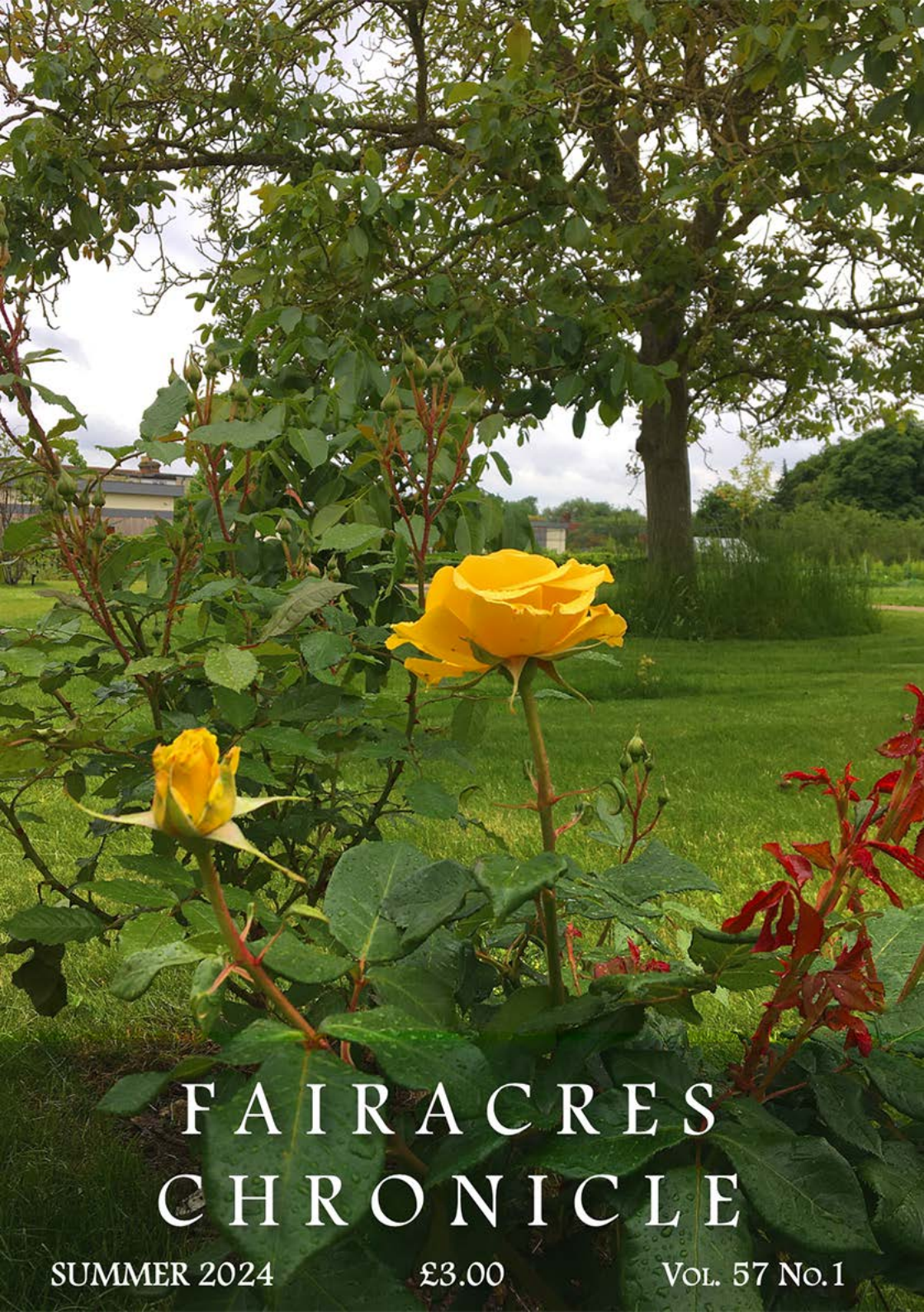

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Cover photo: rose in bloom outside the main entrance, Summer 2024.

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Community Notes

Dear Friends,

I write these summer notes at a time of great uncertainty and change. The situation in Gaza continues to worsen, alongside a rise in antisemitic feeling in many parts of the world. The situation in Ukraine is no nearer resolution as Russia continues its offensive. And here at home we approach a General Election at a time when the National Health Service continues to struggle to provide a service to those who need it.

I am also beginning these notes on the eightieth anniversary of the D-Day landings, remembering the sacrifice of those who fought to obtain freedom and peace for the world. It would be another seven months before the camp at Auschwitz would be liberated, but this was the beginning of the move towards peace. As has been pointed out, there are now very few remaining of those who survived landing on the beaches of Normandy on that day. Gradually fewer and fewer people remember the war years and the deprivations experienced, but we continue to face issues which have their origin in those war years—or going back centuries before.

This edition of the *Chronicle* addresses some of these issues; a reprint of an article by Rabbi Howard Cooper from 2015 faces the issues raised by the war in Gaza and in other areas head on, while Hamish Fullerton's article takes us into the depths of the experience of human betrayal. The *Chronicle* also points us to how we should respond in Andy Lord's article, 'Presence and the Jesus Prayer'. The response of prayer and intercession is a vital part of our lives as Christians.

Watching the televised 'debates' (more like arguments) between our political leaders at this time of pre-election frenzy, reminds me that many of our troubles stem from our inability, or unwillingness, to meet the Other, to discuss and share our difference and similarities. An important text in the SLG Rule is found in Chapter 20, 'Demeanour':

> As part of the repairing of people's lack of respect for human nature and of their cruelty to one another, the Sisters shall remember the presence of God and his indwelling in any to whom they may be speaking. Therefore, quietness, reverence and love shall rule both words and actions.

Fallen humanity can tend to see the Other as an object either to be grasped or pushed away. Christ teaches us the way of the Kingdom, seeing others as unique individuals to be respected and cherished. While we may not agree, if we can learn to live together with trust and goodwill, those differences can become indicators of richness rather than badges of division.

We are perhaps most vulnerable as we approach death. Here in Community, we have been watching and waiting with Sr Julie as she neared the end of her life. We have had the privilege of being able to care for her at home; the experience of being with someone as they gently draw near to death is very different from that of those who lose their lives in violence and warfare. Sister Julie died peacefully just after midnight on 12 June, just before this issue of the *Chronicle* went to press. Our Rule challenges us as a Community to pray for the dead and for the dying,

> remembering the countless numbers of those who have passed from this life spiritually uncared for and who are in special need of prayer. (Rule Chapter 18, 'Intercession').

Remembering those who have fallen in war, whether in the past or in more recent times, we can become aware of the absence of care in those situations. We can also be aware of those who, due to the circumstances of life, have no one close to them when they die. Again, we are reminded of the preciousness in the eyes of God of each individual person, a preciousness and respect which we should all endeavour to recognise, and which calls for a response of intercession and prayer.

This is easy enough with the people with whom we agree, who are friends rather than enemies. But through his self-offering on the Cross, Jesus teaches us that we must extend this love to all people. This is a lifelong task. Imagine what the world could be like if humanity was able to follow this path! However, we are fallen; we have to look to our Lord to tread the path before us.

What we can do is just as the SLG Rule reminds us; remember the presence of God in all whom we meet, and act towards them accordingly, with respect and a willingness to listen. This is something that we are all able to do, or try to do, in our own situations. And small as it is, it makes a difference, to us and to those around us.

Of course, all this is undergirded with love, the Love of God. Each day the Sisters pray a morning oblation, which includes the words:

My God, I desire to love thee with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength.

It is an echo of the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and we pray it each day as we 'begin again' daily—as we all do. It is all about love: our love of God, but more importantly, the Love of God for us.

In that Love I send you our prayers and best wishes.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

✠

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Father Gilbert Shaw's Last Sermon

ASSOCIATES

NEW PRIEST ASSOCIATE

Minty Hull	14 March 2024

✠ RIP ✠

Revd Alan Heaton (Priest Associate)	16 January 2024
Peter Stobart (FLG)	5 May 2024

Shadow and Darkness in Judaism

RABBI HOWARD COOPER

This article was first published in the Summer 2015 edition of *Fairacres Chronicle* and is reproduced here at the request of one of our readers. It is a revised version of a paper first published by the Guild of Pastoral Psychology in 2012. The author decided that it should be reproduced in its original form.

I do not want to talk about this. I am frightened of talking about this. I want to change the subject. I want to share with you instead some Biblical texts, something numinous—like the first paragraph of the whole Bible, those wonderful opening verses of the Book of Genesis, where there is darkness, *choshekh* in Hebrew. It is part of the chaos of the beginning of creation as portrayed by the Biblical storytellers, where the earth is unformed and void, *tohu va'vohu*, some primal state of inchoateness, in which darkness just is: pre-existent, pristine, waiting for something to happen, and the Spirit of God, the *ruach Elohim*, happens. It is hovering over the primeval waters, and suddenly a voice emerges out of the darkness, illuminating the darkness: 'And God said, "Let there be light."' *Y'hi or*. Before we know it, before we have time to think about the impossible, miraculous transformation of intention into action, of thought into matter, of speech into waves and particles, in that moment, æons long, 'Let there be light' flows into 'and there was light.' *Y'hi or va'y'hi or.*

'Let there be' is connected by a single letter to 'and there was/is'. The wish and its fulfilment are the same word in Hebrew. How small the gap between what comes to mind and what then comes to pass; and how huge that gap is for us, between 'Let there be!' and 'here it is!' We live in that space between fantasy, imagination, desire and what then evolves, unfolds, in what we fondly call 'reality'. That space is there already 'in the beginning', with 'let there be' flowing into, yet separated from, 'and there was'.

How much I would prefer to dwell on these verses, make them my subject; where God speaks the universe into being, where our Biblical narrator evokes the creation of the universe by evoking a Creator who uses words, just like the narrator, to conjure something out of nothing; uses language to enlighten the darkness, to 'divide the light from the darkness'. How much I

would rather talk about Judaism's extraordinary foundational text, the Torah, and how the Torah starts with this luminous poetic text, creating a word picture of a Creator who mirrors us, continually bringing light to bear on, and from, a pre-existing darkness.

But something pulls me back, something says, 'No, that's too easy', these biblical texts. Too much light; because the darkness keeps shining through.

> At the end of the watch, on your way from the tent to the shower, you sometimes hear horrible screams. You walk in your shorts and clogs, a towel slung over your shoulder, toilet kit in hand, and from the other side of the galvanized tin fence of the interrogation section come hair-raising human screams … You ask yourself what is happening here five yards from you? … You don't know (exactly). But you know that from this moment on you won't be able to rest. Because no more than fifty yards from the bed where you try to sleep, eighty yards from the mess hall where you try to eat, people scream. And they scream because other people, wearing uniforms like your own, do things to them that cause them to scream.
>
> … And now, as the screams grow weaker, as they change to a kind of sobbing, wailing, you know that from this moment on nothing will ever again be as it was. Because a person who has heard the screams of another person being tortured is already a different person. Whether he does anything about it or not, a person who has heard the screams of another person being tortured incurs an obligation …[1]

As, perhaps, does anyone who hears the accounts of those who hear the screams of others being tortured.

Ari Shavit, an Israeli journalist who lives in Jerusalem and writes for the newspaper *Ha'aretz,* published the account of his experience of army reserve duty in Gaza in 1991.[2] The State of Israel is now long gone from occupying Gaza [Of course in 2015 I never anticipated the catastrophe that unfolded in 2023–4. H. C. June 2024]. But as we all know, and as I saw on a recent trip to Israel and Palestine, a study tour organized by British Friends of Rabbis for Human Rights (www.rhruk.co.uk), the dark shadow of occupation, part

[1] Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (Spiegel & Grau, 2013).

[2] This and the following translations are taken from Ari Shavit, 'On Gaza Beach', *New York Review of Books*, 18 July 1991.

of Judaism's shadow, is still very much present in what we can now talk about only with grim irony as the 'Holy Land'.

The text of Genesis is magisterial, it proceeds with that great series of divisions and discriminations, stage by stage, day by day, creating a Creator whose activity is portrayed as a continual act of distinguishing between opposites, then naming what comes into being: 'And God called the light Day, *yom*, and the darkness He called Night, *laiyla*'. And the rhythm of creation is established: 'And there was evening and there was morning, *yom ethad*, one day'. A rhythm that echoes through the Bible's first chapter, 'And there was evening, and there was morning,' as the Divine Project evolves, stage by stage.

And the text is so beautiful, so melodious, so soothing to the ear as creation is hymned into being, that the narrator's sleight of hand can easily be missed. Let us listen again: 'And God called *the light* Day, *yom*, and the *darkness* He called Night, *laiyla'*. Light—day. Darkness—night. Simple, binary opposites. And then they are put together: 'And there was evening and there was morning.' And what happens when evening darkness and morning light are put together? Suddenly we hear that they form *yom ethad*, one day. One *yom*. But that is what God calls the light on its own: *yom*. So how can the word used solely for the light, *yom*, suddenly be the same word for the light plus the darkness? Where has the darkness gone? The word used in relation to light, *yom*, has cast its shadow over the darkness. The darkness is hidden, it seems to have disappeared. But we know that darkness can never disappear.

And Ari Shavit will not let me pretend that it has: it is being acted out at this very moment in a far-off land about which we know little, but hear a lot. He keeps on describing what he calls the *'silent metamorphosis'* that is required of himself and his friends, people like me and you, 'these good people who are solid citizens of a consumer-oriented, technological democracy'. Because he is a Jew he cannot help but be alert, in a way analogous to the way in which the therapist is alert, to the constant intersection of the past with the present. As he continues to speak he takes us nearer to the heart of the darkness:

> And although there is no basis for comparison—and in truth, there is no basis for comparison—I begin to understand how it was with some of those other guards who stood in other places, over other people, behind other fences. How those other guards heard other screams—and didn't

> hear a thing. For in most cases the bad do not know they are bad. Those who carry out atrocities hardly ever know they are carrying out atrocities. They simply obey orders. Or wait for promotion. Or do what they have to do. All they really want is to get home safe and sound. And they worry about their taxes, and about their kids' problems in school. But at the same time that they are thinking about home and the wife and the bills to be paid, their hands unthinkingly hold the weapon; their eyes are on the fence, on the door. The door behind which people are suffering. When we line up for guard duty at 1.30 in the morning I scan our faces. Our slouching bodies. Are we the thing that is called 'evil'?

There is real humanity and understanding here. And compassion. With painful honesty he refuses to fudge the issues:

> I go over and over again in my heart the long list of arguments, the list of the differences. There are no crematoria here, I remind myself, and there was no conflict between peoples there. Germany, with its racist doctrine, was organized evil, its people were not in danger, and so on.
>
> But then I realized [and here he comes to the core of the problem] that the problem is not in the similarity—for no one can seriously think that there is a real similarity—but that there isn't enough lack of similarity. The problem is that the lack of similarity isn't strong enough to silence once and for all the evil echoes, the accusing images.

How has it come to this? How has it happened to a culture, a people, who treasure, revere, texts at the centre of which is the call for justice: 'Justice, justice, you shall pursue' (Deut. 16:20)? And the refrain repeated thirty-six times in the Bible: 'And you shall love the stranger,' (Lev. 19:34 etc.) the outsider, the Other, 'for you were strangers, outsiders, in the land of Egypt' (Deut. 10:19): so you know, you carry the memory of what it is like to be oppressed, to be treated harshly. How is it that this systemic call to imaginative empathetic identification with those who are not 'us', a call foundational to both Judaism and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948—just six months after Israel's Declaration of Independence—is so disregarded? How is it that we now have religious settlers in the Occupied Territories descending at night from their hill-top homes and fire-bombing Palestinian mosques and houses in the name of those same texts, and in the name of the Divine Presence that is seen as inspiring and infusing those texts?

How is it that in some quarters these luminous texts have turned toxic? Could it be that we never paid sufficient attention—or any attention—to the darkness encoded within the Biblical narratives, with their unpredictable and demanding God and his quixotic project for societal and personal transformation, texts that incarnate for an always-backsliding, rebellious people, a daunting vision of human potential? Could it be that we were not conscious enough of the ways in which that wondrous saga of creation and revelation, of wandering, conquest, and occupation of a Promised Land not only inspired a people over generations, hardened them to the dramas of history, steeled them against centuries of persecution and victimhood, enabled them to survive with their faith continually evolving yet more or less intact, but also contained (and contain) a huge shadow in relation to what this kind of disciplined belief, with its insistence on the rigorous daily practice of righteousness, entails psychically? In short, have we paid sufficient attention to the ways in which belief can be a form of cruelty?[3]

When belief involves a form of domination of the self—'Thou shalt not … thou shalt not … you must … you must …'—and an aggression, conscious or unconscious, towards anything playful, pleasure-seeking or plain unruly in oneself or others, then either the self suffers or, when it is acted out, the Other will end up suffering instead, or as well. Perhaps Judaism has not been sufficiently alert to the ways in which the state of conviction that we call 'religious belief' can have destructiveness encoded within it.

In this sense, the way we might hold to certain kinds of religious faith is analogous to other kinds of faith and belief. You may recall a remark Jung made during an interview in 1938, concerning the appeal of the totalitarian dictators in Europe, where he says that the 'law to remember' about them is: 'It is the persecuted one who persecutes.'[4]

The psychodynamics of 'It is the persecuted one who persecutes,' with its attendant concepts of splitting, displacement and projection, can help us think about the unfolding tragedy that has been taking place over these recent decades in the land of Israel. I would rather get back to the texts, that safe

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[3] Based on a formulation by Adam Phillips in *Freely Associated: Encounters in Psychoanalysis,* ed. Anthony Molino (Free Association Books, 1997), 132.

[4] *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, eds William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull (Picador, 1980), 131.

ground we can dig into, endlessly fertile for the imagination. But that other ground, with its uprooted olive trees and siphoned-off water supplies, will not let me go just yet. Something is being acted out there that needs to be thought about if we are considering light and darkness and shadow in Judaism, something fuelled by both recent history and ancient texts. History and texts are playing off each other in perverse ways within the collective unconscious of the State of Israel.

The newly-born State of Israel arose, as they said, out of the ashes of Europe; this is not a metaphor—at least, not a metaphor that can ever escape its grim specificity in genocide. Since the 1970s we have learned a lot more about the ways in which, in the early decades of Israel's existence as a state, the actual stories of Holocaust survivors went unheard: the tales of persecution, of victimhood, of suffering, were not wanted as part of the official narrative filled with youthful pioneers making the deserts bloom. The silence of survivors was not only a personal inability to put into words the enormity of what had been done to them, of the losses that had been experienced, the traumas that had been witnessed and lived through; but it was also part of a collective response to persecution that sought, paradoxically, to downplay the specific recent history of European barbarism—even though this history was part of the very bedrock of the new State.

In the words of the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld:

> We should not forget that it was not only the survivors who wanted to repress their experiences; the feeling throughout Israel at the time was that survivors should renounce their past and put aside their memories. During the 1940s and 1950s, religious beliefs and European mannerisms were seen as alien values to be kept out of Israeli life. Both the religious Jew and the assimilated Jew were frowned upon.[5]

The perceived 'weakness' and vulnerability of the European survivors was turned against them cruelly: 'Why didn't you resist? Why did you let yourself be led like lambs to the slaughter?'[6] So the new Jewish state built up a national narrative for itself, another mythic saga, of assertiveness, defiance, a refusal to allow itself any hint of uncertainty or vulnerability: 'Never again!' The slang term, the badge of pride, was that the new Israeli

[5] Aharon Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life* (Schocken Books, 2004), 169–70.
[6] Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life*, 168.

state was a nation of 'sabras', an Arabic and Hebrew word for the prickly pear, that tenacious, thorny desert plant with a thick hide that conceals its sweet, soft interior. By definition survivors, non-native born, were not 'sabras'; and the vulnerable core of traumatized escapees from Europe became, as it were, part of the Israeli shadow, along with the knowledge that 750,000 Palestinian inhabitants of pre-State Mandate Palestine had been displaced or fled during the War for Independence.

'It is the persecuted one who persecutes'—or it is the humiliated ones who humiliate. The return of what had been repressed was not long delayed in the life of the young State. It is perhaps not surprising that the State of Israel presents itself as being under constant existential threat when it is splitting off its shame and rage at what was done to the Jewish people, and perhaps its shame at what its own Independence has meant for the Arabs of Mandate Palestine. It is continually experiencing its own displaced hostility as being directed towards it from the rest of the world. And of course, the actual hostility in some parts of the world only confirms Israeli paranoia.

The grotesque Separation Wall that now scars the landscape of Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank is a physical enactment in a particularly brutal and literally concrete form of a psychic reality. It is a physical defence that enacts a psychological defence, because on the one hand, it has brought a kind of daily security to Jewish inhabitants of Israel, but on the other hand, its construction involves a huge nexus of denials. A denial of the suffering it causes, expressed as, 'Let someone else be humiliated for a change'. A denial of the aggression it is generating: 'We are the good guys here, we only have peace in our hearts; it is them who have aggression and hatred in their hearts.' It is a denial of the self-harm and longer-term self-destruction within this policy. The delusion that you are living in the light blinds you to the darkness of your own annihilatory fantasies that wish your neighbours would just disappear. Putting them behind a wall, so that when you drive along your Jewish-only roads you cannot see the 'Other,' is psychologically the crudest, most primitive form of denial. If I cannot see you, I can pretend you do not exist; I cannot bear to know that I do not want you to exist, but at least I can construct a defence that magically makes it seem that 'Let there be no Palestinians' becomes 'and there *are* no Palestinians'.

Let us go back to the texts. Classical Judaism, in the Bible and the Talmud, does not speak so much in the language of 'rights' as we now understand them,

but in terms of 'responsibilities', responsibilities to others, with a bias towards the poor and the marginalized (the widow, the orphan, the elderly), and the stranger, the 'Other' who is not one of 'Us'. They are spelled out in detail in the primary texts and the commentaries on the texts: concentric circles of responsibilities to your own people, to other people, and to your environment. Through ethnocentricity to universalism, because each human being is made in the image of God and therefore each person is precious. It is a wonderful paradox, incarnated at the heart of Judaism, that only through living out your particular destiny will you be able to transcend particularism and understand, and help others understand, that fundamental truth. Part of the vision of the Torah is that humanity is a mosaic or a stained glass window, with each colour and each texture a unique part of the big picture, with the same light shining through but refracting in different ways. Strange word this, 'mosaic', which comes from the Latin for 'of the muse, artistic,' and its curious synchronicity with 'Mosaic', pertaining to Judaism's muse and the Judaic myth of Mosaic artistry in the authorship of these translucent and problematic texts.

And they are problematic in places, distressingly so. What does it do, I wonder, to a people to ascribe holiness to a text like this?

> When My angel/messenger goes before you and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I annihilate them, you shall not bow down to their gods in worship or follow their practices, but shall tear them down and smash their pillars to bits. You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will remove sickness from your midst … I will send forth my Terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you. I will send a plague ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites … I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of Philistia, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hands, and you will drive them out before you. (Ex. 23:23–33)[7]

What does it mean that this text, and others like it, are still part of the Torah, still part of the annual cycle of readings in the synagogue? At least,

[7] Jewish Publication Society translation from *The Jewish Study Bible*, eds Berlin and Brettler (Oxford University Press, 1999), 160–1.

they are read in traditional Orthodox synagogues, which read every word of the Torah within that annual cycle, without censoring texts that might be problematic to a modern ethically-sensitive Jewish sensibility. It is probably worth adding that Reform and Liberal communities do not read these texts; we do 'edited highlights' of the Torah. We like the nice bits, with uplifting enlightened messages and high ethical standards. We effectively censor a lot of the darkness that is grafted into the Torah; we pretend it is not there, which is, of course, problematic in its own way. Because it *is* there, and when you go to Israel, colonized by these ancient Biblical texts, and see what is happening, you become aware that whatever the benign traditions of interpreting these texts have been, it is the narrow fundamentalist readings that dominate and dictate the attitude of self-styled 'Torah-true' Jews to the other residents in the land.

It is no use arguing with this mental world, which is essentially paranoid-schizoid, because from its perspective the boundaries of the land of Israel are divinely determined. This kind of piety creates its own reality, as happens in a psychosis: from inside this world-view, modern Biblical scholarship just does not exist. So there is no access to different ways of thinking about these texts, which might consider, for example, how they echo the rhetorical or stylistic conventions of other non-Hebraic contemporary texts. The notion of genre, the placing of these texts into Middle Eastern contexts, any use of literary critical theory—all this is *goyische nachas* (that is, secular, gentile; what non-Jews enjoy but not us, and probably anti-Semitic to boot). And this is so even if such scholarship is penned by Jews.

To the observant believers in Jewish particularity the study and practice of Torah puts you within a chain of tradition that brings light into the world with a kind of undimmed intensity, because it stretches back to the revelation of the Divine Will at Sinai: 'Many candles can be kindled from one candle without diminishing it' is the metaphor that the rabbinic *midrash* offers to describe this.[8] And to the mystically-minded Torah practitioner, one's own immersion in and living out of Torah stretches back to a source of light that pre-dates this mythical encounter at Sinai (of course, the category of myth is not accepted within this world-view), for the 'light of the

[8] *Midrash Rabbah*, Kleinman edition, 17 vols. (Mesorah Publications Ltd, 2012–2016), *Sifre B'haaloteka*, 93.

Torah', according to the key mystical text the *Zohar*, is one of the seven lights created before the universe came into being. The other lights are described as 'the light of Paradise, the light of Gehenna/Hell, the light of the divine Throne of Glory, the light of the Holy Temple, the light of repentance, and the light of the Messiah'.[9]

The 'light of repentance'—now there is a useful concept. There is something we can work with, that we need to work with. Much of what I have been talking about falls within the penumbra of this metaphor. Because repentance/*teshuvah*, the turning back and seeking forgiveness, and the turning back to try and find something that has got lost in the craziness and despair of Jewish history, feels like a psychological and spiritual, as well as a political, imperative at this late stage of Jewish history.

I am reminded of the lines of that passionate and radically-minded poet Adrienne Rich:

> How did we get caught up fighting this forest fire,
> We, who were only looking for a still place in the woods?[10]

How did we get caught up in this enactment of the darkness grafted into this luminous tradition? Something has gone wrong and it is driving us mad. It is terrorizing us, torturing us, our souls. I see no light at the end of the tunnel. When you drive from Jerusalem to the West Bank now, you go through two huge tunnels. These Jewish-only roads have been dug underneath Palestinian homes and villages, to provide access to the settlements. At the end of these tunnels you emerge, but in the soul there is darkness.

What illumination I find is in those brave souls who are still fighting for human rights in Israel and in the territories. And there are some wonderful people doing that, against the odds, against the indifference. They are like divine sparks of hope, of refusal to give up on that original vision of having been created in order to enact an ethical responsibility towards others. So they provide me with glimmers of light in the darkness. As, of course, do the texts of tradition, these same problematic, accursed and blessed texts such as the verse from the prophet Micah (7:8) that I am going to end with. I have laid it out as a poem, which it is, or can be: thirteen Hebrew words

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[9] *The Zohar*, trans. Daniel C. Matt, 12 vols (Stanford University Press, 2018) , iii. 31a.
[10] Adrienne Rich, *Leaflets: Poems 1965–1968* (Norton, 1969), 77.

'rooted in imaginative awe,' to quote W. H. Auden.[11] The internal connections and tensions, continuities and discontinuities and paradoxes of these verses, deserve an essay in themselves. But I leave them with you in the spirit of the poet Seamus Heaney, who said that the effect he wants to achieve in his work is to take the 'dark embryo' (T. S. Eliot) in which poetry originates, and 'to set the darkness echoing':[12]

Do not rejoice
my enemy
for me against me
when I fall
I rise up
when I sit
in darkness
the Eternal/*Adonai*
is light
for me

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'Destroying those who Destroy the Earth': Creation in the Apocalypse.

TONY DICKINSON

St Bonaventure, one of the two great Franciscan theologians and authorized biographer of St Francis, saw reverence for the creation as part of 'the fervour of [the saint's] charity and his desire for martyrdom'. In the biography, Bonaventure describes how 'like a glowing coal, [Francis] seemed totally absorbed in the flame of divine love', and continues:

[11] W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand & Other Essays* (Faber & Faber, 1975), 60.
[12] Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* (Faber & Faber, 1966), 57.

> Aroused by all things to the love of God, he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands and from these joy-producing manifestations he rose to their life-giving principle and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself and through his vestiges imprinted on creation he followed his Beloved everywhere, making from all things a ladder by which he could climb up and embrace him who is utterly desirable … And he perceived a heavenly harmony in the consonance of powers and activities God has given them, and like the prophet David sweetly exhorted them to praise the Lord.[1]

A vision of the created order as a ladder between God and humankind is not unknown in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in the Psalms and the prophets. It is, though, more difficult to find anything in the New Testament which strikes a similar note. There are some of the parables of Jesus. There is the great cosmological, pneumatological and Christological set-piece in the eighth chapter of St Paul's letter to the Christian communities in Rome (8:21–5), a certain amount about 'the cosmic Christ' in the letters to Ephesus and Colossae, and that's about it. Until we come to the last book in the collection, the Revelation of John, 'The Apocalypse'.

The first three chapters are set on the Aegean island of Patmos, where John encounters the risen Lord among the seven lampstands, and dictates letters to the seven churches of Asia. Then, at the beginning of chapter 4, the scene changes to heaven and to the praises of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, culminating in a hymn of praise to God for the work of creation:

> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,
> You are worthy, our Lord and God,
> to receive glory and honour and power,
> for you created all things,
> and by your will they existed and were created. (Rev. 4:9–11)

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[1] *Legenda Major* 9/1, trans. Ewert Cousins in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Paulist Press, 1978).

And after *that* we are off, into what has been described as the most political book in the New Testament, one whose politics, and theology, draw their inspiration from the sacred writings of Israel. The seven seals on the scroll (Rev. 6), the seven angels with trumpets (Rev. 8), and the seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev. 16) provide John the Seer with a huge range of material—spiritual, political and environmental—which he weaves together, not into a picture of creation as a ladder to God, but into a warning of the cosmic disorder which is coming over creation as a result of what the letter to the Ephesians describes as 'the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12). In our situation it is not difficult to read John's vision of the seals, the trumpets and the bowls as foreshadowing the environmental catastrophe which human greed and short-sightedness are inflicting on the earth in our own age.

But perhaps we ought to begin with a little background. For many people, doorstep encounters with the members of fringe Christian sects have given the Revelation of John a bad name. It is a book that is open to misuse and misunderstanding. And it is disturbing. It seems, somehow, to plug effortlessly into the worst nightmares of humankind. 'Apocalyptic', which really means 'revelatory', has become shorthand for 'unspeakably horrific and disastrous'. Even in this allegedly scientific age, our worst fears find their place in John's twenty-two chapters. Economic meltdown, environmental degradation, military disaster, prisoners of conscience, power worship, ideological enslavement to false gods and false prophets—all are there. Perhaps it is no wonder that this book was one of the last to find acceptance in the New Testament canon.

In most places Revelation was accepted on the basis of its supposed authorship by John son of Zebedee, who was also assumed to be the John who wrote the fourth Gospel. But as early as the third century, Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria was pointing out the differences in style, language and thought between Revelation and other writings originating with John the Evangelist or his circle. Revelation appears to have been written by someone whose first language was not Greek but Aramaic. It is full of ideas and images taken from the Hebrew Scriptures—above all from the writings of the prophets. There are echoes of, or allusions to, Isaiah, Daniel, Amos, Ezekiel (especially Ezekiel), and Zechariah referenced in the margin of many study Bibles, *and* multiple hat-tips to the Psalms, and the books of the Law.

They are the key to how to read Revelation. They set it firmly within the framework of a first-century Jewish thought-world, warning us that we need to read the book in the light of the prophets' proclamation of God's judgement against his sinful people and in the light of other writings from those years 'between the Testaments' in which the Book of Daniel took shape; and it is from Daniel in particular, as well as from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, that John picks up the idea of a prophet 'sealing' words for the future—or, in John's case, the idea of the Lamb opening the seals because the future is now.

Now the seven seals and the four horsemen who are released by their opening don't actually play a central part in John's vision, for all that they have caught the popular imagination, thanks to the movies, particularly the silent film that turned Rudolph Valentino into a star 100 years ago and the remake by Vincente Minnelli forty years later.[2] Those 'four horsemen of the Apocalypse', war, famine, disease and death (Rev. 6:1–8), were a reality for John and for the people for whom he was writing, just as they are in many parts of the world today, as pandemic and climate crisis are exacerbating existing conflicts and the consequent movements of people. The famous Pax Romana did not preclude the possibility of disasters. In the second half of the first century of our era the Roman Empire experienced military defeats, volcanic eruptions, fire, plague and famines. This was the world which John knew and in which, despite everything, he proclaimed the ultimate victory of God and his Messiah. The horsemen, like the events which follow the opening of the remaining three seals, simply usher in what Jesus describes in the Gospels as 'the birth-pangs'. Prices rise in some, but not all, staple foods. There is war, famine and pandemic. These are, so to speak, the curtain-raiser for the main event, but they remind us that the world, as it is, is under threat, and that the threat comes not from God, but from governments, which continue to use armed force, bloodshed and hunger to establish and enforce their rule.

For John the Seer, the natural and political disasters of the contemporary world are, on one level, God's agents for the vindication of His people, but

[2] 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' adapted by June Mathis, directed by Rex Ingram (Metro Pictures Corporation, 1921) based on the 1916 Spanish novel by Vicente Blasco Iñáñez. Remade by Minnelli in 1962 under the MGM umbrella.

they are also a reflection of the principle that actions have consequences. That they reflect 'the wrath of the Lamb' is the perception of 'the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful' (6:15) and, at the end of the list, 'everyone, slave and free'. On the other hand, as the American scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out in her commentary on Revelation, the sense of 'wrath' targeted at the powerful, the despoiler and oppressor, is what makes the book popular with 'disadvantaged and alienated minority groups', whether 'Bible-believing' Christians in the poor rural areas of the USA or exploited and disadvantaged Christians in Latin America and southern Africa.[3]

After the horsemen comes the sealing of the saints, the 'great multitude which no one could number' (7:9ff) of those set aside for salvation, for well-being and peace. And after the sealing of the saints comes 'silence in heaven for half an hour' (8:1), a silence which is broken by the blast of the seven trumpets blown in succession by the seven angels who, in Jewish tradition, present to God the prayers of the saints.

Here we have more than just 'birth-pangs'. When the first four trumpets are blown, we find the beginnings of full-on ecological collapse—contemporary parallels are, I think, obvious. But for the time being it is only partial collapse:

> A third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up.[4] … A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. …
> A third of the rivers and on the springs of water … became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter. …
> A third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night. (8:7–12 *passim*)

This is a warning, again picking up themes from the Hebrew Scriptures, in this case from Exodus and the plagues of Egypt. And, as with the plagues of Egypt, the purpose of these plagues is to lead people to repentance, to change hearts and minds, to transform the way in which they look at the

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[3] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (T. & T. Clark, 1991), 7.

[4] But note that '*all* green grass was burned up', making it difficult, perhaps, to provide fodder for war-horses and even for the sheep and cattle on which Jewish and pagan sacrificial systems depended?

world—and at its Creator. It is, as those first four trumpets signify, an alarm call, a warning. 'This is where you are. Look out! Change direction.' But people don't. They continue along the same path, even in the face of the eagle's cries of 'Woe!' (8:13). As a result they find themselves at the mercy of powers which are no longer merely natural, albeit catastrophic, but demonic, inflicting pain and distress directly on human beings rather than on the natural sources of their well-being. The woes which follow the blowing of the fifth and sixth trumpets represent, perhaps, a destructive power corresponding to the protective power represented by the sealing of the saints at the opening of the fifth and sixth seals.

And then the seventh angel blows.

The opening of the seventh seal was followed in heaven by silence. The blowing of the seventh trumpet is followed in heaven by loud voices, uttering words which have been part of the soundtrack for many English-speaking lives from youth, if not from childhood, courtesy of George Frideric Handel.

> The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord
> and of his Messiah
> and he will reign for ever and ever. (11:15)

Here, at the mid-point of the book, we are approaching the crisis of John's vision, and the twenty-four elders add their song to the heavenly chorus. It begins conventionally enough. Commentators link its imagery with that of Psalm 2, the Psalm which celebrated the king's enthronement as God's anointed and which is used in the Gospels and Acts, and in the Letter to the Hebrews, in relation to Jesus, primarily in the account of his baptism in the Jordan and at the Transfiguration. However, after that 'conventional' opening, the elders conclude by announcing that this is

> the time for judging the dead,
> for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear
> your name, both small and great,
> *and for destroying those who destroy the earth*. (11:18)

The last half-dozen words there ought, I think, to worry those ultra-conservative Christians, mainly in North America, who reportedly take a delight in any government measure or personal practice which opens the way to *more* extreme climate change and *more* environmental degradation on the grounds that this will hasten the coming of the Lord—as if God can

be manipulated. Or those ultra-Orthodox Russian nationalists who give the impression that they would be happy to see the whole world disappear in a nuclear holocaust rather than Russia lose face through the failure of the attack on Ukraine. 'Why do we need a world if Russia is not in it?' asked TV presenter Dimitry Kiselyov a few days after the invasion, echoing Vladimir Putin's words from four years earlier. Such 'ultras' somehow manage to miss the small print and the realization that the destroyers have been given their head so that the earth can be purified and remade and redeemed from its captivity to the demonic powers. This is, I think, the point of the reference to the ark of God's covenant, the symbol of deliverance visible in the temple, which ends this section and opens the way to the cosmic conflicts of chapters 12–15.

After those conflicts, as chapter 16 begins, John hears 'a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God".' (16:1) And this is it. This is where biblical imagery and environmental science come together as what the scientists have begun calling 'the Anthropocene era' meets its end, in scenes again reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt:

> A foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped its image.
> The sea ... became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.
> The rivers and the springs of water... became blood … because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, … It is what they deserve!
> The sun… was allowed to scorch people with fire; they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God ... and they did not repent and give him glory …
> The … kingdom [of the beast] was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and [again] they did not repent of their deeds.
> The great river Euphrates … was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east…
> [and the climactic battle of Harmagedon] (16:2–13)

And at the end of this sequence, as the seventh bowl is poured out, 'a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"' And the finale is spectacular, with –

> flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake... The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people. (16:18–21)

The sequence set in Tokyo near the beginning of the 2004 film 'The Day After Tomorrow' shows what that would look like.[5]

So where have we got to? We began with the elders and the four living creatures acclaiming the God-given and God-revealing worth of creation, in an echo of the first chapter of Genesis: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.' (Gen. 1:31) We saw how, step by step, human sinfulness led to the degradation and ultimately to the destruction of the world as it is, so that it was no longer that Franciscan ladder which Bonaventure described, leading human beings to the adoration of God. Instead it became a plaything for the kings of the earth and the merchants, not to mention the 'shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea', who thronged into 'Babylon the great' and made their home there. And now, in the chapters that follow the pouring out of that final bowl, John shares his vision first of the overthrow of the wicked city, the home of all greed, oppression and exploitation, then of the decisive battle and the final defeat of the powers of evil and of death. And after death comes judgement—but not a great deal is made of that by comparison with later writers' and artists' imaginings.

However, that is far from being the end of the story. John's vision ends not with destruction and judgement, but with 'a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.' And at that point John sees 'the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21:1–2).

That city is not a place of exploitation, greed and the flaunting of obscene wealth, but a place of renewal and healing, a place where people are made whole. Even the kings of the earth who gathered for the slaughter at Harmagedon will bring their glory into it. The nations will walk by its light.

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[5] Directed by Roland Emmerich (Fox Studios, 2004), based on the book by Art Bell and Whitley Strieber, *The Coming Global Superstorm* (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

‘And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.’(21:23). Furthermore, ‘its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations.’ (21:25). And as the pouring out of the seven bowls focused on the deadly pollution of the seas, springs and rivers, so the description of the heavenly Jerusalem ends with this beautiful image:

> the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (22:1–2)

Creation is renewed. Relationship with God is restored. ‘The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the city], and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.’ (22:3–4).

To interpret the Apocalypse environmentally is not to suggest that John’s vision provides a detailed time-line for the end of the world and that we are now well on the way to Harmagedon. John’s narrative zig-zags back and forth between anticipation and event. He picks up themes from one part of the book and weaves them into a later section. This warns us to beware of those who think that they can turn the book into a sort of detailed ‘long-range forecast’ and calendar of the ‘end time’. The fall of Babylon, and all that that means, is foreshadowed in chapter 14, then again in chapters 16 and 17 before it is described in detail in chapter 18. On each occasion we are reminded that the name is primarily symbolic and that ‘Babylon’ is not simply ‘Rome’, or indeed Milan or London. Babylon is ‘the wicked city’, Vanity Fair in all its pomp, the home of shameless wealth extraction and of every exploitative human-centred attitude to the earth and its resources.

Nor was John the Seer an eco-warrior in anything like the modern sense, a Greta Thunberg born out of time. John was writing in the tradition of the Torah and the prophets, who saw environmental breakdown as a symbol of spiritual and moral breakdown. An important clue to the understanding of his teaching is to look at it in the light of Jesus’s teaching about the last days, the so-called ‘Synoptic Apocalypse’. Indeed, some scholars have seen Revelation as an up-date of that teaching in the light of the events that followed

the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. History had moved on, the kingdom had not come, and the people of God needed reassurance that God was still at work in this new situation.

This is one factor that makes Revelation more than simply a tract for its own times. It speaks for the 'Church from below' in every age and every place: for the marginalized and dispossessed who joined millenarian movements in the Middle Ages; or who flocked to the banners of the radical Reformation; and for revolutionary utopian movements in our own day. These are people for whom the world as it is, far from being a comfortable place, is as monstrous as the Hellenistic world appeared to devout Jews in the time of the Maccabees. It also goes some way to explaining the suspicion with which 'established' and more hierarchical Churches handle it. There is, for example, no place for it in the lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church. In a text in which political power is seen as a devouring monster which crushes all before it (13:4ff.), and in which global commerce is depicted as 'the great whore … with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk' (17:1f.), locked in an ultimately destructive relationship with the beast and the ten kings (17:16–18), there is little room for the advocates of pragmatic, liberal compromise.

Indeed there are times and places where such compromise is not appropriate, or indeed possible. During the past century we have seen leaders and states which have claimed a status for themselves that is not compatible with the Christian and Jewish insistence that there is one God, the maker of heaven and earth and all that is in them, and that God alone is Lord. John holds out for the truth of the Christian claim. He makes it clear that there are areas—not only with regard to Church-state relations—where it is not possible to compromise with the spirit of the age, even if that resistance means martyrdom. There are some truths that it is worth suffering and, if need be, dying for, as Christ himself suffered and died—and conquered. That is the message of the letters. It is the message of the seals and the trumpets and the bowls. It is a message of warning and of encouragement from a pastor to the congregations that made up his flock. Much of what John is saying about the evils and the plagues is not threatening God's judgement so much as describing the world in which John lives. They are, so to speak, the facts of life about the first century of our era—and, as we are coming increasingly

to realize, about our own century, too. The themes of Revelation are echoed in ecumenical documents with input from the 'Global South', such as the document presented to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at Accra in 2004,[6] or the so-called AGAPE document produced in 2006 for the ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Brazil.[7]

John's vision encodes an increasingly urgent warning: the climate catastrophe which he depicts is intended to lead to repentance. It is a call to human beings to change their ways and their outlook before it is too late, just as the other disasters which John describes are intended to bring home the consequences of worshipping evil and not God. This is one point where we might find points of comparison with the message of contemporary eco-warriors. It is unnerving to realize that the reaction of the greedy and short-sighted humans whose consumption has contributed to the growing catastrophe—our own generation, in other words—has in many cases not been significantly different from John's description of the human reaction to the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath in Revelation 16. Despite the increasingly visible consequences of climate change, people who can afford to use aircraft in order to travel to destinations which are accessible by rail still do so. Governments still privilege the use of the motor-car over public transport when deciding their spending priorities and, encouraged by the international financial system, they hand out licences to those who wish to exploit the earth's remaining reserves of fossil fuels. Sea cruises remain a popular form of holiday-making; massive container ships glide between the world's ports: both types of craft release massive amounts of carbon into the earth's atmosphere. People who, in their private lives, are caring and responsible, both as family members and citizens, appear to lose sight of their need to care and to be responsible in their working environment. They have become Reinhold Niebuhr's 'moral man and immoral society' made flesh for the twenty-first century.[8]

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[6] The 'Accra Confession', adopted by the delegates of the twenty-fourth General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana (2004).

[7] The AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth) document is entitled 'Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call to Action', *World Council of Churches Ninth Assembly*, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006.

[8] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Charles Schribner's Sons, 1932; repr. Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

Revelation may have been written by a pastor to encourage and warn his flock in a particular situation of crisis rather than as a work of systematic theology, but there are themes and perspectives that can help us to assess what John is saying and apply it to our own age. For every condemnation of supernatural wickedness there is an affirmation of the openness of the heavenly city and of the temple. The outlook of the closing chapters is cosmic and positive. This puts Revelation in line with the rest of the New Testament. Its vision of the end of the world as it now is, chimes with the teaching of Jesus, and its view of salvation as past, achieved in the sacrifice of the Lamb; present, in the work of the Spirit in the Churches; and future, when God brings into being a new heaven and a new earth, is one that is reflected elsewhere in the New Testament. It shares the conviction of the Gospels that the 'second coming', the Parousia, of Jesus is not subject to human calculation (Matt. 24:36). It shares Paul's view that 'you reap whatever you sow' (Gal. 6:7), and its understanding of the wrath of God has a lot in common with Paul's account of 'the wrath' as an impersonal force like the Eastern concept of karma. The foundation and governing concept of the entire book is the self-sacrificing, suffering Lamb, the present and future Christ, Alpha and Omega.

One final point: all the judgmental language in Revelation is to be found in the middle of the book, as the struggle between the forces of God and the forces of evil represented by the dragon and the beasts is played out against the background of a creation destroyed, and then renewed. The positive message comes at the beginning and the end—in Jewish thought the most significant positions. The beginning and the end of Revelation, like the teaching of Jesus and the letters of Paul, are about hope, and endurance, and the promise of Christ's coming to renew and to make whole.

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Presence and the Jesus Prayer

ANDY LORD

This is a chapter from Andy Lord's recently-published book, *Immersed in God and the World: Living Priestly Ministry* (SLG Press, 2024).

To be a priest is to contemplate the Presence of the abundant God whose grace, like a river, runs through our lives and ministry. This continues to be mediated to me through years of immersion in the charismatic worship that creates the extended space to meet with God through the Spirit. Joining in with such worship feels like entering into the river of Presence that continually flows, and can only be articulated through the groaning of the Spirit and the short phrases and verses of songs that often need repeating to sink in. The songs become embedded in me and somehow stretch and immerse me in the greatness of God in ways that break through my defences. Soaking prayer is a charismatic practice that can deepen this experience of a Love that is personal and embodied, transforming us from within.[1] It has, perhaps, more similarity to the repeated monastic psalms than to the hymn-sandwich approach to liturgy that is standard in many of our churches, capturing something of the fluidity and flexibility of worship that witnesses to the God who is always more than us.

It was in the mid-1980s that such experiences of worship found an unexpected connection with the practice of the Jesus Prayer.[2] Here, the extended depth of prayer in worship connected with an approach to unceasing prayer that pointed me towards the abundant God throughout each day. I read the *Way of a Pilgrim* at some point, that wonderful nineteenth-century tale of the pilgrim discovering the transforming presence of God.[3] It felt a bit like a puzzle that promised much but was not as simple as it seemed, as I started the practice and found that my life was not instantly transformed. But I had been granted a desire for the Presence which has never left, and was nurtured

[1] Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, *Catch the Fire: Soaking Prayer and Charismatic Renewal* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2014).

[2] I have explored this more in Andy Lord, *River of the Spirit: The Spirituality of Simon Barrington-Ward*, Fairacres Publications 189 (SLG Press, 2021).

[3] *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. by R. M. French, SPCK Classics (SPCK, 2012).

by the experiences of the charismatic movement. The challenge has been how to move from particular experiences of the Spirit to a daily living in the Spirit. Later, the writings of my Bishop, Simon Barrington-Ward, widened my understanding by placing the practice of the Jesus Prayer in the context of mission and the work of the Spirit.[4] I still feel very much a learner who often needs to start again, but I have found it helpful to reflect below on three seasons of my journey which overlap and interweave.

The First Season

My first season of use of the Jesus Prayer (or simply 'the Prayer'), which lasted for many years, entailed the words 'Lord Jesus Christ' often as I breathed in, and 'have mercy on me' as I breathed out. Sometimes I would use the longer format, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner', although the shorter felt more helpful to me. It is a way of remembering the Presence of the God we know in Jesus Christ, the Lord over all of life, whose character is full of mercy directed towards us and the world. There is so much theology in this prayer which is important to appreciate, and for me the prayer deepened as I undertook further theological training.[5] There is a season where the simplicity of the prayer needs to be stretched, through the meaning and Presence implied by the words used, and the theological assumptions being made. Here, there is so much available from the Orthodox tradition, although I have to confess that much relies on philosophical approaches and language that I struggle to understand![6] More nourishing for me is the work of Rowan Williams, whose engagement with Orthodoxy and practice of the Jesus Prayer feed into and draw from a theology that is celebratory, communicative and critical.[7]

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[4] Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer* (The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1996).

[5] This point is made well by Barrington-Ward's teacher in the prayer, Archimandrite St Sophrony, in his book *On Prayer: Reflections of a Modern Saint* (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2nd edn 2020).

[6] This is particularly the case when looking into the *Philokalia*, collected Orthodox writings that contain much in relation to the Prayer. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* (Faber & Faber, 1983–2023).

[7] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell, 2000), xii–xvi; Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021).

Reflecting back, this season of use is often characterized by a holding onto the Prayer. The distractions that frequently come need to be held at a distance and the struggle is to remember Jesus and the Presence of love. The words of the prayer become important anchors for the memory and a protection against drifting, as my mind wanders to the things done or to do. I have found a simple link with breathing helps and can encourage relaxation. It is important to keep to a particular length of practice each day—the ideal the books suggest is twenty to thirty minutes both morning and evening. I have to say that this has always been beyond me! Why not just five or ten? There are phone apps that help keep time and can give background sounds and regular prompts every few minutes up until your target time.[8] In this season we often find ourselves 'holding on' to God, at times when everything around and within us seeks to pull us away. It is a dogged discipline that we know is vital but whose transforming grace is only seen afterwards. Over the years we find ourselves being drawn back to the Presence more often; we desire to pray more than we can and get frustrated with ourselves; we get to know Jesus better and He becomes more real to us; we see how mercy is at the heart of our faith, particularly in regard to our own failings and those of others; and we grow in compassion and care. In many ways our faith is being deepened, but it is a struggle! Sleep helps, particularly as we get older and/or gain more responsibilities, and there will always remain events that trigger difficult memories and emotions that require us to begin again in humility, saying the Prayer as an attentive holding-on to the God beyond, and yet within, our current struggles.

The Second Season

At some point we find glimpses of the second season, in which we enter *into* the Prayer. Rather than being the anchor, the prayer becomes the gateway into the Presence. We realize that our distractions and concerns feature within the greater Presence of God; they are carried within the river rather than preventing the river's movement. The focus has subtly changed. This is an experience that came for me alongside my theological study of the

[8] Search for 'meditation timer' on the app stores for free options, but you may need to resist getting dragged into paid offerings and the temptations that come with smart phones.

church, as I began to see how the church is rooted in the life of the Trinity.[9] It is by the Spirit that we, as individuals and communities, are drawn into the life of God which is given for the world. Rather than starting with our church communities, structures and beliefs, we realize that everything starts with God and we are not the centre of everything—a vital realization for priestly ministry, as it is also about growing up or getting old.[10] This realization retains a youthful enthusiasm for 'words of knowledge' from God that speak to, and invite, transformation within situations that I face. The river is full of words of life.

This season feels more like a gentle invitation by which Jesus nudges me back into the Presence, into a greater awareness of God. Somehow the character of God is communicated as the biblical images and stories become icons through which grace shines. Symbols are important here as the Bible becomes central, but in a way that is less instructing our thinking than giving glorious suggestions of life-giving ways with Christ—if only we will join in. The connections between the Prayer and biblical study, theological reflection and practical ministry become more intertwined. Seeking patterns of discipleship for others inside and beyond church life are a key part of priestly ministry. Rather than being drawn beyond concepts into some 'higher realm', we find ourselves drawn into a greater holism in which Jesus brings everything together. In this there is both detachment and attachment, both a stepping back from and a deeper joining in with all that is life-giving. For me, this change was represented outwardly by a further simplification of the Prayer to 'Jesus' and 'mercy', each of which carried greater meaning and connectedness. Although teachers of the Jesus Prayer do not recommend changing the words of the Prayer too frequently, for me the change was natural and life-giving. There was less strain and more acceptance and love. The awareness of the Presence also seemed to gather a different texture, almost like a glimpsed sense of someone just beyond sight, yet always close by. The need to be in control and know everything was lessened and the temptations and pressures of priestly ministry became clearer. Maybe this season is about a transparency

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[9] See Andy Lord, *Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology Shaped by Mission*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 11 (Brill, 2012).

[10] At this point in my journey I found helpful insights from Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (SPCK, 2013).

and integrity that is possible because we know the loving Presence of God in a deeper way: our sins, failings and quirks do not get in the way the same, even as they often remain with us.

The Third Season

The third season of the Prayer is rather more elusive, and for many years only glimpsed before it becomes a more regular reality. The focus on Jesus naturally leads to friendship:

> This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you… These things I command you, so that you will love one another. (John 15:9–17)

The closeness of friendship has been attractive from the start in Evangelical prayer and intercession. I remember a summer with 'Operation Mobilization' in Eastern Europe, the year the Berlin Wall came down, where the love-filled passionate prayer spoke to me most. Here were people living Jesus in their service of others. In the Orthodox tradition this season is where the Prayer begins praying itself within us and we know beyond knowing, the Presence of Jesus mercifully at work beneath and through our lives. It is as if the words and symbols of the second season are simply now present in reality—God 'is' and the words of the Prayer are needed less. The Presence, God, becomes not just another object that we sense and observe but is there in a reality that overlaps ours. We are lifted from having to say words, and experience more of the reality they point to. This gently lifts us from preoccupation with ourselves to a generous awareness of creation and the people around us. Some mystics write of us becoming, at this point, one with God, although, because of the recognized need to keep God and creation ontologically distinct, I prefer to seek other ways of communicating this kind of experience. God is 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) but always more than 'all' of creation.

The Prayer gradually seems to draw all things together, so that our disjointed and fragmented life becomes connected and there is a sense of unity and hope. Like many, I glimpse this when sitting in the garden, pondering

the sky, the birds, the colours of the flowers and the earth which sustains. Creation can suddenly seem held together within a Presence that runs through and yet beyond all. I have also glimpsed moments where my worship, theology, pastoral care, anxieties and responsibilities all seem to connect within the Presence which enfolds and uplifts me. It is at these points that the term 'union', that is traditionally used in mystical writings, makes sense. Rather as in a marriage, where two distinct people gradually become one but also two, able to anticipate each other and work together; so we find ourselves in union with Christ in all of life. In our care for communities we are able to see better the personal and the communal within one Love, one mercy, one redeeming and transforming action of God. Hope is sustained better in our hearts and we are able to carry on. This also applies within our deaneries and dioceses so that the artificial separations we live with make less sense: we are *all* church, deanery and diocese rather than one over or against another.[11] At the same time, our deep longing for transformed structures becomes immersed and re-graced in the flowing Spirit. The image of an overflowing river of God becomes one of infinite richness, textures and flows. For me this is less about a 'vast ocean' of God which feels too big, bland and inaccessible but rather an interflow of rivers within which I am learning simply to exist, and through this to discern and hear God speaking and guiding. Sitting by any river and pondering its movement can be a way into feeling the deeper complexities of Divine Working, the assurance of the positive movements of the Spirit at work and glimpses of the next steps we might take. Hope is deepened even as we struggle with pastoral situations and church decisions that lack easy answers.

What it has taken me longer to learn is that such glimpses are not glimpses of some ecstatic state that some saints may live in almost permanently, even if this can be the case for some, and perhaps for many at times. Rather, these are glimpses of *life* lived with the God who simply 'is', to whom we relate in all, in whom all comes together, through which our hearts are transformed. It is living in the present in the way Merton discovered in the solitude of his hermitage; not seeking to be anything else but

[11] These can be adapted for other denominations, the point being that structures become both more important and less fixed as prayer develops. I have explored this elsewhere in terms of 'dynamic catholicity', see Lord, *Network Church*.

himself, 'for "being anything" is a distraction. It is enough to *be*, in an ordinary human mode, with one's hunger and sleep, one's cold and warmth, rising and going to bed.'[12] And given that here the Prayer is simply life, God's life and ours interwoven, then it must include the struggles, pains, losses and failings of our lives. We do not have to wait until our lives are sorted and we are better sorts of people. All the saints see themselves more deeply as sinners, but also more closely united with Christ, a unity that draws us together with all people.

I know that I fail each day, get overly anxious, forget family and friends, email when I should phone, try and get away with less planning and get caught out, feel hurt by the words of others, and much more… but even these can be moments through which the Light, Love and merciful Presence are discovered, where God simply 'is' within my fallen world. The example of St Teresa of Avila has been an encouragement: she was able to write so wonderfully of the journey towards union with God whilst running into all sorts of problems with the church as she sought to reform the monasticism of her day.[13] A more extreme example that has often been used in relation to the Prayer are the words of St Silouan, 'Keep your mind in hell and despair not.'[14] It is better not to try and suggest a simple explanation of this phrase, but rather to recognize that the Prayer is often known best when we are living (and serving) in places where 'hell' seems an appropriate description. Even there, there is hope, and perhaps prophetic words that show ways forward, challenging the powers intent on evil. It is my experience that the Prayer embraces the struggle to bring myself to God in difficult times and to surrender my view of tensions and hurt to the Lord, to remember that it is God and not me who holds all things together. This is to be drawn afresh to the Cross of Christ, which was central to my returning to Jesus in earlier life and now underlies the sense of Presence in all things. To yield to Divine Love when our pride and misconceptions dominate is a tough, but needed,

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[12] John Howard Griffin, *Follow the Ecstasy: The Hermitage Years of Thomas Merton*, Kindle Edition (Wings Press, 2010), 785.

[13] Particularly helpful has been Julienne McLean, *Towards Mystical Union: A Modern Commentary on the Mystical Text 'The Interior Castle' by St. Teresa of Avila* (St Paul's Publishing, 2003).

[14] Quoted in St Sophrony, *The Monk of Mount Athos: Staretz Silouan 1866–1938* (Mowbrays, 1973), 115–18.

journey in prayer, and not at all separate from a consciousness of union with that Love.[15] It is during the journey into both 'nothingness' and 'fullness' that Light shines through all that we are, and what we put in the way diminishes. It takes years, and often we are flung back into seasons we thought we had left behind, but need to appreciate afresh before forward steps can be made.

I am probably here writing well beyond myself! I see hints of something more and desire to head there. Desire is important in the Christian life, in drawing us to the God who then transforms our desires in the direction of the Kingdom. As David Ford puts it, we learn, like Job, to 'desire God for nothing' which is to desire God whatever the results.[16] This is no easy model of success, but a committed direction through which new doors open.

As we contemplate God and life in humility, so we allow ourselves to be led into the three seasons of the Prayer that, by the Spirit, open us out into fresh ways. The ways I have outlined overlap with the traditional ways of purgation, illumination and union, but have been nourished more by the three-fold way outlined by Laird, if modified to embrace a more cataphatic approach.[17]

Andy Lord is Vicar of All Saints' Didcot and Area Dean of Wallingford. He is a visiting lecturer at the London School of Theology and author of a number of books about mission and renewal, including *Transforming Renewal* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), *Network Church* (Brill, 2012), *Spirit-Shaped Mission* (Authentic Media, 2005), as well as several books for SLG Press.

[15] Here the honest life struggles of Gillian Rose, a friend of Simon Barrington-Ward, come to mind. She used the phrase from St Silouan as a heading in her book *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (NRYB Classics, 2011).

[16] See here particularly Chapter 5 of David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 16 (Cambridge University Press, 2007). The recent reframing of this within the theme of glory offers many suggestive ways forward for priestly ministry, David F. Ford and Ashley Cocksworth, *Glorification and the Life of Faith*, Soteriology and Doxology Series (Baker Academic, 2023).

[17] Particularly in Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light: Contemplation, Transformation, and Liberation* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Through Hell to Healing

HAMISH FULLERTON

It was early in the autumn term of 1961 and I was a pupil aged fifteen at a public school. I was in a lesson being taught by my Classics master. Another master, who was a great friend of his, came into the room and asked to have a word with me. We went outside the door and he invited me to come and have tea with him one afternoon. This man had a pastoral responsibility for me in my boarding house. During the post-Confirmation course the previous summer his talk on prayer in the school chapel had made a deep impression on me. Towards the end of that term he had invited me, together with a friend of mine, to go on a climbing trip with him during the summer holidays. I had enjoyed these few days in the mountains, and at the end this man had talked of seeing me the next term. It turned out that he was teaching me Religion. So I wasn't surprised when I was invited to tea. By then I looked on him rather as a friend, who also shared my interest in birds and flowers. In the boarding school environment I appreciated his sympathetic interest in me.

When I arrived at the house for tea, this man's wife happened to be out. He got me to play a game which he called 'Master and Slave': I was the slave and it involved me being tied up. Later over tea we talked about poetry and ideas. This man represented the intellectual development that I was on the verge of discovering; and I looked on the game of being tied up, like the intellectual conversation, as just another part of my education. I was also at a formative stage in my physical development. During the previous summer holidays I had dipped into a book on my parents' bookshelves, T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and had picked up something of Lawrence's ambivalence about the body and his ideal of testing the will by physical acts of endurance. After tea we walked back around the lakes to the school and talked about Lawrence: this man had a great interest in him.

Several weeks later when my parents came to take me out I was depressed. They were so concerned that they spoke to the school chaplain. His response was to ask me to count the chapel collection after the Sunday morning service. Soon after, the man who had tied me up invited me out in his car and during the drive asked me to come to tea again. The paradox was that, in looking on him as a mentor, I was going unwittingly to the very

source of my difficulties. This time the 'Master and Slave' game involved me being beaten. Over tea this man talked of the value of testing oneself and how important it was to do something crazy. It never occurred to me that, in being tied up and beaten, I was engaging in sexual acts.

Later in the term it was announced that this man was to become the headmaster of another public school. Before he left he gave me his new address and suggested that we keep in touch. His time at my school had lasted just long enough to ensnare me. Evil has to go somewhere, and in sexual abuse the evil of what is being done goes into the unconscious of the victim, just as the guilt and shame which really belong to the abuser are put at an unconscious level on the victim. I did not discover this until almost thirty years later, when after three years of psychotherapy I made the breakthrough and at last saw these events in their true light. Then I began to uncover how I had allowed them to happen. There was trust in a teacher who also had pastoral care of me. This trust was reinforced through this man's friendship with my Classics master, whom I admired. There was the attraction of the ascetic ideal and the belief that with this man I was engaging in the search for God. Unconsciously I may also have needed to test how far I could withstand pain as a way of competing with my father, who had been a professional soldier and had talked with me as a small boy of being wounded on the battlefield. Yet, above all, I was incapable of seeing that this man's mask of good was in reality evil.

At the end of the next term I was severely ill with mumps. I now believe that I was more vulnerable to it because of what I was carrying in my unconscious. It was the first of a variety of illnesses which plagued me through the years. During the summer holidays I started bathing in our local river each morning. I saw it as a discipline, but unconsciously I was trying to wash away the guilt and shame. That holidays my abuser invited me to stay with him and his wife at his new school. While there I was tied up and beaten in a classroom. The next holidays were during the very cold winter of 1962–3: each morning I was breaking the ice in order to swim in the river. I saw this as a test of my will; but in reality I was punishing myself in order to deal with my unconscious sense of evil. My abuser had invited me for a climbing trip, but we were confined to his school because of the snow: the beating and bondage happened again. They continued during school holidays, and that summer I was given the longest and severest beating to test how much I could take. Of course every time the ritual took place, it was as if my abuser

was pumping more poison into my unconscious. Yet in a curious way the ritual had become for me a discipline to try and combat the very poison which it induced. At school I compensated by withdrawing into the isolation of academic study. I was rewarded by a scholarship to Oxford. My abuser wrote to invite me to be godfather to his younger daughter, saying that he hoped I would visit them often.

Between school and Oxford I travelled in Europe, driven by a sense of guilt as I wandered from country to country. My first year at Oxford was traumatic: my unconscious revolted. I became very ill and at the end of the spring vacation had to be referred to a psychiatrist who diagnosed depressive illness; but I was unable to tell him the real cause. Before I was admitted to hospital, my abuser came to visit me in Oxford and tied me up in my room. It must be the only recorded example of an undergraduate being sexually abused in his College by a public-school headmaster.

After spending the summer term in hospital, I resumed my career at Oxford. Through a priest I also discovered the disciplined life of prayer in religious communities, and this became my main means of survival for the next twenty-five years. At the same time, as I was tied to the family through my god-daughter, I continued to visit my abuser. The ritual of being tied up and beaten also happened until the day came when I called him a sadist and a homosexual; but since the abuse was not genital, I was still blind to the harm he had done me.

When I finished at Oxford, I went to do some further study at a university in California. It was an unconscious escape, which didn't work out. Then I discovered another escape: a supposed vocation to the religious life. Fortunately I didn't put it to the test: after talks with a novice-master I decided to return to England to find a job. Eventually I became a teacher in a comprehensive school and continued to work as a teacher for seventeen years. Much later I was to realize that by working with adolescent pupils I was trying to repair on the outside what in the end could only be repaired within.

That process of inner repair began in October 1987 when I became too ill to continue teaching. My unconscious had revolted again, this time irrevocably, in order to wake me up. The depressive illness partly took the form of an overwhelming sense of guilt. I had no way of knowing that this guilt originated with my abuser all those years ago. I decided to begin psychotherapy. It was not until I finished, six years later that I realized that my first

meeting with the psychotherapist had been on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It spoke to me of the way the Blessed Virgin Mary had watched over my healing.

It took three years of psychotherapy before I was ready to make the breakthrough and wake up to the real cause of my illness. One night I had a dream in which my abuser's Christian name appeared. Some days later I had a kind of inner vision in which I saw, separating out from myself as entities, the guilt and shame which had haunted me all those years. The next day, as my psychotherapist described how sexual abuse works, my eyes were opened. It was the eve of the Feast of St Luke, the good physician. Once the evil had been named and looked in the face, the process of healing could begin. To get in touch with my anger I wrote an account of all that my abuser had done to me and some of his destructive effects on my life, and then sent it to him, saying that I never wished to see him again.

Since then my healing has slowly but surely gathered pace. After a year I was able to begin a paid job again, working part-time in a parish. A year after that, as part of separating myself from the trauma, I wrote about my experiences, but setting them in Latin America, and gave this as a paper to a discussion group. A year later, on St Cecilia's Day, in a session of psychotherapy I became in touch with my sense of being a man, which had gone underground because of the abuse: I now ceased to need psychotherapy. In October 1994, four years after my breakthrough, I returned with a friend to my school. It was the Feast of St Luke. On a glorious fine day I revisited my adolescence and discovered that the way there was no longer barred: I was free of my abuser.

I wrote the above nearly thirty years ago. On the Feast of St James, my name day, in 2023 it suddenly occurred to me that, if it were published now, it would be a testimony that healing from the destructive effects of sexual abuse is possible and that it would be a testimony to the loving providence of God. It would be an act of solidarity with all those who have been sexually abused by people in the Church, when safeguarding in the Church of England is very much in the news. It would also show the importance of safeguarding. The man who abused me died in 1999.

Hamish Fullerton is a retired priest in the dioceses of Southwark and a member of the Fellowship of the Love of God.

New Books from SLG Press

Adam Couchman, *'In the image of the Image': Gregory of Nyssa's Opposition to Slavery*, 54 pp. £6.00.

Gregory of Nyssa is the most important author of the fourth century in relation to theological anthropology, and was one of the most outspoken of the early Church Fathers on the subject of slavery. Gregory's theology is built upon his perception that Jesus Christ was truly human; therefore, to be human is to be made in the image of Christ. We cannot justify slavery if we accept that humans are made in God's image, because slaves are no less made in the image of God than those who are free. This book examines Gregory's theology, how he understood and taught about the relationship of human beings to God, and how he applied this theology to the practical issue of slavery.

Adam Couchman is a doctoral candidate at the University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia. His research considers the worshipping Jesus through the lens of the Church's creedal confessions that He is fully human and fully Divine. His studies have also included research into the sacramentality of the ceremonies of the Salvation Army, and Christian holiness. He is Secretary to the Australian Consultation on Liturgy and a participating member of the English Language Liturgical Consultation. He was named the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies (ANZATS) 'New and Emerging Scholar' for 2023.

Jonathan Farrugia, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Sins of Asia Minor*, 86 pp. £8.00.

Gregory of Nyssa is known to theologians as one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers who are credited with the final clarification of the doctrine of the Trinity in the late fourth century. Few have ventured to study his role as a bishop who took pains to teach his flock the mysteries of the faith and how to lead a good Christian life. This short study delves into the moral teaching that Gregory delivered to his audience by analyzing the specific sins about which he is teaching. Given that he preached all over Roman Anatolia, the details found in his homilies give us some insight into which sins were most notorious in the lands of Asia Minor and which, therefore, needed to be addressed.

Jonathan Farrugia (*b*. 1978) is a Maltese scholar of early Christian thought. He is the Head of Department of Church History, Patrology and

Palaeochristian Archaeology at the University of Malta. In 2016 he received his doctorate in Patristic Studies from the Pontifical Augustinian Patristic Institute in Rome, and has since published a number of studies on Gregory of Nyssa's homilies. He also has a passion for the history of religious artefacts of his homeland, and his book *Ir-Redentur: History*, *Art and Cult of the Miraculous Effigy of Christ the Redeemer at Senglea*, *Malta*, won the national book prize for bibliographical research in 2020.

Arthur Bell, *Discovery: Adventures in the North of Alberta (1969–1972) Told through Poetic Sequence and Close to the Heart of Earth*, 138 pp. £10.00.

Commissioned by the Anglican Bishop of Athabasca, this book is an autobiographical journey describing the travels of a missionary priest in northern Alberta in the third quarter of the twentieth century, told in poetic sequence and prose. Written late in life, these are a memory of life, adventures and events that continue to inspire and encourage our lives. And as the earth continues through the years, they form a link, a remembrance of generosity, inspiration and kindness, good for the health of our plants, our forests, rivers and lakes, so vital for us all.

Arthur Bell was Priest-in-Charge of St John's Mission, Wabasca, from 1967–1972 and again from 1977 until the end of 1982. He originally published this memoir himself, but after selling out his first print run the book joined the list of SLG Press publications to ensure it will continue to be available into the future.

Andy Lord, *Living Healing: The Spirituality of Leanne Payne*, 56 pp. £6.00.

This book introduces the thinking and practice of Leanne Payne, a leader in the charismatic healing ministry of the last century. Her focus on coming into the Presence of God as we are, engaging our imaginations and embracing different ways of listening, offers wise guidance in the area of healing. We tease out some of the ways her work engages the mystical tradition and how this tradition might be enriched in dialogue with a charismatic approach to healing. Healing is rarely straightforward but we can nourish hope in the active presence of Christ in our midst.

Revd Dr Andy Lord is Vicar of All Saints' Didcot and Area Dean of Wallingford. He is the author of *River of the Spirit: The Spirituality of Simon*

Barrington-Ward (SLG Press, 2021), *Transforming Renewal* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), *Network Church* (Brill, 2012), *Spirit-Shaped Mission* (Authentic Media, 2005) and *Spirit*, *Kingdom and Mission* (Grove Books, 2002). He is a visiting lecturer at the London School of Theology.

Bruce Batstone CJN, *Still Listening: Sowing the Seeds of the Jesus Prayer*, 46 pp. £6.00.

I have conversations with people about how they pray the Jesus Prayer as they walk the city streets, as they travel on buses or on the Tube, as they cycle, or as they sit at home. From these experiences I have come more and more to see the Jesus Prayer as a way of praying well suited to urban life; a form of attentiveness practice that can help us to grow in God-experience amid the changes and chances of metropolitan living. This book explains the prayer, its ethos, and how to begin to practise it in daily life.

Fr Bruce Batstone CJN 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, leads retreats, and is director of an Ignatian programme of spiritual-director training based online and in-person at the London Jesuit Centre. A far as possible he divides his time between his London parish and another home in Norwich.

Sister Elizabeth Ruth Obbard OC, Father Colin CSWG, Mother Hilary Crupi OJN, Bishop Graham Usher, Introduction by Bruce Batstone CJN, *Julian of Norwich: Four Essays Commemorating 650 Years of the Revelations of Divine Love*, 74 pp. £7.00.

This book publishes four papers read at a conference held on 2–3 February 2023 to mark 650 years of the *Revelations of Divine Love*. They show the breadth and reach of Julian's inspiration in today's world, from personal issues such as impatience and despair (Mother Hilary Crupi) to the great questions of climate change and biodiversity loss (Bishop Graham Usher). The essays also examine the place of compassion in today's increasingly cruel world (Sister Elizabeth Ruth Obbard) and what the monastic tradition as it is lived today might reveal about Julian presence (Father Colin).

Sister Elizabeth Ruth Obbard OC is a Carmelite nun, and a previous trustee of the Friends of Julian, who contributed to the vision that became the Companions of Julian. Father Colin CSWG is Superior of the Servants of

the Will of God, a contemplative Anglican religious community in the UK, which reconciles the breadth of the Christian tradition, East and West. Mother Hilary Crupi OJN is Guardian of the Order of Julian of Norwich, an Anglican contemplative community based in White Lake, Wisconsin, with affiliates all over the world. The Right Revd Bishop Graham Usher is Church of England Lead Bishop for the Environment. He speaks and writes widely on the environment, and is the author of two books on the subject published by SPCK.

Dumitru Stăniloae and Kallistos Ware, *TIME*, 50 pp. £6.00.

This book brings together essays by two outstanding Orthodox theologians: Dumitru Stăniloae's 'Eternity and Time', a talk given to the Sisters of the Love of God in 1971 and subsequently published by SLG Press, was expanded in the first volume of his *Teologia dogmatica ortodoxa* (3 vols., Bucharest, 1978). The preface to the 1994 English translation of that work, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, written by Kallistos Ware, was based on his essay, 'Time: Prison or Path to Freedom?', which was first published in 1989 by SLG Press. These reflections, brought together for the first time here, remain at the forefront of modern theology.

Stăniloae illuminates time as a journey on which we may grow in response to the love that God offers us, a journey towards sharing in the eternity of the perfect, interpersonal communion of the Trinity. God, in His Incarnation, shares the journey with us in Christ, so that time enters into eternity, and eternity is brought into time. At every moment we are free to choose between responding to His love or rejecting it. Ware's essay explains that it is the vocation of time to be open to eternity; time is fulfilled when God's eternity breaks into the temporal sequence, as happened supremely at Christ's birth in Bethlehem, as happens also at every Eucharist. Our faith is the true rationale of time: mutual love after the image of the Trinity.

Archpriest Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993) was one of the foremost Romanian theologians of the Orthodox Church, author of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. His writings continue to be in great demand.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (1934–2022), a prolific author and lecturer, collaborated in the translation of major Orthodox ascetic and liturgical texts. He is best known for his extensive writing about the Jesus Prayer and for the five-volume collaborative translation of the *Philokalia* into English.

Tony Dickinson, *Pearls of Life: A Life-belt for the Spirit*, 56 pp. £6.50.

In 1996 Bishop Martin Lönnebo (1930–2023), recently retired after fifteen years as Lutheran Bishop of Linköping in Sweden, was exploring the Aegean when his boat was overtaken by a storm and he and his fellow-passengers had to take refuge on a tiny island with a single guest house. While the storm blew itself out Bishop Martin set about designing what he described as a 'prayer ribbon' that could summarize the message of the Christian faith. The result was a bracelet known as *Frälsarkransen*. The word means 'life-belt'—hence the sub-title for this short book, which provides an introduction to Bishop Martin's thinking behind the beads, and suggestions for using them for prayer and contemplation.

Tony Dickinson was born in 1948 in Liverpool. After reading Classics at New College, Oxford he worked in university administration in Durham and then for the Open University. In 1980 he began training for ministry in the Church of England and was ordained a priest in 1983. He has served in a number of dioceses, acting latterly as Anglican Ecumenical Officer for Buckinghamshire and Diocesan European Officer. He is a Canon Emeritus of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford and has recently retired from his post as chaplain to the Anglican/Episcopalian congregation in Genoa. He is a spiritual director and occasional retreat leader.

James Ramsay, *The Way and the Truth and the Life*, 92 pp. £9.00.

Essential to the message of the Gospels is that they tell a story. This is true of the theologically complex fourth Gospel as much as of the more obviously narrative Synoptic Gospels. This brief exploration of St John's narrative argues that its theological meaning can be properly understood only when seen as integrally part of a holistic drama. 'Made flesh', the Divine Word draws us through the power of story to become participants in this drama, at the same time generating creative tension through conceptual discourses that prevent us from being, so to speak, swallowed up by it. Christ the Way, Truth, and Life offers us, it is proposed, a redemptive integration of different fundamental archetypes of human spirituality that can help us at a practical level in determining the narrative of our own lives as followers of the Way.

James Ramsay is an Anglican priest, retired from full-time ministry and living in North Norfolk. Before ordination he worked as a freelance translator.

Following a curacy in Olney (Bucks) he served at the ecumenical church of the Holy Family in Blackbird Leys, Oxford, then at the Anglican church of the Resurrection in Bucharest, Romania, and finally at St Barnabas, Manor Park, Newham, where he was also part-time Chaplain at the University of East London. He has published two volumes of poetry: *Monuments to a Stolen Revolution*, *and other Poems from Bucharest* (Small Stations Press) and *Chancing on Sanctity* (SLG Press).

***Cosmos, Crisis and Christ: Essays of Wendy Robinson*, collected and edited by Andrew Louth, 150 pp. £14.00.**

Wendy Robinson (1934–2013) was a trained psychotherapist who became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church in England in 1980. To be able to combine these two vocations was, for her, to discover herself. She practised psychotherapy both with individual clients and, increasingly, with religious communities, both Catholic and Anglican, giving retreats and one-to-one counselling, and built up a strong and lasting connection with the Sisters of the Love of God in Oxford. She reflected on her dual vocation in lectures and articles, a selection of which are published here.

Wendy's work was primarily interpersonal and in retreat talks or lectures where she could engage with her audience directly; many of the essays here are transcriptions of those talks. Even ten years after her death, her theology and her compassion are remembered with great fondness and gratitude, and continue to resonate both with those who knew her and those who encounter her writing for the first time.

Andrew Louth, *Towards a Theology of Psychotherapy: The Spirituality of Wendy Robinson*, 80 pp. £8.00.

This is an essay about the theology and thinking of the psychotherapist, Wendy Robinson (1934–2013), but is far more, exploring the theology of psychotherapy and the importance of Wendy Robinson's work. This is a companion to *Cosmos Crisis and Christ: Essays of Wendy Robinson* (See above).

Andrew Louth, an archpriest of the Orthodox Church, is professor emeritus of Patristic and Byzantine Studies at Durham University, having earlier taught in Oxford University and Goldsmiths (University of London). On retirement as professor, he became visiting professor at the Amsterdam Centre of Eastern Orthodox Theology at the Free University, Amsterdam, and

continues his association as an honorary fellow of the (now) Orthodox Theological Institute at Radboud University, Nijmegen. Among his publications are *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, *Greek East and Latin West: the Church AD 681–1071*, *Maximus the Confessor*, and *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*.

Andy Lord, *Immersed in God and the World: Living Priestly Ministry*, 44 pp. £5.00.

In increasingly busy and diverse lives what might it mean to live as priests, immersed in God and the world? This book explores a personal experience of ordained priesthood shaped by the Jesus Prayer in the context of the Catholic, charismatic and evangelical traditions. It explores the contemplative disciplines of Presence and Attentiveness to the overflowing life of God in all things. There is an invitation to all, ordained or not, to enter into a life stretched through the abundance of God. Whilst realistic about the challenges we face, this book seeks to nurture hope in the God who is always at work in Christ by the Spirit. (see above for the author's biography).

NEW EDITIONS

Two books that had gone out of print have been updated and re-published in response to popular demand:

Hugh Wybrew, *Called to be Priests*, revised edition, 54 pp. £6.00.

This book speaks of ministry in all its ordained forms as priestly because it makes the fundamental point that the Church is essentially the priestly body of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Priestly ministry is more about who you are than what you do. The primary vocation of a priest is to grow in holiness; that is, to try to become more and more Christ-like. This book contains much to guide, enlighten and nourish not only priests and people thinking of ordination, but all Christians, because the Christian life can properly be described as a priestly life. In a short space Fr Hugh covers much ground and goes deep. There are no wasted words and no trace of superficiality.

Hugh Wybrew was ordained deacon in 1960 to serve in the Diocese of Southwark. Most of his ordained life has been spent in parochial ministry, with ecumenical interludes at the Catholic University of Louvain (1964–5) and as Secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius 1984–6).

He was Chaplain at the Church of the Resurrection in Bucharest (1971–3), Vicar of Pinner in Middlesex (1973–84) and Dean of St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem (1986–9). His last parochial post was as Vicar of St Mary Magdalen's, Oxford (1989–2004). He was a member of staff of St Stephen's House, Oxford (1965–71), where he is currently Visiting Lecturer in Liturgy.

John Barton, *Love Unknown: Meditations on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 96 pp. £7.50.

The Christian faith, hinging as it does upon the events of Good Friday and Easter Day, has always raised baffling questions for those who reflect upon it. Human life is unpredictable—full of sorrows that no one can foresee and of joys that come unlooked for. But Christians often see the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as an exception to this rule. The 'drama' of Easter seems to unfold like a great play whose author is God, and in which each actor plays a predestined role. The starting point for this book is that Cross and Resurrection alike are travestied when they are seen in this way. In entering into our world and sharing in its suffering, God in Christ accepts the uncertainty and unpredictability that are part of the human lot. In embodying God's love, Jesus was subject to the randomness and uncertainty that we experience as the ultimate threat to human life; and his resurrection is a sign of unexpected hope beyond final despair. Professor Barton searches into these questions with a profoundly attractive simplicity.

First published in 1990 by SPCK and twice reprinted within a year, *Love Unknown* was quickly recognized by readers and critics alike as a work of remarkable depth and beauty. It was first published by SLG Press in 1999. That it remains a work of such interest to readers thirty-five years after it was written is a testament to the power of its content.

Professor John Barton FBA is Emeritus Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture and a Senior Research Fellow of Campion Hall, Oxford. He was ordained in the Anglican church in 1973 and served as Canon Theologian of Winchester Cathedral between 1991 and 2003. His research interests and extensive publications have been in the areas of the Old Testament prophets, the biblical canon, biblical interpretation, biblical ethics and Old Testament theology.

Vestry Guides

Paul Monk, *The Liturgy of the Eucharist: An Introductory Guide*, 86 pp. in full colour. £7.00.

The vast theology and enormous depth of the Eucharist explains why it has been central to Christian worship since the time of the apostles. This modern guide to the Liturgy explores the Church of England's Common Worship form of service. It explains and demystifies everything about the words, actions, traditions and meaning within the Eucharist service, both implicit and explicit. Throughout, the explanations are printed facing the respective text of the service, allowing the reader to follow through 'in real time' as a service proceeds and thereby appreciate better the various parts and gain a fuller understanding of the liturgy.

The approach here is conceived for adult candidates for confirmation or considering reception into the church. It is also an ideal introduction for anyone interested in learning more about the Anglican liturgy, as well as an excellent resource for teaching and discussing its meaning.

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

Contemplative Poetry

On 16 May 2024 an edition of the Radio 4 programme 'Just One Thing' hosted by the late Dr Michael Mosley revealed that reading poetry, and particularly reading it aloud, could boost your mood and relax the body, and that poetry is now being used to treat stress and anxiety. There are now fourteen titles in the Contemplative Poetry series, with impressive potential for much prayerful stress-reduction.

Clare McKerron, *Selected Poems: Seasons of my Soul*, 44 pp. £5.50.

This collection speaks about the experience of nature, religion, thought, ideas and people; sometimes with the anxiety that those relationships can bring, but also with celebration. There are thoughtful ponderings, gazing into the beauty and rawness of nature, from wide, sweeping beaches or forests, to tiny stones and fleeting birds. Fractured meaning is celebrated, even in its incompleteness, alongside the pleasure of wholeness, inner certainty and realization.

Clare McKerron was born in South Africa. After completing her degree in English and History she came to England in 1970 to study for a teaching certificate. She met her husband, then a theology student, in Oxford and they settled in Surrey. She spent twenty years as a literacy tutor working particularly with children with dyslexia before retiring to Bromley.

Reinhard Sorge, *Take Flight to God*, trans. John Gallas, 56 pp. £6.50.

The religious poetry of Reinhard Sorge speaks of his journey to Christian belief, and the final joy and deep love of God that he eventually found. This is the first time a book entirely of Sorge's poetry has been published in the English language, and the riches revealed by John Gallas's elegant translations show this extraordinary poet in a new light. This collection is translated from a selection published in 1925 by Dr Martin Rockenbach entitled *Nachgelassene Gedichte*, simply 'Posthumous Poems'.

Reinhard Johannes Sorge (1892–1916) was killed aged just 24 during the First World War, leaving behind a considerable legacy of Expressionist plays and poetry. He is one of the progenitors of the Expressionist movement, and credited with almost singlehandedly creating surrealist theatre and modern theatrical stagecraft with his play *Der Bettler* ('The Beggar') in 1912.

Romola Parish, *Embertide: Encountering Saint Frideswide*, 62 pp. £6.50.

St Frideswide, or Frithuswith, was an important saint during the medieval period and is patron of the City of Oxford. Her shrine was a place of pilgrimage but was destroyed during the Reformation. *Embertide* engages with all the different versions of her life and seeks to understand her importance in the past and her significance today. It is liminal, elusive and delicately balanced; a kind of spiritual pilgrimage towards understanding elements of faith. This poem is the outcome of one such spiritual pilgrimage, and each reader will encounter it differently, on their own terms. Our saints, in their afterlives, are still travelling, and we follow in their wake.

Romola Parish is a former academic and lawyer specializing in environmental subjects. She received a PhD in creative writing in 2023 which included a poetic engagement with the life of St Frideswide of Oxford. The creative arts, embroidery, textiles and poetry in particular are her languages of faith. She lives in West Wales and is currently an ordinand in the Diocese of Saint Davids.

REVIEWS

***The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, fourth edition, edited by Frank L. Cross, Elizabeth A. Livingstone and Andrew Louth, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2022), 2143pp. ISBN 978-0-19-964246-5. £215.**

I have laid aside the proverbial maxim that one should not judge a book by its cover in reviewing this magisterial, two-volume renewal of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. The acclaimed third edition, edited by Betsy Livingstone in 1997 had, on its dust-jacket, images from the Lady Chapel in Ely cathedral. The bindings over the quarter-cloth hardbacks of the 2022 fourth-edition volumes have a detail of Christ and Abbot Mena (from eighth-century Egypt), and a detail from the Xi'an Stele (from 781 in China). The images on both third and fourth editions are handsome and appropriate for their times. Even the considerably revised third edition, aware of Anglo-centricity, and Anglican-centredness, was still an authoritative, if rather Oxford-centred volume. It is a stated explicit aim of Andrew Louth, that the fourth edition, whilst being profoundly consistent with, and true to, the scholarship of earlier ages (1957, 1974, and 1997) is marked not just by stylistic differences, but by a profound awareness of, and moderation of, an almost complete hegemony of English priorities, style and nomenclature. Although 'its Anglican focus was often regarded as a forgivable, even amiable, idiosyncrasy' (vol I, p. v), this edition has come of age and emerges into an international, ecumenical and inter-faith arena of scholarship.

The result is a truly beautiful, academically justified, and transparently scholarly edition. Although the acclamation on the 1997 review that it had 'no peer as a one-volume encyclopaedia' cannot be said of this (simply because there are two volumes), it is truly a stunning work. The revision, whilst in many cases quite conservative, has more thoroughly enabled the *Dictionary* to be a resource for twenty-first-century scholarship. The number of hard copies able to be stored even in libraries will inevitably be a problem with today's limited book-shelf capacities. That is why it is wonderful that the full text, with hyperlinking, is available on an electronic platform to all institutions that subscribe to OUP. This can be found by searching for *Oxford Reference* or *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (4th ed.)* or at tinyurl.com/OxDCC (which redirects to the longer, rather indigestible, full URL). However, the printing of the hard copy in such aesthetically-beautiful

volumes is a wise strategy to entice scholars, and all those interested in and responsible for communicating the complexity of the Christian church, to buy the volumes, even if students and scholars and ministers may find the electronic text easier to navigate. If you are tempted to purchase a copy, I think that you can safely do so, knowing that it is authoritative and should continue to be foundational and functional for another quarter of a century.

The books are a delight to handle, even though they are very large, and they convey the sense that this is not a single-author affair, but something in which many scholars are invested, and the fruit of many generations of attentive and meticulous scholarship. In our era, so suspicious of 'experts' and ridiculing 'expertise', the succinct and careful honing of previous articles by new redactors and editors, and the creation of new contributions, is ample evidence of the significance of scholarship as 'gatekeeping'. I have space here only to look at one or two examples (below) to illustrate how this methodology is wise. Louth has attentively compiled a means of attribution, not only in this edition but also reconstructing it from previous ones (where attribution was not disclosed to the reader). This is, no doubt, the result of his meticulous attention and filtering. It is also incredibly appropriate. The entries are now 'owned', and therefore clearly accountable. The dictionary openly pursues definitions of the greatest scope in succinct articles, and Louth's source-critical attention contributes significantly to the fourth edition's transparency and clarity, as well as shedding the fruits of that work on previous editions retrospectively. This is infinitely better than the occasionally somewhat doctrinaire contributions of previous years. I have selected the following examples because I confess that I come to the *Dictionary* with an expectation that it is primarily of a historical genre, and I am not disappointed in my expectations of *historical* scholarship. But there is a discernible emphasis on doctrinal, ecclesial, religious-cultural identity, as well as philosophical and ethical perspectives – reflected in a spectrum of advisors for this edition.

One such example is the entry on Mormonism (*sic*) which explores succinctly its history, doctrinal and cultural dimensions and gives ample further resources in the bibliography. The former edition's (unattributed) definition certainly has hallmarks of distancing description and a general approach which is neither specific nor careful enough in its accuracy. Whilst Professor Douglas J. Davies's revision follows closely the *format* of the 1997 entry, it is far more meticulous and therefore less distorting, and exhibits more care

in its scholarship, both in the text of the entry and in the bibliography. Judgmental, polemical inaccuracy is purged without replacing it with inappropriate apologetic.

Another example, this time within a historical and textual perspective, is Professor Mark Edwards's revision of the entry on 'Apollinarius and Apollinarianism'. Without moving too far substantially from the original entry(-ies), Edwards is careful to attribute critiques and readings of Apollinarius to named, contemporary figures. Thus, rather than simply repeating the accusation that Apollinarius left no space for Christ to have a soul, he accounts for the problem of humanity's inherently changeable and fallible mind in the incarnation in a much more satisfying style: he attributes and cites the concerns of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and articulates Gregory of Nyssa's theological objections. Such slight interjections amend the article by making it more transparently scholarly, thus improving the dictionary significantly.

Other illustrations of the accomplishment of this generous and attentive scholarly revision include Professor Theo van Lint's honing of the articles on 'Christianity in Armenia' and the 'Armenian version of the New Testament'. Not only are there revisions to the language of the earlier text, and examples that were lacking from the 1997 edition, but the bibliography at the end of each article more properly equips today's reader to begin the trajectory of an intellectual quest informed by contemporary scholarship and the questions it exposes.

In addition to every entry being revised, there are excellent new articles reflecting the movement in scholarship over a quarter of a century. I have to admit that it has been a dreadful task to try to provide a meaningful review for such a massive tome: not simply because one could not possibly read all 6,500 entries (2,500,000 words) in preparing a short review. However, that it is such a warren of interconnected and interesting articles means that times set aside to write such a review have been inevitably lost because the articles are so interesting and accessible I ended up reading rather than writing; it has been a wonderful exercise in appreciating Louth's source-critical skills that the number of days spent in delighted distraction has been far too many!

I heartily recommend, however, the value of such distraction, and of guided connection. This edition is vibrant, and its availability online will

make it profoundly accessible. I wondered at one point whether, in the days of *Wikipedia*, AI and *Chat GPT*, the format of such a dictionary as it is was still viable. Asking AI to produce articles on some of the entries and comparing them to those in *The Dictionary* made it absolutely clear that this book beautifully demonstrates the value of rigorous scholarship rather than the clumsy electronic mechanics of random and unintelligent search-engine activity. This is compelling evidence that logarithms do *not* replace scholarship.

Andrew Louth has been a humble devoted scholar in this work, but it is not merely Christian humility that made him put his name last after Frank Cross (1900–1968) and Elizabeth Livingstone (1929–2023) on the spine and on the front page. Louth's work has been immense, but he acknowledges and builds upon the work of former editors in this task. These two volumes are worthy not only of Andrew Louth, but also of both of these, his predecessors. The list of contributors and the witness of their careful attention to detail is also a great tribute to them and their scholarship.

I commend this book wholeheartedly without reservation. It is an inspiring example of significant scholarship.

ANDREW TEAL

Erik Varden, *Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024), paperback 176 pp. ISBN 978-1-39-941140-0. £13.49, also available as an eBook.

In this age when chastity, and sexuality itself, have become contentious issues, this is a timely book exploring the true nature of chastity. Issues of abuse, in the Church as well as other areas of society, have put the notion of chastity under suspicion as a suppression of natural human desires, rather than a healthy and natural development of an integrated person.

Eric Varden begins by saying that what he hopes to achieve is not an apologetic for the practice of chastity, but an exploration of the true meaning of the word, leading to a deeper understanding of the concept. He first reminds us that chastity and celibacy are not the same thing; one can be chaste within a marriage by observing the marriage vows binding you to this one other person. In our practice of chastity, we seek an integration of our natural, God-given, desires as human beings living in relationship with each other. Chastity allows us to view the other as other, and not as an object there to meet our needs.

To fulfill his aim, Varden explores images from biblical and classical texts as well as art and music, to understand what the human being is, and how we can engage with the tensions between desire and disorder. The subtitle, Reconciliation of the Senses, reminds us that integrating desire in a healthy way, as human beings in the sight of God, is the route to true chastity. In Varden's exploration of some of the key themes in the teachings of the early Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers he gives us insight from the experiences and teachings of these early monastics.

This is a very worthwhile read, enabling us to look deeper into a concept that has been devalued and distorted over time, but which has a vital part to play in our development as individuals made in the Image of God. When we come afresh to the idea of chastity, we find not an oppressive form of mortification, but a release into the ways of God.

SISTER CLARE-LOUISE SLG

Charles Miller, *The Spiritual Adventure of Henri Matisse: Vence's Chapel of the Rosary* (Unicorn Publishing Group, 2024), hardback 232 pp.; 50 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-91-139758-8. £35.00.

Charles Miller's book is a finely-produced, beautifully, and pertinently-illustrated mixture of art history, biography and spiritual commentary; but it is perhaps most interesting as a story—the story of a man's life and of how that life was fulfilled at its conclusion. After first reviewing the whole of Henri Matisse's career, the book concentrates on the artist's last years when he was creating the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, just north of Nice.

Matisse had a long and interesting life. As Robert Hughes had pointed out in *The Shock of the New*, he was born the year that the Cutty Sark was launched and died in the year that the first hydrogen bomb was detonated.[1] He lived through rapidly changing times in which movements in art, as in everything else, followed each other in quick succession—and Matisse explored most of them, experimenting with flattened perspective and Pointillism before causing an unexpected stir when he and other young artists produced work for the Paris Autumn Salon of 1905 which became known as Fauvism—the work of 'wild beasts'; Matisse was seen as their *chef*.

[1] Robert Hughes (1938–2021) was an Australian art critic and television presenter; *The Shock of the New* (Knopf, 1981) was produced to accompany a documentary series of the same name produced by Lorna Pegram.

The public reaction was not what Matisse had expected or desired and, as Miller says, 'he was wholly unprepared for the humiliating reactions of the public and critics alike' (31); for although, as the author continues, he was 'ever of independent mind and motivation', he was not reactionary. Indeed, he had once said that he wanted his art to be devoid of troubling and depressing subject matter, like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.

In spite of Matisse's innovations and belief in the necessity to challenge those attitudes in art which he considered had become atrophied, Miller shows that his essentially relaxed attitude to art's purpose continued until late in life, when innate anxiety, serious illness and personal distress caused by the second world war (when his daughter was captured and tortured by the Gestapo) upset his equanimity. At this point, he also started, initially by chance, to become involved with a set of people and circumstances which brought him to embark upon what he was to come to consider the ultimate achievement of his life's work, the creation of the Chapel of the Rosary. This is where the book's real story begins, and it is one which combines personal relationships and spiritual convictions. It is also where Miller challenges the widely accepted view that Matisse did not have any real faith.

Views on his spirituality generally vary from that expressed on the *Art Pilgrim* website (www.theartpilgrim.org/), that he was not particularly religious, to the entry in Wikipedia which describes him as an atheist. Miller confronts the assumptions that lie behind those statements, saying that 'the terms "spiritual" and "religious" as applied to Matisse (as to anyone) are weighted with ambiguities of meaning. Each generation understands, identifies and practices them differently' (175). The book then becomes an exploration of those ambiguities, examining the relationship between faith and spirituality, and of how Matisse reached the point where he could say of his chapel, 'it is the fruit of my whole working life. Despite all its imperfections I consider it my masterpiece.' (199).

Miller examines how Matisse's challenge to artistic attitudes was paralleled by a challenge to catholic ones in advanced Dominican thinking in a programme that became known as *la nouvelle théologie*, which saw an acceptance of contemporary art in churches as part of its remit, and how these views of Catholicism and of art were both expressed in a monthly review,

L'Art sacré. The book explains why the contacts which Matisse had with various members of the Dominican community were so significant for, artistically and spiritually, they were all on the same journey. Miller's depiction of the characters within this 'story' and their relationship is one of the most fascinating aspects of the book. The whole is a remarkable achievement of scholarship, which is humanized by the investigation of those relationships to the point where it reads like a novel. This is perhaps the book's greatest achievement. At the same time, the relationships also give an insight—which has very rarely been addressed—of what happens within a commissioning process and of the importance of human interaction if that is to be successful.

The book continually raises questions about the relationship between art and religion for Matisse and, by extension, for others. Many artists, whether religious or not, will know precisely what Matisse meant when he declared, 'each time I've done all I can with my ten fingers something came to complete it which didn't come from me, it came from elsewhere' (198). The creative act is frequently regarded as a spiritual one in some sense, giving value to reality. As Miller expresses it, 'Matisse was acutely sensitive to the *existence* of things, and it was that sensitivity that provoked a reaction akin to religious awe. Matisse had an awareness of the Creator God as present in everything that he has caused and continues to sustain in existence.' (188). As Miller continues, that sensitivity in turn determined Matisse's relationship to the art movements of his time,

> there is compelling reason to locate the heart of Matisse's spiritual 'home' in creation and the natural world, the 'real'. That accounts for his refusal to go the way of expressionism and abstractionism, which gained ground in France by the 1930s. (188)

The book ends with a quotation from a letter which Matisse wrote to the Dominican Sr Jacques-Marie, whose connection with Matisse before she entered the novitiate was the initial chance encounter that led to the chapel project. The words are a fitting conclusion, and sum up Matisse's life, work and faith, at the same time proclaiming their interrelationship and value:

> I obey. I believe firmly in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. My contemplation cannot be simply that of wonder but must be active; it must put into motion all the resources of the spirit to create the most direct

> means to raise the spirit of my fellow men and women to a region which leads them out of their merely human condition. (letter of 20 June 1945), cited in Marie-Alain Couturier, 'La Chapelle de Vence', *France Illustration. Le Monde Illustré* (24 December 1949), 141.

Charles Miller's book, like Matisse's art, is a celebration of the realization of value in work and in life. It is a salutary message for our times.

RODNEY MUNDAY

***The Vowed Life: the Promise and Demand of Baptism*, ed. by Sarah Coakley and Matthew Bullimore (Canterbury Press, 2023), paperback 192 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78622-189-6. £19.99. Also available as eBook.**

The Vowed Life is the latest title in a thoughtful and thought-provoking series from the Littlemore Group of theologians and lives up to the high standards we have come to expect from their essays. The Group was founded in 2005 in Littlemore Parish in Oxford to provide a forum for scholar-priests and those living the religious life, in order to discuss issues affecting the Anglican church. More than just a support group for the participants, their aim has been to encourage a renewal of purpose within Anglicanism, including the renewal of the Anglican religious life. Five books have been published so far, each examining a selected topic through a series of essays.[1]

This book begins with a general introduction by the editors, setting out definitions of the 'Vowed Life', for all baptized members of the Church and for those who profess monastic vows. The contributors have a wider purpose: to show that from our baptismal vows on we are marked with

> a commitment to a *practice*, one that entails an implicit *Rule* of life; but the Rule that is followed then needs over time to become internalized, *habitual*, and etched into one's life as a whole (xxvii, emphasis original).

This statement comes within a discussion of the thought of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben who examines the nature of the oath and the

[1] The others are: *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2008), *Fear and Friendship: Anglicans Engaging with Islam*, ed. by Sarah Coakley and Frances Ward (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012) *For God's Sake: Re-imagining Priesthood and Prayer in a Changing Church*, ed. by Jessica Martin and Sarah Coakley (Canterbury Press, 2016); *Holy Attention: Preaching in Today's Church*, ed. by Frances Ward and Richard Sudworth (Canterbury Press, 2019).

Christian vowed (monastic) life, in his book *The Sacrament of Language*.[2] It is one of few current writings that give thought to the positivity of a vow; most deal with the failure to fulfil them. A summary of his thought covers several pages and is well worth reading and re-reading.

The rest of the book is divided into two parts, the first looking at the traditional expressions of Christian commitment: baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, and religious vows. The second reflects on the place of a vowed life within the movement usually called 'new monasticism'. Both sections are introduced by Petà Dunstan, a historian of the Anglican religious life. The first of her essays recounts the revival of Anglican religious communities in the nineteenth century and the opposition to the making of vows which arose. The second continues the reflection on vows in the context of community life through traditional and new expressions of monasticism. Ben Edson explores the ways new communities like the St Anselm Community at Lambeth Palace and the Community of Hopeweavers, to name two of many, combine both the fraternal, or 'sodal', elements with the customary ways things are done as in a parish church, the 'modal' elements. He suggests that the new monasticism lies somewhere between these, 'but seeks to draw from both and hence can serve to bring renewal to both' (123).

Each chapter of the first section discusses thoroughly the arguments for and against making a commitment to God through a vow or vows. The traditional forms of commitment are set in the historical context of the changes in wording and intention brought about by the several revisions of services and prayer books since the 1970s. To someone preparing a candidate for one of these forms these studies are almost required reading. They might leave the reader wondering what they can say about the commitment, but each essay endeavours to reconcile current practice with the original intention of the form.

To discuss each chapter in detail would make this a very long review. However, to give a flavour of the content I quote two passages that stood out as I read them. The first is Alex Hughes writing on Confirmation:

> [Confirmation] is the truly radical sense of identity as a creature before the Creator; for God finishes the sentence, 'I have called you by name …' with '… you are mine'. Through confirmation, therefore, we vow to

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

> let our urgent, anxious, dependent query, 'Who am I?' deepen into the profoundly transformative, because worshipful, 'Whose am I?' (41)

The second is from Frances Ward's account of Nicholas Farrer's community at Little Gidding:

> When one agrees, voluntarily, to submit to the disciplines of the daily office, or to join a third order, for example, there freedom is found. … To vow oneself to this life is to find a life that is stronger than death. In so far as traditional Religious communities seek to sustain the disciplines and rhythms of prayer and communal life, shaping themselves to a different construction of time, so they witness to an enduring way of life that finds a freedom in regularity, a freedom which is also a freedom from aberrant choice and license. To live in time in such a way can be to see it as sacramental. (145)

The final chapter by Victoria Johnson, 'Choosing to be Beholden', takes up the theme of commitment in the context of our culture, and considers whether it is possible for anyone drawn to seek God to make binding vows. Her conclusion is that:

> the important thing … for those who call themselves Christian [is] to ratify and articulate the way in which they have become mysteriously 'beholden' to God, and then live out their public vow in their daily lives so that a way of life becomes the vow, and the vow becomes a way of life. For all the church's failings and ambiguities in these strange times, vows are once again becoming matters for serious concern and even mysterious attraction, imbued with the initiating divine allure that alone can tell the story of grace, repentance, and salvation (171).

In the end, vowed living is 'all God's work', as Fr Gilbert Shaw used to say, and whatever form this takes for each of us is a source of strength and stability to keep us always seeking God. What is promised by us in our baptism (or on our behalf if we were baptized as infants), is completed through these other expressions of our original commitment.

SR CHRISTINE SLG

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The Community is very grateful for the support we receive in so many ways, particularly through the prayers of our readers.

If you would like to support our life of prayer and reconciliation financially, please consider:

Making a Regular Gift, either by cheque or standing order. Over time these add up to a significant sum. If you are a UK taxpayer you can also Gift Aid your donation. This enables the Charity to claim an extra 25 pence from HMRC for every £1 given.

Gifts of Shares and Securities can attract tax relief and capital gains tax relief. For further information, please contact the Charity Office.

PayPal Giving Fund for online payments at any time:
https://www.paypal.com/gb/fundraiser/charity/3280131

Leaving a Legacy in your will to the Charity will help support us in our work.

Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are available on the Community's website, together with information about legacies, bequests and other tax-effective ways of giving.

If you would like more information, please contact The Charity Office, Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres Parker Street, Oxford OX4 1TB
Email: **charityoffice@slg.org.uk**

COMMUNITY OF THE SISTERS
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guests@slg.org.uk

TELEPHONING THE COMMUNITY
Since phones are not answered during the times of daily services, email is usually the best method of making contact in the first instance.

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

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Please note that the staff are not usually in after 3.00pm

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

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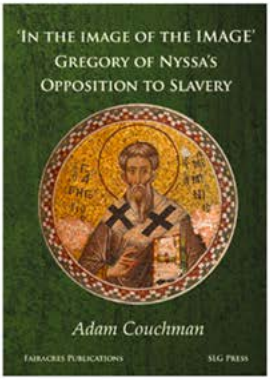

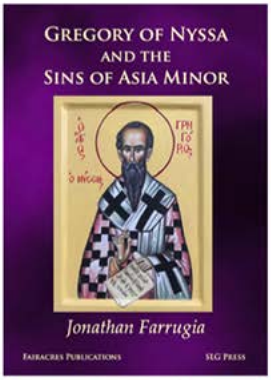

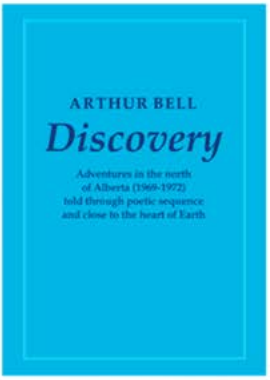

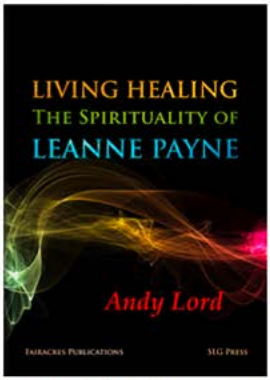

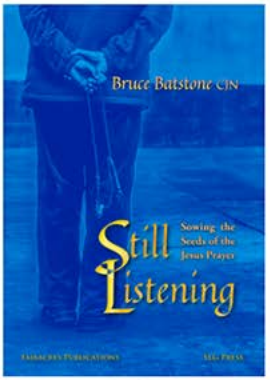

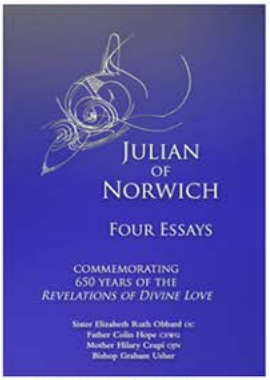

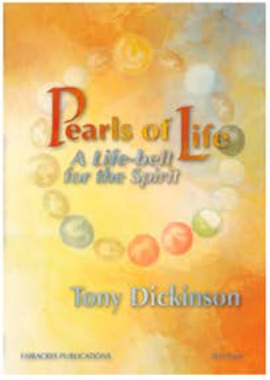

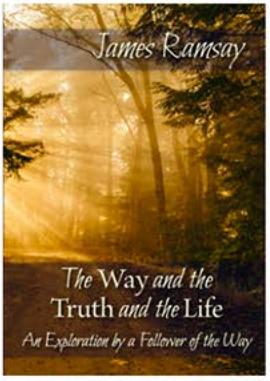

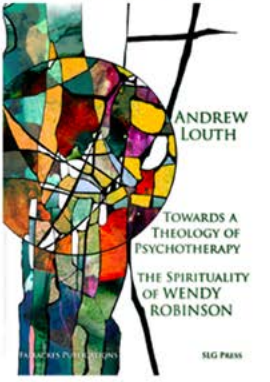

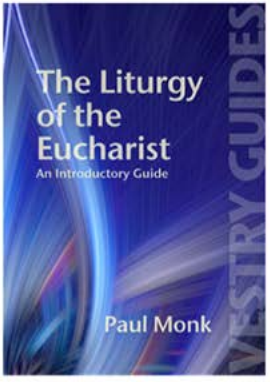

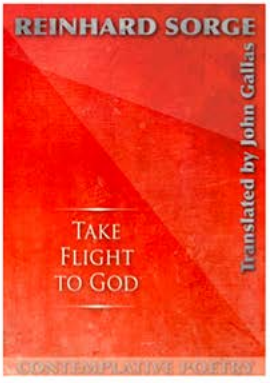

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