



STANBROOK BENEDICTINES

Consolamini, consolamini



10th Anniversary Edition

NO. 15 PENTECOST 2019





Oxford Chaplaincy Retreat, March 2019 (see p. 10)
Photo by D. Anna

Dr Rowan Williams engages with participants at the Study Day on
Creation, 23 March 2019 (see p. 3)
Photo by M. Abbess



Stanbrook Benedictines

No. 15 Pentecost 2019

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Front cover: WILD FLOWER MEADOW eastern approach to Stanbrook
Photo by D. Philippa

Editorial

Welcome to this ‘bumper’ edition of *Stanbrook Benedictines*, marking our tenth anniversary at Wass. There are at least three ways in which the current issue differs from the usual. First of all, it is longer in order to accommodate reflections from the community on the past decade and also includes some guest contributions.

Then, as part of that reflective process, we have invited Mother Abbess Andrea to contribute a ten-year review in words and photographs. This occupies the centre pages of the magazine. M. Abbess has some news to share with you there which we shall leave to her.

Thirdly, you may have noticed the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo on the front cover. We are delighted that our printers, Claremon, have joined this scheme which guarantees that the paper used in *Stanbrook Benedictines* has been responsibly sourced. Claremon also participates in the Woodland Trust’s Carbon Capture Programme which undertakes tree planting to offset the amount of carbon generated in the production and delivery of each paper order. There is always more we can do to help the environment!

On 21 May, the actual anniversary of our arrival north, we held a Mass of Thanksgiving. It was a simple gathering, followed by coffee, attended by some of our neighbours but you were all remembered in our prayers at that service in deep gratitude for the support you have shown the community over the past ten years – and beyond.

We should like to take this opportunity to congratulate our Carmelite sisters at Thicket Priory, near York, who moved into their new monastery on exactly the same day as we moved here in May 2009, and our Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal who are also celebrating their tenth anniversary at Leeds this year. *Ad multos annos!*

We look forward, God willing, to many more years of witnessing to the Risen Christ here on his holy hill in North Yorkshire as, together with all God’s people of good will, we journey to the fullness of the Kingdom.

Tenth Anniversary Study Day, 23 March 2019: Creation with Dr Rowan Williams

An annual Study Day, where the community, oblates and local friends meet to consider a topic of general interest led by an expert, has become a feature of life since we moved to Wass. In this 10th anniversary year we were delighted that Dr Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, agreed to share some thoughts on the Theology of Creation.



After coffee, Mother Abbess opened proceedings with a prayer and welcomed the fifty participants, who included Bishop Hugh Gilbert of Aberdeen and a delegation of our Carmelite sisters from Thicket Priory. Abbess Andrea then gave a power-point presentation entitled, 'A Benedictine Response to Climate Change', first prepared for the 2016 Abbots' Congress in Rome. This outlined both the urgent global need for action to stem climate change and our local efforts at Stanbrook to do what we can via eco-features in the design of the monastery and the practical, green wisdom enshrined in the Rule of St Benedict.

In her introduction to the principal speaker, D. Laurentia explained how hearing (via the internet) Dr Williams deliver the Hulsean Lectures in 2016, '*Christ: the Logic of Creation*', had prompted the idea for the Study Day at Stanbrook. The lectures may be heard at <https://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/2154437>

Dr Williams began the morning talk by summarizing the nub of his book *Christ the Heart of Creation* (Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-1-4729-4554-9), namely that between God and creation there is an infinite distance; that God who is infinite is totally 'other' in respect to the finite world and therefore not at all in competition with it. This insight, not unknown in the Fathers of the Church, he attributed more recently to the theologian Austin Farrer (1904-1968).

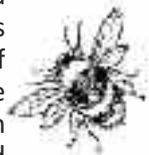
Creation, taught Thomas Aquinas, is not a process with an end product but rather a relation between the absolute freedom of the Giver and the effects of the gift. Creation represents God's unbounded imagination, freely and gratuitously expressed in the world specifically in the Incarnation of Christ, the Eternal Word who became fully human while remaining fully divine. God's 'Let there be...' (Genesis 1, 3) continues in the eternal now of 'today' precisely through the eternal Christ who is the heart of creation, the one who bridges the infinite distance between infinite and finite, Creator and

creation. So how and what we think about Christology shapes how and what we think about creation and vice versa.

Dr Williams then outlined some of the implications of the above. First of all, he suggested, the fundamental response of the human being as a finite creature to the infinite, creating God has to be **gratitude**: we were reminded that 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'. In rendering thanks to God we are acting most humanly, fully in line with our nature.

Secondly, our finitude gives us a proper sense of our limits. While this is sobering – we are not infinite – it is also liberating for it teaches us that we do not have to be God! To ignore our limitations and the limitations of the planet, as sadly our consumer culture does most of the time, is to live in an illusory way.

Dr Williams went on to make illuminating use of St Paul's metaphor of believers making up the Body of Christ and in which each of us has a unique part to play. From the reality of our state of being limited, flow a convergence and an interdependence within the Body. But there is more, we need, said our speaker, in words that echo the thoughts of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, to extend the logic of our life in the Body of Christ to the logic of our life within the whole created order. In that Body, there are no disposable parts; every atom of the created world has its role in the whole. Our particular place in the global ecosystem as creatures made in the image and likeness of God brings with it the God-like responsibility to care for our fellow creatures and the environment.



At this point reference was made to St Benedict's ethos as outlined in chapters 31 (v. 10) and 32 of his *Rule* and to which M. Abbess had referred earlier in her presentation, namely that all created matter should be treated with the reverence we show to sacred altar vessels. In this vein, mention was made of St John Damascene's famous defence of icons in the iconoclastic controversy of the 8-9th centuries: 'I shall not cease to venerate matter through which my salvation was accomplished' (*On the Divine Images*, I. 16).

Before the lively first questions session, chaired by Fr Chris Jackson (Oblate), Dr Williams threw out a question which invited an imaginative response. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 29-37) it is the one who saved the injured victim's life who was considered neighbour. Given that we draw life from our natural environment, can we see the natural world, to some extent, as our 'neighbour'?

Midday Office allowed participants to praise the Creator while drinking in the beauty of creation visible both through the tall windows of the abbey church and in the wooden and stone fabric of the church itself, bathed in spring light, while the shared lunch which followed allowed us to enjoy fellowship with each other.

Two linked themes from the afternoon session stand out for any Benedictine: stability and hospitality. Dr Williams reminded us that the word 'ecology' is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning 'house' or 'home'. Just as our capacity to extend hospitality in the traditional sense depends on our being at home with ourselves and having somewhere stable to live [generally – surely many have been warmly welcomed into their fellowship by homeless people], so our care for the environment may be seen as an extension of hospitality to the whole earth and its inhabitants. So much of today's culture is *inhospitable*, marked by people experiencing uprooted-ness and a sense of disconnect between themselves, other people and the earth. And, of course, human-induced landscape destruction through insensitive exploitation of natural resources and climate change are rendering vast tracts of the planet inhospitable to life.

It was, however, a key point of the Study Day that our efforts to act in harmony with creation should be more than crisis-driven; they should stem rather from recovering and living out of our deepest God-given nature. Martin Luther is said to have said his reaction to knowing that the earth would cease to exist on the morrow would be to plant a tree today. And this would be a fitting, hopeful, loving thing to do which would reflect something of the Divine gratuitousness in creating.

The second questions session, chaired by D. Anna, was as lively as the first. After D. Philippa had offered a response to the talks, M. Abbess concluded the formal part of the Study Day with thanks and a prayer, then informal conversations continued over a delicious, but suitably Lenten, tea.

In conclusion

Alas, there is no space to expand much further on the riches of the day, e. g. on the relevance to the ecological debate of the contemporary crisis of reason, a deep concern of Pope Benedict XVI's. One point from the morning session will have to suffice to draw things together. Dr Williams suggested that while classical theology tells us much about the relationship of God and creation including humanity, we can also see this relationship embodied in individual lives characterised by a high degree of attentiveness to the natural world and how it works – one could call it 'contemplation'. Think of a St Francis, or a Mendel. Coupled with that reverence and care mentioned

above, such an attitude prompts us to work with the grain of nature rather than against it. This attitude of attentiveness is something we can each try to cultivate and which will liberate us to see the world ever more clearly as it is. Ultimately, this can lead to the contemplation of the God who longs for the company of each one of us. I like to think that perhaps something like this lies at the heart of St Benedict's vision, shortly before he died, of the whole earth gathered up in a single ray of light (St Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Bk II, 35) and was the culmination of his life of attentively seeking God on this earth.

This Study Day will, I'm sure, abide in our hearts and minds long after our tenth anniversary at Wass. It remains only to express our deepest gratitude to Dr Rowan Williams for helping us to extend those hearts and minds.

Sr Laurentia



Drawings in this article and throughout (except on p.31)
by D. Julian

Thoughts on Creation

‘God makes the world to be *itself*. To have an integrity and completeness and goodness that is – by God’s gift – its own. At the same time, God makes the world to be open to a relation with God’s own infinite life that can enlarge and transfigure the created order without destroying it.

‘The fullness and flourishing of creation is not something that has to be won at the Creator’s expense; the outpouring of God’s life into the world to fulfil the world’s potential for joy and reconciliation does not entail an amputation of the full reality of the world’s life. And all this is summed up in our belief in a Christ who is uninterruptedly living a creaturely, finite life on earth and at the same time living out of the depths of the divine life and uninterruptedly enjoying the relation that eternally subsists between the divine Source or Father and the divine Word or Son.’

Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, p. xiii

“To what are we inviting people when we evangelize?

To become subscribers of our organisation?

Is it not rather an invitation to the NEW CREATION, to that reconstruction of humanity ushered in by the Paschal Mystery?”

Rowan Williams, from the Study Day at Stanbrook 23 March 2019

‘The definition of truth, in my opinion’, writes Gregory of Nyssa (4th C.) ‘is an unerring comprehension of that which is.’



Stanbrook Oblates: a Decade

One of the first things I did on receiving care of the oblates in the autumn of 2009 was to map their distribution. It was no surprise that the result showed a ring of oblates concentrated around Worcester and the Midlands with a scattering throughout the rest of the UK and across the globe. There was one oblate in the North East!

The move north has been a challenge for many of our oblates who are unable to travel long distances or who cannot cope with the demands of staying in the lodges with their steps and steep approaches. But the support we have received from everyone has been terrific and we have managed to remain a united body through prayer, emails, letters, the four annual newsletters and our website. We decided to hold annual meetings from the start, rather than awaiting perfect conditions. Some oblates have been intrepid in visiting from Iona, Perthshire, West Wales, the South Coast of England and many points in between. A silver lining to the move has been that residential meetings have allowed activities like shared lectio to flourish.

From the fidelity of our veteran oblate body new shoots have sprung. There have been eight oblations since we moved to Wass and two affiliations with several people walking alongside us discerning. Some have walked along for a while and decided their path lies elsewhere. Each brings a blessing and hopefully takes one away.

Highlights of the past ten years must include the retreat on St Hildegard of Bingen with Dom Brendan Thomas of Belmont in 2014 to mark our 5th anniversary, the pilgrimage to Rievaulx Abbey in 2018, as well as the stimulating Joint Study Days with the community each year.

We look forward to our tenth anniversary retreat in June which will be led by former Oblate Mistress, Dame Petra.

The map of oblate distribution now looks rather different with a healthy clustering in the North East. We meet regularly for study, prayer and fellowship under the guidance of the Gospel and the Rule of St Benedict. Do get in touch if you are interested. And, as oblation is primarily a spiritual bond, you are not excluded by not living in the NE – our latest oblate lives in Christchurch, New Zealand!

Sr Laurentia

The Way of Benedict: Eight Blessings for Lent by Laurentia Johns OSB is due to be published by SPCK in November this year.

Thoughts for Pentecost



When all our soul's impulses are led by reason like sheep by their shepherd, and so we are living in peace, the truth will shine upon us and its radiance will illuminate the eyes of our soul.

If truth is God and it is also light, two of the holy and sublime epithets by which the Gospel describes the God who manifested himself to us in the flesh, then it follows that a virtuous life will lead us to the knowledge of that light which came down to the level of our human nature.

This light teaches us what we are to do if we are to stand in the rays of the true light...To know that which is, we must purify our minds of assumptions regarding things which are not.

Christ is the real light and the truth coming to us from the bramble bush and the thorns, that is, from the flesh which he took for our sake.

Drawn from 'The Life of Moses' by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395)



Oxford Chaplaincy Retreat, 9-12 March 2019

It was a great delight to welcome a group from the Oxford Chaplaincy for a Lenten retreat. At Stanbrook, Worcester, we had established a regular welcome to a group of c. 6 women from Oxford to experience 48 hours inside the monastery. Here at Wass we don't have the same space within the monastery to offer the same experience until the guest house is completed. It did mean, however, that chaplains, Fr Matthew Power SJ, and Becky Short, could bring both men and women to Wass and use our lodges which provide a good space for a group to be creative and do their own thing.

It is always a privilege to share with those who come to our prayer and liturgy, the first work of a nun. At the end of a busy term, and a not insignificant journey by minibus from Oxford to North Yorkshire, it was impressive that this clearly committed group of Christians joined us for the whole liturgy and were found praying at other times in the abbey church.

There was opportunity for the group to have coffee with the community and for one-to-one sessions for those in the group who had expressed interest. D. Laurentia and I gave a talk each: 'Transformed by the Word' and 'Responding to Lent with Joy' and divided the group for shared lectio. We always enjoy sharing our life with the groups that visit, but it is a special joy when they are so engaged. St Benedict tells us guests often bring a blessing and this group most certainly did!

Sr Josephine

New Church Furniture

At the start of 2018 we commissioned a new presidential chair, two concelebrants' chairs and side tables, for the abbey church (pictured opposite). M. Joanna worked on the design with Geoffrey Taylor-Gell of the Coxwold Cabinet Makers. D. Anna had originally asked them to replace the dark wood on the reading lectern, which had come from Worcester, with a piece of sycamore (more fitting for the new church) which had been given to us by Clare Bernie Reid. Such was the quality of the work on the lectern that we felt confident that this local firm would be able to meet our needs for new church furniture on a larger scale. The new pieces arrived on 31 October 2018. We are delighted both with the level of craftsmanship of Geoffrey and his colleague, Paul Cooper, and the way the new furniture blends harmoniously with the other church fittings.



NEW presidential furniture crafted by Coxwold Cabinet Makers
Photograph by Geoffrey Taylor-Gell



BACK view which shows the harmony in design and materials with the choir stalls. The new pieces were made from sycamore wood left over from the crafting of the stalls.

Inset: UNICORN logo of Coxwold Cabinet Makers

Both photos by D. Julian



D. Agatha on Laetare Sunday at Apley Grange, Harrogate
Photo by Sr Marian



D. Michaela (and Bruno) at Apley Grange, the care home run by the Holy Child Sisters where D. Michaela joined D. Agatha in February 2019.

Photo by D. Josephine

One Monk's Perspective on Stanbrook at Wass

I receive a warm welcome from Sr Gunilla, relieved that I made it through the snow. One of her beautiful woollen vestments is ready, and an air of quiet preparation pervades the church, things done properly but not fussily. The sense of light and peace strikes me again as I enter to the unaccompanied Introit. Sr Michaela contributes her usual, unforgettable commentary to my homily, even adding three cries when the host is elevated. The view opening up to the south brings an inspiring perspective to the thoughtful intercessions, and yet again I feel renewed by this celebration, sealed with coffee and chocolate digestives in one of the parlours afterwards.

The presence of Stanbrook for the last ten years just a few miles up the road has been an unalloyed blessing for Ampleforth. The main contact, of course, is the daily conventual Mass, but the link has brought much more than that. We were invited there for their patronal feast in July, and they came here for Boxing Day, two great days for strengthening our friendship in faith. We have taken groups of girls there on house retreats, day visits, overnight stays, all of which have had a great impact on our students, enriched by the witness of a refreshingly non-male community. Our housemasters and mistresses made a pilgrimage there as part of their annual retreat. Both monasteries have benefitted from their Chilean links, whether that's one of the Manquehue oblates staying several months at Stanbrook, or Ampleforth monks listening to a Scottish lament sung by Mother Abbess around a Patagonian fireside.

More recently we have been blessed with two talks giving a Stanbrook perspective on the Office, which went down very well with what can be rather a jaded and critical audience. The Stanbrook rota is one of the few Ampleforth tasks that is not seen as a burden. We are close enough to be neighbours but distant enough not to be rivals. We look forward to ever closer links that respect our difference but share our perspectives.

Fr Chad Boulton (Ampleforth)

Ten Years On

In 2003 our brief to the architect included the request that our monastery make maximum use of natural light. That wish has been fulfilled beyond our imagining. One of the many advantages of this setting on the edge of the moors, over 700 feet above sea level, is the unique quality of natural light which enfolds the building and flows in through every window and glass cloister.

So-called natural light is God's light. In a great breath of creativity, he called the sun into being; then the moon and the stars. 'And God saw that they were good.' Ten years on, I am learning how to 'lectio' this first gift of the Creator, on which every other gift depends for life and well-being. I now take time to meditate on the mystery of our Creator making new his first creature, as Mother Earth dances gracefully around the sun. Slowly, skylscapes and landscapes emerge from the darkness, at times gloriously colourful, at other times shrouded in fog. However dull and dead it seems, the daylight never fails to come. God's word for each hour of daylight comes gently but clearly, 'I am the light of the world.' **M. Joanna**

I love the radical simplicity of the York Moors landscape under the vast and ever-changing sky. Our first abbess, Catherine Gascoigne, was a Yorkshirewoman and when we arrived in 2009 it was her anniversary, 21 May. Her faith and courage, and the pioneering spirit of our foundresses are expressed in this landscape and are inspirations for a life of prayer.

Sr Petra

For a while, I missed our grounds and gardens in Worcester. But there is much beauty here: the forest and the wide skies which lift the heart.

Sr Hilda

What really struck me, says, **Sr Mary Stephen**, who arrived in Wass almost six years ago from Nigeria, was the beauty of the place – the landscape reminded me of the countryside in 'The Sound of Music'! But it was not simply the landscape, it was the beauty of the light, especially the natural light in the monastery. I had heard that new Stanbrook was designed as a monastery for the 21st century and that is how it seems to me: the simplicity of the building and the quietness of the location certainly help prayer. The whole monastery reminds me of the Easter Vigil exclamation: 'Christ our Light'.

Sr Raphael reflects

As a 21-year old, entering Stanbrook, in Worcestershire in the late 1950s, I found a community of over seventy in number and a novitiate of seven. It was a whole new world and I loved the solemnisation of the liturgy in the church with a marvellous acoustic, and a two manual organ. This was pre Vatican II. The grounds were large with a big apple orchard, a pear orchard and a wild area called 'the dingle' where violets hid in the shade and daffodils of different varieties grew in their hundreds. The pond, the size of a small lake, attracted ducks and carp swam happily.

The idea of leaving was painful, but I knew that the community, now reduced in number to the twenties, was where I wanted to be, and so by coach on that May morning in 2009 we left the 19th century and arrived in time for Vespers in the 21st century up here in North Yorkshire. The essentials of monastic life remain, translated to the different situation. We have been greatly helped by the kindness of the Ampleforth community, a few miles away, and I have found the celebration of Mass by a rota of monks a huge boon.

Inevitably, moving here has coincided with my becoming an octogenarian, with the accompanying symptoms of ageing, and the amenities of a modern building have proved an advantage. Please God, our community will be blessed with new members and find the funds needed to build a monastic library as well as to develop the Guest House. We are his little flock, and we trust in Him.



21 May, 2009 saw old Stanbrook at its most appealing: a lake of bluebells under the beeches, dazzling hawthorn, newly-hatched moorchicks on the pond. After a farewell walk round the enclosure and a wave to human friends, I joined the coach.

The new building looked bleak. But we processed into Vespers; new friends provided supper; we slept in our own beds. A new chapter had begun. It was several years before I could answer an unequivocal YES to the question 'Are you happy here?' **Sr Philippa**

Ten Years On, contd

What I love here is the magnificent show of daffodils in the monastery grounds each spring, like a great alleluia chorus. The daffodils were in bloom when we first visited the site and persuaded me that I might be able to live here. Tokens of God's faithfulness on life's journey, they remind me of Wales, of the delightful wild dingle in Stanbrook, Worcester, and of Christ's glory which we are all called to share and are still moving towards. **Sr Laurentia**

What struck me most on our arrival here were the wonderful skylscapes. There seemed to be so much sky wherever you looked and always different. Also I was taken by the long view from my cell right down the Vale of York.

As our monastic enclosure is not all that walker-friendly, we can take exercise and make our prayer in the adjoining public forest. For me it was, and still is, a great delight to meet the many dogs (with their owners) who also love the forest. It is almost as good as seeing the dogs go wild on the beach in my native Scarborough! **Sr Agnes**

When we moved I had only been at Stanbrook Worcester for just over 2 ½ years, and was still a novice; I received the black veil in July 2009. Because of this change of status, and as I was still in the earlier stages of monastic formation, it is hard to identify any deeper changes occurring solely or mainly on account of the move. What really stands out for me is the gratitude with which we received our newly-built abbey church and moving into it from the chapter house when it was completed in 2015. I think that is the time we began to feel settled in Wass.

As for Yorkshire, I appreciate the light in the building, the stunning views, the ready access to God's creation, my precious cell. In Worcester, I appreciated living in a beautiful building loved and inhabited by so many of our predecessors. **Sr Thérèse**

What I particularly like about living here is the natural beauty of the countryside and the walks in the forest. Even a trip to the dentist is almost a pleasure! **Sr Julian**

Sr Marian reflects

I began visiting Stanbrook in 2011, two years after they arrived in Wass. At the time I had quite a demanding job and, while the main purpose of my visits was vocational discernment, I also came to value Stanbrook as a little 'oasis' where I could recharge and spiritually refocus. The new location on the North York Moors was ideal – set apart from the busy world, yet not so remote as to be inaccessible (just 20 minutes in a taxi from Thirsk station).

I particularly appreciated being able to join the nuns for the Work of God. I had already been saying the Divine Office on my own for several years, but it was at Stanbrook that I first experienced it as the prayer of the Church in its wider cosmic dimension. This was a major factor in my decision to join the community two years later.

Back then, the chapter house was still being used as a temporary chapel, with a Thompson table serving as an altar, and two rows of chairs either side forming a 'choir'. Space was tight, so each Easter the altar and chairs had to be moved to the glass cloisters, where there was more room to celebrate the Triduum liturgy, and more room to seat the guests who liked to attend. Now that we have the new abbey church, it is encouraging to see an increasing number of guests – individuals and groups – come to participate in the Mass and Divine Office throughout the year.

The contemplative life is not, as some people think, a flight from responsibilities for the world, but is very much at the heart of the Church and world. Our daily life of prayer, work and community living is offered for the salvation of the world, even if it remains largely hidden within the monastery enclosure. But here in Wass, Stanbrook is also a welcoming place where people can come and seek God in this beautiful setting, encounter Him in the liturgy, and take something of the Benedictine 'way' back into their work and daily lives.

I greatly admire the community for taking the difficult decision to move, and it is a privilege to begin my monastic life at this new phase in their history.

* * *

It has been wonderful to return to an area I know so well and to experience us as a community being so warmly welcomed. It is a beautiful place to live and I shall never tire of the amazing vistas, watching the mood of the day change with the light and the weather! **Sr Josephine**

We live life forwards, but understand it backwards

How true that is! How many of us could have foreseen twenty years ago what the Stanbrook community would do and live through. Making the decision to move from an iconic place whose name had become synonymous with the community was doing the unthinkable. In the past we had moved because we had been forced to (the French Revolution) or when we knew we were living in temporary homes (Woolton, Abbots Salford) – now it was different: circumstances meant we were the ones making the choice. And there were many moments when each of us must have wondered if we were mad! The low times of trying to find a new monastic home, and especially when we were gazumped! But the Lord had something better in mind – we should have known it.

The preparations for the move – Wednesday afternoons dedicated to clearing out became every day, the sound of parcel tape being used, the cry for more boxes, more bubblewrap – even more time. But D-day approached and came and went, and we survived. At first we were exhausted, emotionally and physically, and that took a long time to get over as a community and individually. There was the joy of exploring the new monastery and countryside – perhaps one of the joys of being here. Rooms with a view! A cell with a big window to see out of, being able to step out on the balcony and survey the wildlife and the view, whatever the weather. I love summer evenings, after supper or Compline, standing on my balcony and ‘surveying my estate’, i.e. my little garden. That is my especial joy. We had a wonderful welcome from local people, both those who already knew us and those who have since become friends. I felt we really established roots when Srs Clare and Maria died and were buried in our new cemetery.

I suppose many of us had ideas of what life here would be like but I don’t think any of us realised the importance of having the Ampleforth community down the road. Their daily presence at Mass, the meals we have shared, the talks and conferences, the support, are a huge blessing. None of us knows what the future holds but we can be sure it is beyond what we can imagine or even hope for. Alleluia!

Sr Benedicta

2009-2019, A Review by Abbess Andrea

In this issue of *Stanbrook Benedictines* we are commemorating the tenth anniversary of our move, on 21 May 2009, from Callow End, Worcester, to Wass in North Yorkshire. As with all anniversaries this provides the opportunity to look back at the past ten years, at the highs and lows of everything that has happened. For me, there has been a double opportunity to reminisce. In July I will come to the end of my twelve-year term as abbess.



I was elected on 25 July 2007, a month before the builders broke ground on Phase I of the monastery. 1997 to 2002 had been years of discernment. In April 2002 we announced that we had decided to move. Thus began a voyage of discovery; we looked at properties from Devon to Cumbria. In November 2004 we bought Crief Farm, Wass. In buying a property with no planning permission we walked in faith, believing that God was overseeing the project!

On the feast of St Benedict's *Transitus*, 21 March 2005, we presented our plans to the North York Moors Planning Committee. There were two hoops to negotiate. First, we had to obtain planning permission and, if granted, the application had to go to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, since our application for a new build was against National Park policy. In September 2005, after much prayer, we were granted permission to build. The next two years were spent putting together detailed drawings for Phase I, since we could not afford to build the whole monastery at once.

When elected, I knew what lay ahead. During the construction of Phase I the community had to clear out the old monastery, move and sell our old monastery.

We had lived at Worcester for 171 years. This meant we had much to sift through, to decide what to take, what to give away or sell, and what was junk (of which there was a huge amount). The help of dear friends Mark Jones and Stephen Wood of Bonhams was invaluable. They made sure we threw away nothing valuable; they also suggested a 'parlour sale', a Stanbrook version of a car boot sale for the 'junk'. Thanks to BBC Midlands Today, who advertised the event, Callow End had its first traffic jam! The sale was a great success. The more valuable items were sold through Bonhams.

Sr Mechtild of Jamberoo Abbey, Australia, who came to help us with moving, was a huge help.

The BBC, radio and television, had asked to record the move. They were present at the parlour sale, the blessing of the foundation stone, the move and our arrival at Wass. Six months later they concluded the TV documentary by asking our initial thoughts on the new home. The Guardian newspaper published *Get thee to a nunnery – just make sure it has an eco loo*.

Probably the most challenging work was to pack the library and archives. Two years before the move, D. Maria and her team catalogued the books on computer and started packing. Half the library went into storage at Buckfast Abbey; we brought the rest to Wass. The archives and church items went to Oscott College, Birmingham.

In early 2009 we had a series of farewell parties – for local Catholics, Anglican and non-Catholic friends, oblates and our families. The final celebration, on the Solemnity of St Benedict, 21 March, was a Mass of Thanksgiving, presided over by Vincent Nichols, then Archbishop of Birmingham. We gave the archdiocese a vestment woven by D. Gunilla as a parting gift.

As the day of our departure came closer, Dame Cecilia and Dame Anne, our two seniors, went into temporary care at Boarbank Hall, Cumbria, to be shielded from the stresses and strains of the move. D. Anna was the forward party. She had gone up to Wass early to prepare for our arrival.

The removal men, Lambs of Worcester, appeared on 12 May to begin packing. It was on this day that the reality of our moving came home to us. Lorries were loaded on 15 May, and at 6 a.m. on 18 May, they left for Wass. There were three teams of removal men: one worked at Worcester, one ferried the furniture and one stayed at Wass for the unpacking.

Our last Vespers in the abbey at Worcester was celebrated on 20 May. Afterwards, we processed to the cemetery singing Psalm 138. I read the prayer of Dame Catherine Gascoigne, our first abbess and a good Yorkshire woman. Significantly, the day of the move, 21 May, is her anniversary. We sang the *Suscipe*, and with holy water I blessed the community's living and dead.

My sister, Clare, wanting to help us in any way possible, provided pizza and beer for our 'last supper.' We met in the refectory for a final de-brief.

Contd on p. 24



Packing up the Thompson tables in Stanbrook, Worcester, May 2009



Building of Phase One of the new monastery at Wass, 2008

Overleaf: COLLAGE of Stanbrook Worcester, Easter 2009

Photos pp. 21-24 by M. Abbess







Stanbrook Wass when we arrived 21 May 2009
Compare this with the same view in 2019 on front cover



Bishop Terence Patrick Drainey of Middlesbrough blessing the new
cemetery at Wass

Everyone was there, including the cat.

Normally, after Compline the grand silence begins, but that night the silence was cancelled! There was too much to do. To complete the packing in time, many worked into the wee hours of the morning.

Everyone was up at 4.00 a.m. After Lauds and Mass, we were ready to leave by 11 a.m. Fr Christopher Calascione (Downside) our chaplain, and some locals and staff waved us off. Senior members of the community went by car.

TV crews and press were at Wass on our arrival. Alan and Lorraine Dale, who had sold us the property on which the monastery was built, and ever-faithful Tony and Anne O'Brien, were there in the refectory with tea and cake. There were also several bouquets of flowers to greet us. Then the community went off to claim their cells and look round the monastery. Supper was provided by our brethren from Ampleforth, while Maaïke Carter kindly made us a cake.

At 6 p.m. we processed into the chapter house to celebrate Vespers – our first formal Office in our new home. This was the high point of the day; after all we had been through we had arrived and were doing what we came to do – to celebrate the Work of God.

Abbot Cuthbert of Ampleforth celebrated the first Mass the next morning. He then blessed the house, every nook and cranny, including the cupboards!

Over the next months we spent time getting to know our neighbours, our surroundings and our new home. One major problem remained: we hadn't sold the old monastery. In 2008, with the credit crunch, the property market had slumped. It took a long two years to find a buyer. Eventually, with the help of faithful friends, Andrew Grant, our agent, and solicitor, David Hallmark, Clarenco put in an offer. By September 2010, the old monastery was sold.

The community, meanwhile, longed for an abbey church. Around 2011 we began preparations to build the east wing, which included the abbey church. The main rooms – cells (bedrooms), refectory, novitiate and work rooms – had been built in Phase I. We used the chapter house at this stage as a temporary chapel. As project manager for Phase II we engaged Richard Cavadino, and over the next few years he was worth his weight in gold, as was Richard Oldfield, appointed by the construction company as the site manager.

Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios remained as architects for Phase II. Peter Clegg and Louise Wray, who had worked on Phase I, were joined by Tara Breen. We engaged QSP Construction as builders. For the interior design of the church we worked with Benedictine liturgists Daniel McCarthy (Atchison, USA) and James Leachman (Ealing Abbey). In July 2012 we launched a fund-raising appeal. There were three patrons: Bishop Terence Patrick Drainey, Bishop of Middlesbrough; Bishop Arthur Roche, then Bishop of Leeds who later became Secretary Archbishop of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; and actress, Patricia Routledge DBE, who had played Dame Laurentia McLachlan in the 2006 production 'The Best of Friends'. We owe a great debt of gratitude to these dear friends, and to all who supported us in building the East Wing.

On 6 February 2014 Bishop Terry blessed the site, cut the first sod and laid the foundation stone. For the next fifteen months the community watched the building grow. We hoped it would be finished in time for us to celebrate Easter 2015 in the new church, but we just missed the target. Nevertheless, we did show our Easter guests the nearly-completed church. On the fourth Sunday of Easter, 26 April 2015, we celebrated the first Mass in the new church. The Ampleforth community and Fr Hugh Sinclair shared the joy of the day. But the greatest day, and the one I would say was the most important, along with the move in 2009, was the Dedication of the Abbey Church on 6 September 2015. Seeing the completion and consecration of our abbey church was, for me, the high point of my years as abbess.

Since completing the church, the community has come to realize we are no longer journeying to Wass; we have arrived. Deo gratias!

[For photographs of the Dedication of the Abbey Church in September 2015, please see our website:

https://www.stanbrookabbey.org.uk/upload/files/JN40870_Stanbrook.pdf]

Dame Catherine Gascoigne (1 March 1600 – 21 May 1676)



First abbess of our community

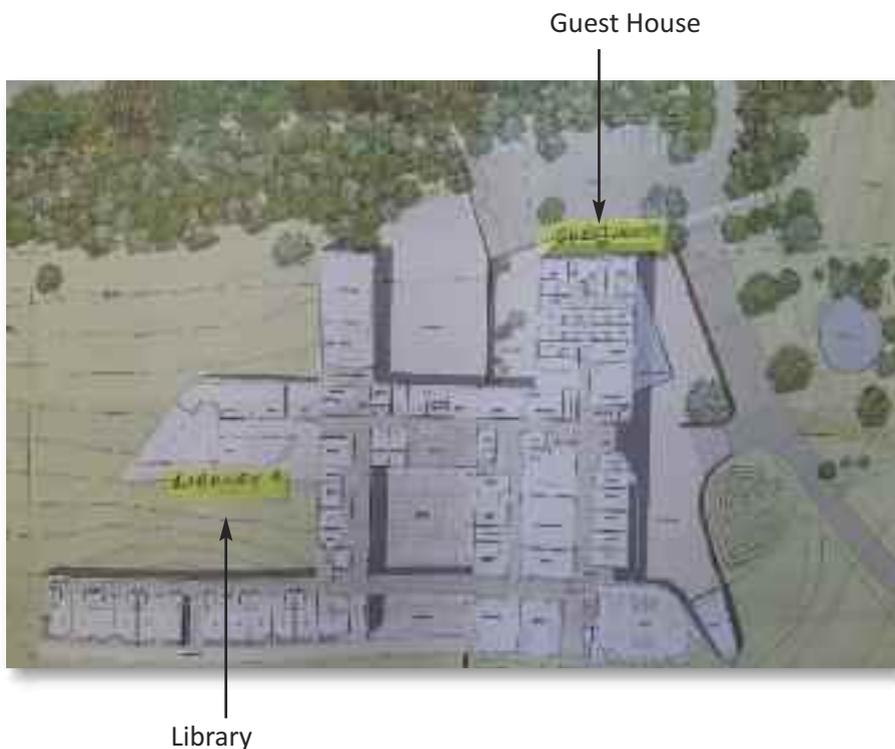
Born into a strong Roman Catholic family in Barnbow, Yorkshire, Catherine Gascoigne was unwavering in her desire to embrace religious life, in which, to use her own words, 'she might the more seriously attend to God alone than if she were among kindred or acquaintance.' After overcoming many obstacles, including via smallpox, a beauty which some thought a barrier to her chosen state, she followed Helen, later Dame Gertrude, More and the other seven young women who had gone into voluntary exile on the continent to undertake the monastic life proscribed in their own country at that time. Catherine joined these at Douai (France) where they were waiting to proceed to Cambrai in Flanders in order to found a Benedictine monastery there. Hers was a quiet, self-effacing but resolute character. She sought God alone and the EBC monk, Father Augustine Baker OSB, taught her to find him. When all abandoned his teaching in the early years of the foundation, she remained loyal for Fr Baker had shown her how to discern God's call to her spirit and nothing would deflect her from that.

At the English Benedictine Congregation's Chapter of 1629, the community of nuns at Cambrai was judged to have been sufficiently trained to be ready to be governed by one of their own number (initially they had been helped by some generous nuns from Brussels). The choice fell upon Dame Catherine who was appointed abbess and, apart from a short time when she was asked to assist another community, continued to be re-elected every four years until her resignation in 1673.

When later Fr Baker's orthodoxy was again called into question, Abbess Catherine staunchly defended his teaching and, in obedience to superiors, wrote a beautiful and succinct summary of her method of prayer which helped to vindicate Fr Baker of all charges. However, 1655 brought a further attempt to confiscate the Baker manuscripts and intimidate the Cambrai community into surrendering them. Abbess Catherine stood firm, refusing to allow the documents out of the house on the grounds that all had been minutely scrutinized and declared free of error at the 1633 General Chapter.

Her watchword, 'God alone', appears today on the Stanbrook page of the *Benedictine Year Book* as an ever-apt description of the monastic quest.

The bulk of this text is taken from the Stanbrook website:
<https://www.stanbrookabbey.org.uk/site.php?id=20>



Plan for the whole monastery at Wass showing projected library and monastic guest house still to be completed

Palestine: some personal experiences

I first became interested in Palestine after hearing a talk by Amal, a Palestinian physiotherapist and one of the Nassar family, about work she does at a children's hospital in Bethlehem. Afterwards she invited me to come and visit her and her large family, most of whom live and work in Bethlehem.

In 1916 when the Ottoman Empire ended, Amal's family bought one hundred acres which was registered during the British mandate (1918-1948) and later developed as an environmental farm which is now known internationally. The state of Israel was founded in 1948, and it gradually began 'encouraging' the Arab Palestinians to leave. This is now known by Palestinians as the *Nakba* or 'catastrophe'.

The Nassars are Christians, some of whom emigrated voluntarily after 1948, but Bishara Nassar began travelling around nearby villages singing songs and teaching Bible stories in the hope that music and stories would encourage fellow Palestinians to stay in their homes. Bishara's children and grandchildren turned their farm (known as the 'Land') into a non-violent peace centre, whose motto is 'We refuse to be Enemies'. They hold summer camps for local school children and teach ways of non-violent resistance. This is managed by Daoud Nassar and they have encouraged International visitors.

The West Bank was annexed by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967, and in the 1970s Israeli settlers began building on hilltops, many surrounding the 'Land'. On 19 May 2014 the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) bulldozed the family's orchard of 1500 fruit trees. This prompted international condemnation from the Presbyterian Church.

It didn't take long for me to accept Amal's invitation and in a few months I found myself inside the walled city of Old Jerusalem where I took a room in the Austrian Hospice. I visited the crowded market, and often noticed men dressed in black with the traditional Jewish attire of black hats or skull caps, and long sideburns, the women mostly in long skirts. Many were praying at the Wailing Wall which separates the great Al Aqsa Mosque, with its golden dome, from the rest of the city. Both Jews and Arabs claim this as a holy place and there were queues of people waiting to enter. This ancient city is separated into three main areas: Jewish, Arab, and Armenian Christian.

From Old Jerusalem I caught a bus to Bethlehem where I was met by Amal's brothers, Daoud and Tony, and taken to the home of Amal and their mother,

Miladi. This is a modest but carefully appointed and decorated flat located within a courtyard on Star Street. The flat became my base where I was always welcome to stay and dry out my occasionally rain-washed clothes and gear.

Soon I was taken to the 'Land' where I had a small room in an old farmhouse with a corrugated iron roof, built to collect rainwater for their well. Drinking water is brought in from the Beit Jala suburb in Bethlehem. Many people come and go; members from Amal's family, visitors, and some volunteers who plant and tend crops: onions, grapes, figs, olives, along with almond, apple and apricot trees. There are a few large caves on the 'Land' with classrooms where visitors learn about traditional farming practices, Palestinian traditions and stories, and the context of wider situations faced by Palestinians. Daoud feels it is important to maintain a strong connection to the 'Land'. In 2018 there was a special celebration of 102 years there.

During July summer camps are held for children from Aida and Dihaisheh refugee camps. Also they hold work camps for local and international participants about every ten days. While I was there three young German men were staying to work and learn, and a group of visitors from the USA was planting onions.

Visitors to the 'Land' sleep in large tents or in some of the caves. Meals are prepared in the farmhouse. Once Mary, another sister, came to visit Amal and Miladi from East Jerusalem, where she teaches Arabic in a school. Fortunately, she can pass through the check point into Bethlehem, which is usually impossible for the rest of the family who live there. A couple of years ago they planned to attend a Palm Sunday service in East Jerusalem but were turned back by the IDF. I had no problem at check points, but Palestinians often waited in long queues to enter.

Amal invited me to visit the children's hospital to see what her work as a physiotherapist involved. Using a large red ball, she was helping Mamoud, a young patient, learn to walk. She told me that many children had to wait so long at the Bethlehem check point that their parents finally gave up and took them home.

While in Bethlehem I visited the busy market and some of the stalls in Manger Square during the olive harvest fair. A co-operative handicraft stall was selling many items carved from local olive wood, including a detailed Nativity scene. Daoud's wife, Jihan, invited me to a meeting of a youth group which meets weekly. The young members were friendly and courteous, but

some spoke English with some difficulty. One of them explained his stylised painting of 'the separation wall which divides people' in Palestine/Israel. Jihan has taught them an Arabic folk dance called the *Debkeh*.

My friends, although Palestinian Arabs, are Lutheran in belief. I find this encouraging in a world which is often divided by religious faiths. They are tolerant and accepting of other local people and their many international visitors. Surely anyone who supports people who are persecuted and/or disrespected will feel moved by the current and ongoing problems of Palestine.

Margaret Vernon

Margaret, a member of the Friargate Meeting for Worship (Quakers) in York, belongs to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

The views expressed here, and in all articles of 'Stanbrook Benedictines', are those of the authors.

For an article more sympathetic to the Israeli side of the question, please see issue no 13, Pentecost 2018. Eds.



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Last Message of a Great Man

Jean Vanier (1928-2019), founder of L'Arche, died peacefully on 7 May. His last message, spoken a few days before he died, bears witness to a life lived faithfully to his inner calling. It can give strength and hope to all.

'I am deeply peaceful and trustful. I'm not sure what the future will be but God is good and whatever happens it will be the best. I am happy and give thanks for everything. My deepest love to each one of you.'

Thoughts on Martyrdom

‘Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested his charity by laying down his life for us, no one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for Christ and his brethren (cf. I Jn 3.16; Jn 15.13). From earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon – and some will always be called upon – to give this supreme testimony of love to all, but especially to persecutors. The Church, therefore, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the highest proof of love.

‘By martyrdom, a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master, who freely accepted death on behalf of the world’s salvation; he perfects that image even to the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented with such an opportunity, nevertheless, all must be prepared to confess Christ before men, and to follow him along the way of the cross through the persecutions which the Church will never cease to suffer.’

From the Second Vatican Council’s document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations) 42.



Facing: D. Julian’s calligraphic representation of Psalm 150.

The capital (below) is based on medieval manuscripts while the animals are drawn from the 12th-century Aberdeen Bestiary.





Praise God in his holy place
 praise him in his mighty heavens.
Praise him for his powerful deeds
 praise his surpassing greatness.

O praise him with sound of trumpet
 praise him with lute and harp.

Praise him with timbrel and dance
 praise him with strings and pipes.

O praise him with resounding
 cymbals praise him with clashing
 of cymbals. **L**et everything that lives
 and that breathes give praise to the **L**ord

ALLELUIA

Book Reviews

An Invitation

Making Space for God: an Invitation by Nicolas Stebbing CR & Philippa Edwards OSB; Mirfield, 2019; pb; 112pp. £6.50. ISBN-9-780902-834484

Here we have a book written by two quite different people – one a man, the other a woman; one Anglican, the other Catholic. They are connected, however, by a shared history with Zimbabwe and South Africa, but more importantly by a shared wisdom born of many years of monastic life. It is that wisdom and experience that they share with us.

This is both a personal and an honest book, rooted in the conviction that the best way to introduce monastic life is to tell the story of one's own journey. In both of their cases that story is very real, at the same time very ordinary and human and yet also a very powerful and transforming experience of grace. Through the various experiences of life, through the many twists and turns along the way, God gradually reveals Himself as present at every moment, patiently writing the story of his grace and his love into the oftentimes tangled threads of our lives, slowly drawing us to himself through the concrete circumstances of our histories. At heart, the story these two lives tell is the same – a story of being captivated by Love, and of being drawn, inexorably, into His life.

Although the life they follow, and the *Rule* it is based on, is well structured and articulated, its greatest wisdom perhaps lies in its willingness to allow that mystery to be at work, to leave space for God to be present to each person in the particular ways they need Him. It is rooted in the conviction that grace is at work in the most ordinary and the most human ways, and not just in the most 'divine' and beautiful. God is to be found in the liturgy, in beauty, in silence, in nature, but equally in the demands of each day's work, the challenges and joys of community life, the real daily service of pots and pans and very ordinary things.

What the authors invite us to discover is a way of living all these things that opens up a space where God's voice can be heard and his presence felt; where something deeper can begin to awaken and come to life within us – our own heart, where God is always speaking to us and drawing us to himself.

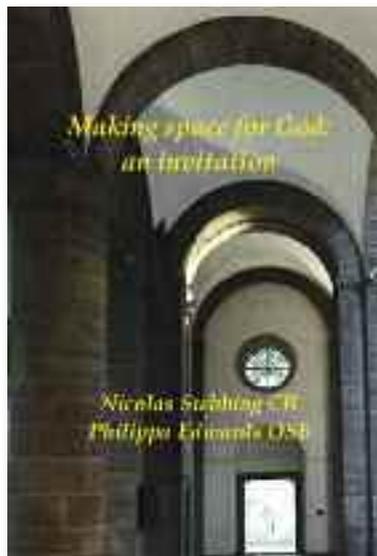
As they put it themselves: 'We lose a sense of ourselves. Monasticism offers us a space where we can find ourselves.' (p. 1)

'Very often people come to our monasteries with major problems they think we can help them to solve. We are happy to talk with them. But we also leave them alone in the silence, the space or the worship...Amazingly enough, they sort out their own problems. Priorities re-establish themselves. God comes first.' (p. 91)

This book is simply an invitation to enter that space – spelled out in terms of simplicity, listening, silence, community, humility and balance, moderation and freedom. God is already waiting for us in our lives if we give ourselves the chance to come home to this presence. We too can learn how Christ's 'way of being poor and meek actually sets us free and gives us a completely new understanding of life.' (p. 100)

Like monastic life, there is a humble wisdom waiting in these pages – personal, unassuming, 'unimpressive' but real and essential. Take time to enter into the stories here and what they have to say, and you will come away enriched with some surprisingly practical insights to bring to your own living of your daily life.

Kevin Hayden OSB (Ampleforth)



Shattering Loneliness

***The Shattering of Loneliness: Of Christian Remembrance* by Erik Varden; Bloomsbury, 2018; pb; 175pp. £10.99. ISBN-978-1-4729-5328-5**

This is a book of astonishing richness, subtlety and profundity. Abbot Erik weaves a vivid tapestry of scripture, patristics, literature, in many languages often translated by himself, personal experience, the visual arts, all mediated through a sensibility of great originality.

The theme of memory is explored through six chapters: ‘Remember you are dust,’ ‘Remember you were a slave in Egypt,’ ‘Remember Lot’s wife,’ ‘Do this in memory of me,’ ‘The Counsellor will call everything to mind’ and ‘Beware lest you forget the Lord.’ Supporting sources range from Virgil to the present day.

Followers of the Rule of St Benedict will be delighted that humility is one of the pervasive themes of the book. We are reminded that we are made from *humus*, soil, the dust, the lowliest material, akin to the Hebrew *adamah* from which Adam was named. But the dust is destined for glory, and the whole book exudes paschal joy and celebration of the wonders that the Lord has done for us, completely undeserving as we are.

In the second chapter we are reminded that we were slaves called out into freedom. The journey from Egypt to Israel is a paradigm applicable to every Christian life. Redemption is pure gift and we must never forget it lest we succumb to ‘the chief intoxicant of the spiritual life: self-righteous ingratitude.’ On the contrary, in the light of Christ’s victory, ‘even memories of freedom compromised, cruellest captivity...can become occasions of praise and thanksgiving.’

A powerful example of humility is provided by the story of the devoted observant monk, Zossima, who comes to recognize the greater holiness of the reformed prostitute, Mary of Egypt.

Tolstoy’s story of the long and chequered life of Father Sergius has a similar message – it is only when Sergius surrenders his desire for perfection largely through his own efforts that he attains the long-sought wisdom and peace.

In the chapter on Lot’s wife Abbot Erik looks searchingly but compassionately at the possibility of being stuck in mediocrity. Using a poem by the Russian dissident, Anna Akhmatova, he shows that ‘what holds us back from unconditional self-giving is not just vice. Much that holds us back is good and

dear. To remember Lot's wife is to prepare for a severance that may bring pain.' However, he also shows that it is never too late to repent, even when we are beginning to turn to salt!

The chapter on the Eucharist moves from the recollection of the vengeance of Cain and Lamech through a marvellous meditation on Maundy Thursday to an awesome story of forgiveness. Maïti Girtanner, a young Swiss *résistante* was tortured in such a way as to leave her in constant pain for the last seventy years of her life and to deprive her of her career as a pianist; yet when opportunity offered, she forgave her torturer with tenderness and generosity. She had resolved to make a gift of what had been taken from her, to make Christ's Passion the pattern for the building of her life, to allow Christ's openness to vanquish the closedness of sin.

One of the loveliest passages in this glorious book concerns the beloved Saint Seraphim, who taught that the goal of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. The well-known story of his conversation with Motovilov, sitting on a log in the falling snow, both of them shining with the Spirit, is accompanied by another story told by Seraphim's biographer Iulia de Beausobre, of the transfiguration of a tree a hundred years after Seraphim's death in which an old peasant woman saw the continuing influence of St Seraphim in the world.

Another theme running through the book is that of brotherhood. The author's own spiritual awakening began when, as a child, he heard with empathetic understanding of a farmer scarred by a terrible whipping under the Nazis. This opened him to the pain of the world, to a sense that a particular, as yet unidentified task, of helping to bear the burden of that pain, was assigned to him, and eventually, by means of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony, he came to Christian hope and faith. Speaking of the atheist playwright and poet Stig Dagerman, Abbot Erik says 'When I look at him I see a brother'; so too with the Syrian priest, Fr Michael Kayal, to whom the book is dedicated. I was reminded of the very moving story told by Abbot Erik in the Christmas issue (2018) of *The Tablet* of his encounter as a student in Paris with a young homeless man. From the start Abbot Erik addressed him as 'vous' in response to his 'tu'. This meeting on the level of equality led to an explosion of joy in the author's heart. The man's name was Emmanuel. Erik Varden, an exile from his native Norway, seems at home everywhere, like Christ, a brother to all.

The question occurs: why the title 'The Shattering of Loneliness?' In the end

it is only the acquisition of the Holy Spirit which can shatter our loneliness, the insatiable need for comfort shared by all humans. But this book shows that the Holy Spirit is not limited by the boundaries of the Church. Russia, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Germany provide witnesses.

Even unrequited love, separation by decades of longing, or by death, can open the heart to the Spirit. The citing of non-Christians will surely broaden the appeal of this book to many who do not share our faith, but by virtue of their humanity share our longings. As Rilke says, 'Man is made of longing.' This longing, hard-wired by God into every human heart, bears witness to a world beyond ourselves and invites us out of our own petty lives to enter it. Claudel asks: 'All those people, Lord, who withhold their faith from you, what if you were to invite them to give their lives?' The only worthy response to God's total self-giving to us is free joyful self-giving in return. This sounds like a huge demand to make even of devout Christians but this book demonstrates that it can be asked of – and given – even by those who seem 'outside'.

Music is another language in which our author is at home. As already mentioned, Mahler's Resurrection Symphony was a key to his conversion, and Makine's novel *A Life's Music* is quoted to show the power of music to unlock the closed heart.

The book is most beautifully written and beauty itself is one of its recurring themes, a beauty that is as much ethical as aesthetic. 'A radiance of beauty issues where we least expect it, in what seems humble, grey, very poor. To perceive it is to be changed. To share it with another, to reach it together, is to love; to love in this way is no longer to belong to this world.'

'Beauty forges communion among people by indicating a universal realm in which individual solitude ceases although personhood endures. In that world, beyond life and death, love has its home. And that "there" can be accessed "here". We can meet eternity "now".'

This is a book to be read and re-read, to be savoured like a fine wine, which brings to mind the cover illustration by Arcabas of the supper at Emmaus, the disciples listening intently to the Lord in the glow of the Resurrection. It makes one long to give all to acquire the Spirit, to become fuel for the fire of love which Christ came to cast over the whole world.

Philippa Edwards OSB

The 21 Martyrs: Renouncing Revenge and Retribution

***The 21: A Journey into the Land of Coptic Martyrs* by Martin Mosebach, trans. Alta L. Price; Plough Publishing House, 2019; hb; 238pp. £18.99. ISBN 978-0-87486-839-5**

***Ecumenism of Blood: Heavenly Hope for Earthly Communion* by Hugh Somerville Knapman OSB; Paulist Press, 2018; pb; 128pp. £16.95. ISBN 978-0-8091-5371-8**

We tend to think of the Age of the Martyrs as belonging to the past, to the early centuries of Christianity. But, in fact, it is estimated that of the c.70 million Christian martyrs to date, two-thirds have been killed in the 20th and 21st Centuries: the Age of the Martyrs is today.

These two recent books concern the 21 migrant workers (most of them in their 20s or 30s) murdered for their witness to Christ by ISIS on a beach in Libya on 15 February 2015. While written from very different perspectives, one theological and the other more journalistic, such is the impact of the story and the skill of both authors that theology leaps from the journalism while the theological work is as accessible as biography.

Arrested by the image on a magazine cover of one of the martyred '21', award-winning German writer, Martin Mosebach, was impelled to travel in 2017 to Upper Egypt, home of all but one of the '21', in order to try to learn more about the Coptic culture which had reared men of such unshakeable faith. This remarkable book – difficult to classify, straddling biography, travel, religion, sociology and history – is the result.

The work unfolds, significantly of course, in 21 chapters, each preceded by a photograph of one of the martyrs, and concludes with an epilogue which places them in the wider context of the 'invisible army' of Christian martyrs through time and now rejoicing in eternity. Throughout, Mosebach brings to bear his considerable powers of observation as poet, of skill in interacting as a journalist and of narrative as a novelist, to evoke the background of these extraordinary men. And one of the first things to emerge is just how 'ordinary' they were. Loved by their Muslim neighbours, they were, said Abuna Bolla, one of their priests, 'so decent and helpful that they were often called on when help was needed' (p. 125). From poor farming families, these men had gone to Libya to earn money to supplement their modest incomes.

But even more significantly, in a Church which has suffered persecution of one kind or another for 1,400 years and kept the Christian faith unbroken, they represent 'ordinary Copts'. In an interview with the author, the local bishop of the diocese from which the martyrs hailed did not hesitate to state his belief that not a single Copt in Upper Egypt would betray the faith. The same Metropolitan even went on to express gratitude to the Islamist killers for making their macabre video of the decapitations which, far from spreading intimidation worldwide as planned, has removed any doubt that these men died witnessing to Christ (pp. 46-47). The words *Ya, Rabbi Yasou* (O, my Lord Jesus) were audible on their lips as they submitted serenely to their fate.

This conviction was borne out by the families of the martyrs who welcomed Mosebach into their simple homes where traditional mud-walls contrast sharply with iPads treasured like icons for they carry the video of the martyrdom of their loved ones who are now saints.

But the author's penetrating gaze is never intrusive. He writes, 'These people's thoughts...were so focused on the supernatural order of things – into which the events of February 15 2015 clearly fit – that prodding them to delve any further into factual details was, as soon as I met them, something I felt to be fundamentally off-limits' (p. 128).

Nevertheless, we can be supremely grateful for his sensitive reporting which allows us to be immersed in a culture at once so foreign and so attractive where faith, lifestyle and actions are in harmony. There must surely be traces of this in our own Christian DNA dating from medieval times.

A fortnight after the massacre on the Libyan shore, Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, canonized the 20 Copts and their companion, Matthew from Ghana, whom the Copts consider as one of their own after his profession of faith and death. At about the same time, Mosebach asked a German prelate why the Roman Catholic Church had not formally recognized these men as martyrs. It is a question which Fr Hugh Somerville Knapman, a monk of Douai Abbey, treats in depth in what has been described by Professor Stephen Bullivant as a 'brilliant theological debut', *Ecumenism of Blood*. This phrase, popularised by Pope Francis, describes the unintentional but positive unifying power of the persecution of Christians from across confessional divisions, and has its roots in earlier Catholic tradition.

The book, which grew out of an M. Phil dissertation, seeks to answer two questions. First of all, *Can the principle of Ecumenism of blood be reconciled with Catholic doctrine? And secondly, Can the Roman Catholic Church formally recognize the Coptic Orthodox Church's canonization of the twenty-one martyrs of Libya?*

Proceeding through six carefully-argued chapters with preface, introduction, epilogue and a most helpful, comprehensive set of notes, bibliography and index, the work is a concise but deep study marked by a clarity and precision which help make this complex topic accessible to the general reader. While undeniably academic in thoroughness of approach, it is far from 'academic' in practical application, e. g. by challenging those elements of the 'blogosphere' who would deny the martyr's crown to 'heretics and schismatics', it can shine a ray of the truth which liberates from fanaticism even among people of faith.

No attempt will be made to summarise the main line of argument, which needs to be followed closely, step by step. Suffice it to say that the case under study also serves well as an illustration of the 'development of doctrine' in the Church over time. Not that the deposit of faith changes but rather our understanding deepens and widens under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (see esp. Ch. 3). Nor will Fr Hugh's conclusion be given away here. You must read the book!

Capuchin, Thomas G. Weinandy's description of this book as 'an ecumenical event' in itself may be applied equally to the other book under review. *The 21* is written by a Roman Catholic and published by Plough Publishing House which is to be congratulated on its breadth of vision.

I found just one sentence in the *The 21* which jarred, that is the suggestion (on p. 162) that the Greek and Latin churches 'didn't hesitate to expel' the Egyptian church in the fifth century for its refusal to back the Council of Chalcedon on the human and divine nature of Christ. It would probably be more accurate to say that, by refusing to agree with the rest of the body of the Church, they took themselves out of communion with that body. However this could be a nuance which is missed in the otherwise very fluent translation from the original German text. Happily, as both books state and *Ecumenism of Blood* charts carefully, there has, since the twentieth century, been an almost total rapprochement between the Catholic and Coptic Churches on the main tenets of doctrine.

Ecumenism is a major project for all Christians mandated by Jesus himself at the Last Supper – *May they all be one* (John 17. 21). Christ goes on to explain a key purpose in this unity, namely, for evangelisation – *...so that people may know that it was you [the Father] who sent me* (John 17. 23). These are weighty reasons for reading the two books under review which illuminate each other. There can be few other contemporary works of comparable length (c.370 pages *in toto*) which, taken together, so stimulate thought, inspire hope and strengthen love.

Finally, for me, perhaps the most moving part of the story of these martyrs is that of the ‘outsider’, Matthew Ayairga from Ghana, a Muslim who had shared the life and work of the 20 Copts in Libya. At his capture, not being a Christian at that point, he could have been released but chose instead to stay with his companions right up to, and through, death, proclaiming: ‘My God is their God’. Such solidarity strikes even deeper than denominational unity to the very ground of our humanity made in the image and likeness of a God through whose grace we can be empowered to live, like the martyrs, with and for others, beyond revenge and retribution.

Laurentia Johns OSB

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Bookshop

The books reviewed above, plus many more, are available via our bookshop which also offers a unique selection of cards and hand-crafted goods, including the popular Stanbrook chocolate.

The 2020 calendar should be available late summer.

For more information or to order, please contact the bookshop:

T. 01347 868927; bookshop@stanbrookabbey.org.uk

Exhibition: ‘Hand in Hand’

Don't miss the exhibition of sacred artwork (vestments, paintings and wood carvings) by Stanbrook nun, Dame Werburg Welch (1894-1990), which is on show at Ushaw, Durham until 29 June 2019.

If you are unable to visit in person, you can take a virtual tour <http://www.ushaw.org/page/current-exhibitions>

Alternatively, Dame Werburg's work may be glimpsed on the exhibition poster on the back cover of this magazine. We hope to include a feature in a future edition of *Stanbrook Benedictines*.

Meanwhile, as someone born in the century that Stanbrook, Worcester, was built and whose spiritual and artistic legacy is being celebrated in the North in the 21st century, Dame Werburg seems to make an apt bridge figure to close this tenth anniversary issue.



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Designed and compiled at Stanbrook Abbey, the Conventus of Our Lady of Consolation, Wass, YORK, YO61 4AY, Regd Charity No. 1092065.

Tel: 01347 868900 www.stanbrookabbey.org

Emails: secretary@stanbrookabbey.org.uk

Sr Benedicta friends@stanbrookabbey.org.uk

Crief Lodges: Tel: 01347 868931 www.cottageguide.co.uk/crieflodges

Email: crieflodges@stanbrookabbey.org.uk

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O LORD, Thou hast showed
so much Providence towards
this house that if we cast not our
whole care both for body and soul upon
Thee, we shall not deserve the favours
Thou hast showed to us.
We are Thy little flock:
keep Thou ever possession of us:
Let us be of one mind and one heart.
Thou hast called us and
gathered us together:
send us a good life and a happy death,
to Thy praise, honour and glory,
who art God of all things,
and to whom, now and forever,
be given all laud and praise by all creatures.
Amen. Alleluia.

Prayer of Dame Gertrude More

Prayer of our principal foundress, Dame Gertrude More (1606-1633), composed sometime during the first decade of our foundation (1623-33). Dame Gertrude (Helen) More was the great-great-grand daughter of St Thomas More.

This prayer featured on the card to commemorate the Abbatial Blessing of Dame Andrea Savage on 29 September 2007.

The Back Page

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Hand in Hand

The artistic and spiritual life of Dame Werburg Welch

Saturday 6th April - 29th June

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