, it would make a difference, what ails us would really change.

In reality, though, nothing of any consequence has happened, or has begun to happen, except by the moving of a single heart, the firing into flame of a single desire. Friends of Julian gather because one woman was moved to give her assent to a simple request, 'look upon this crucifix and take comfort from it'.

What about impatience and despair, and what can they tell us? They are not at all spectacular sins; they even seem to have something embarrassingly childish about them. And right there in the childishness is actually our first clue. It tells us there might be something developmental going on, something having to do with increasing maturity, with time, and with experience. Hidden amongst all the embarrassment of giving in to temptation is also an invitation to some kind of developmental process. Present behind every instance of impatience and every movement of despair is a desire. Much of our intentional spiritual life is concerned with the purification and refinement of desire, with learning to cooperate with Jesus in turning the basic human faculty of desire, and our sense of incompleteness, towards the purposes of grace.

Impatience and despair may be a reaction, deep down, to the inescapable fact of our 'creatureliness'. We did not have a say in our original existence, but we find ourselves here, nonetheless, with a heart full of questions and with things on fire – the energy behind these might be akin to that of a child

crying in frustration, ‘I didn’t ask to be born!’ But if we had no say in getting here, we do have a say in whether we want to become fully human beings or not.

Since God is the ultimate housewife and wastes nothing, it will not be surprising to learn that the presence and the prevalence of impatience and despair are actually quite useful as diagnostic tools that we can press into service as we actively, and often flailingly, engage in the work of our salvation. That work, as Julian tells us, is to become as like to Jesus in character as we already are in nature,² to become fully-human beings on the pattern of Jesus who is the original template for that being. Julian says,

And he wants the blessed creatures who will be with him in heaven without end to be like himself in all things. And to be perfectly like our Lord is our true salvation and our utmost bliss.³

Whatever their specific content, whatever instigates them, impatience and despair can actually be allies: they can help us work out, from the behavioural evidence, what it is we really want. If we can stand back a bit we can allow our deepest desires, as far as we can articulate them, to gently interrogate our reactions to present reality. What do our reactions tell us about what it is that we really want?

In the monastic tradition from which I live and write, this is made explicit and formalized at every stage of taking on the monastic life. Beginning from our entry into the monastery, we are asked the question, ‘My brother or my sister, what do you seek?’ In other words, ‘what is your desire?’ It is a re-statement, in the present moment, of Jesus’s often-repeated questions, *What are you looking for? What is it that you want me to do for you?* And the answer to that monastic question is always, ‘I seek the mercy of God and the prayers of the brothers and sisters.’

What do you seek? I seek the mercy of God and the prayers of the community. There is something really fundamental about this question, and answering it is not the work of a season only, but of a lifetime. Often what we really want is not even completely clear to us, not easy to articulate. We can have no clue how that mercy of God is going to be manifested in our

² Chapter 41, para. 4 (Windeatt, 92).

³ Chapter 77, para. 5 (Windeatt, 155).

lives, however our concrete circumstances as they unfold stand ready to show us, and that includes the content of our failures and our fallings as well as our successes.

To return to Julian, here she is, before she is even ‘Julian’, all unsuspecting, but with that half-remembered long-ago desire for a comprehension of Jesus’s passion floating in the background, and she is suddenly struck down by a mortal illness. In the extremity of that illness, Jesus speaks to her from the crucifix. Again and again across the whole series of the sixteen revelations Jesus, in effect, asks Julian, *What is it that you seek? What is the real nature of your desire that you made known to me so long ago?*

Here it is that the two movements of impatience and despair or doubting fear, give us a lens through which to see and relate to Julian’s experience in a way that is a little closer to our own. We who are reading Julian from her future tend to see her experience in terms of one continuous arc that makes her book, from the initial instruction of the curate to look upon the crucifix, across the whole of the sixteen revelations to the end of the long text, where Julian assures us,

Then none of us will be moved to say in any way, ‘Lord, if it had been like so, it would have been very good’; but we shall all say with one voice, ‘Lord, blessed may you be, for it is so, and it is well. And now we see truly that all is done as it was ordained before anything was made.’⁴

It is easy to forget that Julian’s life was just like ours, that she was living the revelations in real time. She had no idea from the outset that there were going to be fifteen more showings following that first one. She had no idea that she was eventually going to live to tell what she saw. Julian and all those with her had every reason to believe her future in the body was completely foreclosed.

Let us look at the path of the revelations as though in pictorial shape and see what it might tell us. If we step back for a wider view, we can see the whole picture looks like a wave pattern. There are the successive peaks of Julian’s articulated desire, the things she wants to know from Jesus, and there are the calmer troughs of comprehension in between these as she takes in Jesus’s responses. Jesus meets Julian where she is, and at the same time

⁴ Chapter 85, para. 1 (Windeatt, 163–4).

is bringing her to a radically new understanding of himself, a radically new understanding of the purposes of God, and to new clarity about her own deepest questions. It is certainly immediately clear that Julian does not meet the God she expected. From the very start, Julian's meeting of Jesus from the crucifix was a continual round of surprise and reappraisal.

The wave pattern of the showings looks a little like a labour and delivery process, or the onset, subsidence, and increase of serious nausea; really both are going on. Julian's increasing comprehension of what she is seeing and hearing become more sure-footed at the same time as her desire – what she really wants to know from Jesus – becomes better defined, sharper, and more desperate. You could even call it *impatient*.

To map this more directly onto Julian's account, in Chapter 10 she first expresses the wish to have more light so that she can see the vision of Jesus more clearly. But Jesus does not grant this, and Julian hears in her reason, 'If God wishes to show you more, he will be your light—you need none but him'⁵ At this early stage, Julian's experience of Jesus as He is, and her comprehension of her own desire, are not yet well-formed enough to give her an understanding of what she is looking at, even if there were more light to be had.

Up to this point, Julian's understanding of God and God's ultimate intentions toward humanity has been formed by what she had received from Holy Church. As the revelations proceeded, Julian would come to learn that, perhaps warped by temporal might and worldly success, a good part of the church's own reception of what God is trying to communicate about with us had been, and still often is, garbled in the process of transmission. Soon after this request for more light, when Julian really begins to be afraid, as though to reassure her she is on safe ground Jesus tells her plainly,

See, I am God. See, I am in everything. See, I do everything. See, I never lift my hands from my works, nor ever shall, without end. See, I guide everything to the end to which I ordained it from without beginning by the same power, wisdom, and love with which I made it. How should anything be amiss?⁶

⁵ Chapter 10, para. 2 (Windeatt, 53).

⁶ Chapter 11, para. 5 (Windeatt, 56–7).

Still later, when Julian's distress at the distance between what she has received from Holy Church and what she is seeing before her is even more acute, Jesus says to Julian,

It is I. It is I. It is I who am highest. It is I you love. It is I you delight in. It is I you serve. It is I you long for. It is I you desire. It is I who am your purpose. It is I who am all. It is I that Holy Church preaches and teaches you. It is I who showed myself here to you.⁷

Jesus's word that it is He himself that Holy Church preaches and teaches is not an uncritical, automatic endorsement of all that Holy Church has preached and taught. Rather, it is something more like, 'I, Jesus, showing myself clearly, nakedly, and directly here to you, is what Holy Church – however imperfect its understanding, however obtuse its hearing and clumsy its grasp – is trying to understand and present. I, whom you see here, am the one the Church, often so flailingly, is trying to navigate, to understand, and to interpret'.⁸

Across the trajectory of many of the first visions, we see Julian's own experience of impatience and despair, going from an expression of the wish for more light in Chapter 10 to what has to be called the panicked desperation of Chapter 50. It is as though Julian feels her time may run out at any moment, or the visions cease, and she dreads failing to come to an understanding of the grace and mercy of which she has received a first blissful taste. Julian's desire is now both well-articulated and all the way to being distraught: she is desperate to know how God views us in our failing, how God sees humanity in our sins. The distance between what Julian understands from the teachings of Holy Church, and what she sees in the person of Jesus himself has become too great to bear:

I cried inwardly with all my might, seeking into God for help, thinking in this way, 'Ah, Lord Jesus, king of bliss, how am I to be comforted? Who shall teach me and tell me what I need to know, if I may not see it in you at this time?'⁹

⁷ Chapter 26, para. 2 (Windeatt, 74).

⁸ It is to be noted that in the end, Julian says, the 'lower' judgements of humanity and of Holy Church, even such as they were, will be upheld and reconciled with the 'higher' judgment of God (Chapter 45, para. 2 (Windeatt, 98)) and Julian herself desires that both judgements could be saved.

⁹ Chapter 50, para. 1 (Windeatt, 106).

It is at this point that Jesus gives her the marvellous parable of a Lord who has a beloved servant.¹⁰ This parable is the linch-pin of all the showings, and the vision that Julian needs to understand what she now most deeply wishes to know. She is not able to take it all in at once, but she gets enough to see and really begin to understand what Jesus is talking about. Over the rest of Julian's life this parable is going to break open and give its light as she builds up, little by little, the supporting structure, the solid repository of trust to be able to understand and interpret Jesus's meaning in it for herself and for us.

What Julian experienced over the course of the showings, over the waves and calm troughs of articulated desire, of desperation and fear, of question and answer and increasing comprehension, could be summed up, as the line from T. S. Eliot's poem 'Little Gidding' puts it, as 'the purification of the motive In the ground of our beseeching'. Of course, in the lines just before this one, Eliot has introduced into the modern landscape Julian's quotation of Jesus,

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.¹¹

Jesus had said to Julian, 'It is I that Holy Church preaches and teaches you. It is I who showed myself here to you.'¹² Centuries before this he had said much the same thing to another woman, so I want to take a bit of a side step and see how, with this other woman, Jesus uses the feeling of desiccation caused by sin and despair to great advantage in the developmental process of revelation and reception, of the knowledge of God and of the self. How do impatience and despair conspire to assist this other

¹⁰ Chapter 51 (Windeatt, 106–8).

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 4: 'Little Gidding' III.

¹² Chapter 26, para. 2 (Windeatt, 74).

woman to get where she most wants to go, and to become, as Julian later became, a signpost for others? ‘By the purification of the motive In the ground of our beseeching.’

This woman’s story comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 4. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, coming round the edge of Samaria. It is about noon-time; He is tired and thirsty and He sits down, alone, by Jacob’s well. A woman comes to draw water, and Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman is surprised by His request, defensive and suspicious, and says, “You’re a Jew, so why are you asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink of water?” Perhaps she is also thinking, ‘Yah, and I was hoping to be alone here, and now you’re really messing with my day.’

The conversation continues, for the woman is curious. Jesus makes her even more curious, saying that if she knew who was speaking to her, she would have asked Him, and He would have given her living water. As the story goes on, the woman is beginning to realize the extent of her thirst of heart; it is painful and, before long, that long-burning mattress-fire of dissatisfaction that she has been enduring causes her to take a chance on telling this man the truth about her situation. Which, in any case He already knows: the woman has had five husbands, and the man she is with now is not her husband.

Julian calls Jesus the pattern and ground of all motherhood, saying that we have our being from Jesus ‘where the ground of all motherhood begins’;¹³ we recognize in Jesus our own elemental source, and that recognition begets the movement of trust. Jesus’s love for us is immediate, immanent, and all-encompassing, yet as an adult mother – as *the* mother – Jesus is able to stand back from our often immature, unwise solutions to meet our vaguely understood, unrequited desires and ask, ‘So, how is that working out for you?’ Jesus is not so much the answer to all our questions as the question to many of our answers, gently querying our methods and inviting us to consider if what we are doing is really getting to the root of our need. Just so with this woman at the well. Jesus, in effect, is asking her, ‘how is your solution to this problem working out for you and those six other men?’

¹³ Chapter 59, para. 2 (Windeatt, 128).

You know how the story goes: the woman panics and tries every possible way to get Jesus to go away; He is now far too close to the source of her pain. Finally, she as much as pats his hand and says, yes, well, when the Messiah comes, He will tell us all about it. It is at this point that Jesus says, as he says to Julian so many years later, “I am He, the one who is speaking to you.”

As we undergo the multiform suffering that Julian says in Chapter 25 is known to us in this life, some of it of our own contrivance, some of it simply the result of free-range, free-radical evil, Jesus allows us the latitude to experiment with assuaging that suffering in whatever ways we might find to hand. Jesus, the wise mother whom it is impossible to threaten, allows us to be impatient and to despair of our own solutions; to be people for whom the developmental moment has not yet come, for whom the teacher has not yet appeared, because the student is not yet ready.

As learners, time and again we are given to bear the gathering chaos of impatience and despair and other assorted temptations that beset us, before some developmental threshold is reached and a paradigm-shift can take place. However, as with the Lord in the parable he gives to Julian, in all this Jesus never ceases to look upon us protectively and lovingly, and in our blind flailing about, keeps us from ultimate harm.

Julian learned by experiencing the showings of Jesus that we do not need to be afraid of the length or the acuity of the learning curve, or to be afraid of the truth we will be shown as we come to a more complete understanding of our own desires, and of God’s merciful purposes for us. Just like Julian, in this growth process we too are building a ballast, a solid repository of trust in Jesus that can weather all manner of temptation and failure, and be a source from which others can drink.

Mother Hilary Crupi OM is a priest in the US Episcopal Church and has been Guardian of The Order of Julian of Norwich since 2010. The Order of Julian of Norwich is a contemplative monastic order of the Episcopal Church, committed to intercession and conversion of life in the spirit of the teaching of Saint Julian of Norwich. The nuns of the Order live the monastic life together under Benedictine vows of stability, conversion of life, and obedience, while Oblates and Associates of the Order are dispersed throughout the world, observing the vows in ways suited to their particular vocations and life situations.

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM SLG PRESS

FP196 **Benedicta Ward** SLG, *Anselm of Canterbury, Teacher of Prayer*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0333-1; 72pp. £6.00.

For those who study St Anselm, his prayers provide an intimate personal introduction to his thinking and his spirituality. For Anselm, who never considered himself a teacher of prayer, his prayers were simply personal devotions that he occasionally shared with others to encourage them to develop their own devotional style. Anselm would probably have been surprised to discover not only how widely his words were disseminated, but also the ways in which their translation and interpretation changed over the centuries. This brief study, by one of the leading scholars of early monastic life and thought, examines Anselm's prayers as models and inspiration for mystics, saints and writers up to the present day.

Sister Benedicta Ward SLG (1933–2022) was a member of the Anglican religious community of the Sisters of the Love of God. She wrote and translated a number of books on early monasticism and aspects of the Middle Ages. She was Reader in the History of Christian Spirituality at the University of Oxford and a Supernumerary Fellow of Harris Manchester College.

FP197 **Anthony Kemp**, *With One Heart and Mind: Prayers out of Stillness*, foreword by **Archbishop Stephen Cottrell**. ISBN 978-0-7283-0342-3; 78pp. £7.00.

This collection of short prayers seeks to support and sustain individuals in private devotion throughout the changing seasons of the liturgical year, also celebrating the lives of the saints, and addressing a number of day-to-day concerns. Their purpose is to support those seeking a deeper, more devotional prayer life. They are intended to induce the wonder and mystery of intimacy with God encountered in all things, visible and invisible. The prayer for Trinity Sunday is printed opposite.

Anthony Kemp was professor of education and music psychology at the University of Reading. He is a trained spiritual director, psychodynamic counsellor, and chartered psychologist. Shortly before retirement he was ordained priest in the Oxford Diocese. Since then, he has been involved in the training and supervision of spiritual directors and his writing has focused on spirituality and aesthetic experience.

Trinity

Creator God, source of all life, whose supreme wisdom
and power exercises dominion over all things;
Give us eyes to perceive the touch of Your creative hands
in all that is good, beautiful and delightful;
Your touch which embraces all universal life in timeless
creative growth.

May we be caught up in Your continuing act of creation,
turning our darkness into light, and transforming our
human nature through the influence of Your infinite
wisdom and integrity.

God incarnate who walked the earth, loving the despised
and the isolated, and healing the suffering;
God, falling into cruel human hands, despised, humiliated,
wounded, and left to die on Calvary's tree;
We praise You for sharing our human frailty, experiencing
fear, anxiety and despair;
You offer us an example of holy living, loving and caring
for the vulnerable and marginalized.

God, Holy Spirit, encompass us and endow us with
wisdom and understanding.
Search us out in our waywardness and discern the inner
secrets of our hearts;
Breathe upon us, speak to our hearts, enter into the depths
of our being, and transform us into Your likeness.

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, risen, ascended
and glorified;
God above us, God beside us, God within us, we pray
You, illuminate our pathway to heaven.
Be present at our awakening, hear our dawn chorus of
praise and bring us to that place where we shall see You
in the fullness of Your glory. Amen.

FP198 James Ashdown, *Sayings of the Urban Fathers and Mothers*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0344-7; 88pp. £6.50.

I wrote these stories when I was living in Hackney, East London. Life was quite hard. My health was poor, I was re-evaluating my career and I was beginning to recognize that I needed to leave London which had been my home for twenty years. It was a place I had grown to love: its estates, its religions, its shabby backstreets, its people from all over the world. Then I discovered the ‘old men’, the Egyptian Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries. They entranced me. So every day before starting work I would translate one of their sayings into the context I knew: the urban wilderness that is Babylondon (a Rastafarian term for London). Reading these reworkings again after ten years I found they made me cry and realized they were a love letter to the London I knew, and a hymn of gratitude to the ‘old men’ who saved my life.

James Ashdown CJN is a poet and theologian. He lives now in West Dorset where he is a Licensed Lay Minister in the Golden Cap team. He and his wife Lucyann (an Anglican priest and hospice chaplain) open their home as a Tree of Life, providing self-contained space for a ministry of welcome inspired by the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

EXTRACTS FROM *SAYINGS OF THE URBAN FATHERS AND MOTHERS*

How to Keep Growing and Never Become Stagnant

5 Holy Tony and some friends had gone to the park and were sitting under a tree talking, when a journalist came along and saw them. So she came up to them and said, “I thought you were holy men. Why are you here relaxing and enjoying yourselves? Shouldn’t you be praying or doing good deeds?” Tony looked up at the journalist and said, “Please lend me your mobile phone.” The journalist did so, and Tony proceeded to phone a friend and have a long conversation with her. The journalist started to get uncomfortable and Tony said to her, “Is something the matter?” So the journalist said, “I’m worried about my mobile phone. You will run down the battery, and I need to use it.” So Tony said to her, “It is the same with us. If we spend all our time praying and doing good works, we will become exhausted and be no use to anyone. Human beings also need time to recharge their batteries.”

Why Being Quiet is Important

25 Holy Miriam said, “The person who knows how to be alone and spends time in quiet contemplation is like an organic tomato matured under the Italian sun, but the person who is never without company and gossip is like an industrial tomato force-grown in a Dutch greenhouse.”

On the Proper Use of Guilt and Sorrow

41 The Bishop of Westminster invited Holy Pandit to come into town but he found Pandit standing before some enormous advertising hoardings crying. When the Bishop asked him what the matter was he replied, “This blatant worship of materialism is awful, but what is worse is that more creativity and skill is put into this mendacity than we put into our service of God.”

How to Gain Control over Your Emotions and Live a more Fruitful Life

59 Diana of Newham was a very dedicated and systematic holy woman. At the beginning of each year, she made a new resolution: only to eat local produce, to spend a day a week in complete silence, to befriend a homeless person. This was her method for seeking God; she mastered one discipline and then moved on to the next.

How to Live with Sexual Desire

106 A brother seeker who was looking to live a celibate life came early to a meeting at a church hall and stumbled on a group of young sisters having an aerobics class in leotards and lycra. He was flustered and embarrassed and clumsily fled from the hall. Later when the holy woman who was supervising the sisters met the brother she said to him, “If you truly had the calling for a celibate life, you would have been able to wait in the hall without embarrassment.”

How to Overcome the Worship of Money

147 A seeker asked one of the holy men, “Imagine there were two seekers: one reads widely in all spiritual traditions, only eats organic, fair trade food and perfects his meditation technique, whilst the other cares for homeless people. Which one is closer to finding God?” The holy man replied, “Even if that one who is so scrupulous never so much as set foot in a Tesco supermarket, he would not equal the one who cares for the homeless.”

How to Keep Strong

149 Holy Priya spent fourteen years in Dagenham, praying to God every day to learn how to manage her anger.

Why it is Important Not to Do Things for Show

154 There was a seeker who, in a humble manner, encouraged the other seekers when Holy Tony was visiting. But when Tony spent some time with him on his own, he challenged the seeker over a small matter and found him very defensive. Holy Tony said to him, “You are like a house with an elaborate security system, but you go out and leave a window wide open so that burglars can come and go freely.”

Keeping it Real: Why Discretion is the Key to the Holy Life

172 Holy Theodore of Farringdon said, “If a seeker gives in to sexual temptation or addiction, or to something else that causes other seekers to reject them and the public to see them as a hypocrite, then you must come alongside them and support them. But if they start to use the Gospel to support racism or some other anti-human ideology, then you can no longer stand alongside them. Also, if they become an atheist and ridicule your faith you are still their fellow seeker, but they have separated themselves from you.”

FP199 Sr Raphael SLG, *Doors*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0346-1; 108 pp, full colour throughout. £8.00.

Through writing gathered over a lifetime of meditation on doors as ways into the understanding and fulfilment of a Christian life, Sr Raphael SLG guides us gently to an understanding that every aspect of life can be a door into the Love of God, and an opportunity for prayer, reflection and spiritual growth. This is a collection of thoughts and quotations for every situation, for everyone who is looking for a sympathetic and thoughtful support for their daily spiritual life, or for a series of meditations to use on retreat. An extract is printed on the following two pages.

Sister Raphael SLG was a primary school teacher for thirty-two years before entering the Anglican religious community of the Sisters of the Love of God in 1983. Here she has helped with catering and gardening (she likes to potter) and for a number of years was Assistant Oblate Guardian.

THE DOOR OF WORK

For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided. He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; he overlaid them with gold, and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. So also he made for the entrance to the nave doorposts of olivewood, four-sided each, and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. He carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, overlaying them with gold evenly applied upon the carved work. (1 Kings 6:31-4)

This passage from the first Book of Kings about making the doors for the Temple is striking for the level of detail recorded. The story of Solomon's building of the Temple is rich in such specifics. When we meditate on this, we recall how everything had to be done manually; with just a few simple, hand-made tools. How hard all those hundreds of people must have worked to obtain the necessary wood and stone, and the builders themselves using all their energy and strength, day after day, to make a solid and enduring structure for the Temple, all the while knowing that they might not live long enough to see the completed building.

All of these different craftsmen and labourers were working to build as a team, each depending on the other. Is that not like a true Church community? Each with responsibility to do well whatever their vocation may entail; with care, joy and love.

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.

George Herbert (1593-1633)

That is not so difficult when we are doing work which we enjoy, but it is sometimes another story when we have a task that we do not enjoy, and struggle to complete; then it is harder to do it all for God cheerfully.

Why should this be so? Is it perhaps the desire to do only those things that we know we can succeed in, our pride wanting always to be successful? This holds us back, and it is why we avoid the difficult things, thus letting the devil have his way, and so we fail.

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:24)

We need not despair, for by the grace of God we can acknowledge our failures, our lack of trust, our selfishness, our pride, or whatever is our particular stumbling block, and we can begin again and make a new start.

We need the exercise that manual work provides if we are to keep healthy in body, mind and spirit, for each of these parts interacts with the others, so all parts need to be well if the whole person is to be well. Interleaved like the parts of the Temple doors.

We can enjoy our work and get into our own rhythm, and contemplate while working if we give ourselves wholly to the task in hand without worrying about the next thing, or whether we shall have time for whatever other things are in our lives or thoughts; that uses up such a lot of energy to no purpose. So let us work steadily, prayerfully and cheerfully, and to the glory of God.



Ponder

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Helen Howarth Lemmel (1863–1961)



FP201 Duncan Forbes, *An Ecology of the Heart: Faith through the Climate Crisis*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0353-9; 80pp. £7.00.

Terms such as ‘climate grief’ and ‘ecological anxiety’ describe the sadness and desolation triggered in many people in response to our changing climate. What are we to do with this aching that is sometimes dull, sometimes sharp? Nowhere is immune from extreme weather events, from physical and even death. How should we react to this? These questions that are central to every religious account of the world and its peoples. This book looks at the insights that can be gained from the world’s faith traditions, particularly Christianity. By considering the extent of the ecological crises that humanity faces, this book discusses the new and searching questions that these crises raise for us and for our faith, and how those questions reflect our approach to our environment and our responsibility in and for the world.

Duncan Forbes worked in NHS management, as a College Bursar, and ran a Hospice before retiring from paid employment. Since then he has maintained his interest in the non-clinical aspects of care at the end of life, including their relevance to human responses to climate change. More recently he has become committed to exploring some of the novel pastoral challenges to which the changing climate gives rise.

CONTEMPLATIVE POETRY

CP6 Gabrielle de Coignard & Vittoria Colonna: *Fly Not Too High*, translated by John Gallas. ISBN 978-0-7283-0331-7; 78pp. £6.00.

*Here amidst the path of life I see
A shining lamp of double-flame, whose light
Sustains and guides, as You intended it
When all Your pain was bright, and succoured me.*

V. C.

Like private prayers, the sacred sonnets of Gabrielle de Coignard (c. 1550–1586) and Vittoria Colonna (1492–1547) have long been soft utterances in a quiet corner of devotional literature. Bright expressions of faith amongst the problems and businesses of writing as women in sixteenth-century France and Italy, of illnesses, long widowhoods, personal grief and politics, these sonnets speak both passionately and practically about the trials and triumphs of living, and of living with faith.

*I keep my verses in my cabinet.
They stay there. I remember what you said:
Fly not too high, with too presumptuous wing,
But keep to hedgerows, trees and flowers instead.*

G. C.

John Gallas is an award-winning Aotearoan poet now living in the UK. After attending the University of Otago he won a Commonwealth Scholarship to Merton College, Oxford to study Medieval English Literature and Old Icelandic. He is a Fellow of the English Association and author of twenty collections of poetry and ten translated anthologies.

CP7 James Ramsay, *Selected Poems: Chancing on Sanctity*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0332-4; 58pp. £5.50.

In a variety of moods and forms the poems in this collection attempt to capture something of the spiritual element that resides in the ore of common experience. They range from sing-song verse to taut lines embodying struggle. In some the everyday breaks into the numinous, in others the sacred is fused with ordinariness, even comedy. Irony has a prophetic edge, and human pain and brokenness, entangled with memory, border a mystical vision.

James Ramsay is a retired Anglican Priest living near the North Norfolk coast. While in full-time ministry he served in North Buckinghamshire, Oxford, Bucharest and East London. This is his second published collection of poetry. His works are illustrated by his wife, the artist Celia Ward, who works from a studio in their walled garden. She is a painter, muralist, textile artist, book designer, and founder of East London Textile Arts.

CP8 *Gabriela Mistral: This Far Place*, translated by John Gallas. ISBN 978-0-7283-0340-9; 50pp. £5.50.

In 1945 Gabriela Mistral became the first Latin American author to be awarded a Nobel Prize. She was a passionate advocate for many disadvantaged groups in her native Chile, but particularly women and children living in poverty and unable to access education that might help them to improve their lives. She spent much of her life as a teacher, but her poetry reflects the people she met and the situations she encountered through her life. It speaks of a deep empathy with those around her, and of great strength of faith. Her legacy is continued by the many foundations and schools set up

in her name. Gallas's translations bring Mistral's words to English-speaking audiences, creating new and beautiful works in the canon of literature by Christian poets.

CP9 Henry Vaughan & George Herbert: *Divine Themes and Celestial Praise*, edited by Edward Clarke. ISBN 978-0-7283-0352-2; 84pp. £7.00.

This book contains poems by Henry Vaughan, all of them selected from the 1655 edition of *Silex Scintillans*. Almost all are followed by a related poem from George Herbert's 1633 collection, *The Temple*. Despite scholarly discussion of the relationship between the poems of Vaughan and Herbert, this is the first occasion their works have been published in this way. For Vaughan, Herbert was that 'blessed man, whose holy life and verse gained many pious Converts': poets who wisely exchanged 'vain and vicious subjects' for 'divine Themes and Celestial praise'. Vaughan thought of himself as 'the least' of those converts, but the poetry in *Silex Scintillans* shows him matching and even sometimes surpassing his master's work.

Henry Vaughan was born in 1621 at Newton-by-Usk in Breconshire. Both he and his twin brother, Thomas, were tutored locally before going up to Jesus College, Oxford. Henry then went on to study law at the Inns of Court in London. After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, he returned to Wales and served in the King's army. He remained in Breconshire, marrying twice and practising as a physician, until his death in 1695. Vaughan's first volume, *Poems, with the Tenth Satire of Juvenal Englished*, was published in 1646. Another collection, *Olor Iscanus*, was published in 1651, but it is the 1655 edition of *Silex Scintillans* for which this poet is best remembered today.

George Herbert died at the age of 39, in March 1633. A month before, he had given the manuscript of his poems to an emissary of Nicholas Ferrar, who had it copied out and then printed as *The Temple*. In the preface to that popular book, Vaughan would have learned that Herbert was 'nobly born', but had given up on a fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, 'choosing rather to serve at God's Altar'. In 1630, Herbert became rector of Bemerton, near Salisbury, where he remained for the rest of his short life.

Edward Clarke is the author of two books of criticism, *The Later Affluence of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and *The Vagabond Spirit of Poetry* (Iff Books, 2014). His latest collection of

poems is called *Cherubims* (Kelsay Books, 2022). *A Book of Psalms* was published by Paraclete Press in 2020 and a selection of his poems, called *The Voice inside Our Home*, was recently published by SLG Press.

CP10 Sisters of the Love of God, *An Anthology: Love Will Come With Fire*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0351-5; 76pp. £7.00.

This is a collection of personal reflections on faith and the struggle to meet and serve God that is part of our Christian journey. Here there are no fractured poetic experiments except in the faith-struggle itself, that is, the thinking, which is the accomplishment and power of religious poetry, just as it is of religious life. This struggle is manifest here, expressed by different people with different impulses to write. Here, the little, the personal and the tightly-imagined have the most effect. The transfer of faith, doubt, struggle, praise, prayer into poetry is hard – and that struggle too is part of this collection.

The collection includes poetry by Sr Ruth, Sr Barbara June, Sr Clare-Louise, Sr Catherine, Sr Adrian, Sr Stephanie-Thérèse, Sr ShirleyClare, Sr Christine, Sr Raphael, Sr Helen, Sr Mary Paul and Sr Mary Teresa.



Search for the still point
from which all else flows
and live from that.

God is the ground of all Being
Christ the Source of all life
The Spirit the Breath that breathes us.

Find the still point
It is the pearl of great price.
From it life flows
In it we meet all beings
Through it we enter into life.

Sister Clare-Louise

Holy Community

Here we are found a trusting place
Where corn and wine and gladness overflow.
Given you are into our open hands
Which cannot grasp the mystery they hold.
And here, enfolded in your shadowing
We are cross-bound with you to worlds of pain,
Our bread cross-broken by you;
Cross-born in you to be
Your everlasting gift in threefold joy unbounded.

Sister Catherine

Freedom

Free as birds soaring
Unseen paths
Free as rain falling
Where it will
Free as air and wind
Dancing with the leaves
Free as fire that
Burns for thee
Free as mighty waves, spent
In wild beauty
Free in the heart of creation
I shall dare to stand, where
None remains but thee
In trembling, free.

Sister Shirley Clare

Sleep

Sleep comes;

broody-breasted gift of God
gathering us under the night-dark wings of oblivion
a gift given by the Beloved to the beloved;
in measure running over,
in measure poured to fill the empty, tired shell of human
frame;
in measure given as the beloved leans upon the breast of
the Beloved
care free, anxiety still, achievement ended,
to live the measured life of love in resurrection.

Sleep comes:

a gift possessed in fear,
taking to self in anger the oblivion of unconsciousness.
a gift given by the Beloved to the beloved;
in measure running over ...
in measure poured to heal the teeming, fertile mind,
in measure squandered by the beloved to ease the burden of
unregenerate self;
anxious, unhappy, achievement-ended life,
forever reaching into the darkness of death.

Sleep comes;

the open-handed gift of the Beloved to the beloved.
within this uneasy death we take our ease
in measure as we live care free,
in measure as we give ourselves
unconditionally to life.

Sister Christine

Obedience

Omnipotent, omnipresent one,
Bountiful being blessed,
Eternally extolled,
Deity divine.
Inimitable infinite
Everyone, everywhere
Naming none above the next,
Clearly calling – Come
Everlasting ecstasy.

Sister Raphael

Self Sacrifice

Before I let them go,
Each sin and sacrifice,
I kiss them with a blessing
And bundle them up tight.

I lay them on the Altar
For this I do presume
That Love will come with fire
And each one there consume.

For sin and sacrifice
Same on the Altar lie
No longer mine but God's
As smoke drifts up on high.

Sister Stephanie-Thérèse

22 July, 2020 – for Ridgway (RIP 24 July)

Cacklemaster crow calls forth the day,
another day of your dying;
you will not hear him in your morphine drowsiness.

Or, if you do, you'll think it music,
and the angels will make it so;
like that which sprang from you,
a river over-spilling,
refreshing, filling listeners
with new sound and
tickling the Universe.

Sister Helen



CP11 *Touchpapers*, collected and translated by John Gallas. ISBN 978-0-7283-0341-6; 70pp. £6.75.

This anthology of thoughts seeks to be a various and portable nudger into the corners, plains and hilltops of all kinds of what might be called Wisdom. The poems and extracts selected here from writers famous to relatively unknown, from every century and continent, may be enough in themselves; kickers-on to bigger, longer, things, or no; touchpapers to bright thoughts either related or, in the end, unrelated to them; or a spur to read more of the same, be it poems or poets, or more writing of the thinking kind, philosophers to parsons.

This collection of snippets is intended to stimulate, lead on to more. It is less an anthology, and more a trigger, leading the reader, as they dip and choose, read and leave, to whatever depth of thought in whatever area they might choose.

VESTRY GUIDES

VG2 Paul Monk, *Help! No Minister! or Please Take the Service*. ISBN 978-0-7283-0317-1; full colour, 88pp. £6.00.

What do you do if someone approaches you just before a service is due to begin and tells you that the minister is not coming? This book is provided for those who are asked at the last minute, ‘Can you take the service?’. It provides three complete services that can be led entirely from this book (including sermons and prayers of intercession), as well as guided sections in which the leader can use the church service books or printed pew-sheets that may have been prepared in advance. Appendices supply additional sermons and sets of prayers of intercession. This is an essential for any vestry bookshelf. The edition uses the forms of text from Common Worship and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Paul Monk was an academic research chemist until entering the priesthood later in life. He was ordained deacon in 2007 and priest in 2008. All his ordained ministry has been spent in Oldham, Greater Manchester, most recently as Vicar of Clarksfield and Waterhead parishes.



REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Arthur Bell, *Discovery* (Published by the author in 2022), 130 pp. £10. Available only from SLG Press (orders@slgpress.co.uk).

Arthur Bell was the Priest-in-Charge of St John’s Anglican Mission, Wabasca from 1967 until 1972 and again from 1977 until the end of 1982. His two-part poetic sequence, *Discovery*, describes his adventures in that wild region of northern Alberta, Canada.

St John’s Mission was established in 1894, after the Hudson’s Bay Company opened their first trading post in this area in the 1880s. Wabasca 166, an Indian reserve of the Bigstone Cree Nation was surveyed there in 1913. As Bell notes,

the life and culture of these parts had suffered hard times, especially in the latter parts of the 19th century, with famine and disease. The native population of these parts lived in close relationship with the environment, food-gathering, hunting, and living in relationship with the natural life of the area.

Bell came there at the age of 34, ‘single, fully trained in the sacred ministry’ and ‘feeling the need to adventure beyond the rather specialized bounds of ‘western’ life in England’. His book *Discovery* takes its readers on that adventure, and we find ourselves often beside the poet-priest in his old canoe –

Through rivers searching the beaver,
Skirting forests through lake-side rushes
Creeping hidden.

The first half of the book is very wild and elemental. We witness initially a ‘sun-scorched’ Maytime, when –

The million liquid pearls shimmer in shades;
Shine, sunfast thin to the dry heat of day

– fires threaten the forest and its communities. But then we are taken on a rain-drenched late June canoe ride to where –

Waters flow as it were backwards,
Mud from the channel a vivid muddy yellow
Spread out from the influent effluence above-below!

On these journeys the poetry has an almost Old English quality that sometimes leaps into the bud bursting red birch exploding linguistic vicinity of Gerard Manley Hopkins. As Bell carries his ‘canoe up-turned’ to lodge it behind a shed, I am also reminded of Andrew Marvell whose

Salmon-Fishers moist
Their *Leathern Boats* begin to hoist;
And, like *Antipodes* in Shoes,
Have shod their *Heads* in their *Canoos*.

In the second part the poetry is just as immersive and we are taken on an epic hunt for beaver, which ends with an almost Dantean encounter with a lynx:

I press the button: Flash!
Round the tree-trunk, a queen;
Queen of the forests, Huntress!
Golden-faced, sharp tufted ears,
Mother Lynx.

Along the way we encounter the hospitality of numerous western teachers, missionaries and traders and indigenous people stubbornly and ingeniously surviving in this wild place, their friendship intensified by the sublime surroundings, as is the taste of the beaver stew they often offer.

So one discovers patterns of practical life and inner vision expressed in ways of life which may reveal something of the metaphysical in Life as a whole, and source of the driving Spirit which characterizes humanity.

The use of Cree words, nicely explicated in the poetry and in footnotes, accentuates the strangeness of the experience. The epiphanies come, not only from the 'encircling breeze' and the elemental landscape and its creatures, but occasionally from the liturgy performed in that wild setting, the Christian mystery, 'Indivisible, inexplicable', and intensified through the wonder of locals who gather from their 'dozen or so homes', and so

The world grows together in prayer, and our
Elements of life.

Part of me wondered how this poetic sequence would look in heroic couplets or at least blank verse. But I was quickly drawn into the freer verse and came to appreciate a spirit at work in the sometimes quite short lines and even the prose sections. I relished most the moments at the ends of arduous canoe journeys when the locals emerged to offer a bed for the night and food 'In warmth of friendship'. I was exulted by the mysteries celebrated in old log chapels along the way, the familiar words of the liturgy taking on a strange resonance after long passages of poetry devoted to sylvan rapids, beavers, wild ducks, and fears of forest fires. I encourage you to embark with Arthur Bell on his adventures into these wild and thrilling regions in the north of Alberta. You will not be disappointed.

EDWARD CLARKE

Simon Cocksedge, Samuel Double & Nicholas Alan Worssam, *Seeing Differently: Franciscans and Creation* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2021), £16.99. ISBN 978-1-78622-300-5. Also available as an eBook.

For many of us, ‘ecology’, ‘sustainability’, ‘climate change’, ‘living simply that others may live’, have been the vocabulary of our lives for the past fifty years or more. Our response has been shaped by seminal books such as Rachel Carson’s *The Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962) and E. F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (Blond & Briggs, 1973) and perhaps even before that by Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (David McKay Co., 1957). In many ways, as a study of advertising in a wealthy consumerist society, Packard was the precursor of the first two and prepared the ground for us to begin to hear the message of the later authors. These writers began to provoke responses both in politics and in the lifestyles of ordinary citizens. Since the 1950s and 60s people have been living sustainably and, where possible, teaching others to do so. With the very real changes in the global climate in the past twenty years becoming a threat to our water and food supplies as well as our general health, there is a general sense of urgency to *do something* to address these problems.

Like faith, sustainable living has to be both taught to, and embraced by each generation as a response to the ills of society; then demonstrated to have benefits. This recent book by the Franciscans began in part from that knowledge. Since their foundation, their mission has been to the poor, teaching, preaching and relieving suffering. However, they were the beneficiaries of a neglected farm in Dorset that became their motherhouse, but for many years the land remained untended. Under the guidance and tutelage of Brother Samuel the possibilities of turning this property into a place of green living have flourished. Although as Franciscans the community has always lived from a place of poverty, with the deliberate decision to live sustainably came a new way of seeing the life and teaching of St Francis and his early followers as precursors of current concerns for living simply.

Most people who know anything about the saint can point to the ‘Canticle of the Creatures’ or tell some of the stories attached to his name: the embracing of the leper; the wolf tamed after ravaging the flocks of Gubbio; preaching to the birds; the rabbit freed from a trap which then refused to

leave him. But his life was more than a series of sweet stories about his love of the animal world. Francis was at such peace and unity with God through his vow of poverty that he had recovered an Eden-like relation to the whole of creation. Brother Nicholas Alan, in his overview of the theology of the early followers of St Francis, explains this well. He draws on the writings of familiar Franciscan names: Clare of Assisi, Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus, Angela of Foligno, Jacopone da Todi and Francisco de Osuna. A formidable line-up whose teaching is accessibly expounded. These are writers whose theology shaped, and shape, the Christian response to our relationship with God.

Brother Nicholas Alan's chapters form the core of this book, prefaced by an introduction from Simon Cocksedge to the life and spirituality of St Francis, especially his relationship with creation. The final section is by Brother Samuel; while telling us of his own experience of living sustainably, he skillfully brings us to a place where we can reflect on our own response to the same call. To help us in this, each chapter of *Seeing Differently* ends with a series of questions that can be used by either the individual reader or as a study guide for a discussion group.

A poem by the late David Scott is reproduced on pp. 145–6, and these last few lines are particularly pertinent:

I know that
'man cannot live on bread alone',
I say, let us get the bread right.¹

Getting the bread right is the call to each of us to examine our lives; to change and be changed. This book well worth reading reminds us that we are integral to creation and that God has given it into our care. We have no alternative but to care well if we are to discover the Love of God.

SISTER CHRISTINE SLG

¹ David Scott, *Beyond the Drift: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014), 122.

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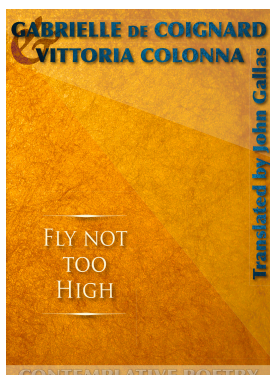
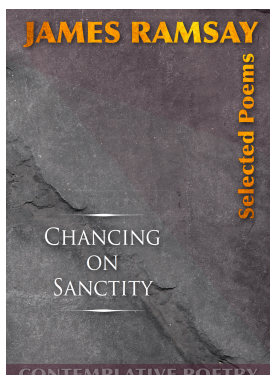
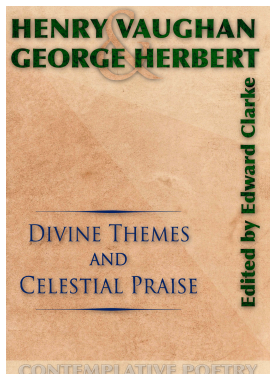
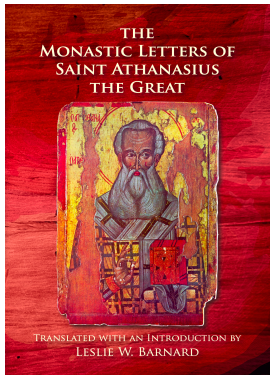
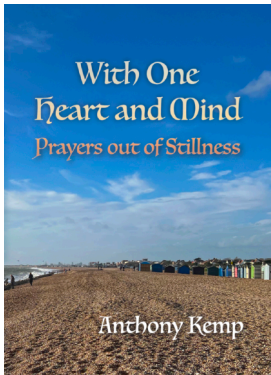
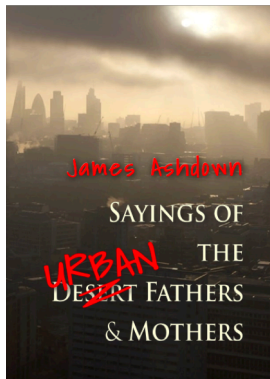
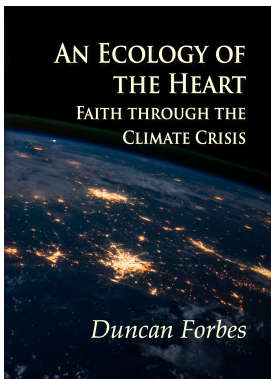
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