



CR

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News from the Superior

It has been quite a Summer for the small band of men who are today the Community of the Resurrection living together at Mirfield. There are currently 13 of us. The highlight was the profession in solemn vows of our brother Patrick Souter on the Feast of the Transfiguration, which also happens to be Patrick's birthday. It was an additional joy to have Patrick's mother with us for that day, and Abbot Thomas and three of the brothers from Mucknell Abbey, as well as Br Michael Jacob SSF.

Patrick's life's path has been something like the labyrinth in our grounds: it has followed a steady route but taken a good while and many turns to reach this centred space. When I came to CR in 1997, Patrick was already the senior novice, having spent some time as an alonsider here. He lived for a while in CR's London Priory, but eventually left to work, and later to look after his father. Nevertheless the experience of the monastic life remained a good fit for Patrick's urge to serve God. He joined the Benedictine brothers and sisters at Mucknell in Worcestershire and undertook another novitiate and was warmly appreciated there. But somehow Mirfield remained home and Patrick found himself returning here in 2021 after twenty years away.

Those who have met Patrick this Summer will be able to testify to just how at home, at peace, he now is in his life's vocation. And for CR this is a true sign of hope; Patrick is the first brother in over 18 years to embrace this hope as his life's endeavour.

But we should never be too complacent in reading the signs. This same Summer has seen us say farewell to Marc Voase. Many will remember fondly Marc's warm and friendly presence here. Marc considered life vows but has decided to leave after 9 years to pursue ordination and a curacy, hopefully in



Br Patrick's profession

the Diocese of Leeds. He resumes his studies at Cranmer Hall, beginning with a two-month placement at the Beda College, Rome. We miss him, but can see that this is important for him.

And to our consternation and puzzlement – and his own – Fr Peter Allan has also now withdrawn from CR, after more than 40 years as a brother, including years as Prior of the Community and Precentor, and as Principal of the College of the Resurrection. You will know that Peter retired from his long-term role in the College in 2019, and took up a new and restorative challenge as house-for-duty priest in rural Shropshire, while maintaining his works as a CR brother. The solitude has proved an unexpected consolation, even though parish life is not exactly quiet. At the same time Peter has been able to give thought to wider questions of faith which have arisen through his years of service and teaching others to serve, and to ask questions about how we should understand how God's love addresses the radical questions that have emerged for human beings in the past half-century. For Peter this has required him to leave behind the known and venture into the unknown. Hence the puzzlement; neither he nor any of us know where this will lead. But he goes, strong in faith and with our continuing love and prayers.

So, a Summer of encouragement or of discouragement? Perhaps it is a renewed invitation to us as brothers and all who pray with us to place our faith for the future in God. It is not ours to call. And in drawing more deeply on faith we have also been given the example of men who have left their familiar ways of life and chosen to test God's call to a life in CR: Fr James Baker came to live with us as a postulant in August. We are expecting another postulant in November and, as the monastic taster week in July showed, there are several others asking whether this monastic way is what God has in store for them. In the meantime we continue to do what is set before us. We are welcoming returning and new students to the College. The College has grown this year, which is very good news. Among the 17-strong student body there are women and men, and ordinands who are differently abled, of varying ethnicities and churchmanships, but one praying community seeking to serve God.

As I write, our Companions are staying in the Retreat House immersed in a richly devised study week on the Arts. And four of the brethren have recently returned from Germany and our companion Community of St Matthias. The operations at Mirfield have gained a strong new impetus from the recent appointment of Fr Nigel Wright as director, who is an experienced parish priest, a highly qualified accountant and businessman, and a member of the Society of the Resurrection. Please say hello to him when you come – he'll be

glad to know what it is you appreciate about coming to stay. Pray for us, as we pray for you, not for success, but to be faithful to the God who calls, us that His will may be done.

Oswin CR

Learning to “be the change” with the Coat of Hopes

When a problem arises, we naturally ask “why is this happening?”, or perhaps “why is this happening to me/us?” and that suggests that the problem has purpose – one purpose being that we should address its cause, and another a deeper question of seeking its meaning in our story. And this is how I have thought about the Climate and Ecological Emergency – why is this happening? The physical answer is: an excess of CO2 emissions released into the atmosphere at a rate that creates global heating and destabilises our climate, and pollution and habitat destruction on a scale that lead to mass extinction. And why is this happening? Most simply – it's the way we (humans) are living. So, then - “why are we living like this?” And that is an existential question, as well as a question about history (how this way of living has come about). Then I think again – what could this problem possibly offer us? What learning could it bring? Does this collective problem, that faces everyone on Earth – every creature including all humans – have a purpose? How do we recognise that what we do, and how we live, has an impact on all life on Earth? What is my part to play?



So, what has all this got to do with a wandering patchwork coat? The *Coat of Hopes* is a patchwork coat that all are invited to wear. A coat that is coming into being, worn on a pilgrimage through Britain on foot (1200 miles and counting). It is an evolving, community-created, wearable artwork in progress – gathering into itself sewn blanket patches to carry people's griefs and hopes for the places where they live

in the face of climate and ecological breakdown. It is the beginning of the answer that came when I asked “what is my part to play?” – it is the means by which I continue to ask that question and by which I share that question with others. The Coat of Hopes is a coat which walks with a song! A song that says, “Ask me where I'm going. Ask me what is my purpose”. So let's ask these questions of the Coat. Let us seek answers reflecting on the story so far...

Shall I start at the end of the beginning? – outside the gates of COP 26, the UN climate summit in Glasgow in November 2021. That was the destination of the original pilgrimage on which the Coat came into being – nine weeks' wearing and walking from Newhaven on the South coast of England. During that walk the Coat went from being completely blank to consisting of around 600 unique contributed blanket patches. Stitching-stops happened once or twice a week, to sew the collected patches on/in to the Coat, with seven women sewing all night in the basement of St George's Tron Church in central Glasgow, to attach the remaining patches to the Coat for the morning of the summit opening. One pilgrim described that moment as a transfiguration – from a pilgrim coat to a regal garment requiring train bearers. Each day of the conference the Coat was worn, and walked in procession – drum, standard, Coat, train bearers, pilgrims – from the centre of Glasgow to the turnstiles where international delegates entered the talks. Daily, there I loudly declared our invitation: to wear the Coat as an act of communion with all life, and an indication of willingness to accept the weight of responsibility at that time, supported by the warmth of the love with which the Coat was made. And many delegates did join the 700 plus people who had worn the Coat on its way north. Some wept, some danced, others stood reflecting as we sang the song again and again. I see that time now as the Coat coming to adulthood, it had grown to its full size, it had found a way of life. But in the weeks that followed I became aware that its work was not done: those delegates did not have it in their power to make happen the great turning that our problem demanded. Who then? Only everyone. And so, with a change in the “Coat Song” from a first verse that started “Ever northward to Glasgow”, to a new first verse whose first line changes daily with ever-new destinations, and states “in truth my

destination is each person that I meet”: pilgrims gathered again where the gates of COP 26 had once stood, to launch the Coat on a perpetual pilgrimage towards the end of the Climate and Ecological Emergency. It is this walk that brought the Coat to the House of the Resurrection, on its way from Edinburgh to Norwich.

These are some answers to the question “where are you going?” Today (as I write) the Coat is walking to Southwell, to stop over on the way from Lincoln to Nottingham; each person it meets along the way is also its destination, in the direction of travel, which is towards each committing ourselves to being part of the inner and outer change that is needed in the restorative work to counter this emergency we face. That must be the point where direction and purpose meet. So, what is the purpose of the Coat of Hopes and how does it work?

The purpose of the Coat is multifaceted from interrupting people in the flow of their everyday life to carrying in its fabric the stories of people and places at this time. Its purpose is endlessly emerging as I recommit myself again and again to keep it walking, working, growing. Long before there was a physical coat there was the idea of the Coat, expressed in an invitation (which you can read or listen to here <https://www.coatofhopes.uk/invitation>). It was this vision

which drew others into the making of the Coat; it says “I want to make you a coat...so you can wear the promise that we all belong together”, “but I can't do this alone”. As I read this back now I see I was already proposing that the answer to the question about what climate and ecological breakdown can offer us is the realisation of our connectedness. But it is only in the challenge of the journey, of the process of making this Coat “so you can wear the promise that we all belong together” that you begin to see how impossible it is to make such a Coat. Even as group after



group of pilgrims gather and walk the Coat, hosted with diverse and heart-warming generosity night after night by all sorts of people, communities and churches, we pass so many who cannot meet us – people who are busy, people who are frightened, people who think we have something to sell or an agenda to push. When you walk with the Coat, you commit to walking open, and that means there are many authentic meetings with strangers; there are also many rejections which must be accepted with love. And you witness all the things you feel that you can't change – the boarded up yet still occupied houses of Horden (ex-mining town in county Durham), the deep grief and rage at a colonial past and racist present among people of colour at the Unity Hub in Halifax, the Cathedrals that welcome the Coat pilgrims as part of their job for the time the schedule allows. How tired you sometimes feel with holding your heart open, with holding the Coat open with its invitation both gentle and tough. And then, when you let go and accept that you can't do it, you find a new way of being for a time, where the work happens not through your own energy. Then the joy and gratitude at every little offering – somebody willing to meet your eye kindly – is absolute.

The purpose of this work is to change the world! And that change only really begins when you let go of yourself. Then the world is changed, (only a tiny bit, but still it's a start). The purpose of the Coat is to offer a moment for turning, a moment of presence and reflection to person after person in the space of time given them by the singing of the song, or as they walk with the weight and wonder why they would do such a thing. The purpose of the Coat is to remind its wearer that they are part of history, and if you are part of history then what you do matters. To remind them that they have choices (however small) and how they make these choices is forming the world as we know it. This work reminds me - as a pilgrim and a servant of the Coat's purpose, that nothing is more joyful than working from a place of love, walking forward with a song that asks you to ask questions, and knowing that the solution grows in the process of walking with the problem. Nothing more real than meeting others where they are and sharing the walk.

Barbara Keal

Guided by Swans

Echoes and Reflections from Selby Abbey

Text and images from a video made by members of Selby & District u3a

In July the Community had a day out as guests of Selby Abbey, a medieval monastery whose church survived in part-use until it was eventually saved by the townsfolk in 1618 to become their parish church. The story is that Benedict, a monk from Auxerre in France, experienced a vision by God in 1069 where he was called by St Germain, the local saint, to start a new monastery at “Selebiae”. In his vision he was told the site would be marked by the presence of three swans. Benedict implanted a relic of St Germain in his arm to guide him on his journey, which led him up various false trails, until he came upon a bend in the river Ouse and saw three swans land on the river: it was here he must found his monastery. Three swans have been on the Abbey Arms ever since.



Benediction: a monologue

'As the bell tolls midnight, I rise from sleep
and kneel on matted straw beside my bed
to pray the holy office of Matins,
giving thanks to God for this dawning day.

My hermitage in Selebaie is home,
a simple place to rest my weary bones,
a long way from my brethren in Auxerre.

But here is the promise of community,
where tracks are trampled and rivers converge,
an anchorage for pilgrims, nesting-place
for swans that inspired blessed St Germain
and guided my vision to build God's church.

My prayers completed, I lie down again,
and sink into sleep with what dreams may come,
a few hours given entirely to God,
an empty space to store holy wisdom.

My body wakes me in time for Lauds and Prime,
then gratefully receives a breaking fast,
oatcakes and honey, food fit for a king,
placed at my threshold by a faithful friend.

I eat and then pray, paying attention
to the needs of people who live nearby,
the local farmers, masons and weavers,
those who willingly respond to my cause,
trusting the truth of a vision of swans,
laying foundations of an abbey church,
a building they will never see complete,
yet committing their time, their skills, their faith.

I pray for their strength, their freedom from plague.

I pray for the peaceful passing of life,
the purposeful spending of days and years,
with no hours wasted, no kindness withheld.

At Terce, the third hour of my day, I move
from my cell to the oak-tree's sheltering,
where I read the Psalms and lives of the saints,
words for the soul, spiritual nourishment.

Like bread and fishes that fed five thousand,
or a swan feeding its cygnets, I cast
holy scripture, like bread upon water,

feeding my people here in Selebaie.
Approaching noon and preparing for Mass,
the relic embedded in my left arm
begins to throb and burn with searing heat,
a sign that healing may be needed now.
I stand so the sick can come close to me
and kiss this precious piece of St Germain.
I stretch my aching arms around the oak,
seeking strength from its sap to ease the pain
that God asks me to endure, absorbing
the agony of grieving hearts and minds
in those who beg for remedy or cure.
The wound that holds the relic swells, and leaks
foul puss and blood, bodily fluids
that must be expelled, like sins, before the
miracle of healing can be received.
I am wracked in pain, leaning on the tree,
begging forgiveness for my mortal faults.
My legs give way and I fall to the ground,
tearing at the sleeve of my rough habit
to expose the wound to some gentle air,
now doubting my part in St Germain's plan,
praying, like Christ, that this torture will pass.
I hear a hand-bell calling me to Mass,
but cannot crawl to the table of God.
I am done. I am spent, sanctity drained.
I am mortal and must to dust return.
But what is this soft lapping at my arm,
a gentle wiping of my poisoned wound?
A woman, heavy with child, is bathing
the infection with clean water and tears,
a mixture like the balm of Gilead
that soothes as it heals and frees me from pain.
Kissing the relic, drying with swansdown,
she plucks white feathers from her rippling cloak,
and makes with spittle a downy poultice
to cover my arm like a swaddling-band.
I sleep soundly through Sext, Nones and Vespers,
waking for Compline in my hermit's cell.
My arm rests in its bandage of feathers.

I reach for my breviary and see that,
between its pages, are three pure white quills,
gifts from the wide wings of Selebaie swans,
an invitation to record this dream.'

Maggie Jackson

A tribute to Fr Silvanus Berry CR

September 8th 2024 is the centenary of the birth of Fr Silvanus Berry, original name Graham Renwick Berry, Superior of CR from 1987 to 1998. He was one of three New Zealanders to have made a permanent home in CR; the others were Jack Guinness and Kingston Erson. Renwick is the name of a town on New Zealand's South Island with which his family had associations. Graham (later Silvanus) was born in Foxton, in the North Island, to Henry James Berry and his wife Ivy Myrtle née Collyer. The family, as de Berry, were French settlers in New Zealand in the 19th Century. Henry and Ivy had five children, one of whom died in infancy. The eldest, who was born in 1918, was given forenames Hector Paul Silvanus (or possibly Sylvanus).



I do not know where Graham went to school. I have found online a record of his having passed the NZ Public Service Entrance Exam in January 1940. That was of course in the early days of WW2, and as soon as he was old enough he joined the RNZAF. That time was spent in the Pacific. I could not possibly improve upon the account of that by Rev John Butler in the obituary of Graham/Silvanus in the Quarterly. On demobilisation Graham trained as a teacher. He taught at Hereworth School on the North Island of NZ for a period, where he became firm friends with Timothy Raphael, ultimately Archdeacon of Middlesex. There was a scheme whereby those with a teaching diploma could do extra credits and push that up to a University of New

Zealand BA. Graham/Silvanus availed himself of that, and there is online a record of his having graduated in 1954. He was confirmed in Christchurch, in the South Island, by Bishop Campbell West-Watson.

Graham/Silvanus took up mountaineering as a hobby, and it became much more than that. He was part of a group who went to Greenland to scale the mountains and provide information for cartographers. He also took part in an expedition to the Antarctic, something else that John Butler records in the obituary. In 1955 a book (M.Marret, *Seven Men Amongst the Penguins*, Kimber, London, 1955) was published, in which a journey by seven New Zealanders to the Antarctic to establish a base there is described. I once got hold of a copy, and was a tad disappointed to learn that Graham was not one of the 'seven men'. I think it is a reasonable conjecture that he was one of the group who followed them there to continue the mission.

Timothy Raphael travelled to Mirfield to train for ordination at the Hostel and College. Graham found himself in England on the way back to NZ from the Greenland expedition referred to, and paid Timothy a social call at Mirfield. Graham remained back in NZ only for a short time before coming to England again, arriving by boat in the month of his 30th birthday. He obtained a teaching post in South London. Graham made frequent visits to Mirfield to see Timothy, and eventually decided to give it a go himself. He did not have to go to the Hostel as he already had a BA from NZ. He enrolled at the College in 1955, when Hugh Bishop was Principal and Godfrey Pawson Vice-Principal. Hugh Bishop made Graham Senior Student for the college year 1956-57. Anthony (Aidan) Mayoss was an exact contemporary of his.

Graham was ordained by Bishop Montgomery-Campbell of London to a title at St Cuthbert's Philbeach Gardens, where he remained until 1962, when he came to CR as a postulant. Shortly before that decision was made he had a serious illness necessitating surgery. Although there was no CR brother with first name Graham at that time, he was required to take another name so as to avoid confusion with Fr Nicholas Graham and Fr Jonathan Graham. He chose Silvanus, the name of one of his brothers in NZ who had died, and whose memory he treasured.

Silvanus was very articulate, and his outlook and interests were wide. He bore the name of an illustrious NZ family. He had a BA (at a time when only a small percentage of the population went to university), a distinguished war record and fame as an explorer. It is not being fanciful to suggest that all of this would

have made him a strong candidate for election to the NZ Parliament. Instead, he became Superior of Mirfield!

In *The Nun's Story* with Audrey Hepburn and Peter Finch, there is a profession scene where the newly admitted sisters undertake to try to banish memories of life before entering the convent. Later in the movie a nun starts to recount something from before her entry to the convent and stops in the middle of a sentence when she remembers that that was not allowed. When Thomas Merton OCSO was given permission to travel from his monastery at Gethsemani to attend some event or other in New York, it was on the strict understanding that he did not make contact with any of his friends there from pre-Gethsemani days.

CR is not, and never was, like that. Brethren talked as much or as little as they liked about their pre-CR lives, which they were not expected to deny. Moreover, many had been students at the Hostel and College, and therefore in the CR circle several years before becoming novices. The matter of continuity, or lack of it, between pre- and post-profession life is a delicate one, more so if a change of name is involved. Silvanus Berry certainly had a remarkable pre-CR life. Someone once said to him that in CR he was like a 'caged bird'. I was a student at the Hostel under Silvanus for quite a few years, and I recall that in mealtime conversation references to his youth and early manhood in NZ were few. From Leeds I went to live in Australia, and would find myself across in NZ every couple of years or so. When on visits back to England and after my eventual repatriation to the UK I went to see Silvanus at Mirfield or in London, he seemed happy enough to talk about NZ. I am fairly sure that he always travelled on a NZ passport. He made only one trip back to NZ, in 1975 during a furlough from CR. The first part was spent with friends from Philbeach Gardens. He stayed in touch with several members of the congregation there, including Bridget Mellor, who would come to Leeds about once a year to see Silvanus when he was Warden of the Hostel. She was a 'society person', and would not have been the only such in the congregation at St Cuthbert's. In 1963, by which time Graham/Silvanus was in the novitiate at Mirfield, Bridget was imprisoned in South Africa for ten days for allegedly attempting to help an African youth across the border to Bechuanaland (now Botswana).

Silvanus's obvious gifts were recognised in his award of the Cross of St Augustine, which according to Wikipedia is 'the second highest international award for service within Anglicanism'. Otherwise, Silvanus tended to shy away

from recognition. I think that he was the only Superior of CR not to have had an entry in *Who's Who*, and that must have been his choice. (Was that really quite fair on the Community? For the Superior to be in *Who's Who* is an 'esteem metric' for CR. Silvanus probably did not see it that way.) It is possible to take modesty and self-effacement too far. I recall that when a student at the Hostel asked Silvanus whether history was 'one of his subjects' he replied that he 'hadn't got any subjects'. He had an English-Psychology major from NZ as well as his theological training at Mirfield. He read the quality newspapers voraciously. To that must be added the knowledge and experience gained from his varied and adventurous life. For example, he'd have made a superb instructor in orienteering. He had plenty of 'subjects', even if not all of them were acquired in a conventional way.

I took a day off from my work at the University of Aberdeen to be at Silvanus's funeral in 2000. Timothy Raphael and I were both a little disappointed that there was not a eulogy. Timothy, whose former London curate Antony Grant was in the congregation, would have been the obvious person to give it. I will conclude with a recollection of Silvanus from the time interval (about three years) between his leaving the Hostel and my going to Australia. I went to see him at Mirfield in an Austin car I had at the time. As I was getting into it to prepare to depart he recited the following.

*If you go for a ride in an Austin
You're likely to find it exhaustin'
You can get in the seat with your legs and your feet
But the rest of you has to be forced in.*

The pre-war Austin 7, a.k.a. the Baby Austin, was exported to NZ. I daresay the lines were composed with reference to that. Silvanus never sought a driving licence in the UK. I don't know whether he had one previously in NZ.

Clifford Jones
Reader Emeritus in the University of Aberdeen

St Paul for Anglo-Catholics: Apostle, Evangelist, Mystic

Second of a 3-part series based on talks to the 'Mirfield Gathering' in May 2024

Part 2: Evangelist

1. *Militant grace? The Apocalyptic Paul*

In this second section I would like to speak a bit more about St Paul the Evangelist. By this I don't mean so much Paul's church-planting tactics and missionary travels but his Gospel. I think Paul's abiding power and greatness consists in his giving us such a rich, deep but also cutting-edge interpretation of the Gospel of Christ. Every text in the New Testament is of course such an interpretation, whether it is the careful putting together of a narrative by the Synoptic Gospels, the symbolic world and language of John or Luke's salvation history.

We have already said that Paul has a radical notion of grace, which is not so much about a gentle healing process but rather a divine force hitting this world like a meteorite. It certainly hit Paul with a vengeance! He is usually quite mute about his own conversion or calling story, but in Philippians 3:4-11 he becomes a bit more outspoken when he relates all the impeccable credentials he had as a law-abiding Jew, indeed as a Pharisee. As Pauline scholars such as Kirster Stendahl have pointed out some decades ago, there is not a hint of a guilty, tormented conscience here. Paul felt good about himself – insofar as somebody can be righteous before God through keeping the law, he made it! So, what change did meeting Christ bring about? Well, it strangely did not improve his life, to make it even more fulfilling, along the lines where the Gospel is sometimes presented as a kind of missing puzzle-piece, a final enhancement and refinement of life. In contrast for Paul the Gospel kind of ruined everything Paul held dear. It's not so much that he gives it up – he rather goes for a radical re-assessment of his privileges and credentials. In the light of Christ he says that they are nothing more than 'dirt', he puts them on the 'loss' column of his balance sheet (3:8). But why, we wonder? I think the deeper reason may lie in Paul's own experience: when he was at his best, a law-abiding Jew, a zealous Pharisee, he was also at his worst, not understanding what God had done in Jesus and persecuting the church of God (3:6). I think this experience shook Paul to the core. After this he could never see grace as a

gentle regime of healing potions and bandages again; to him grace was God's power breaking into this 'evil age' as he calls it in Galatians (1:4). It was what brought him down before it raised him up. But the raising-up is important. Paul says he counted gain as loss 'in order to gain Christ and to be found in him' (3: 8-9). It is very important to pay attention to this 'in-order-that' when Paul speaks with an edge, when he is in his radical mood. Paul does not wish to wallow in human sin and misery for its own sake; he rather wants to show how God's revelation in Jesus Christ reaches into the depths of human misery and sin: It embraces those who have nothing for show and shakes up those who think they are fine. There is a very influential and exciting strand in contemporary Pauline theology (very much powered by Protestant theologians) which is called 'the apocalyptic Paul'. This scholarly approach tries to understand Paul against the background of apocalyptic theology, which existed in many forms in Judaism before and after Paul. In a nutshell apocalyptic theology thinks in two ages, the present age and the age to come. We also find this idea in the gospels. The present age is usually seen as utterly dark, beyond redemption, and often engaged in persecution of the faithful. God's final saving outreach will come from the outside, after present systems, societies and philosophies have exhausted themselves. There will be a completely new heaven and a new earth, not just a bit of repair work, and for this purpose the old world must go first. Sometimes we find the idea that the world will be destroyed in a fire-ball or something similar. Unlike some of these writings, Paul does not speculate about the end or give much attention to fireballs (he is more in favour of sounding trumpets), but he very much thinks that salvation comes from the outside, from the future, from the end of time if you like, invading this present world and creation, showing it up as a spent force and bringing in the new. We could call this 'militant grace', to borrow the title of a book by Phil Ziegler, Professor at the Centre for Protestant Theology in Aberdeen. However, this final launch of God's salvation has already been inaugurated according to Paul – in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Believers now live in two overlapping time-zones, the old and the new, with all the tensions and longings this produces. But how is this going to inform our pastoral labours and our own discipleship? This brings me to my second point:

2. *'Go figure!' God's paradoxical revelation*

Apocalypse, or 'revelation', is at the heart of Paul's theology. Remember how he sums up his conversion in Galatians 1:16: 'Then God revealed his Son in me'. It is a revelation, not something you can figure out from observing nature or studying creation, or from learning wisdom from the best philosophers. In 1

and 2 Corinthians Paul uses a very different vocabulary from Galatians and Romans. There is no talk about 'justification by faith alone', and the law makes only a brief appearance. Instead he engages a church which also felt very good about itself, just like Paul felt good about himself as a Pharisee. These Corinthian Christians are very much into spiritual gifts, into signs and miracles, speaking in tongues and what have you – the full range of charismatic phenomena really. And once again Paul is such a kill-joy, he is just no feel-good apostle, though he definitely is a charismatic himself. He takes that church on with a similar radical attitude as he took on the Galatians who were seeking circumcision, though his tone is kinder this time. 'Listen', he says. 'The Gospel is simply not a pathway to spiritual enlightenment and to spiritual power for individuals. You can see that clearly from the way God has revealed himself to the world: In a crucified man!'. That's where we see God's power and God's wisdom according to Paul: 'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom – but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block for Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1: 22-24). Again, you could say that this revelation has something destructive. Because the world, just like Paul, could not find God in the best their cultures had on offer – be it the holy Torah or the choice wisdom of Greek philosophy – and because of that, God was going to bring it down and make it look stupid. Again, this can be moderately disturbing – is there nothing good and useful to be found in all the world and creation we might wonder? I have already hinted at how the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians seek to redress the balance. But there is something more affirming in this deeply paradoxical revelation of God. It means that God plants his banner of salvation right in the heartland of sin. God plants his banner of hope at the epicentre of suffering and death. Sin is outdone by grace, death is swallowed up by life, suffering is overshadowed by glory. For Martin Luther this *theologia crucis* was a life-giving but also challenging insight: God is revealed in God's opposite as you could almost call it – in seeming weakness and seeming foolishness, but with a power stronger than death and sin and



hell. This power, as Paul goes on to explain in 1 Corinthians, is the power of love. It is not a coincidence that the great hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 is part of this letter. But rather than seeing roses and a happy couple, Paul sees a cross. He sees the weakness of God, which is stronger than human power, and the foolishness of God, which is stronger than human wisdom (1 Cor 1:25). If people embark on their Christian discipleship for a spiritual top-up or deeper wisdom, they are likely to become lonely planet solo travellers. It is unsurprising that they meet in circles of 'their kind of people' and it is unsurprising that they all have their own favourite apostle or guru (1 Cor 3: 1-9). 'Knowledge puffs up', says Paul, 'but love builds up' (1 Cor 8:1b); it builds up the body of Christ, not just individuals.

We learn from 2 Corinthians that this revelation of God's power in weakness became an existential insight for Paul himself. In this letter Paul is much more emotional, there is deep grief and anger next to warmer and more hopeful notes. Paul must have come under some form of attack by the Corinthian Christians: they think they are not getting their money's worth because he is not a great public speaker and seems to be bedevilled by some long-term illness, the famous 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7). Paul has to contend with super-apostles, who are much more accomplished, putting on a great show, speaking elegantly and with persuasion (2 Cor 11). Instead of downplaying his bad health and public speaking issues Paul now really goes for the kill – he says that yes, his illness was giving him a hard time, but that it also led him to a new depth of understanding God's grace. Christ himself had spoken to him, saying: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12). And so Paul can boldly say: 'When I am weak I am strong' (12:10b). This is the precise application of God's paradoxical revelation to his own life and existence, I think.

3. Big sin, big grace – Paul and universal hope

By seeing God's outreach in Christ coming in weakness and foolishness, in a very paradoxical shape, Paul unlocks an almost tidal wave of hope. However, in the bright light of grace the shadows of sin and death look very deep, too. In Romans, the only letter written to a church Paul does not know personally, and the letter coming closest to a kind of essay or tract, Paul paints a totally dark picture of humanity, both Gentiles and Jews in chapters 1 –3. There is nobody who does anything good (Rom 3:10ff.). Under the conditions of sin there would be universal condemnation. But Paul does not paint this bleak tableau because he detests human beings. Once again we have to pay attention to the

'in order that'. Paul says in Romans 11:32 that 'God has locked up all into disobedience (meaning Gentiles and Jews) so that he may be merciful to all.' God seems to have surprisingly changed the goal-posts of salvation by placing Jews and Gentiles on the same level (Romans 9). But Paul argues that this was always God's plan and promise, this widening of God's mercy. However, this mercy is not just an indifferent 'waving through' of people by a bored deity. God still cares about right and wrong, about sin and justice. This is why sin has to be marked out for the evil it is, and why Gentile and Jewish sinners have to be held to account, 'locked up' as Paul puts it. But all this only serves as the prelude to God's mercy. I think there is no other writer in the New Testament who pushes as much against the limits of grace and salvation. I think if anybody gives us a vision of universalism, or rather radical universal reconciliation in the New Testament, it is Paul. The man who has a radical and almost shocking view of sin also has a radically wide and big horizon of hope (cf 1 Cor 15: 12-28 or Rom 8:18-24).

The Rev'd Dr Dorothea H Bertschmann
College of the Resurrection



Plainchant Mass and Mirfield get-together

on the first Saturday of the month at 6.30 pm



Join us for Mass sung to chant, with a time of study and fellowship, for friends and supporters of the Community of the Resurrection and all with an interest in monastic music and spirituality.

Dates for 2024 and 2025:

5 Oct | 30 Nov | 4 Jan | 1 Feb | 1 Mar | 5 Apr | 3 May
7 Jun | 5 Jul | 2 Aug | 6 Sep | 4 Oct | 6 Dec

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Reading a book or a screen?

As Academic Librarian at Mirfield, part of my job involves providing a library service to undergraduate and post-graduate students mainly, and to external readers, some of whom are working on their post-doctoral thesis. They all have access to the College and Community Libraries – about 90,000 books, 200 print journals and 12,000+ pamphlets. The students on the Common Awards scheme also have access to online resources: e-books and e-journals.

It may not be obvious, but Libraries have always been at the forefront of technology and early adopters of Information Technology (IT). Trends in e-resource provision at universities has certainly skyrocketed, and Higher Education (HE) educators from varying-sized institutions frequently want to get on board and do the same. Smaller institutions will often ask themselves – what do our distance learners need and can we provide it? How do our current students use the resources, and what are the reasons for their choice of format? Do we have the budgets and IT infrastructure to provide access adequately? The answers to these questions ensures appropriate provision of resources to their students.

In academia, particularly in large and established universities, e-resource provision is huge; spending on the library catalogue and integrated discovery systems can be up to or more than £150,000 and that doesn't include the spend on e-resource platforms which provide access to e-books and e-journals. It is often thought that going all online is cheaper than having libraries with physical books, but it isn't always the case. HE Libraries can't buy and provide access to e-books from Amazon Kindle, where the books are very cheap. HE Libraries have to buy e-books with licences from specialist suppliers, often costing more than print books, or subscribe to platforms like Perlego/Ebsco which provide access to thousands of e-books.

Online resources do have a place and are very useful, especially when a text is set as a core text. One e-book can (if the licence allows) be accessed by many students and this saves space in the Library. E-books can be searched with keywords, text size options and individual chapters can be downloaded. Text to audio is often available too. E-journals are terrific and space-saving. Of course, being able to access these e-resources anywhere is the ultimate benefit.

On the whole, smaller colleges, can't compete with the bigger

universities – particularly in terms of IT infrastructure, budgets and staffing, but can provide the best of both worlds. Understanding the print collections/libraries on site at Mirfield is essential, as well as liaising effectively with tutors to understand use – is it a core text, is it useful pre-reading, is it a secondary source? etc. But equally, it is useful to understand the students' preferences. Yes, we will have a few students who prefer online resources only, and for some but not all Dyslexia students as well, but on the whole our usage statistics at the College of Resurrection speak volumes – **our students still prefer print.** These statistics are echoed by research, where it was found that 92% of students preferred reading printed books. Studies have also found that readers' comprehension is 6 to 8 times better from a physical book than an e-book, primarily because physical books provide an immersive experience, allowing the reader to absorb and recall information more effectively.



College library

The act of holding a book, connecting with the artwork of the cover and appreciating moving through the book visually – all add to the experience of handling an object, which provides information to our brains building a mental picture, thus helping us to remember more of what we have read. The Library itself, where the physical books are kept, should also be valued and provides so much to the student. It was once thought that with the advent of IT, libraries would become obsolete. But integrating IT with the traditional aspects has in fact made academic libraries robust. The Library space is key to intellectual activity, inspiration, conversations with like-minded individuals and discoveries – from serendipity browsing of the shelves among material that may not have been found online, to asking the Librarian – “where is...?” The Library denotes a sense of learning and entering such an environment provides the right

setting.

While it is inevitable that more and more information will be available online, it is still worth remembering that print still has a place in our lives and that it can be good for us to step away from the digital screen now and then; and that it is sometimes crucial for our learning to enter a place of study and to be surrounded by books.

For further reading:

Altamura, L., Vargas, C., & Salmerón, L. (2023). *Do New Forms of Reading Pay Off? A Meta-Analysis on the Relationship between Leisure Digital Reading Habits and Text Comprehension*. *Review of Educational Research*, 0(0).

Artushin, H.R (2024) *The Case for Paper: Books vs. E-Readers. Why a good old-fashioned book is better for your mental health*. *Psychology Today*, Feb, 2024.

Baron, N. S. (2015). *Words onscreen: The fate of reading in a digital world*. Oxford University Press.

Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space. Council on Library and Information Resources Washington, D.C (2005)

Anisha Christison
CR Librarian

‘Spiritual but not religious’ and parish ministry



My visit to Mirfield in August 2024 was part of my ministerial development leave where I wanted to look at individualized religion and how the church should respond. I set up over 20 interviews with leaders mostly in alternative spirituality, but also in Buddhism and Christianity. I attended seven retreats, workshops, and courses, all drawn from this same demographic. Some refer to this trend as 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR), and others refer to it as individualized religion. Yet however it is seen, and however big a social trend it is, there are undoubtedly, in my experience, some very distinct characteristics to it that I learned from. I will briefly summarise them, and point towards what I both learned and am cautious about.

Dynamic and free from structural and institutional constraints.

The independence and freshness of this movement as well as the need to appeal to potential clients in this highly competitive market, means that practitioners have to be creative and offer courses, treatments and practices that are innovative, relevant and have not become stagnant. They have the freedom to do 'religion on the hoof', and believe me, they are! I am cautious that this might at times tip over into leaders becoming idealised or of guru status without the accredited training, accountability and experience that will sustain

it. Yet equally, with the freedom of clients to simply go elsewhere as something different will be on offer 5 minutes away, the freedom to experiment and mix and match is undoubtedly of great appeal.

It's Jesus but not as we know him!

Whilst the figure of God as an omnipotent and omniscient being who decides who lives and who dies simply has too much historical baggage, and indeed false assumptions built into it for many in this movement, I was quite surprised to discover that Jesus is a very popular and indeed acclaimed figure in alternative spirituality. But it is not Jesus as we know him. Jesus is no longer the Son of God, or even the son of man, but a cosmic master, a portal to a greater level of universal consciousness, or a time traveller sent back to teach us the way. Most, if not all of the doctrines and dogmas surrounding Jesus within traditional Christianity have been removed. The specific teachings of the church that try and draw out the dimensions of his life within an overall narrative are done away with and Jesus is seen as much more of a proto-type who manifests universal qualities present within all of humanity. An example of this would be to see him and Mary Magdalene as the yin and yang of divine consciousness, the masculine and feminine aspects of everything.

Get outside!

One of the themes that cropped up time and again was the disconnect from nature and the loss of the natural world. Much contemporary spirituality draws from nature in a multitude of different ways and sees nature as not only part of us, but as our teacher too. As someone aptly put it, 'we need to make the most of it because it won't be with us much longer'. The environmental emergency is creating spiritual practice all of its own, and is perhaps why indigenous religions have been imported so vastly by the west, as their beliefs and practices are interwoven with the very fabric of the natural world. One doesn't have to look very far in Christianity to find a saint, or a text, that sees the fingerprints of God within the natural world. I think we can go a lot further than we are currently doing to tap into these traditions and resources. If you fear lapsing into paganism or animism, try a good read of St. Frances, Hildegard of Bingen, or John Scotus Eriugina, before concluding on just how inextricably linked God and his creation are.

Popular psychology and becoming your true self

There is a considerable emphasis in alternative spirituality on the individual realising their true self and fulfilling their divine destiny. There was much that I thought was helpful here, and it seemed to me that it has undoubtedly helped people with mental health issues, and offers a positive counterbalance to a society that can at times be caustic, and damage people's self-esteem and self-worth.

Coupled with this is the emphasis on personal healing; to become your true self you need to be healed of the trauma, shame, and false expectation that has dogged you to date. In my experience the mental and physical health crisis is one of the factors fuelling this trend, and it made me think of the gospel stories that see healing as one of the major aspects of Jesus' ministry. Social, spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical healing are all there in his ministry, and I thought I might do well to look at my own ministry here with fresh eyes. The incredibly rich resources of the contemplative traditions of the church, and the interpersonal and social skills needed to live in community, are not always at the forefront of what we do. It makes me want to re-examine some of the insights of St. Benedict and Benedictine communities, *Lectio Divina*, *Imaginative Prayer* in the Ignatian tradition, and even praying the rosary. And then there's all the resources needed to simply be part of a living, breathing community.

What can I learn for my Church ministry

To start with, I found that church is not necessarily viewed negatively: many may have started off in church or dropped by a church, and whilst they may not have found what they were looking for, this does not mean they view the church negatively. Some do of course, but I think this would be the minority. However, many people, especially those now identified as Generation Z, are simply not going to sign up to a single, monolithic brand any more, especially the closer it is to institution and historic power. As one Gen Z told me, 'Young people are only too aware that colonialism, capitalism and the environmental emergency are in some ways the children of institutional Christianity'. They are not going to completely align themselves with something that lies at the root of the problems. So where must I direct my attention if this is to be the case?

Offer a wider variety of options on teaching, practices and outlooks

Many churches are doing a fantastic job of providing a rich and varied

programme of events. And this has inspired me. Do I need to get out more? – go outside and use nature as the fifth gospel. Use crafts and play as ways to explore the inner presence of God. Teach about how the body can often be a more reliable spiritual barometer than the mind. Use art, music, literature, film and depth psychology to get people in touch with the mystical side of their being. And many other things besides. I don't think it means letting go of the hard-won teachings of the Christian Faith, yet people interested in church might already have formed some views on Jesus and if they sense that there is a hard line of insistence of certain aspects of doctrine about him or his nature, it might signal that this place is not for them, when it might actually be just right for their next step. The quality and depth of our teachings, practice, wholeness, love and counter-cultural challenge to corruption, inequality and injustice might be more winsome to them and in time deepen their faith.

Ensure spirituality over management

Rather than my priestly ministry being that of an administrator, manager, financial controller, building advisor and marketing consultant, something I'd be no good at anyway, my focus of attention will need to be on having a deep and dynamic spirituality of my own that can be communicated winsomely and alongside spiritual practices and insights that are good for overall mental health, bring about community, and provide a sense that we are loved unconditionally and that our life has a meaning and a purpose.

The need for a strong community

Many of the people I spoke to both formally and informally expressed the idea that community was very important to them. And whilst a characteristic of contemporary spirituality is individual subjective experience, many long for community and express the sense that we as church could offer this. Individualized religion does offer community but in different ways, it is more finely grained and works in networking, relational ways outside of a formed and geographically localised community. The strapline I heard many times, “I am enough”, will need to move in the direction of “we are enough”. They are aware of this and so must I be.

Conclusion

We might be seeing churches close and numbers at alternative events swell, but Christianity has a knack of re-birthing in new ways and new forms of life. To

borrow from Hegel's dialectics, thesis gives way to antithesis, gives way to synthesis. Many ideas and practices within the church have fallen by the wayside and are in the process of being buried. But equally, many wonderful ideas from both within and without the church are being carried over to form part of a new synthesis. My hope is that many of us will take this opportunity to be part of this unfolding drama.

Barry Linney

Anglican priest in the Diocese of Rochester

Is prayer a problem?

When I give talks on prayer I usually begin by asking, “How many of you have problems with prayer?” Usually, a few hands go up rather guiltily. After all, prayer is something every Christian must love doing! Then I put up my own hand. There is a gasp of surprise: even I, priest-monk that I am, have problems with prayer. That is normal. Problems can be a sign we are doing something wrong. They can also be a sign that we are doing everything right! They are always there. We need to listen to them and see what they are saying.



1. The commonest problem is probably distractions. We can't stop thinking about other things. That mustn't surprise us. Our brains are constantly active. We can't switch them off. They will keep on generating words, questions and pictures when we are trying to think of God. That will only stop when we are dead. Sometimes we can use our distractions; sometimes we just ignore them. The Cloud of Unknowing says we should just “look over their shoulder at God.”

2. A bigger problem is the nature of prayer. It is not just chatting away with another human being. We are talking to God. Where is he? What does he look like? We don't know, and we can't know. So for the most part we do just talk and listen and God deals with us through that. But if we want to move on to different places in our prayer, we need to do it differently. We recognize that God is Other. He lives deep within us in a place to which we hardly ever go.

Our prayer needs to go down into that depth. It is a dark place, not hostile darkness, but dark because it is completely unknown. We go into that darkness and find someone waiting. Then usually we just wait, too. Much of prayer is just time spent waiting, trusting that God is there; trusting that God is doing something. Waiting in trust.

3. In the end we find that we do not pray. It is God who prays in us. We are not in control; God is in control. Our whole job as Christians, as people of prayer is to give ourselves completely to God. He is in control. He is in charge. Then, curiously, we find we are completely free. We have become who God wants us to be. That is real prayer.

Would you like to explore this kind of prayer? Fr Charlie and I are doing a weekend on this kind of prayer here from 7th – 9th February: **Be still and know that I am God**. Within a week of advertising it all the places were taken up! Clearly many people want this kind of discussion. By the time you get this CR Review there should be another date with a retreat of the same title. Contact the Guest Office and see if you can book in second time round. We would love to see you here for that.

Nicolas CR

All Christians Are Monks – A short review

'All Christians are Monks', by Fr George CR, was reviewed in the last issue, but Joss Davis, a Computer Science student at York University, has sent these added thoughts:

The first thing I noticed about this book is how well paced it is. The back and forth between illustrative anecdotes and deeper commentary makes absorbing the ideas and messages quite accessible. Reading through the chapters, filled with diverse topics and a wealth of well-travelled experiences, many of the accounts relate almost unexpectedly back to monasticism, in such a way that makes everything written surprisingly relevant to something in a reader's lived experience. While some stories may immediately resonate, I suggest that there is something locally applicable in even the more outlandish ones.

In chapter 6, *Practices*, Guiver analyses one of the most pressing issues for Christianity, in particular, regarding The Hump, as he calls the current lack of interest in religion. The discussion contextually and historically diagnoses the

cause of growing apathy, and I am gratified by the novelty and understanding of the explanation. A great energy and optimism greets this otherwise coarse realism, the reader is not only brought calmly through the problems, but offered some solutions. It could be said that the end of the chapter reads almost like a manifesto, and together with stories from chapter 8 (*Going for effect*), I wonder what an implementation of these themes would look like in various parishes, what concrete difficulties and successes may be realised.

The key part of community, for me, was best explained with the practice of listening. The instruction to listen in Discussions with respect (in chapter 4) can be applied to pretty much everything in all our lives: at work or home, in leadership and in all sorts of negotiations, personal or otherwise. There is a powerful account of the rewards found in following such a discipline as the Rule of St. Benedict, of following through the immediate frustrations of deliberation into a proper consensus, which is very compelling.

There is something in this book for everyone; from guitar playing to swinging a thurible, Guiver provides a refreshing insight into worship and our own motivations behind it. With that in mind, I feel we are better empowered and directed into listening for and discerning God's will for us in each of our own worshipping communities.

Joss Davis

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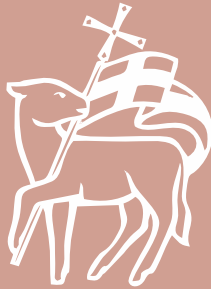
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