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## A Tour of Departments

Not everyone will realize how many people work behind the scenes at Mirfield, and so we are beginning a new series of articles which in each issue will say something about one of our various departments and the people working in them, and in this Michaelmas Review we begin with the finance department.

### **Adele, Finance Manager**

Adele Hannah has been our Finance Manager for several years, after joining us for just one day a week as a fundraising administrator in 2011 and coupling this work with finance responsibilities soon after. The department could hardly be in more competent or generous

hands. Adele makes no secret of the fact she loves working here, and has great patience in dealing with the variety of requests for help – often with things nothing to do with finance – that come from Brethren who wander in. She's also a familiar face at the occasional auctions organised by Fr John. Adele is busy catching up on a backlog after being away, and so the Editor is writing this to spare her the task!



*Br Steven, Wendy, Br Philip and Adele*

### **Br Philip, Bursar of the Community**

It was about 10 years ago that the then Superior asked me to become Bursar, assisting the Finance Manager and helping the Brothers with their financial matters. I rather enjoyed the quips of “never trust a lawyer” which greeted my appointment - I had read law before entering CR!

As Bursar I'm privileged to be part of the finance team, working with Adele the Finance Manager, Wendy the Assistant and others in an office which is usually bursting with people, activity and enthusiasm. A key part of my work is to be available to brothers at advertised times to assist with their personal needs and travel arrangements, and in this I am in turn assisted by Aidan CR and Steven CR. There are of course many administrative tasks to be seen to as well, and in

all this I am often aware of the generous financial support of our friends and supporters that helps makes the life of CR and everything that happens here at Mirfield possible.

An annual event I always look forward to is the Association of Provincial Bursars Conference at High Leigh, when some 200 of us gather for an update on a wide range of financial and related topics, and to support each other in what is effectively a ministry with a definite pastoral character.

### **Wendy, invoices and so on**

A quiet and efficient presence in the midst of the hurly-burly is Wendy Pimlott, who has worked here over 5 years now, dealing with invoices using our Sage accounting systems, related queries, franking the post, reconciling the bank accounts and of course paying the wages!

### **Margaret, supporting and cheering**



We are all brightened up by the cheerful presence of Margaret Pickles around the place – she writes:

I have worked at The Community since 2004 as the Fr Superior's secretary, typing letters, reports, filing, etc. In 2009 I helped install all CR's contacts onto the new Donorflex database – three days per week, for several months. I now work one day each week in the Bursary inputting donations and typing letters for Fr Oswin to sign. I also help out with setting up standing orders, dealing with gift aid declarations, outgoing post, telephone calls and library lists, etc. There's a lot to it!

### **Darren the Accountant**

Darren Broadbent, from our accountants Forrest Burlinson, is a regular presence, checking us all with a friendly but beady eye. He is a great supporter of CR, but lets us get away with nothing, holding up the highest standards on our duties in good practice, compliance, and general financial management.







### **Fr Aidan and Br Steven**

Fr Aidan's main job is to sit at the seat of custom for an hour each day, when brethren can come in and draw cash for whatever might be needed. Brother A, let us say, has emptied his pockets, and comes for replenishment; Brother B wants a loan to cover expenses for a journey, which will then be replaced (hopefully) by whoever needs to repay his expenses; Brother C has spent money from his pocket on materials for his department, and comes for restitution. They are served

with unfailing courtesy and a ready smile. Fr Aidan has now been joined by Br Steven, who is at present learning the ropes.

### **Alan Speight, Bursar of the College**

After retiring early from banking, at a time when you could hold your head up when you told someone you were a Bank Manager, I joined the College in September 2002 after a short spell as a GP Practice Manager.

I now tell anybody who asks, and several who don't, that I am the Bursar of a Theological College attached to an Anglican Monastery – nobody else can say that. My official working life is 20 hours per week – five mornings. Often the needs of the job mean I have to be flexible, but that flexibility means I can enjoy exotic holidays with my wife and regular trips to Surrey to see our son and his family. We have two grandsons (aged 9 and 11) and they keep us busy when we are with them.

As the job title suggests, I deal with all financial matters relating to the College – and this can range from emptying the washing machine coin boxes (a few pounds) to dealing with our investment brokers (tens of thousands of pounds). Issuing invoices for fees, paying invoices for work done and operating the payroll are just a few of the matters I deal with. Preparing budgets and reporting progress (or lack of) is another important task.

It has been a privilege and honour over the years to get to know the students



and meet the many visitors to the college – as reflected in the picture I have chosen to accompany this short report – it also shows me 10 years younger!

### **Andrew & Leanne, Fundraising**



Andrew Davies and Leanne O'Sullivan work from offices in the College but are very much part of the finance team, working especially on fundraising. We keep in touch with donors and potential donors – and keep us all on our toes when it comes to thinking of possible sources of donations! Leanne manages

the database, puts together (and often writes!) our monthly newsletters, and looks after fundraising admin. She now looks after weddings and events too. We work hard to encourage and nurture support for the Community's works, for life at Mirfield and plans for the future.

### **CR Trustees**

The Community's Trustees at present are Fr Oswin, Br Philip, Fr John, Fr George, Fr Thomas. We receive invaluable help and advice from the:

### **Finance Advisory Committee**

This is a group of financial and commercial experts from numerous professions who meet regularly to monitor and advise; at most meetings there is a special topic to discuss which helps shape the Community's thoughts for the future. We are very fortunate in the help we receive from the 'FAC' and would always welcome further advice from anyone who has commercial, property, finance or project management skills and experience.

### **College Trustees (The Frere Educational Trust)**

At present Fr Oswin, Br Philip, Fr George, and the Revd Dr Frances Ward, the author and former Dean of Bury St Edmunds, we are currently looking for a financial expert to join the team.

### **A large team**

That, then, is the finance team – a lot of people, but reflecting the great amount of activities that go on on the site. Next time we hope to tell you about the running of our (several) libraries.

## Religious Communities Without Borders

**L**ore in the Community of the Resurrection has it that if you join, you'll see the world. For me, it has very much seemed that way, with excellent opportunities to go to Italy, Germany and most recently to Montserrat in Spain, where I represented the community at the biannual International Interconfessional Congress of Religious (CIR) during the middle of June.

The congress has been established for just over forty years and seeks to bring together religious from all denominations and charisms. Ostensibly, this is for the holistic good of purely being together as Christians in religious life, but further it calls for conference papers on a particular theme meant to engender dialogue and increase friendship and solidarity between participants. This time, the theme was 'The Spirituality of Communion,' upon which there was an interesting array of presentations: everything from the role of Mary in communion to

a more statistical analysis from the Orthodox perspective of parochial and monastic interpretations of communion.

All of the interaction we had was made doubly interesting from my point of view, given that I eagerly decided from the get-go to place myself in the French-speaking group (there was also a German and English speaking group.) Part of the reason for this was hubris – I thought I would be fine – I mean I have an 'A' level in French and a distinction in literary translation... why not? However, when your brain decides to turn all that French into the 'good' German you're beginning to accrue following time in that country and *only* that German, it turns out



*17 June Sr Therese op dancing the 9 ways of Praying of St Dominic*

Francophony isn't so straightforward. But ho-hum, I persevered, and typically by the last couple of days and the onset of the homeward journey, felt I was finally re-learning all the French I'd appeared to leave behind with my mid-twenties.

Montserrat ('serrated mountain') is situated in the Catalan region of Northern Spain, about forty minutes' drive from Barcelona. We stayed in the Benedictine monastery up the mountain in a not unpleasant 22-degree heat. From here, it is possible to travel to the top by funicular to explore some of the breathtaking scenery afforded by such topography. Fortunately, we were not without the support of experienced guides to the 'steep and rugged pathways' of the mountainside. – Negotiating these in a cassock and scapular is not to be recommended – much less a veil in the case of some sisters!



The conferences place a sound emphasis on being together and forming relationships. It was a delight to be able to do this with people living the same vocation albeit within a different expression. We had inter-communion with



the bishop's blessing, and the regularity of the daily Eucharist served to show that it is the Jesus who lives within each of us who is the heart of communion. - In essence, our communion is pre-existent – we have only to search out and find it. I think this was a profound realisation for each of us, and it is certainly a re-awakened awareness which I brought back with me. The Christ made visible in my brothers and sisters. Needless to say, the party spirit that ensued among us as a consequence was vibrant to the last with vocal and dance performances on the last evening (Liturgical, naturally!)

We were welcomed so warmly by the brothers of the monastery, who shared their worship with us generously, with instruction on singing the 'Our Father'

in Catalan and daily multilingual intercessions and bible-readings. All present were thankful for their congenial approach and inclusivity. It must also be said that seeing the famous 'Black Madonna' was a great highlight of the visit.

Fr. Pierre-Andre is the new president of the congress. He is a French Dominican based in Sweden with a good brain and a good heart; he is young and keen for the congress to flourish further in the years to come. Nicolas CR is its former president and cannot esteem it highly enough. 'It gives one hope for the religious life,' he enthused following my own waxing lyrical. You only have a snapshot of it here, but of course, I heartily concur. Bring on Sweden 2020! Communities who miss it will surely miss out.

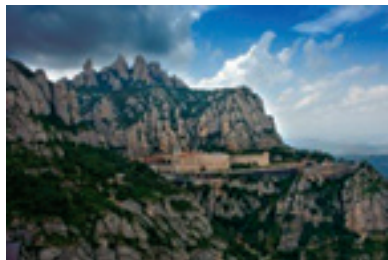


**Marc CR**

# **The International Interconfessional Congress of Religious (CIR)**

*13 – 18 June 2019*

*Montserrat Abbey, Catalonia*



*The Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat in  
Catalonia*

**O**ur Conference consisted of about 50 men and women religious, from the following Churches: Copts, Ukrainian Orthodox (in France working under the Patriarch of Constantinople). Lutheran, Evangelical Protestant, Anglican and Catholics.



The theme of this meeting was the Spirituality of Communion. This is something of great interest to those of us who are Religious and belong to the Focolare Movement and have greatly helped by it in different ways. The Focolare movement has as its main aim the fulfilment of Jesus' words in John Chapter 17 "That All may be One, as I (Jesus) am in you (God the Father)

and you are in me”. Therefore it was very appropriate for three of us to be present at the CIR meeting in June at Montserrat. Conrad Sciberras, Missionary of St Paul from Malta and living in Rome; Paolo Cocco ofm from the Venice Region, a Capuchin ecumenical theologian, and myself Jonathan Cotton osb, a Benedictine Parish Priest in the north west of England.



Before arriving I made a note in my diary: *There will be about 50 of us there, Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Protestants of various kinds and Orthodox, men and women. Let us hope all this can contribute to the building up of the Unity of the Church.*

In his apostolic letter to all consecrated people in the Year for Consecrated Life, November 2014 Pope Francis wrote about Religious: “Be men and women of communion!” and “The old saying will always be true: “Where there are religious, there is joy”. We did enter into communion and we did share much joy. After the meeting was over I found myself repeating and even in my heart singing the Magnificat again and again. Now at the end of the conference I can say that there are a group of men and women religious who have enjoyed a prophetic experience of unity and God willing this lived experience will expand one day to the whole Church.



Each other year the CIR chooses a different religious institute for the meeting. The criterion for the choice is that we may have a living experience of communion by praying with the local community where we are hosted; by following a particular theme for the event with talks on the theme; and by living together for the 5 days we are together in communion.



This simple formula works very well; obviously we “disturb” the host community, but they also have the gift of a group of committed men and women religious coming among them. On this occasion we were guests at the famous Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, the heart of Catalonia and the Abbot welcomed us personally on our arrival. 2½ million people visit Montserrat each year.



Fr Alexis Mityutn, an Orthodox priest from the Ukraine who had studied in the Orthodox faculty of Paris who is currently ministering in a parish in Toulouse. He explained how within their one monastic religious life there was a lot of flexibility. Monks or nuns could become missionaries, or teachers, helping the poor or contemplatives with the support of what the Holy Spirit inspired them to do or they were asked to do by their superior or Bishop. In fact it was implied the possibilities were endless.

Sister Michaela Koldman, a Catholic Sister of the Ecumenical Community of Jesus Brotherhood in Germany, spoke of the way to Communion as illustrated by the famous passage in Philippians 2: 1-11. She spoke about being empty of self and allowing Christ to live; overcoming the desperate battle with sin in each person as the way to let Christ be alive in us. She also explained how this same “spirit” helped them overcome a descent when the Jesus Brotherhood went down as a group into their shadows, and only the reconciliation of Jesus from his emptiness and exaltation lifted them out of that dark place.

Sister Teresa Forcades i Vila osb is of the Montserrat community of sisters.





Her theme was the Glory of God and the Spirituality of Communion. She spoke about the reality of the Trinitarian relationship that Jesus wants us urgently to share as found in John chapter 17. This text is the one that sums up Jesus' teaching; his final word as he is about to enter his glory (the cross and the glory of God is also the Holy Spirit. Jesus repeats in the short chapter four times a prayer of longing for the whole of humanity; "that they may become one as I (Jesus) and God the father are one". Her talk was inspirational and she is a very positive force for Religious Life and the Church in the modern world speaking strongly as a feminine theologian. In some ways

she gave a special tone to the entire conference.

Sister Celine Spitz asked the question whether Mary the mother of the Word of God is or is not a path of communion for our Churches. She based her talk on a two year experience of ecumenical encounters in Sweden with members of Catholic, Lutheran and Protestant Churches. The talk was based on the life of Mary as seen in the New Testament, on the Old Testament teaching on Zion, the Holy Mountain and the daughter of Zion and statements of the Creed. *I believe in Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary* and on the statement of the Dombes ecumenical group "*On Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints*".

The one final speaker on our theme was Sister Judith Forrai SLG from the Anglican Sisters of the Love of God in Oxford. Her theme was struggling to understand "What is the Spirituality of Communion?" In her struggle she was enlightening. She quoted St Dorotheus of Gaza (6<sup>th</sup> Century) that gave us a central point and a direction to follow: "*Imagine the world is a circle; God is the centre and the radii are the different ways human being live. When those who wish to come closer to God walk towards the centre of the circle, they come closer to one another at the same time as to God. They closer they come to God, the closer they come to one other. And the closer they come to one another, the closer they come to God*".

There was also the living together, the visits to various aspects of the Montserrat experience, like the audio-visual presentation, the museum, the meals together, the struggle with languages not understood, the walks over the mountains, the last afternoon and evening with the Montserrat Benedictine Sisters who live in a much smaller set of buildings and where there is much



*A Dominican, a Benedictine and a young lay girl at the Benedictine Sisters monastery of Montserrat.*

less hustle and bustle that is a constant with the daily visitors to the main monastery. (Though to be fair to the monks of Montserrat, their monastic quarters are a haven of peace).

One of the best living experiences of communion was helping each other down a narrow, steep and rocky path from one of the ancient hermitages that are scattered over the Mountain on the Sunday afternoon. We were able to love each other in practical ways, and that helped to build up the communion.

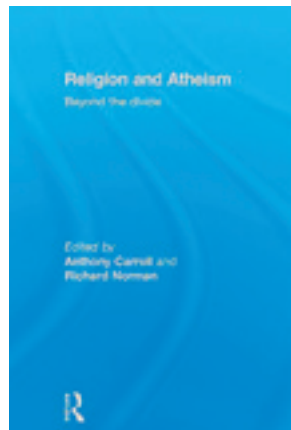
As I reflect on this congress I find myself thanking God and singing the Magnificat in my heart over and over again. The gifts of the Holy Spirit seem to be stronger and more uniting than the divisions are between our Churches. Religious have not just received a consecration from God at their baptism; that consecration is something for all the baptised. We, men and women Religious and in another sense, priests who are under the Bishop or are ministers in different Churches, have chosen to consecrate ourselves to God extra to the consecration that we already have in Baptism. This is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives and our task is faithfully to respond. We find our communion in that gift, and it is a strong bond, stronger (thanks to the Holy Spirit) than the divisions between the Churches.

**Fr Jonathan Cotton OSB**

## Mirfield Conversations on Belief and Non-Belief

The study day on *Ancient and Modern Insights into Human Flourishing* held at the Mirfield Centre on 3 June 2019 was organised as a part of a series of events following on from the publication of *Religion and Atheism: Beyond the Divide* in 2016. The purpose of this publication was to foster better dialogue between the religious and the non-religious about beliefs, practices, and to encourage better mutual understanding. Through putting on a number of events around the country on these issues it has become apparent that there is an appetite to explore these matters in a spirit of openness and without seeking to convert the others to one's own position.

The four speakers for the Mirfield day were chosen because of their expertise in areas that have become significant in previous events and because of their capacity to take issues further than it has so far been possible to do.



The opening speaking of the day Raymond Tallis spoke of 'Flourishing without God'. His presentation explored the avenues in which human beings find ways to flourish which do not rely upon a religious vision of the world. Central to Raymond's contribution was the notion that humanists should reclaim the spiritual dimensions of life and so re-discover 'transcendence from within' the world. He is due to publish a new book on this topic in the autumn and so we were fortunate to be able to hear his

current thoughts in this area.

Raymond spoke about his recent ideas as a form of 'spiritual irredentism' which seeks to learn from the insights of thinkers such as Feuerbach and Durkheim and so to view God as 'the ultimate intentional object' that needs to be re-appropriated by us for human flourishing.

Challenges which this position provides for the dialogue between the religious and non-religious include the fact that the bridge across the divide between the religious and the non-religious seems to have 'asymmetrical

piers'. That is to say, religious belief has inspired cultural creations which all acknowledge as great achievements (music, cathedrals, art and so on) and so humanism needs to be less oppositional in its stance towards religion and more positive in elucidating what it brings to the table in these dialogues. It seems clear that non-belief is now at a phase of maturing into a positive worldview rather than simply being a negative critique of the religious approach to reality.



Suzanne Stern-Gillet provided a fascinating insight into the significance of the Neoplatonic tradition, principally of Plotinus (204-270), for dialogue between the religious and the non-religious about matters concerned with ethics, spirituality and visions of God. She spoke in the spirit of Raymond Tallis in that she made it evident that it can be too easy in such dialogues to assume that one side of the divide has a monopoly on the spiritual or on dimensions of transcendence. As she made evident in her paper, even a cursory knowledge of the philosophical tradition reveals this to be false.

The Neoplatonic tradition has in many ways pride of place in this aspect of the dialogue because living 'the good life' is seen in this tradition as becoming 'god-like'. Plotinus who for many is the natural post-Aristotelian heir to the Platonic tradition of philosophy developed a whole language for talking about these issues in the *Enneads*. Importantly, for the current dialogue between the religious and the non-religious, this language is not specifically Christian though it was later taken up by the Christian tradition to speak of the mystical journey of union with God. Plotinus is in fact describing the adventure of coming to know reality through seeking to live the good life. In this sense epistemology, ethics and mysticism are united in his account of philosophy in a way which is suggestive for both the religious and the non-religious.

Nicholas Adams shifted the register of the day to social and political matters of leadership and discipleship. Drawing on the work of both the Jewish German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and the Anglican theologian Daniel Hardy (1930-2007), he raised the question of how it is that Christian culture seems to have become obsessed with models of leadership when the true vocation of Christians is primarily to discipleship.





Indeed, as Nicholas elaborated during his presentation, these issues go beyond the current crisis in the Christian community and affect how our present democratic political system is so obsessed with finding the new ‘strong man’ to lead nations out of their current malaises. Inspired by the philosophy of Arendt, Nicholas developed a critique of the contemporary Christian and secular obsessions with these leadership models of rule by showing that leaders in the ‘command and control’ style of ruling tend to be lonely figures because this way of ruling is by nature not collaborative and tends towards the instrumentalisation of people through subordinating collaborators to the goals of the leader.

Such a model of ruling is by its very nature unstable and leads to crisis after crisis which is something we are experiencing both in the ecclesial and political worlds at present. Developing Arendt’s notion of ‘action’ and Hardy’s understanding of ‘*sociopoiesis*’, Nicholas illustrated how it could be different if we understood ‘rule’ in terms of collaborative action and the creation of communal life. Both depend upon a natural attraction towards the good rather than compulsion by commands. If, as Hardy suggests, there is a ‘grain to the world’ which provides a natural way to act and to be, then such models of ruling are by nature attractive because they correspond with the truth of reality.

Regardless of whether one is religious or non-religious, such ways of acting and of collaborating in societies and in churches provide a way out of a managerialism that has been identified as one of the great pathologies of styles of leadership in modernity by classical thinkers such as Max Weber and in more recent times by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 *After Virtue*.

Fr George Guiver CR closed the day with a talk entitled, ‘Prayer and Human Flourishing’. Drawing on his experience of life as a monk at Mirfield, he spoke of how contemporary notions of prayer have often detached themselves from the essentially corporate nature of prayer in the Christian tradition. Explaining how a life devoted to prayer involves being embedded in communal practices and rituals, George made clear that community is at the heart of prayer, and in a similar manner to the presentation by Nicholas Adams, George developed the notion that a community is drawn together by the attraction towards God. Prayer understood in



this way provides the resources for the more solitary dimensions of prayer, but these draw on the power of being connected to a body of which one is an important part.

Whilst George's paper focussed on the personal and experiential dimensions of prayer, he also highlighted aspects of it which have implications for the wider society. Again reminiscent of Nicholas Adams' paper, he spoke of how the bonds which connect us together are generated through these common rituals and, without using Hardy's term 'sociopoiesis', he demonstrated how a life given over to prayer is by its very nature one which generates community and has a public role to play in the broader society.

The day concluded with a round-table discussion chaired by Richard Norman which sought to bring the different strands of the day together and to raise issues that required further exploration. A central theme of the discussion was whether secular humanism can meet the challenge of 'asymmetrical piers' from which to bridge the divide and construct a shared vision of human flourishing. Does Raymond Tallis's focus on human distinctiveness make excessive claims about what separates human beings from the animal kingdom? Can humanists share a version of the Plotinian idea that the civic virtues, by developing our human reason, raise us to a state of oneness with the divine? Are humanists in a position to endorse Nick Adams' claim that collaborative models of communal activity, in contrast to the rule of the strong man, work because they 'go with the grain of the world'? And do secular practices such as mindfulness lack the important dimension of prayer which is embedded in communal practices and rituals?

Due to the generosity and quality of the speakers and the engaged interest and insights of the participants the day achieved its objective of encouraging better dialogue between believers and non-believers. Nevertheless, it left many themes and questions unanswered and underexplored and so we are hoping to continue this dialogue in the future in another such event that hopes to bring the monastic tradition of Mirfield into dialogue with non-believers. This will allow a further opportunity to deepen our knowledge and understanding of one another's positions and to foster a dialogue that is now inescapable for a Church living in the UK at least in a predominantly secular age.

**Tony Carroll**

## Community Pilgrimage to Bolton Priory



The morning of July 31<sup>st</sup> dawned with the humidity and intermittent wet feel which we have increasingly come to expect from the *nouvelle* British Summer. As such, you may well concede that we at CR were not wanting for a car packed with victuals and the requisite walking equipment (namely walking sticks and a rollator) for a pilgrimage day in the glorious surroundings of Bolton Priory near Skipton.

Here is an active church amidst ruins of an Augustinian priory, where the canons lived from 1154 until its dissolution in 1539. Surrounded by the picturesque scenery of Wharfedale and its meandering river, the whole estate makes for an experiential and pleasant time apart. – Something much needed by the community at the end of our July Chapter.



We were warmly welcomed by Fr. Nicholas Mercer, vicar of Bolton priory since April 2019, who, after presiding at the regular Wednesday mass, regaled us with the interesting story his former work as the Army's chief legal advisor in Iraq and how it is that he came to be incumbent of a wholly different parish in North Yorkshire! His is certainly not a mundane example of calling, and it was good to hear the ways in which he traced God's presence throughout his life, particularly in relation to the field of legal ethics and the application of a Christian

framework to the life and death scenarios of the battlefield. He writes in more detail about this in the next article.

After a fine picnic lunch, there was time to saunter the beautifully kept estate grounds, take a closer look at the gift shop - and even bump into members of the Scargill House community also enjoying a day out together. Frs Eric, Thomas and I were grateful for the Superior to drive us home via the scenic route across Ilkley Moor. Unfortunately, we were all *'baht 'at'* on this occasion, but at least the refectory carpets looked pristine on our return home, for they had been deep cleaned in our absence!

Thank you too to Barbara, associate CR and our oblate Kevin, and Katherine Hardy for their accompaniment and photographs. Let's hope for more of the same next July Chapter!

**Marc CR**





## Uncomfortable Thoughts about Wartime Detainees Then and Now

One of the great twentieth-century theologians, Jürgen Moltmann, began his religious journey as a prisoner of war. In 1944, the eighteen-year-old Moltmann was drafted into the German Army. After his training, he was sent to Belgium where he promptly surrendered to the first British soldier he encountered. He was then held as a prisoner of war for the next three years which was to have a profound impact on his life. It was as a prisoner of war that he first met Christian chaplains, was given a Bible and then had his first introduction to Christian theology. At the same time, the hospitality and friendship extended to him as a prisoner of war, left a great impression upon him. As he remarked, he did not find Christ but “Christ found him”. After he was released, he was ordained and eventually became Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. His contribution to Christian Theology has been immense, not least through what he termed the “Theology of Hope”.

Fifty-eight years later, the British Army was, once again, running a Prisoner of War Camp. This time, however, the treatment of prisoners was very different. Conditions were similarly harsh but there was no culture of hospitality and friendship. Worse of all, prisoners were being subjected to what are termed the “five techniques”. Primarily driven by intelligence gathering, prisoners were subjected to a combination of five techniques which included hooding, stress positions, sleep and food deprivation and white noise. Although such techniques were illegal and had been outlawed in the 1970’s, they re-appeared in Iraq in 2003. They were then followed by an interrogation regime that permitted physical, sexual and religious denigration of the prisoners. This was by no means the full extent of the mistreatment. As well as the horrors of Abu Ghraib and Camp Breadbasket, some prisoners were ‘rendered’ from Iraq (and Afghanistan) and found their way to Guantanamo Bay. Here they were held, largely without trial, and subjected to water-boarding and force feeding. The UK was complicit in both but no one on either side of the Atlantic has yet to be held to account.

In contrast to Moltmann, I found myself on the opposite side of the barbed wire fence. As the Command Legal Adviser for the 1<sup>st</sup> (UK) Armoured Division, I visited the UK/US Prisoner of War Camp in Um Qsar in 2003 just twenty-three days into the Iraq War. Whilst visiting the Camp I came across a UK interrogation facility where I saw between 30-40 Iraqi prisoners hooded and in stress positions. At the same time there was a generator running outside the interrogation tent which, in my view, was being used to intimidate the prisoners (white noise). I later found out that the prisoners were also being subjected to food and sleep deprivation. When I went to object to the Officer Commanding

I was informed that the treatment was “UK doctrine” and, in any event, the facility did not come under the command of the 1st (UK) Armoured Division but, instead, answered “to London”.

I lodged a complaint about the illegal mistreatment the same evening. The response was remarkable. Rather than accept the advice, the intelligence branch objected and sought to have the matter referred to Higher Headquarters. Their response, in turn, was that the techniques were not illegal and that I had misinterpreted the law. I refused to budge. Fortunately the International Committee of the Red Cross had also witnessed the mistreatment and had lodged a separate formal complaint to the British Government. My legal advice was eventually vindicated in the High Court and in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.



This was not the start of a religious journey in my case because I was already on a pathway which would lead to ordination eight years later. However, my religious journey became intertwined with a legal journey, one informing the other.

The first lesson I learned was about the International rule of law and what happens when it is disregarded. I had spent a sizeable part of my professional life studying International Law and had been an instructor at the Institute for Humanitarian Law in San Remo. I understood the framework well. Although the UK and its principal ally paid lip service to this International Law, when it came to the implementation, the rules were liberally dismissed, as required. First a war without a Security Council Resolution followed by complicity in torture/inhuman and degrading treatment coupled with extraordinary rendition. This was a watershed in military operations. One only has to look at pictures of prisoner abuse from any conflict to see what happens when a country plays fast and loose with the rules

The second lesson was the value of Human Rights. This is still a toxic political issue but, at the time of the Iraq War, there was a legal debate about the application of Human Rights on the battlefield. There were competing legal views. Broadly speaking, the military lawyers believed that the Human Rights Act should apply in Iraq when we had jurisdiction over enemy territory. The Government Legal Service took the opposite position even instructing the military lawyers that “under no circumstances” should they give advice on Human Rights. The Government position was subsequently abandoned three years later in the High

Court. When the case went to Strasbourg, the Human Rights Act became firmly established on the battlefield and has remained ever since. This has, inevitably, been presented in a rather different light by the State and as something to be resisted. However, I saw it as a force for good. Whilst the US and its allies were blithely dismantling the Geneva Conventions, the Human Rights Act acted as a legal safety net for the prisoners of war in whatever interrogation facility they found themselves and wherever they were packaged in the world. Contrary to the Government narrative, it does not fetter a commander on the battlefield. Instead it holds the State to account and does it very well. That is why, no doubt, it meets so much opposition and also why it must remain at all costs

The whole experience with Prisoners of War not only crowned my legal career, but it also shaped my future ministry. Since ordination, as part of a prophetic ministry, I have devoted much time to speaking out about the mistreatment of prisoners of war, the attempts by the UK Government to hide the facts and attempting to counter the popular narrative of this whole episode being a fiction simply to enrich Human Rights lawyers. It is no such thing. At the same time, I have been honoured to become a Trustee of Redress, a legal charity based in London and the Hague which seeks to obtain legal Redress for torture victims across the globe. This, in turn, has opened my eyes to the shocking prevalence of torture across the world and the indifference towards this barbarity, even in our own country.

I am a parish priest in the Yorkshire Dales and, by contrast, Jürgen Moltmann is one of the great theologians of the post war era. Peculiarly, however, both our lives have been shaped by our experiences of Prisoners of War. This is where the comparison begins and ends but, in comparing both experiences, I find myself asking why Moltmann was met with kindness and hospitality during his captivity and why, fifty-five years later, we behaved with such indifference and sometimes cruelty to our prisoners of war? What happened in the meantime?

On the question of time, the last word, rightly, belongs to Jürgen Moltmann and the Theology of Hope. He said

*"Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."*

May we whom Christ finds, show hospitality and friendship to the prisoner of war, and "conflict with the world" for the sake of those we abuse.



**Nicholas Mercer**

## South African Adventures



A few days after Easter, the Superior of the Community and I flew out to the Western Cape answering a call to begin an exploration into how the CR family might deepen its links with the Anglican Church in South Africa. As you may be aware, the Community of the Resurrection today has many parts to its wider family: Monks, Oblates, Associate, Companions, and Members of the Society of the Resurrection. All of these, in their different ways, promote a growing relationship with the living God, through structured prayerfulness, reflection, study, work, recreation and relationships.

CR has a long-running relationship with South Africa which began towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It has always ebbed and flowed according to the Spirit's promptings. CR was especially influential in opposing apartheid: various brethren were imprisoned or expelled from the country, the most famous being Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was also heavily influenced by CR as a young man and trained for the priesthood at a theological college they helped run in the country. Following the fall of apartheid, and as CR grew smaller, the Community slowly withdrew its permanent presence. More recently, however, there have been increasing prompts to begin renewing the relationship in some way. Our trip was a preliminary exploration to try and gauge how God might be prompting us to going forward.

After landing in Cape Town I was immediately struck by a change of atmosphere in the country. The hope and optimism of the 'Rainbow Nation',



that was so prevalent when I visited on a missional placement with the College a decade ago, felt under great strain now. Various political scandals and the rhetoric of the imminent elections had taken their toll. Over the two weeks we were there, many people expressed a fear that “South Africa was headed in the same direction as Zimbabwe”. South Africa had long been a country of extremes, but the rise in violent crime and corruption was sadly all too evident. The stories of violent rape, burglary and hate crime were readily told by many and there was real frustration at the inability of the security services to bring perpetrators to justice. The sheer levels of poverty were obvious throughout our stay, standing in stark contrast against the affluence of the large gated communities, mansions and sports cars.

We visited lots of different church communities and groups in lots of different settings during our travels and spoke to many different individuals, lay and ordained. We listened to anxieties expressed (at all levels) over a perceived lack of depth in prayer and formation for ministry and the spiritual deprivation that many felt sat at the root of the country’s issues.

At various gatherings and forums, we offered reflections on monasticism, prayer-life and priestly ministry, and we celebrated and preached at services in a host of differing settings: in affluent suburbs such as Durbanville and Pinelands; in the rural areas of Klipheuwel, Hoedjies Bay (on the West Coast) and Clan William (mountain dry-lands); and the deprived (gang-land) areas around Cape Town of Manenberg and Nyanga.

We were regularly impressed by the biblical, theological and liturgical literacy amongst so many in the congregations and how they work so tirelessly to try and implement it in daily life. This is experienced at its most obvious in the way terminology slips into everyday parlance: “God is good”, “May God bless and keep you!”. It is not rare, as bad news is broken to a household, for those present to break out spontaneously into prayer and biblical reflection. More comfortable in its diverse



liturgical tradition and void of many of the arguments over style that so often plague the Church in England, the vibrancy, diversity and richness of the liturgy in South Africa held deep sacramental integrity and was often both inspirational and transformational.

Manenberg is situated in the very centre of what the locals regard as gangland. Fr Oswin was to preach there on our final Sunday. In the days leading up to it, local clergy reassured him that the competing gangs would be perfectly well-behaved during the service and that no shooting would start until after they had left the building!

After discussing Fr Oswin's experience with him, it seems there was something truly transformative about the way the liturgy was celebrated there. And I don't know if it was Fr Oswin's words or his calming influence, but it seems there were no reports of violence following the service on that particular Sunday!

Nyanga is an area of extreme poverty situated near the airport on the opposite side of the N2. Likewise, this was to be my destination for our final Sunday. I was pre-warned that during the high-liturgy I might have to be prepared to pause for regular outbreaks



of spontaneous African singing. This unfolded just as described, and more so. The service finished after 2 hours, a short service by local standards. Following the service, I was treated to two lunches – in the first, served in the porch, I shared a lovely rich chicken broth with all the locals, many of whom would not get much other sustenance that day. The second, a full roast at the incumbent's house together with all the other sacred ministers and churchwardens (I only managed to leave in the nick of time to catch my plane home).

So, this is not a story of what we can do for them, like some kind of one-way mission enterprise, but instead a story of giving and receiving in equal measure. Hopefully, we provided them with some material and positive presence that will help in their deeper reflections, formation and prayer-life. All being well, we also gave them an opportunity to ponder how structured prayer-life might be of benefit, and consider how CR might influence it on an individual level.

For our part, we were treated to rich examples of faithfulness, worship,



hospitality, hope and the joy of living the Gospel in daily life – often in extremely difficult circumstances. It strikes me that, whatever the future holds and however the relationship between the CR family and the Anglican Church in South Africa may develop, it has the promise of providing both parties with a wonderful opportunity for broadening our experience and invigorating both with new prayerful and missional energy.

What this might look like is yet to be seen. There may be a number of ways the CR family can respond, but for the moment it requires more conversations, time, discernment and much prayer. The CR family (in its

wider sense) may have the means at its disposal to support the Church in South Africa in its quest to deepen its formation and prayer-life, but it is also clear that the Church in South Africa has much to offer CR (and the UK) in return. Experiencing church-life and Christian resilience in South Africa may help us to be enriched, grow in confidence, and draw from the mutual support such relations offer. We can most certainly work together across continents to promote the kingdom values that are so desperately needed in both countries and are the answer to all things.

**Fr Rob Parker-McGee**  
(Society of the Resurrection)



## First Performance - An Old Quarry Theatre Anniversary



Way back in 1968 our local church in Warwickshire staged a parish mission with the support of Father Ronald Haynes and Brother Jonathan, and members of the congregation were invited to visit Mirfield for the day to see something of the work of the Community. I cannot pretend to have received any great spiritual insights from the outing and indeed spent some time stalking round the lower parts of the grounds hoping to see one of the rapidly diminishing fleet of British Railways steam locomotives across the valley! However, in the course of my rambles I came across the open air amphitheatre in the Old Quarry and was suitably impressed by the grandeur of the natural setting, one of the highlights of this first visit to Mirfield. When the Community moved into Hall Croft in 1897 they quickly saw the potential of the quarry site for open air religious and artistic events. Keir Hardie and Emmeline Pankhurst both addressed large political meetings and the actor Sir Patrick Stewart gave one of his first performances on stage there. Around that time fifty years ago I was also studying for my O Levels and one of the set texts for English Literature – *Six Modern Poets* – featured the Cumbrian poet and playwright Norman Nicholson. His verse was readily accessible to me even as a naïve 16-year-old, and was perhaps a welcome contrast to the bleak austerity of R.S. Thomas who also featured in the anthology. Nicholson developed a strong religious faith as an adult and employed deceptively simple language to convey his ideas and beliefs. Lines from his poem *The Blackberry* illustrate his style:



*And grant us the sense to feel  
The large condensed within the small  
Wash clear our eyes that we may see  
The sky within the blackberry*



Some fifty years later a connection between Nicholson's work, which had so impressed me as a youngster, and the Quarry Theatre became apparent when I came across a second-hand copy of his verse play *Birth by Drowning*, published by Faber in 1960, complete with original dust jacket. In 1959 Norman Nicholson was commissioned by the Committee for Religious Drama in the Northern Province, associated with Radius, to compose a verse play - *Birth by Drowning* – setting the Elisha and Naaman story in a Cumbrian setting, with Elisha as a country doctor and dramatic participation by the local fells. The original story in 2 Kings chapter 5 requires the leper Naaman to bathe seven times in the River Jordan to be cleansed but in the play the ritual is performed in the local beck. Our Lord also makes reference to the cleansing of Naaman in Luke 4.27. The play was produced by Miss Pamela Keily, who later went on to receive an MBE for her services to religious drama, and actors were drawn from the College and the hostel at Leeds University. The first performance was in the Quarry Theatre on 9 July 1959. Plays were performed here from 1909 until 1976 and perhaps they will be again some time in the future.

**Bill Hines**

## The Bells are Ringing, But are we Really Listening?



*Floods in Fiji*

Those of us who are deeply concerned about the way life on earth is threatened by the rise in global temperature are often dubbed as ‘Alarmists’ by those who deny that human activity is effecting what is happening to our climate. In their mind it seems as though this lets them off having to act in response to the clamour from around the world to end our dependence upon fossil fuels, which the vast majority of climate scientists agree is raising the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The ‘Denial Movement’, fuelled by the oil and gas industries, wants to sow doubt in the minds of those who would otherwise become more active. I would argue that just as the slave trade fuelled the early days of the industrial revolution, (and fought tooth and nail to prevent abolition) so the trade in oil and gas is today at the heart of our so-called ‘developed world’, and clearly wants to remain there for as long as possible.

We know the story of the little boy who cried ‘wolf’ when there was no wolf and whose cry was ignored when the wolf was really at the door! But when the wolf is at the door the need to sound the alarm cannot be denied. And the need to hear and understand the threat is real. The truth is that alarm bells are ringing around the world, and most loudly in places where populations have contributed least to the problem. The Mission Agency USPG have collected stories from places where they are involved, showing both the extremes of climate change and

some inspiring responses from churches (*Faith in a Changing Climate*). A Bishop in the Diocese of Polynesia writes: 'The land to which I belong is in crisis. The source of my identity and belonging is threatened by immense changes being brought about by climate change. There has been increasing erosion of the beach surrounding my village; the beach and habitable soil is being washed away into the lagoon ... During storms and high tides, sea water reaches the village green and damages roads, gardens and homes. .... To shore up the Pacific, and indeed the whole world, we need to focus on proactive approaches, multi-lateral co-operation and innovation. If we are of one mind, one heart and one spirit, we can challenge leaders and decision makers to work effectively to end the calamity that surely awaits us if we continue blindly down this road.' He lives in Fiji.

In Madagascar, the Provincial Secretary of the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean writes: 'As a Malagasy person, the most obvious experience of climate change is how unusual it is to have so many cyclones. During the hot season we now have three or four cyclones each year. Not only is the number of cyclones increasing but so is their speed and strength. The sea is getting warmer, so fish are becoming rarer as they swim at deeper levels. This means fishing has become more difficult. In rural areas reduced rainfall has ruined harvests. For nine months the land receives too little rainfall, then in the remaining three months cyclones destroy the land even further'. The changing climate crisis is making life for the poor in many areas increasingly impossible.



*Drought in Madagascar*

The bells are ringing in Fiji, in Madagascar, in places too many to number, the cry goes up, 'How long O Lord?'. The list of agonies is endless – but are we listening? Or is it business as usual? Greta Thunberg, the Swedish schoolgirl who has led striking school children all around the world is now calling for adults to

come out on strike on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September in support of her demand that all government of whatever colour take action to increase the pace of change. Her future and the futures of all our children and grandchildren are at stake.

Alarmist or prophetic? Surely both!

I would like to conclude this reflection by remembering a moment from the Stations of St Benedict at the companions' gathering at Mirfield in early July. Fr Peter gave a lovely elucidation of the true meaning of obedience. Derived from the Latin 'ob-audire' it involves us in moving towards a deeper listening, to God, to one another and surely also to the needs of those who cry out in suffering because this world is still chronically hooked on carbon-rich fuels for so much of its energy consumption.

A prayer:

Almighty God, who created the heavens and the earth, give us grace to listen to the groanings of your creation, and inspire us by your Spirit to discern what we can do to change our ways and find a better path. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**Canon John Payne-Cook**  
(CR Companion)

## Book Reviews

**The Joy of God.** *Sr Mary David.* Bloomsbury. £12.99.  
Foreword by Erik Varden. Isbn 9781472971326.



Sr Mary David was an American woman, an English scholar who at the age of 30 entered the Benedictine monastery of St Cecilia's, Ryde, on the Isle of Wight, a strictly enclosed monastery where they sing beautiful Latin chant, pray, live together and hardly ever go out. She died of cancer aged 60. This little book is a collection of her writing mostly to her novices for whom she cared for over 22 years.

What can she say to us who live busy lives in this chaotic and challenging world? Quite a lot. One of the essential characteristics of Benedictine life is that, despite its sometimes exotic appearance it is quite simply Christian life lived in a rather unusual environment. And for all Christians the real



coalface of spiritual life lies in the ordinary, the things you do every day. Living with the people we love can be very trying. Our spouses don't understand us, the children annoy us, work colleagues are infuriating and our dear fellow Christians in church often seem consumed by petty jealousies. They probably say the same about us! Yet day after day we must love them, care for them, listen to them, pray for them. We can't rely on feelings to do this. We do it whether we are feeling loving or not. That is what slowly changes us from being the selfish, sinful creatures we usually are to the generous, loving people God wants us to be; and it generally takes a life time. It is just the same for nuns and monks in monasteries which is why Sr Mary David knows what she is talking about.

Likewise with God. Spiritual life is not rocket science for the exceptional. It is a steady attention to God. Sister quotes Therese of Lisieux whose unique insight was to see that God is everywhere, always attending to us so that if we can attend to him in every event of daily life *whatever it is* we shall be growing in love. Most prayer seems pretty humdrum but we keep on with it and from time to time, like a train emerging from a tunnel we suddenly find we are in new country. Most attending to God is a matter of faith: Yes, he is in that person; yes he is in that pile of dishes I must wash. Then from time to time we get a glimpse of another dimension of God's activity that embraces the whole world.

And this is the Joy. There is joy in God despite all the sin and suffering, the stupidity and destructiveness of the human race. Joy is not the same as happiness. Joy persists through all the darkness. Joy is founded on hope for we know God is there.

**Nicolas Stebbing CR**

**Rarely Ordinary Time: Some Memoirs.** *Nicholas Reade*

Available from [nicholas.reade@btinternet.com](mailto:nicholas.reade@btinternet.com)

One thing that comes out very clearly from these memoirs is that Bishop Nicholas loved being a parish priest, and when he moved upwards (or is it just onwards?) to become an Archdeacon and a Bishop it was the love for the people and an awareness of the graces coming through the Church that were his real strengths. That is how bishops should be!

In some ways Nicholas' background is that of the classic Church of England priest: prep school, public school (though finding that on Guernsey was a bit unusual), University of Leeds, Mirfield and then a curacy in the Black Country. He says often how much he owes to the Community of the Resurrection,

which is nice for us. He is certainly the kind of former student we most like who is firmly rooted in parish life, still believes in the Catholic faith, and knows that keeping faithful to prayer and the sacraments is the real key to an effective ministry.

Black Country, Sussex and Blackburn does show quite a range of geographical and social experience in his ministry. Of the earlier part one is tempted to say “This was a different world”. In some ways that is true. Getting young people into church, rejoicing in strong and growing congregations being unapologetic of Catholic Anglicanism is much harder these days. Yet people stay the same and I suspect that priests who are confident in the faith and energetic and at the same time really sensitive to their folk can still have a traditional kind of ministry that succeeds. In fact, I see that today in many Society parishes.

Bishop Nicholas belongs of course to that part of the Church which cannot accept the ordination of women to the priesthood or episcopate. This does not seem to have stopped him working well with female clergy and greatly valuing their ministry. There is a paradox here which most of us in that part of the Church find hard to resolve: how do we stick firmly to our principles, based usually on an understanding of Catholicity which is not limited to the C of E, and yet show appropriate respect to those we disagree with. Many do it very well and Bishop Nicholas appears to be one.

Those who hope this book may provide them with ecclesiastical gossip, salacious ‘dirt’ on common enemies or comforting stories of other people’s failures will be disappointed. No doubt Bishop Nicholas knows plenty of that but he has left it off the pages of his memoir. Everyone he encounters, whether bishops, curates, lay folk, MPs or noble Lords, seem to have been delightful and supportive. Just occasionally, as with the attack on Bishop George Bell’s reputation, does another note ring through.



**Nicholas Stebbing CR**




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