



# CR

LADY DAY APRIL 2024

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## New Challenges

The Tariro Charity is facing some new challenges. If you aren't familiar with Tariro, it has grown extraordinarily over the years, helping in Zimbabwe with care of orphans, enabling teenagers to get a good education and go on to good jobs, and paying for some of them to go to university to become doctors and other professionals. The charity is influenced by its monastic origins, and so has a strong sense of community. Former students who are now set up in life are coming back to help in the running of the charity with a strong sense of commitment to it. Tariro has also helped start up some agricultural projects, among which the pig-breeding venture in the Honde Valley is now becoming a resounding success. The numbers of people helped are reflected in the scale of the financial operation – Tariro now has to raise approximately £250,000 per year to pay its way.

But ...

Since Covid, raising this amount has become a little bit more difficult, and so the trustees are exploring what they can do to keep up the income. In 2023 we had to reduce the amount available for some projects which meant, for instance, no longer providing some schoolchildren with one of their meals per day. This caused considerable distress, and so we are working hard to find alternative ways to enable the funds to go as far as they can. Fr Nicolas writes from Zimbabwe as we go to press, “this has been a disastrous year for rain. Our crops and pigs in the Honde valley are great because we have irrigation. Crops at Penhalonga, Chikwaka and Shurugwi are terrible. There will be

much hunger this year and we need to act quickly to buy in food for the Sisters and the children before prices go up”.

The trustees in Britain are very dedicated, capable professional people, and the charity is in the best of hands. The people running the charity on the ground in Zimbabwe are equally capable and dedicated. Tariro works hard to ensure that as much as possible of every £ or \$ donated to it is used to support its activities on the ground in Zimbabwe.



*A laptop arrives*

Our many supporters in the UK are wonderfully faithful and generous – we are always looking for more supporters. Please let us know if you can suggest a parish or other organization that might help. The website is <https://tarirouk.com>. On the news page we try our best to keep our supporters up to date through the newsletter – if you know of anyone who be interested in following what we do, please encourage them to sign up to receive it. If you are not yet a Tariro supporter and would like to make a donation, or even better, set up a standing order, you can do this by going to the donate page, or contact Fr Nicolas at [nstebbing@mirfield.org.uk](mailto:nstebbing@mirfield.org.uk). In the past we have received generous legacies from supporters in their wills – you will find some guidance on how to do this on the “donate” page. That would be a marvellous boost to



our finances sometime in the future.

And once again, a huge thank-you to all the supporters of Tariro, in helping to change many young people's lives for good.

**George CR**

## CR Library

### Project: Cataloguing Pamphlets

**W**ith the help of external funding, we have been able to recruit a temporary Library Assistant for one year who is leading on a project to catalogue 12,000 pamphlets. Anne Purdon will manage the project and train volunteers. We are very excited to have Anne on our team and help us move forward with our library – the pamphlets will be incredibly useful to researchers and Anne will help to catalogue the Spirituality section too.



*Anne*

### Rebecca Hussey Book Charity

We've been awarded a grant-in-kind for £1,200 worth of books from the wonderful Rebecca Hussey Book Charity. The grant has enabled us to add brilliant titles to our collection. They have been catalogued and are ready for use!



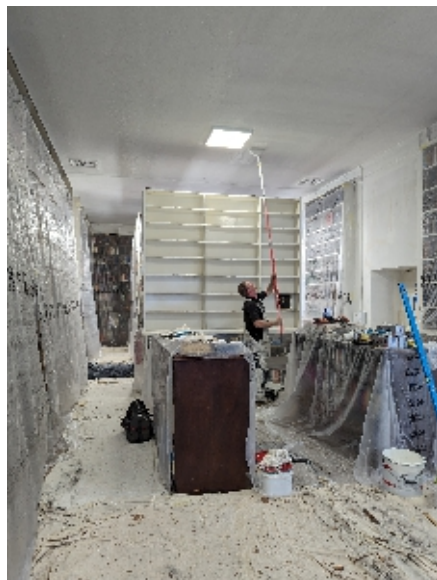
*Jackie*

### CR – Old Library Decorated.

In an ongoing programme of refurbishment and improvement for the library rooms, the Old Library room has been decorated and fitted with new improved lighting. Paul Hatfield (Estates Manager) co-ordinated the work and has made the space a much better environment.

## Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland Library Collection

Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland has agreed to loan its extensive Library Collection to CR. The collection previously housed at Willen Priory arrived at Mirfield in December 2023. The TMSGBI collection will be accessible to all library visitors and it is by way of a permanent loan with the community that TMSGBI seeks to promote the life and writings of Thomas Merton in the context of an engaged and outward-looking religious community. The collection will be catalogued (over the coming months). Fr Nicolas Stebbing CR (Library Brother) is also the society's newest TMSGBI patron. Our Library volunteer Jackie O'Brien, who also happens to be a member of TMSGBI is cataloguing the collection. Decorating Library work continues at a great pace and if you would like to support our work, please consider the Sponsor-A-Shelf scheme – by donating £5.00 per month. If you would like more information, please email Barbara Clarke (bclarke@mirfield.org.uk).



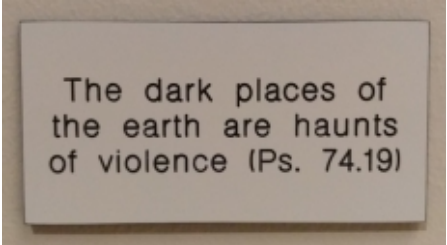
**Anisha Christison**  
CR Librarian



## All the suffering

**I**n the Holy Cross Chapel at Mirfield there is now a concrete sculpture, a piece of debris from a demolished building, shown on our front cover. In it a light burns, inviting us to prayer. It aims to draw our attention to all the world's suffering. Much of it is very public, but even more is unseen: the hidden suffering of communities and groups and families, and individuals suffering torture and terrible situations of every sort, often alone and with no one to

turn to. This piece of debris reminds us too of all the destroyed homes and workplaces, and the breaking-up of the structures of lives of untold numbers of ordinary people. The Psalms that we pray every day in our offices frequently refer to them, and we know Christ in his cross is there where they are. Like the lamp, we pray for light in their darkness, and an end to all that is terrible in our world. And for that we need to pray and work for a just and peaceful international order. “Let justice pour down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5.24).



## James Gray (1770?-1830) and *India - A Poem*



The Revd James Gray was one of most gifted and at the same time sadly forgotten of the chaplains of the East India Company. His entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography by Peter Jackson focuses on his life as a teacher and poet in Scotland (he was a friend of Robert Burns and teacher of his children in Dumfries) prior to his ordination as an Anglican priest in the Church of Ireland in 1824 and his subsequent departure for India as an East India Company chaplain. Daniel O'Connor gives some attention to Gray's remarkable ministry in Bhuj,

then a remote city in northwestern Gujarat, some five hundred miles from Mumbai, in his book *The Chaplains of the East India Company, 1601-1858* (2012). No-one, however, has paid much attention to Gray's remarkable poem *India - A Poem*, written at the end of his life and, taken to the USA by his son William where it was published in a journal, *The Zodiac*, in 1835-36. The poem is set against the background of his ministry in Bhuj and was begun shortly after the death of his second wife Mary whose departure he laments in

the opening stanzas. It comprises two hundred and twenty five Spenserian stanzas - over two thousands lines - and clearly demonstrates Gray's links with William Wordsworth and English Romanticism.

But a few comments on Gray's ministry as an East India chaplain are necessary as a background to his poem, illustrated largely through surviving letters from Gray and his wife Mary as well as an extended obituary in *The Oriental Christian Spectator* for May, 1831 and the privately printed *Sketch of the Life of the Rev, James Gray, M. A.* (Edinburgh: John Baxter, 1859). Though in many ways a conventional chaplain of his time, writing of India as a 'land of delusion,' Gray was nevertheless remarkable in a number of ways. He was always ready to be critical of the British officers in Bhuj when, for example, he was forbidden by his commanding officer to preach to the Indian soldiers who were Christian, or of the British soldiers who, he reports, 'spend the Sabbath in field sports, or lounging at home' instead of attending church. He quickly learnt two languages, the Hindustani of the local Christians and the local Kachchi and subsequently translated the gospels into a deliberately simple version in the former and a dictionary and translation of Matthew's Gospel in the latter. Furthermore he became the personal tutor of the young Rao, Dessul, becoming as a result a noted figure in the local royal court over which he seems to have wielded some considerable influence. But perhaps his most significant achievement was his vocal campaign against the plight of women, both Indian and the wives of the local British soldiery, in a society that was utterly dominated by men, both Indian and British. He used his influence at the local palace 'as a man and as a Christian minister' to oppose the practice of female infanticide, fathers preferring the death of their daughters to their inability to afford acceptable marriages, and Gray observing that, 'they are too poor to portion their daughters to high caste men of other castes, and too proud to marry them to any other.' Second he vigorously opposed the practice of sati whereby widows were constrained to sacrifice themselves on the funeral pyre of their deceased husband.

Gray's work *India - A Poem* illustrates graphically his radical defence of women - though less so his pioneering work as an educator of an Indian prince of the influential Rajput brotherhood, the Jarejhas in Cutch. India begins with a ten stanza lament for his wife Mary, herself a poet who died not long after their arrival in India. From the start Gray expresses his longing for his native Scotland as he labours in a land that has great beauty but knows only suffering and slavery, unlike the European tradition that is, in his words, 'sacred to liberty and ancient fame', celebrated in Bannockburn and Marathon (Part 1,

stanza XII). At the same time Gray is prepared to ascribe to the Indian Moslems a piety which is sadly lacking in the 'Christian' British soldiery, who dare 'with hounds and horn the Sabbath to profane'. Meanwhile the pious Moslem faithfully responds to the minaret's call to 'midnight worship'. Nor are cruelty and neglect found only in Indian family life. Embedded in India is the touching story of Jeane Ryan, an Irish girl who marries a soldier stationed in India. She is beaten and abused by her husband, turning her after his death to a miserable life in which 'she drank, dragoon'd and swore', until her late conversion in which she 'dreamt of the Saviour's mercy', her death affecting even the rough soldiery, for 'even the rude soldier has a gentle heart'. Gray's letters indicate a ministry of quietly epic proportions, rising each morning at 5.00 to prepare sermons and then teach Dessul at the palace from 8.00 to 9.00, adding to lessons in 'scripture reading' classes on elementary science and 'natural philosophy', persuading them that 'their religion and their philosophy rest on the same divine revelation, and they must stand or fall together.' At the other end of the social scale he opened a school for the children of the Indian and Eurasian soldiers, many of them Christian yet treated with a degree of contempt by the British officers.

But perhaps most remarkable is Gray's use of his influence at the royal court to significantly change a culture of widespread female infanticide and the practice of sati. He wrote in a letter, 'My influence in the palace is such that there is nothing I could ask from either of the kings, old or young, that they would not grant... It is fortunate for me that the prime minister, who is much my friend, has it [infanticide] in horror.' In India, Gray describes at some length the cruelty of the killing of infant daughters even within his own 'parish':

*Sweet, gentle child, thy birthright is a bier  
 Born but to breathe a moment, and to die,  
 For thee no kindred eye is wet with tear,  
 Thy father hears not nature's holiest cry.* (1, LXXXVI).

He also writes at length of the practice of *sati* in a country where 'the world's finest wheels are out of joint.'

*The husband dooms the widow to the pile -  
 'Tis the son's torch that lights the funeral fire...  
 It seems as God in his avenging ire,  
 Had reason quench'd and left the spirit dark,  
 Without one ray of light, without one guiding spark.* (2, XLII).



In his short three years in Bhuj, James Gray had a remarkable ministry. His championing of the rights of women was far ahead of his time, as was his insight that the education of the ruling class (without any aggressive drive to convert them to Christianity) would have a disproportionate effect on the wider population. Of his pupil Dessul he wrote: "If I could gain this young man to the cause, it would be equivalent to gaining the whole country that contains one million souls.' Furthermore it would be another hundred years in India before Anglican clergy were as openly critical of the racism and arrogance of the British ruling class. Finally, his willingness, and ability, to learn local languages and provide straightforward translations of the New Testament was an extraordinary and visionary achievement, eclipsing in some respects the better known translations of another, slightly earlier East India Company chaplain, Henry Martyn (1781-1812) who, between 1806 and 1811 translated the New Testament into (among other Persian languages) Hindustanee and Urdu. Gray wrote in a letter that 'Henry Martyn's translation... is in too high a language to be understood.' He continued:

*Sometime ago I told you that I had not been permitted to preach even to native Christians, yet you must not think I have been idle. I have just finished a translation from the four Gospels, into Hindoostanee, so selecting and arranging as to omit nothing in the life of Christ. My aim has been to give a specimen of a simpler translation, and more intelligible to all classes of Hindoos, than any existing. The errors of all the translations with which I am acquainted, is an affectation of high language, totally unintelligible to all but the learned.*

James Gray's *India - A Poem* has been published but once and in the rather inaccessible pages of *The Zodiac* (1835-36). Largely written shortly after the death of his wife Mary it is surprisingly readable if conventional in its early nineteenth century romanticism, the record of a lonely man, mourning for his wife and homesick for Scotland, yet utterly devoted to his Christian task in a remote outpost of the early British Empire and with a vision and an intelligence shared by few in his time. Gray survived Mary by a mere seventeen months, dying in his son's arms on 25th September, 1830. Husband and wife are buried in Bhuj. His gravestone is engraved:

*Sacred to the Memory of  
James Gray of Scotland  
Chaplain of Bhuj  
Tutor to H. H. Rao Desaljee  
Died 25th Sepr 1830 Aged 60*

**David Jasper**, University of Glasgow

## Sponsored cycle ride



**I**t has become time for another cycle ride. I and my companion Peter Sowden will be cycling from Holy Island to Durham from 29th April to 1st May, in aid of the refurbishment of Shepherds Law Hermitage. The hermitage, dedicated to St Mary and St Cuthbert, is set on a hilltop between the villages of Powburn and Eglington with magnificent views of the Cheviot Hills. It looks out towards the stunning Beamish valley stretching away towards the Tweed and the Scottish border.

It was the vision of Brother Harold, a Franciscan Friar who, back in the 1960s felt a call to a contemplative way of life, a life centred on prayer and solitude. Over the next few years, through his own hard work and with the help of friends and supporters, the hermitage was built and a cloister and four cells were added, and dedicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1989. Later a beautiful chapel was built by local craftsmen; it took seven years to complete and was dedicated by the Archbishop of York in 2004. He was accompanied by the Anglican Bishops of Newcastle and Wakefield, the Vicar General of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and representatives from the Orthodox and Reformed churches; reflecting the ecumenical vision of Brother Harold for the Hermitage.

For over fifty years Brother Harold lived a life of prayer and solitude at Shepherd's Law, where he had to endure many hardships through tough winters. It drew many people to come to share in its monastic life and worship

and enjoy the silence, the beauty and solitude. One past visitor wrote: "Shepherd's Law, soaked in the prayers of Brother Harold and pilgrims who have ventured here makes the Church an especially 'thin place'. Here, vocations including my own have been nurtured and better understood. It is a gift to all who come upon it". Br Harold is now 93 and not able to live at Shepherd's Law alone, though he is able to be there on and off.

A new Ecumenical Board of Trustees has been established and registered with the Charity Commission and plans are under way to refurbish the buildings, making sure they comply with current health and safety regulations. Groups of volunteers have been busy clearing the grounds and preparing the buildings for the works that are needed. Worship has been re-established since Covid, with a simple ecumenical service on the second Sunday of each month at 3pm. Increasingly, there will be visits by members of religious communities who will make monastic worship available for people who wish to come. In the very long term the hope is for a permanent community, when God makes that possible, but in the meantime we hope a variety of communities of the various denominations will keep the flame going.



There is a lot of enthusiastic support from local people and further afield. Money has already been raised to pay for a link building between the accommodation and the church, which can also function as a meeting-space, and work is shortly to begin on it. Then the accommodation in 4 two-storeyed "cells" needs full fireproofing and insulation, updated bathroom facilities and preparatory work for installing central heating, and this is estimated to cost £5,000 per cell. Our bike ride has set £5,000 as an ambitious target.

It is the vision of the trustees that nurturing the monastic way of life with its daily round of worship, work, prayer and contemplation will continue to be the heart of everything at Shepherd's Law. It will be possible for groups and individuals to stay for retreats, sabbaticals and briefer stays.

I have set up a funding page for any who wish to support the bike ride, but I didn't realize that its whole name would go in the link, so I'm afraid it's a bit long: <https://www.gofundme.com/sponsored-bike-ride-for-shepherds-law-hermitage>.

George CR

## My Dog, Ascetic Teacher

It has taken the acquisition of a boisterous, loving, playful, affectionate Cocker Spaniel puppy to realize that I am a thoroughgoing cat person. Four months into being a dog owner, I must conclude, regretfully, that I was more enamoured with the idea of being a dog owner than I was with owning a dog. I don't know about man's best friend, but MY best friend would fetch me a negroni cocktail, not a slobber-soaked squeaky ball for yet another thrilling hour of fetch. Dog social media has a lot to answer for. I was led to believe it was all cuddles, amusing antics, and pleasant walks. I have been alarmed to discover just how much time I now devote to: 'Don't Eat that', 'Don't bite her, and (always a favourite) 'Don't pee there' at varying pitches and volumes across the day. As I interrupt my working day to accommodate his atrocious control, I do wonder precisely who has domesticated whom in this arrangement.



In truth, I am all bark and no bite. I love Louis (for that is indeed his name), and he has undeniably made my job very easy as the students adore him, even if I am reduced to being 'the man behind the dog'. Still, my occasional sense of ambivalence is one that is biblically grounded, as Scripture has hardly anything good to say about dogs. I know from personal experience now that they do indeed return to their vomit (Prov. 26.11) although I'm yet to see him lap up the blood of evildoers like Ahab and Jezebel (I Kings 22.38 and 2 Kings 9.33-7 respectively). Often, they are an insult heaped on enemies worthy of destruction (Psalms 22

and 59, or 2 Sam 16.9). Some scholars are willing to venture that Deut 23.18 really does refer to a fee paid for a dog and not a male prostitute being

abhorrent to God. Needless to say, it hardly gets much better in the New Testament; 'dog' continues to be an insult (Phil 3.2) that Jesus himself possibly uses (Matt 15.27). Moreover, he certainly doesn't praise them when he says 'Do not give to dogs what is sacred'. However, most surprising is the assertion that contrary to popular belief all dogs do not go to heaven; rather they are barred entry to the New Jerusalem in Revelation, being left outside with the company of 'those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practises falsehood' (Rev 22.15). Even I am willing to concede that this seems particularly unfair and more than a bit insulting to dogs everywhere.

When discussing this with a friend who is big on animal ethics, he ventured that it might be linked to Zoroastrianism and its sharply defined dualisms of good and evil, clean and polluted, but to our surprise, Zoroastrianism is highly pro-canine. The thirteenth chapter of the Vendidad praises dogs and stipulates how they should be treated, including plenty of horsewhipping for people who strike them too hard, and damnation in the afterlife for good measure. It's possible that their status as carrion-eaters and scavengers (as already noted in the books of the Kings), which perhaps makes them rather unwelcome in biblical Jewish company, is what makes them praiseworthy for Zoroastrians. Indeed, part of a Zoroastrian funeral is the *sagdīd*, which requires a dog to look at a corpse to keep the demons of decay away.

Meanwhile Jewish and Christian ambivalence continued. After the sack of Constantinople in 1204 Pope Innocent III sharply rebuked Baldwin of Flanders for this PR disaster: '*The result is that the Greek church, afflicted to some degree by persecutions, disdains returning to obedience to the Apostolic See. It has seen in the Latins nothing other than the example of affliction and the works of Hell, so that now it rightly detests them more than dogs.*' While there is a litany of Yiddish proverbs and idioms about dogs, most of them making pretty clear that they are considered the opposite of a decent person: 'If you are already a dog, at least do not be a pig.' and 'if a Jew has a dog, either the dog is no dog or the Jew is no Jew' being quite forthright, although there are some positive ones too: 'If there is a dog and a potter in a town, one does not need a rabbi' (since questions of whether meat/vessels were kosher become irrelevant as they can be disposed of/replaced), while Saint Roch, patron saint of dogs, was looked after by one while he suffered from the plague. In the interest of Abrahamic comprehensiveness Islam carries the same ambiguity; the 18th Surah of the Qu'ran has a very positive story about the protection offered by a dog, but the Hadiths seem to suggest the prophet Muhammad did not like dogs, stating that



to own a dog was to reduce the merit of one's good deeds unless it was a farm or hunting dog, and it seems many Muslims would consider owning a dog to be *haram*.

There was however one corner of ancient near East that did have some good things to say about dogs, and that was the Desert Fathers. What shines through the previous three paragraphs is the way the dog is presented as living in a *liminal* space in society. It does not share the valued status of farm or grazing animals, and it is not a house pet; it sits on

the margins of society, living on the scraps, hovering between clean and unclean. Perhaps that sense of being on the margins is what allowed the desert monks as they self-consciously took themselves out of civilization to sympathise with dogs: An elder said: “If you are living in *hēsychia* (stillness) in the desert, do not think to yourself that you are accomplishing some great deed. Think rather of yourself as a dog banished from company and tied up for biting and attacking people” (Sayings, 573). In fact, this quest for humility allowed monks to see themselves as lower even than dogs: 'An elder said: “A dog is better than me, for a dog has love and does not go passing judgement.” ' (Sayings, 436). Perhaps in attempting to quell their own



unconscious drives and desires the monks saw more of themselves in the dog than someone insulated in the city might. Then again, that same impulsiveness could also be used as a teaching point about the spiritual life:

*'A young monk asked one of the old men of the desert why it was that so many people came out to the desert to seek God, and yet most of them gave up and returned to their lives in the city. he replied: “Last evening my dog saw a rabbit running for cover among the bushes of the desert and he began to chase the rabbit, barking loudly. Soon other dogs joined in the chase, and they were barking and running as well. They ran a great distance and alerted many other dogs. Soon the desert was echoing the sounds of their pursuit but the chase went on into the night. After a little while, many of the dogs grew tired and dropped out. A few chased the rabbit until the night was nearly spent. By morning, only my dog continued the hunt. “Do you understand,” the old man said, “what I have told*

you?"

*"No," replied the young monk, "please tell me father."*

*"It is simple," said the desert father, "my dog saw the rabbit."*

In the tradition of desert spirituality, the dog finally has his day, and in dying to self one can see the redeeming qualities of even the corpse-eating scavengers like the dog. Anglicanism happily carries on this humble identification in the BCP Eucharist: 'we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs from under thy table...'

For my own part, Louis has been an ascetic teacher, although a paradoxical one. Especially when young, his behaviour managed to shred every one of my pretensions of being a patient soul with a reasonably tranquil, kindly mind; he pushed buttons I had no idea I possessed, over and over again. Though as I'm told shouting at the dog does no good, I have instead been left literally hopping around the room in a ludicrous and silent rage while he looks on in bewilderment. I am less a model of humility than one of mere humiliation. Yet when I think that loving a creature so lacking in self-control, so determined to put itself in harm's way, and often so obstinate in doing so, is difficult some days, I remember that somehow God manages to carry on loving me every day, despite the difficulties of doing so. If nothing else, that at least gives me paws for thought.

**Nathan Mulcock**

Chaplain, Mansfield College, Oxford

## An Oxford Movement Sesquicentennial



*The author with Bishop Dintoe blessing a new statue of St Michael slaying the dragon.*

I have been in Bloemfontein, capital of the Free State Province of South Africa, for a very special anniversary. On 8 February, St Michael's School celebrated Founders' Day with a splendid Sung Mass to mark one hundred and fifty years since its foundation. The Bishop of the Free State, the Rt Revd Dintoe Letloenyane, presided and I was honoured to be a concelebrant, together with Archdeacon Hendriks of Bloemfontein and the School Chaplain, Fr Grant Trewern. The congregation comprised the entire senior school and staff, together with invited guests. Juniors and infants had their own Service later in the morning. The actual foundation day was Epiphany but schools in South Africa are on holiday during January, and so Founders' Day is kept always on the Thursday of the first complete week of February.

Although not of the first generation, the Founders had deep roots in the Oxford Movement. Allan Becher Webb, second Bishop of the Diocese, had been a Fellow of University College, Oxford, and Vice-Principal of Cuddesdon College under Edward King, later Bishop of Lincoln. Perceiving the need for 'women's work' in his vast diocese, Webb approached English Sisterhoods for help, but none was willing to send a group of Sisters to what was then a remote, independent, Dutch-speaking republic. It was no doubt Webb's acquaintance with Fr Thomas Chamberlain that led to Sister Emma (Proctor) of the Community of St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford, being loaned

to the Bloemfontein Diocese for five years, with the aim of starting a new Community.

The Community of St Michael and All Angels, Bloemfontein, and St Michael's School came into being together on 6th January, 1874. St Michael's was the first girls' school north of the Orange River, and from the start provided facilities for boarders as well as day pupils. It still does. The Free State is farming country, with widely scattered homesteads and small towns thirty or forty miles apart. In 1874 there were no railways and only animal-drawn transport was available. Travel was slow, uncomfortable, and hazardous over rough tracks and fording unbridged rivers. When Sister Emma and the five young women who accompanied her from England arrived, the journey inland from Algoa Bay took thirteen days before they reached Bloemfontein.



*The girls in formation*

St Michael's School was the first work of the new Sisterhood but it was never their only work. Bishop Webb's vision went much further. There was no hospital in the Free State and, one hundred miles to the west, diamond-rush Kimberley was within his diocese. Webb chaired a committee that had St George's Cottage Hospital built alongside the Community's house in Bloemfontein: Sisters provided the nursing staff. In Kimberley he made an agreement with the Government to supply nurses for a new hospital. It was all a venture of faith, for he did not yet have the numbers required. Henrietta Stockdale from Nottinghamshire, one of the group who arrived with Mother



Emma, was still a Novice when sent to head the latter work. Kimberley Hospital grew to be the largest in southern Africa, with Sister Henrietta CSM&AA as Matron. She started training nurses and campaigned for state registration: it was achieved in the Cape Colony twenty-eight years before England. At one stage CSM&AA was staffing four hospitals but, as with English Sisterhoods, nursing was gradually handed over to secular agencies.

Webb's third aim was mission work and, within weeks of her arrival, Mother Emma described her first visit to St Patrick's Mission, with its devout black congregation. In each centre where the Sisters staffed hospitals or ran schools, mission work was developed and eventually employed more Sisters than the flagship school in Bloemfontein. In Kimberley, Harrismith, the eastern Free State, and Lesotho, as well as in Bloemfontein, Sisters worked with the clergy to build up faith among the black and mixed race populations. In the year when St Michael's celebrated its Golden Jubilee, 1924, the first two Postulants were admitted for an indigenous women's Community, the Society of St Mary at the Cross, Leribe. It flourished under CSM&AA's guidance, and in 1962 was incorporated into the Community of the Holy Name. From that small beginning have grown the Lesotho and Zululand Provinces of CHN. The centenary of that foundation will fall on Holy Cross Day, 14 September, this year.

The Sesquicentennial Mass took place in St Michael's School Chapel, a large and spacious building erected in 1970. During the previous decade, the Sisters had become aware that their buildings were old and cramped and needed major improvements. Courageously they took the advice of some local business people, who suggested selling the city centre block they owned and constructing an entirely new complex on the outskirts of the city. The Community and School moved together in December 1970. The decision was taken for the good of the School, and its wisdom is evident in the thriving St Michael's School of today. The Sisters withdrew from direct involvement in teaching and administration at the end of their centenary year, 1974. Their numbers were declining, and they had become 'God's grey warriors', to quote Mother Mary Ruth (who hailed from Southend-on-Sea). Sisters continued to live on the campus until 1993, when the remaining six moved out so that the School could expand into the large Community House. There was a brief return to live in a staff flat from 2003 to 2007. The last Sister, Joan, died in frail care in 2016.

At the Mass, I was conscious of their presence, and of how thankful the Sisters



would be as they looked on at this special celebration. An efficient team of school-girl servers, and a well-prepared choir, ensured that the liturgy lived up to the best traditions of Anglo-Catholic worship: dignified, devout, and joyful.

'150 Years of Grace' is the theme that will link a series of special events through this sesquicentennial year. Two teachers are reading my book *Nuns Across the Orange* while writing a play to be performed in August by pupils in a theatre on the University campus, telling the story of this century and a half. They will find many incidents with good dramatic potential, like the time an escaped baboon rampaged through the Home pursued by two black-habited nuns who were trying to catch it. While my book aimed to focus on the religious life of the Community in its broad range of works, a new book more specifically about the School is in preparation. Written by the Deputy Headteacher, it will relate the heritage with the help of more than one thousand photographs.

When I researched the archives, it was interesting to find how many well-known names feature in their early history, some in the Free State but more in Britain, raising financial support and recruiting potential Sisters and helpers. Lord Halifax is among them, and also Dom Anselm Hughes OSB of Nashdom Abbey. His elder sibling was Sister Margery Angela CSM&AA, a mission Sister who became fluent in SeSotho, not in its purest form but as spoken in the black township where she worked indefatigably for fifty years. St Michael's Bloemfontein is a direct product of the Oxford Movement, one that has borne much good fruit.

It all began when a handful of individuals heard the call of God to leave their families and home comforts behind, and to go out they knew not where.

**Michael Sparrow**  
Oblate CR

*Print copies of Michael Sparrow's book Nuns Across the Orange: A History of the Pioneering Anglican Community of St Michael and All Angels, Bloemfontein, can be bought online from Amazon books. ISBN 978-1-928424-62-8.*

## Sin and the destruction of our world

“Committing a crime against nature is a sin; causing the extinction of species and destroying biological diversity is a sin; degrading the earth's integrity and bringing about climate change through the destruction of the planet's forests and wetlands is a sin; harming another human being by disease or by contaminating the resources of earth, land or air by releasing toxic substances...it is all sin.”

That is what the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox, Bartholomew, tells us. He goes on to describe the passions – “greed, avarice, egotism and the insatiable desire for more” which lie behind this sin.

What should be our response to this sin? First of all we must repent. We are all guilty, at least in the West. For all the hand-wringing and anxiety we go on insisting on the creature comforts, the heating, the motor cars, the imported foodstuffs, the luxury goods and holidays which drive this sinful destruction of our world. We can't point fingers at others until we have repented ourselves.

Then we must pray. Our tendency is to make a list of all the things we can do to change this situation – stop flying, stop wastage, stop eating meat, save electricity, use buses, not cars, write persistently to our MPs, vote responsibly at the next election...All that is important, but prayer does not come at the end of that list, as a sort of hopeless 'add on'; God comes first. He created the world. He is already caring for it. He uses our actions and enthusiasms to put right what we have messed up. God understands the whole picture in a way which we don't. Our projects for saving the environment often cause more damage than they prevent. I have just read the marvellous book *Wilding* by Isabella Tree (see Book Reviews). She describes how they turned their Sussex farm, Knepp, over to nature and were astonished at how nature took care of the problems. Problems such as ineradicable thistle turned out to be part of the answer, regenerating insect and bird populations. Nature knows what it is doing, not because nature is clever but because God is behind nature. Give God a real chance and he can work what seem miracles to us, but are just normal to the world he made. That's why we must pray.

And we must pray with hope. Much has changed in the last few decades. Thirty years ago environmentalists were thought to be bearded idiots in sloppy jumpers. Now they are respected, even by Governments. Small-scale

regenerations like Knepp have shown just how much can be achieved; and there are hundreds of such projects. Statistics seem to be against us. Change is not coming fast enough. The oil companies are still trying to increase the amount of oil they sell even though they know it is a major driver of climate change. Governments are still too anxious about their immediate electoral prospects to act as bravely as they could. The need is urgent, but we must not despair. God is in this. He is driving the change. He is changing people's hearts. He changed mine, showing me how bad the situation is, but also how exciting it is to get involved in this vast project of rescuing our world.

I am no expert on the environment, having given up biology when I was thirteen. Yet every time I read an article about some animal that has been brought back from extinction I get excited. Every time I read of how ants and moths, and caterpillars and birds work together, I become amazed at the complexity and beauty of this world and realise how it needed God to make such a world. Insects, birds, animals and plants interact with each other and sustain each other. It seems they know exactly what they are doing.

I used to find the doctrine of creation rather boring. Yes, God created the world and set it going, then sat back and watched it get into a mess, occasionally stepping in to sort out a mess. Yet this isn't what the Bible says. God was intimately involved in forming man and woman, animals and plants and setting them to care for this world. Throughout the Old Testament we are reminded of his constant involvement in the world:

“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork.” (Ps 19)

Jesus also shows this intimate love of nature. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;” (Luke: 27) He notices every sparrow that falls to the ground (Matthew 10: 29).

Today I find the doctrine of creation more and more fascinating. As I become aware of the complexity of nature, the astonishing biodiversity we are destroying, I am more and more convinced that God is acting in every part of it, as he acts constantly in us. The only trouble with this is that I now see more and more how our treatment of this world is not just stupid. It is sacrilege, even blasphemy. Desmond Tutu, years ago made me realise how it is bad because it treats badly people whom God loves. That is sacrilege. So is our maltreatment of the world. As the Patriarch Bartholomew says, quite simply it is sin. And we Christians are committed to eradicating our sins, or letting god eradicate the ones we can't get rid of ourselves.

Can we make this part of our confessions – both those we speak in our daily prayers, and those we speak in confession to a priest? That would challenge us to do more, but it would also open us up for God to more with us.

When we read in the newspapers of people who are destroying the world, like oil companies, Amazon farmers, the farming operations in this country and America which practise destructive farming, just to make money, we need to pray for them. They are real people, needing to make a living. Can God get through to them to change their ways? It happened at Knepp. It can happen anywhere. (If you haven't read *The Shepherd's Life* by James Rebanks, please do. It is a wonderful account of what real farming should look like and very inspiring.)

What more can we do? Come on retreat to a place like Mirfield where we can look at the trees, flowers, fish and birds in the context of a place where prayer is offered several times a day. It will be easy to see the presence of God in this. Read the Scriptures both Old and New Testaments with an eye to the celebration of God's presence in our world. That is particularly true of the psalms. Remember how Christ takes bread and wine, two of the staples of human life, and makes them into His Body and Blood. God is not afraid of being deeply involved in creation. And above all, pray! It's amazing how coincidences, and unusual things happen when we pray.

**Nicolas CR**

## **Companions' Study Week 16th – 19th September 2024**

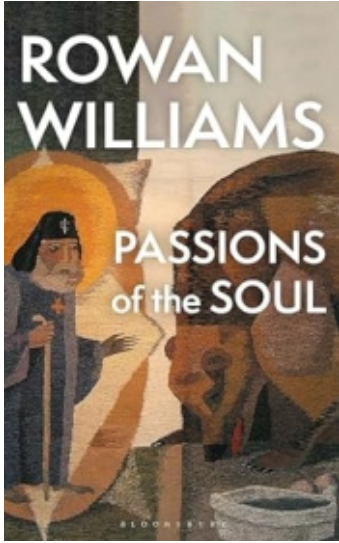
The Companions of the Community of the Resurrection Study Week will be held at Mirfield. The theme will be Faith in the Arts. We are aiming at a relaxed and refreshing look at Christian belief as seen through the works of artists and poets. The presenters will be members of CR and Companions. The programme is still in process. Fr John Gribben CR and Fr Keith Perkinson are working on the details. The event is organised by the Companions but it is open to all. Come and relax in pleasant surroundings and explore the faith within the rhythms of the monastic life. The number of places is limited.

Book with [guests@mirfield.org.uk](mailto:guests@mirfield.org.uk)

## Book Reviews

### Rowan Williams: *Passions of the Soul*

Bloomsbury 2024. £11.99. isbn 9781399415682



At the heart of monastic life is the life of prayer. We join a monastery to pray, though we always find ourselves doing a lot of other things besides. Those who are linked with us as Companions, Oblates, Society or friends come to us because they are encouraged in their own life of prayer, to persevere, to move on and to find real joy. Prayer within the Catholic tradition is centred on the sacraments, on the prayer of the Church and on a God who is transcendent and yet immanent, unimaginably large yet intimately close. In the wider church, prayer seems to have become largely subjective, self-centred and focused on 'good feelings'. Prayer for most people seems to be doing what makes me feel good. This is no basis on which one can

live the Christian life, particularly in its Catholic form. Rowan Williams is one of the few Anglican leaders who really understands this. In this slim but solid book he turns again to the East for inspiration. Eastern Orthodox prayer is still rooted in the earliest traditions of prayer before the tragic division between spiritual life and theology took place. Theology is profoundly prayerful, and you cannot pray effectively to God unless you have some theological idea about who that God is.

In this book, Rowan focuses on the passions which underlie all that we do. Understanding and controlling these passions is essential in Christian life. Passions, the feelings that drive our lives, are rooted in good movements of the spirit: love, desire, a concern for justice. Yet we corrupt them. We use them for ourselves. Rowan shows how the East has understood these passions, and how they become sinful. He uses the teaching particularly of Evagrius and Cassian to explore these passions. Both these writers show an extraordinary understanding of human psychology. We tend to think psychology began with Freud. That is far from true. Evagrius and John Cassian can teach us a lot, and their understanding of psychology is founded in God. Origen and Gregory of Nyssa also make significant appearances, as do Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux



and John of the Cross.

An interesting aspect of the book is that Rowan links the passions of the East with the Beatitudes to illuminate them both. As Rowan himself admits, some of these links are a bit tenuous, but they usefully challenge us to think more deeply about the Beatitudes and the Passions.

One of the fallacies of modern life is the idea people have that you can have spirituality without religion. Rowan challenges this from the start. For Christians, spirituality obviously involves the Holy Spirit. In the West we probably still do not take this seriously enough, despite decades of the charismatic movement. The result is that our prayer becomes merely intellectual or emotional and isn't properly integrated into the whole Christian experience of life. Then of course prayer should not be primarily about us, but about God. In a final chapter Rowan explores the relationship of prayer to the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is not merely a theoretical way of explaining God; prayer takes us into the heart of the Trinity. We need to understand something of that mystery so we know where are going.

Read this book slowly, and it will deepen and enlarge the way you pray. The Church desperately needs us all to pray with the greater depth and maturity to which Bishop Rowan invites us.

**Nicolas CR**

**Isabella Tree: *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm***

Picador 2018, £7.69



**T**his is a wonderful read! Charlie Burrell and his wife Isabella had inherited the family farm in West Sussex. For more than ten years they tried to make it pay. The clay soil was against them and modern farming conditions defeated them. Just as they realized they would have to give up, they discovered the possibilities of letting the farm go back to Nature. They stopped farming, sold off their equipment (paying off huge debts) and let things go. Life quickly returned. Trees grew. Grass and shrubs grew. Insects reappeared, birds came

to eat the insects. Bird song and insect squeaks could be heard again. The monochrome appearance of a modern farm changed to variety with trees, scrubland, ponds and rivers taking their natural form.

The main rule was to keep their hands off the farm. However, some animals were needed. Fallow deer were introduced around the house. Tamworth pigs, about the closest thing the UK has to ancient boar, were set free. Exmoor ponies (similar to the ancient ponies that once roamed Britain) arrived. These and other animals helped to shape the landscape, grazing in different ways, each adding their contribution to the growing biodiversity.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this process was to see how nature interacts. When a particularly nasty thistle appeared and rapidly spread, the Burrells resisted the impulse to reach for the weed killer. After a while, painted lady butterflies appeared in droves and landed among the thistles to lay and hatch their young. Then caterpillars came and ate the thistle spikes and leaves (too tough even for donkeys!) so that the donkeys could take the rest. Then it was revealed that a whole new range of insects had burrowed under cover of the thorns, increasing biodiversity and delighting the birds. None of this should surprise us who believe in God. God created the world. God created every tree, plant, insect, animal and bird. God is still totally involved in this world he created, teaching us how to live in it and keeping the processes of life going. Isabella Tree never mentions God, yet to me he is excitingly present all the way through.

Isabella is extremely well informed, sometimes overwhelmingly so, but she writes so well that you never tire of reading the detail as well as enjoying the story. She shows how disastrous modern farming has become for the environment. She exposes some of the scandals of the world – when criticized for not growing food she points out that a third of the world's food is wasted, either never reaching the people who need it, or thrown away by those who have too much! All of us who care about the regeneration of the environment need a book like this to cheer us up, show us what is possible, show the wonderful fruits of letting nature take back its own, and of course, for us, reminding us how much God is at work in it. Last year, I commended Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics* to readers as a wonderful description of how our economic system is destroying the world and how it should be changed. A similar book is *The Shepherd's Life* by James Rebanks where a sheep farmer abandons modern farming practice in the Lake District and reverts to traditional ones, which produce better sheep and a regenerated land. Isabella

Tree's *Wilding* is a real boost of joy and life in a world where everything seems to be going wrong. Read it and find God working as before!

**Nicolas CR**

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