

FIT FOR LIFE

by Brian Boobyer

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Introduction: A Biographical Note

Brian Boobyer was one of the best all-round sportsmen of his day. He was a double-blue at Oxford University in rugby and cricket 1949-52, getting seven blues in all, and he played nine times for England at rugby, 1950-52. He was an exciting mpres-threequarter with a deceptive run which could confuse his own team as much as his opponents! Sport runs in his family; the first of many was his grandfather Bishop E.D.Shaw who was a double-blue at Oxford in 1882 and carried his bat for 78 against the Australians that same year.

To the surprise of many, Boobyer put his sporting life on one side in 1952 and spent the next ten years in Asia and America with the work of Moral Re-Armament (MRA). During that time, he married Juliet Rodd, painter and writer. They then settled in Oxford, where they lived for almost thirty years, and had two sons, Philip and Mark. They now live on the Welsh border, near the small town of Presteigne.

MRA was founded by the American Lutheran pastor, Frank Buchman (1878-1961). After he died, MRA was led for a time by the English sportsman and journalist, Peter Howard (1908-1965). Buchman, Howard, and religious writers like the Scotsman, Henry Drummond (1851-1897) greatly influenced Boobyer's faith and outlook. On five continents, Boobyer used his experience, comparing the all-outness of sport with the all-outness of the life of faith.

The pieces in this collection comes from a number of sources: some originally appeared in the magazine *Freeway*; others appeared in the British MRA newsletter or the parish magazine; some were talks that Boobyer gave for special occasions.

Dawn Chorus

When I was 12 a teacher at school used to take us for walks on Sunday afternoons. As we went, he gave a name to every bird, every sound. I can remember him pointing out the first migrant to arrive in the spring of 1940 – a willow warbler. It was 13 March.

How I love that bird's song. It came to be my favourite.

Every journey, every walk, every early morning ever since has been different for me because of that teacher's enthusiasm for nature.

I have a precious book *Birds of the British Isles and Their Eggs, Volume 1*, by T.A.Coward, signed by him: 'Bird Club, Ripley Court, 2nd prize, April 1940, John Bowes.' He was killed in the war.

How much I owe to him.

Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary 1907-1916, in his classic *The Charm of Birds* wrote this about the call of the curlew: 'The notes suggest peace, rest, healing, joy, an assurance of happiness past, present and to come . . . on a still day one can almost feel the air vibrating with the blessed sound.'

The message of nature is newness. Every tree is different. Every leaf, every second of a sunrise.

People through the ages have had a craze for novelty, for the next sensation. Nature, on our doorstep, offers constant newness, and it's free.

I love walking through a wood or down a stream watching, listening, aware that what I can see is only a tiny fraction of the teeming life around.

Woods seem to say to me 'slow down'. A tree rebukes a tired, busy and burdened spirit. A forester once said that when he was young and had a problem he would talk it over with the beech tree in the garden and was always satisfied with the result.

I used to have a date in May every year to go to Wytham Wood near Oxford just before 4 o'clock in the morning and watch the world wake up. Thrushes and robins are usually the first. By 4.30 the chorus is astounding. The sun comes up through the mist. A cuckoo calls. Deer appear, and perhaps a fox. It reminds me that the world is still perfect.

There is no hurry or impatience about nature. The oak takes about 70 years before it produces its first acorn.

The boatman who took us out to the Bass rock near Edinburgh years ago said there were 30,000 gannets on the rock and about 10,000 of them went out each day to fish. It has stayed in my mind ever since: 10,000 gannets out at sea fishing – the very wonder of it!

The naturalist, Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), wrote of 'the sublime extravagance of nature': 'Every blade of grass, every leaf, is an inscription speaking of hope. There is nothing utilitarian, everything is on a scale of splendid waste.'

But nature is unobtrusive in her profusion. Most of the blossom remains unseen. It does not grow to be admired. It reminds me of the carvings in cathedrals, mostly unseen and author unknown.

Dante described nature as the art of God.

'Thy righteousness is like the great mountains,' says one psalm.

Cricket – My first Love

My brother Philip and I found our way into every second hand bookshop we could find, searching for cricket books, and we had over 300 between us. I remember buying W.G.Grace's book for three pence and Ranjitsinghi's book for four pence.

We played cricket in the garden all summer long, pretending to be the great players of the past. Dad, a doctor, joined us when he could. Seeing that garden years later, I was amazed to see how small it was.

I was very afraid of the dark, and playing cricket under the bedclothes at night was a great comfort!

My first heroes were cricketers. Head of a long list was Victor Trumper of Australia and Jack Hobbs of England, both renowned for their sportsmanship as well as their batting.

Moreover, Hobbs' wife became mentally ill, and he looked after her with devotion, and took her with him to meet people without embarrassment.

Dad took me to Lords' cricket ground in 1938. England was playing Australia. It rained all day, and I think there was half an hours cricket. But it did not seem to matter. I was actually there!

Later, I played there quite often, and it became one of my favourite thinking places.

No wonder cricket became my first love!

When I was playing a big match – cricket or rugby – dad would rise at 6 in the morning, and cut the hedge in the garden, whether it needed cutting or not. He was more nervous than me!

Whenever I meet with my oldest school and sporting friend, John Wimperis, we say 'How lucky we were' – lucky to have been coached by the great maestro and teacher, P.F.Saunders, lucky to have played for years on the glorious cricket ground at Uppingham, the 'Upper', lucky altogether.

Lucky on the rugby field too, to have been coached by Smallwood, who played for Leicester and England in the early 1920s.

Luck continued at Oxford with the chance to play for four summers in the lovely parks.

My first match was against Yorkshire. Opening the innings with Murray Hofmeyr, I received first ball from Fred Trueman, then in his first season for Yorkshire. In the second innings, I was struggling to stay there and showing much frustration, when Norman Yardley, the Yorkshire captain, fielding at short leg, said quietly, 'Don't worry, you're doing alright.'

We put on 55 for the first wicket and so helped Oxford, in a low scoring match, to beat Yorkshire for the first time since 1896!

But Yardley's word is what I remember most.

Of course, there is no logic to all this. Cricket is often slow, boring, impossible to explain to people, and there may be no result in the end. It is hard to see cricket, with its slower tempo, holding its own in a world that cannot stop going faster. But it just may, because people who love the game love it passionately.

Like me!

Here is a different pace of life.

And the ball hitting the right part of the bat on a green field, freshly mown, and blackbirds singing, is a good picture of heaven!

The Romance of Sport

I was playing in a big rugby match and in the first half made a break which led to the one try of the match. At half-time, as we crossed over, the opposing fly-half, said quietly, 'Well played, Brian.'

It was only years later that I remembered this. By then he had died young. His name was Glyn Davies, a brilliant player for Cambridge and Wales. He had the longest sidestep of anyone I can remember.

How attractive sportsmanship is – and often unseen.

I grew up in a sporting world. It started with my grandfathers, both passionate sportsmen. One of them, E.D.Shaw, was a double-blue at Oxford in 1882 and carried his bat for 78 against the Australians that year. Later he became the first Bishop of Buckingham and the Archdeacon of Oxford – but as far as I was concerned, that was his supreme moment!

Each year, on Boxing Day morning, the Shaw family played the choirboys at football in Christ Church meadows. I remember complaining that Grandpa was not a very good goalkeeper! I was about five at the time, and he was seventy-five!

Dad was a passionate sportsman. He had opened the batting for St Mary's Hospital. He grew up at Nottingham, where his father was for forty years Medical Officer of Health. He used to tell me he had been brought up at Trent Bridge and Meadow Lane, homes of Notts cricket and Notts County football – entrance fee to each one penny! Notts County had a goalkeeper called Iremonger – also a cricketer – and he used to wander out of goal. The crowd would shout 'Get back there, Albert!' We often used that expression at home as we grew up!

Each Saturday, through the winter, at about 4.30 in the afternoon, I would go to Ealing Broadway station, 100 yards from our home, to buy the sports edition of the evening paper. Then I would return and read every football result aloud to my father. Brentford was our nearest football team, and we often went to watch them play. They were then in the Premier division.

A happy and sporting life somehow protected me from the darkness on the world scene – I was 17 in 1945. They also enabled me to overcome my intense shyness.

After school, I did my national service in the army for two years. I joined up on a Thursday and went to Warley Barracks, Brentwood. On arrival, I was immediately sent for by the sports officer. He said that he had a letter from the Secretary of the Rosslyn Park rugby club, Frank Lyall, asking if I could be released to play against London Scottish – in 2 days time! I was duly released, and Lyall's persistence enabled me to play regularly for Rosslyn Park throughout army service.

I often think what I owe to him – and many like him.

During my spell in the Royal Artillery, I got a 'Sports' exhibition to Brasenose College, Oxford: The Principal, Stallybrass, law expert and vice-chancellor, was a passionate cricketer!

Sport continued at Oxford – as well as history. It took me to every part of Britain, many times to France, and on memorable rugby tours of South Africa and Japan.

So many memories and lessons – perhaps most of all learning to succeed one day and fail the next – and hopefully not to be thrown by either. After one successful period, I played rugby for England against Wales. We lost 23-5. One reporter wrote: 'Boobbyer's play was too bad to be true.' I would like to have had that day over again!

Then in Tokyo I took a different road. It was not a sudden decision. I was 24, and Oxford was over. I saw the Oxford rugby team off at the airport at 3.30 in the morning, and returned to my room in the old Imperial Hotel. I remember that early

breakfast! Either I had made the best decision of my life, or I was a bit crazy – probably both!

‘To whom much is given, much is required’ has always been a special verse for me.

The next ten years I spent in Asia and America with Moral Re-Armament. During that time, I married the perfect person. But all that is another story!

Encounter in Paris

I was on a rugby tour in France in December 1948, with the Oxford team. After matches in Toulon and Grenoble, we came to Paris to play Stade Français, staying in the happily named Hotel du Printemps.

After the game, two of us went into a coffee shop near the hotel, and to my great surprise we talked about things I had never talked about before.

I wish I could remember what they were! All I can remember now is that I drank hot chocolate! One of my favourite drinks ever since.

We continued that conversation back in Oxford and he put a challenge to me: to take time each morning to listen to God, and write down my thoughts: and to compare my life with the purity and honesty of Jesus Christ.

I did not respond. It sounded rather strenuous. Besides, life was comfortable and seemingly successful, and I had a faith already.

But there was no edge to it, and certainly no Cross. And there was an authority in this person’s life which I could not get away from.

So I did what he suggested – with a definite reluctance! I began with ten minutes; it became twenty, and steadily longer. I bought a Westclox alarm clock from Woolworths to help the process.

Out of self, into Christ, out to others – as simple and stretching as that.

Thank God He moves in unlikely places, and for that friend, Murray Hofmeyr, a brilliant sportsman who later played a vital part in creating the new South Africa.

Moses writes in Psalm 90, ‘Satisfy us with Thy love when morning breaks.’

And David in Psalm 5, ‘At dawn, I hold myself in readiness for You.’

And in Psalm 63, ‘O God, thou art my God: early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.’

And Mark, chapter 1, verse 35, ‘In the morning, rising up a great while before day, Jesus went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.’

How to Start and Stay New

When I read a book I usually like to take a sort of running jump at it. Authors like Scott and Dostoevsky tend to start slowly and it is not fair on a book to read five or ten pages a night before going to bed, lose interest, and then blame the book.

In the same way, to anyone intending to lead a new life I would say, ‘Start thoroughly, Take a running jump.’

One sure way to do that is to be completely honest, with God and maybe a trusted friend – our sins in murky detail may not look so attractive after all.

And when you become a trusted friend yourself, there is a rule: listen and then forget.

Solzhenitsyn in his *The Gulag Archipelago*, expressed these thoughts that he had when he was in prison: ‘Remember all your previous life. Remember all you did that was bad and shameful and take thought. Cannot you possibly correct it now? Yes,

you have been imprisoned for nothing, you have nothing to repent of before the state and its law – but before your own conscience....’

I remember first playing rugby football. I was twelve, and I began very tentatively. Fear of getting hurt made me flinch all the time, and the result was that I constantly did get hurt. It was two years before I made an all-out tackle. Suddenly a game that I hated became a game that I loved.

C.S.Lewis, in his book *Surprised by Joy*, describes his road to faith. He writes: ‘Dreams of childhood and adolescence have much in common: in between is boyhood, which is very much like the Dark Ages, in which everything has been greedy, cruel, noisy and prosaic, in which the imagination has slept and the most unideal senses and ambitions have been restlessly, even maniacally, awake.’ That is why I say ‘Start thoroughly’. If we do not face the truth, Christ cannot give us the freedom that He promised. We remain actors. Frank Buchman talked about people who were starched and ironed without being washed. Without allowing Christ to cleanse us from our past – distant and recent – we can easily yield to discouragement and despair.

But suppose we’ve started on a new road, how do we continue?

A prime secret of victory is to see that our lives are built around other people, and not our own spiritual development.

Mother Teresa said: ‘How strange that Christ should spend thirty years doing nothing, wasting His time, not giving a chance to His personality and His gifts.’ In fact He laid down His life for others and for the world.

Another secret is to spend enough time with God in quiet. David says in Psalm 23: ‘The Lord gives me everything. He gives me rest and righteousness, and restores

my spirit when it is frail. He removes my fears. He guides me, comforts me, fills, fills to overflowing. He gives me a permanent home – abiding in Him.’

What a promise! But there is a condition, We have to give God time and space to do these things for us. It may mean going to bed earlier so that we can rise early enough to enable this to happen.

This time enables me to start each day afresh. Henry Drummond said: ‘Don’t give people a thimbleful of the Gospel.’ If I’m going to give people bread instead of stones I need to be filled anew each day and my purity renewed. St Paul wrote: ‘If you’re not pure enough to be at your best all the time, you’re cheating people.’

Finally, it is important to find a big enough aim in life. ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ could become a commitment. But there may be also what Mother Teresa calls ‘a call within a call’. For her a call to become a nun became a call to serve the poor. Gandhi wrote: ‘The leadership of the true man of God is measured by the purity of his life, the selflessness of his mission and the breadth of his outlook.’

Eric Liddell, hero of the film *Chariots of Fire*, gave up his sporting success to become a missionary in China. He wrote: ‘The bravest moment of a man’s life is the moment he looks at himself without wincing, without complaining.... Build the habits of your life round the early morning hour. Be silent. Bathe yourself in God’s word. Write down what comes. Pore over it. Don’t read hurriedly. When a person hurries through a wood, few birds and animals appear. They hide. But if he sits down and waits they come out. Finally, act.’

These thoughts came in a manuscript discovered about 40 years after his

death and published in a paperback, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life*. The book includes these lines of his:

‘When God loves He loves the world.
When God gives He gives His Son.
When God invites He invites everybody.
When God saves He saves everlastingly.’

Paul, Athlete of God

In my university days I was too much of a sportsman to take my subject, history, seriously enough. For instance the summer term meant cricket 11.30-6.30., except on Sundays. So it was impossible to go to lectures. Luckily my tutors took a lenient view of the situation!

But I did learn to love history, especially biography, and I did learn to make notes on every book I read; and I’ve managed to do that ever since, including novels, bible commentaries, bird books, poetry, children’s books – jotting down any sentence or insight that seemed to stand out.

Winnie the Pooh and *Alice in Wonderland* are full of wisdom as well as absurdity!

Early in my spiritual journey I ran into the useful world ‘Relate’, the importance of relating faith to daily life. I discovered in the writings of William Barclay, the Scottish theologian, more about the Roman world into which Christ came with His dazzling message.

He quotes the Roman writers: Propertius – ‘I see proud Rome perishing, the victim of her own prosperity’; Juvenal – ‘Enervating riches sapped the sinews of the

age with foul luxury’; and Tacitus – ‘Crime became the only antidote to boredom. The greater the infamy, the greater the delight’.

Very topical!

In his book *The Mind of St Paul* Barclay writes: ‘The resurrection proves that truth is stronger than falsehood, that good is stronger than evil, that life is stronger than death, that love is stronger than hate.’

Barclay refers to a historical novel written in 160AD describing Paul as ‘A man of little stature, thin-haired on the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat hooked, full of grace. For sometimes he appeared as a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.’

Paul seems to have been no beauty!

I find myself constantly returning to his great truths:

‘The whole wide world is on tiptoe waiting to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.’

‘He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, in you, through you.’

‘The letter kills, the spirit gives life.’

‘This one thing I do – I leave the past behind and reach out to what lies before.’

Barclay points out that the Greek word for reaching out is the same as for an athlete at the end of a race, going for the tape.

This is just one of eight sporting references in the Epistles of Paul. He surely attended the Isthmian Games which took place in Corinth and drew people from all over Greece.

No wonder that Paul has often been called an athlete of the Lord – a truly all-out person.

‘And Such were Some of You’

Some sixty years ago a parish priest, J.B. Phillips, sent a copy of his translation of ‘Colossians’ to C.S. Lewis. He wrote back with great encouragement: ‘It’s like seeing an old picture after it’s been cleaned.’ Lewis suggested he should translate all Paul’s epistles, and offered a possible title – ‘Letters to Young Churches’.

This suggestion was accepted and I remember first reading it as a student, and its vividness.

Phillips went on to translate the whole New Testament and then wrote a short book, *Ring of Truth*, expressing the profound impact the experience of translation had made on his life.

In it he wrote this astonishing passage:

‘One letter which really struck me a blow from which I never recovered was “1 Corinthians”. I was reminded that Corinth was a byword for every kind of vice and depravity. I had a fair picture of the sort of place it must have been for the founding of a Christian church, when I suddenly came across 1 Corinthians 6, 9-11.’

Paul writes: ‘Don’t be under any illusion. Neither the impure, the idolator or the adulterer, neither the effeminate, the pervert or the thief, neither

the swindler, the drunkard, the foul-mouthed, or the rapacious, shall have any share in the kingdom of god. *And such, remember, were some of you.*'

Out of his whole translation, Phillips puts this one sentence in italics. 'I realised', he wrote, 'what an astonishing piece of Christian evidence this is, to Paul and his fellow apostles. It was plainly the invasion of the human spirit by God's own spirit.'

When I was in my 20s I attended many meetings and Bible studies led by Frank Buchman, and he constantly underlined this passage. Referring to impurity, he would say: 'Not one drop.' And he would quote Henry Wright of Yale: 'The joy of the uncommitted sin.'

Wright used this definition of purity: 'Transparency in the crystal, clear water from the mountain spring, the white of snow, the clear open heaven through which the stars appear, victory over every sin.'

One of Gandhi's favourite verses came from Christ in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9: 'Salted with the fire of the discipline.'

In his book, *That Hideous Strength*, C.S.Lewis writes of his principal character:

'He was aware without having to think of it that it was he himself and nothing else in the whole world that had chosen the dust and the broken bottles, the heap of old tin cans, the dry and choking places. It could have been "the system," "an inferiority complex due to his parents" or the "peculiarities of the age".'

None of these things occurred to him now.'

Let me return to the passage from ‘Corinthians’, ‘And such were some of you.’ No one is too set in their ways, too far gone, that cannot be redeemed.

And no city.

Paul says elsewhere: ‘The past is finished.’

What a dazzling hope!

The Past Can be Faced and Finished

Jesus spent 90 per cent of his life at home. His first miracle was at a wedding feast. His last words from the Cross were a request to John to make a home for his mother. He believed in families. All families have problems. Some of our married friends, people in their forties, are separated or separating – with all the anguish that involves. This is, I think, partly due to a yearning for lost years, a feeling that life has passed them by and some important ingredient has been missing. The women want to look young and exciting again. Men want to show that they can make fresh conquests.

Christ offers us the chance to start again with the same person, instead of starting again with somebody else. This requires a new vision of the future based on the hope that things can change. This, in turn, depends on a growing spiritual life. St John says that if we don’t develop a close relationship with God we become like dry sticks. What basis for unity have two dry sticks? Without change, self-willed and proud personalities are bound to drift apart.

For most people, Christmas means going home. A good motto for such homecomings could be ‘look back in wonder.’ There is plenty to wonder at if your heart is open. For the fortunate, there may be memories of childhood Christmases. But all can wonder at the story of the first Christmas. God speaks to a teenage girl. She

believes what he says. When her child is due she hunts desperately for a room in which to bear it. God entered the world in an astonishing, unforeseeable way.

The next step is to look forward in hope. You can find inspiration from a book, a piece of music, a picture, the sky, a skein of wild geese, a friend. But the vision of hope is best fed by a fresh look at Christ's own life, in all its simplicity.

Christ took up his calling as a boy. Benedict was 17 when he walked out of decadent Rome into the hills. Francis of Assisi was in his twenties when he answered God's call; St Paul in his thirties; Abraham "growing old." Whether we are young, middle-aged or old, God's promise is the same. The past can be faced and finished. Christ told us that the truth would make us free. We need no longer stay the same. Any person, any marriage, any relationship can be reborn. Christmas offers the vision of a new world that is so compelling that it can silence those voices that say, "It is too late. It is too difficult. What's the use." The voice that spoke to Mary, the wise men and the shepherds still speaks today.

Purity

'My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure.' (Tennyson)

'Light and lust are deadly enemies.' (Shakespeare)

'The soul's perverse love that makes the crooked way seem straight.' (Dante)

'Even more pure as tempted more: more able to endure as more exposed to suffering and distress: thence, more alive to tenderness.' (Wordsworth)

'Guard your eyes specially. Show a great love for that virtue which sheds a lustre on all of life, the guiding star of the priesthood, purity.' (Pope John)

'Purity concentrates God in us.' (Teilhard de Chardin)

‘Just as you have your own face, your own smile, your own handwriting, your own walk, you have your own temptation. It is subtle, pitiless. The greatest mistake is to underestimate its strength.’(Drummond)

‘Remember Augustine’s history of temptation: a thought, a picture, a fascination and a fall.’ (Drummond)

‘Have done with impurity and every other evil that touches the lives of others.’ (St James)

‘A pure mind soon becomes a deep mind.’(Buddha)

‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways and they will be converted unto Thee.’(Psalm 51)

These quotes list some of the fruits of purity: energy, compassion, courage, a sense of wonder, selflessness, stamina, depth, power to help others, the revelation of God Himself.

Purity must be absolute because helping another person on the moral and spiritual road of life is the most delicate art in the world. Most people on the surface do not want to be helped on that road, but deep down they may do. But they would not say so. Drummond wrote: ‘To draw souls one by one and take from them the secrets of their lives, to talk them clean out of themselves, to read them off like a page of print, to pervade them with your spiritual essence and make them transparent, this is the spiritual diagnosis which is so difficult to acquire and so hard to practise.’ He was 23 when he wrote that.

The apostle Peter wrote: ‘Now that you have, by obeying the truth, made your souls clean enough for a genuine love of your fellows, see that ye do love each other fervently and from the heart.’ (I Peter 1, 22)

Clean enough to love.

The big question is: Is it possible to live that kind of purity all the time?

The answer is ‘No’ . . . unless you have a motive that makes you want to do it badly enough. And it’s covered in that verse of Peter. You want to do something for a friend or for the world, for the nation or for the Lord Himself. For the sake of people we love.

But I have to forget myself to do that. Moment by moment. Day by day. Always. Then I’m available for others.

Ugo Bassi from Italy wrote in the early 19th century:

‘Measure thy life by loss instead of gain:

Not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth,

For love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice,

And whoso suffers the most hath most to give.’

Christ told us that the truth would make us free. Sin is attractive but its gory details are not. Absolute honesty can mean that the sin that I love can become the sin that I hate. From such hatred of sin can come the power to break with it.

Shakespeare wrote: “It is one thing to be tempted, it’s another thing to fall.”

(Measure For Measure)

Henry Wright, Professor of Christian Methods at Yale University in the early 20th century, wrote: ‘The human mind is like a camera film. After exposure to an impure thought you can delay and develop the plate or flood the plate immediately with the life of Christ.’

At sport it's all too easy to try too hard and become tense, especially when you are going through a bad patch. Passing a rugby ball or hitting a cricket ball require good timing. More relaxation is needed rather than more effort. Furthermore, if you hold on to your bat too tightly you cannot keep it straight.

It is the same with the spiritual life, especially with the battle for purity.

Charles Wesley wrote in a hymn:

‘Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin,
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.’

I remember hearing Frank Buchman say: “‘Make and keep me pure within’ – those are the greatest words in the English language.’

Saint Columba (521-597)

The story of Columba is one of the great stories of British history. He brilliantly combined the political and the spiritual.

The Bible is full of stories of people who got into deep trouble – Moses, David and Paul, for instance – then repented, recovered and gave outstanding leadership. God gave them a second chance, a second touch, and the world has been renewed by them.

Columba continues that great line.

He had all the gifts – horseman, sportsman, boatman, poet, musician (with a glorious singing voice) –and with his princely background he was surely destined to be High King of Ireland.

But he had one weakness. He was a violent man, of hot blood, and at one point his temper was so hot that it led to a Druid-Christian confrontation. Three thousand were killed in the battle of Culdremne, in Sligo. The Christian forces won, but for this violence, Columba's fellow monks threatened him with excommunication. But they relented, saying, 'We could not cast out the one whom God has chosen to lead the nations into life.' As a penance he accepted exile from Ireland and a calling to win 3000 souls for Christ, to atone for the dead of the battle.

Columba was then 40, and he accepted his second chance. He sailed for Iona with 12 companions and so the Golden Age of Ireland, which began with Patrick, continued.

The story of Columba is a great favourite of my wife, Juliet, and myself. A Scottish friend sent Juliet a book about Columba's life, suggesting it might contain material for a play. Indeed it did. Here was high drama, and a story that deserved to be told and retold; giving a picture of the real Ireland that gave faith to Europe.

With the co-operation of a friend, Joanna Sciortino, and much research at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the play came to birth, and went around Britain for two years with 133 performances in six different productions – from the Orkneys to London – starting at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1978.

An Irish nun said: 'This makes me proud to be Irish again.'

In the introduction to the play, Juliet and Joanna wrote: 'Columba and his monks made Ireland literate. From Iona and other monasteries they bound together the wandering tribes of Scotland with a common faith, and started to Christianise the North of England. In the years ahead the Irish Saints and Scholars were to become the intellectual leaders of Europe. Their schools sent out the "Peregrini" bringing culture and faith to a continent disintegrating in barbarism.'

Columba prayed for ‘purity, wisdom and prophecy. His prayers were surely answered. This then is the story of what one person can do. He could have easily turned back at the age of 40.

C.S.Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote this: ‘We say, “I never expected to be a saint. I only wanted to be a decent ordinary chap”, and we imagine we are being humble. But this is the fatal mistake. To shrink back from God’s plan is not humility, it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit but obedience.’

Columba did not shrink back or turn back.

The Second Touch

Christ cured a blind man. He touched his eyes once and the blind man could see people vaguely ‘like trees walking.’ Then came the second touch and all was clear. He could see other people as individuals.

I am suggesting that we all need both touches.

St Teresa of Avila, the patron saint of Spain, who lived in the 16th century, wrote about her ‘second conversion’. She mentions it in her famous autobiography which, after *Don Quixote*, is the most widely read prose classic of Spain. She was 40 at the time, having become a Carmelite nun at 21.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta describes a similar experience for herself as ‘a call within a call’.

I remember God first getting a foothold in my life at the time of my confirmation in the church when I was 13. My conscience then rescued me from various habits. But I was still the centre of things, aware of myself, I think, as a decent bloke with a few minor blemishes.

Seven years later, through a sporting friend I was challenged to listen to God and compare myself with Christ and His standards. I found I was not the decent person I thought I was.

This was for me the beginning of the second touch,

I got a Christmas card from an old university friend. At the bottom he wrote 'Isaiah chapter 60 vv 1-2'. I remember thinking, 'I've read that before', but after Christmas I did read it and it seemed to me like a charter for the new year: 'Though darkness covers the earth, and dark night the nations, the Lord shall shine upon you; and the nations shall march towards your light, and their kings towards your sunrise.'

It seemed to say to me, the darker the darkness the brighter the light can stand out. As AIDS and violence spread, and despair grows, there is one essential for all of us: to make sure that our candles are fully lit.

Psalm 18 says, 'Thou wilt light my candle.' A quiet time in the morning enables us to leave our rooms with our candles lit.

And if the candle flickers or goes out, what then? I suggest: pray quietly, obey the next thought, care for the next person.

There is a simplicity about the spiritual road in life which we can recapture each day.

If I believe in God and do not give Him priority it seems perhaps that I am content with the first touch. I may have a certain spiritual dutifulness, determination and intensity, but there is no music.

God can cross out my self-will. That is the Cross. Then I am free from myself. That is the second touch.

Always Something to Discover

I rediscovered Psalm 57. I must have read it hundreds of times before.

‘I will call on God who performs all things for me.’

‘My soul is among lions but my heart is steadfast.’

‘Awake, my soul, awake at dawn, I will confess Thee and sing to Thee among the nations.’

The Bible is always waiting to be discovered. A modern translation may make an old verse come alive, although personally I love the old Authorised Version best. – it is a literary masterpiece.

This sense of discovery reminds me of the tours of Oxford I’ve often done for visiting friends. Constantly I notice new things, I look up and there is a new statue or a new view. But it’s been there a long time.

‘He performs all things for me.’ How often have I thought that I performed all things for Him.

Psalm 18 is a beauty. ‘Thou wilt light my candle, enlarge my steps under me, make my way perfect.’ Enlighten, enlarge, perfect. What a fantastic God who can do these things for us.

One point of having a leisured quiet time is to allow God time and space to do them.

Take Romans chapter 12. It is a charter for life. It opens: ‘Commit your life to God. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould. Do not conform, but rather let God transform you. Then you can know the will of God and move towards the goal of true maturity.’

I was on the early bus from Oxford to London. I had bicycled furiously and had only just caught it. I sat down breathlessly and looked forward to reading the novel *Waverley*, by Walter Scott.

Opposite me was a girl from Africa. There were several reasons why I should not talk to her. It was early in the morning. She was in her 20's and I approaching 60. I wanted to read my book. Finally, she was asleep,

I started reading but prayed to see if I should talk to her. When she woke I greeted her and she said she was on her way to a weekly lecture at the London School of Economics, part of her Doctorate on the Administrative Service of West Africa.

When the bus arrived in London about two hours later we had had the most interesting conversation. She said how our TV news and programmes filled her with hopelessness, when what she needed was hope for the serious situation in her country.

I think I gave her a bit of hope. She certainly gave me an idea of what she expected Britain to do for Africa.

I finished *Waverley* another time! Probably it was another bus journey. I don't automatically talk to strangers on buses.

Walter Scott is certainly one of my favourite authors. John Buchan, in his *Life of Walter Scott*, wrote: 'Scott stood at the heart of life and his interests embraced everything that interested his fellows. This is the keystone of his character and mind: they were central and universal. He was impatient of nothing that God had made, but he did not merely tolerate, for he was eager to understand.' He quotes Scott as saying, 'without courage there cannot be truth and without truth there can be no other virtue.'

Early illness and lifelong lameness did not embitter him: only deepened him. Scott inspired novelists like Victor Hugo, Manzoni and Dostoevsky.

It is fascinating to look at the spiritual vein that runs through much of great literature.

There is a lovely verse in Isaiah chapter 26: ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose imagination is stayed on Thee, because he trusted in Thee.’

It is important to feed that imagination with great writing and great lives. Otherwise the world, the flesh and the television can fill it with garbage.

Friendship at Many Levels

I had a friend in his eighties who lived close to us in Oxford and shared my love of cricket. His shelves were lined with cricket books. When I visited him we talked cricket and probably nothing else – so relaxing. Mainly we talked about some of the great matches of the 1920s and ‘30s which he saw, which my father saw and used to talk about. How much I enjoyed those visits.

Visiting New Zealand, I lost my binoculars. Friends we were staying with wanted to arrange for me to borrow a pair, so they contacted a person in Auckland who had written one of the classic books on New Zealand birds. I went to have tea with him and his wife – the Sibsons – and we talked birds for two hours! And he lent me a pair of binoculars.

My wife, Juliet, is an artist and garden-person – with a passion for roses – two fast ways of making friends – like sport and birds for me.

My father-in-law, Lord Rennell of Rodd, loved the Herefordshire countryside on the Welsh border where his family had lived for centuries. He wrote a book called *Valley on the March* which described the geography and history of this lovely unspoilt part of Britain. As he was getting older, what he loved specially was to be driven through this countryside that he knew so well, and just gaze at it. When I drove

him round we hardly ever spoke but I felt he was drinking in what bountiful nature was offering: making him feel part of something old and wonderful, yet hard to put into words.

He wrote: 'I always yearn when I am away to return to the home of my ancestors in this quiet valley on the March where the purpose and continuity of human life on the land for a thousand years are so pleasant and rewarding.'

Continuity was his great love.

Psalm 4 says, 'Thou has enlarged me when I was in difficulties'; and Psalm 18, 'Thou has enlarged my steps under me so that my feet did not slip'; and Psalm 119, 'I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.'

I like the word 'enlarge.'

An Oxford friend I knew well, beginning in my student days, was a teacher of English literature at the university for 40 years – one of the supreme conversation people. I will tell her I'd just read, say, *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, and then for ten minutes she would unravel the story for me as she saw it with insights I had probably missed – although it might have been years since she last read the book! How rich were those conversations. I asked her what was the best piece of literature that dealt with selfish ambition and she replied at once, *Macbeth*.

It is important in all our friendships that there is no string attached. At certain times in my life I felt I wanted to impose my convictions and faith on people. The Pope once said, 'You either love people or you use them.' I am glad to share my faith with people but I also realise it is a very intimate thing. Christ said: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.' He did not say we should knock the door down.

There is a further reach of friendship which is the most delicate of all, where you may be able to help another person find his moral and spiritual road in life. He

may trust you with things about his life that he has never told anyone else, enabling him to get free from the past.

I was reading Psalm 16: ‘Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is the fullness of joy: at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore’ – a road, a home, and a heart permanently satisfied. We can be mediums through which God can touch people, who can then turn to Him and so receive these wonderful gifts.

I have a sense that God is operating at all levels of friendship.

The Mark of Greatness

Nadezhda Mandelstam, widow of the Russian poet who disappeared in the camps in 1938, wrote in her book, *Hope Abandoned*, this comment on the 20th century: ‘I do not believe any preceding age has been marked by such a passion for self-advancement as ours. It is the disease of our time.’ Also: ‘Total absorption in oneself is a sure sign of mental illness, something to which whole nations may succumb as well as individuals.’

The alternative to this self-absorption is well-expressed in two sentences written about Henry Drummond: ‘He made you believe that you were stronger and your work better than you dared to believe.’ And: ‘If you were alone with him, he was sure to find out what interested you and listen by the hour.’

How attractive that is.

Les Miserables, based on the novel by Victor Hugo, has been running as a successful musical worldwide, for many years.

The scene is set in early 19th century France. A man, Jean Valjean, steals a loaf of bread to feed his starving family. He is caught and sentenced to the galleys for 19

years. After his release he goes from town to town looking for work but no one will employ him because he bears the permanent brand of a galley-slave. In his final despair he knocks on the door of a person who receives him royally, asks no questions and gives him a meal and a bed for the night. Valjean takes advantage of such treatment and escapes from the house with the silver he finds in his bedroom.

The police catch him and recognise the mark of the silver as belonging to the Bishop's palace. The Bishop says: 'But I gave the silver to him. But he forgot something. He forgot to take these candlesticks.' Valjean is confronted by a dimension of life which he did not believe existed.

Victor Hugo says in his original novel: 'When the convict came he did not even ask from what country he came nor what was his history. The convict had his misfortune only too present in his mind and the Bishop's aim was to divert him from it and make him believe he was a person like any other.'

Valjean then sets out to do for someone else what was so miraculously and naturally done for him.

Helping others, encouraging people, is not a technique, It is a love that comes from a deep inner life. It cannot be obtrusively done. Barnabas does not get much publicity in the New Testament. But without his unselfish care and friendship the apostle Paul would surely not have become the man he did.

One of the founders of the Cistercians, Stephen Harding, said eight centuries ago: 'The real leader of men is the man who can make others believe they are accompanying him not following. He is the man who is wise enough to recognise, respect and show due reverence to the manhood in other men. He is the man who wins their confidence by showing his confidence in them.'

H G Wells wrote: ‘The test of greatness is what a man leaves to grow. By this criterion Jesus stands first.’

Selfish ambition makes a person touchy. Faith cannot grow on such a soil nor can anyone grow round such a person. There is very little room on a ladder.

St Peter in his first Epistle wrote: ‘Now that you have, by observing the truth, made your souls clean enough for a genuine love of your fellows, see that you do love each other fervently and from the heart.’

Honesty, purity, love. Here is the root that enables us to draw out the best in people.

St Paul wrote: ‘Always aim at the highest in each other and in the whole world.’ (*I Thessalonians 5,11*)

It is good to keep asking ourselves: Do we enable the people around us and the people we meet to be at their best and rise to their full stature? Are we making openings for others or are we only interested in running with the ball ourselves?

Chapter of Chapters

I wonder if the first chapter of St Mark’s Gospel is not the most important chapter of any book ever written.

It is the first chapter of the very first life of Christ and it describes what a day in His life was like. He went to church in the morning and healed somebody. He went ‘out to tea’ in the afternoon and healed someone. Then He was available to crowds in the evening and healed quite a few.

The chapter is full of breathless wonder. Thirty-five of the forty five verses in the Authorized version begin with the word 'And'. The author seems to be carried away by the astonishing news he brings.

The chapter is full of exaggeration. When Mark says that 'all the city was gathered at the door,' I doubt very much if 15,000 people were there, which was the population of Capernaum at the time.

It is full of simplicity. Christ's first sermon is put into one sentence: 'The Kingdom is near: repent and believe the Gospel.' A new world, change, faith.

Then we come to verse 35, which may be the key verse of all: 'And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.'

Following the early morning silence, 'He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee and cast out devils.' What must have been a strategy lasting several months goes into one sentence. So, you might say, the chapter is full of unwordiness.

Finally, He heals a leper. He befriends a person whom the world condemns. And that person spreads the word.

Here in this chapter is a picture of the Lord in all His simple, natural and loving splendour.

If we let Him, He could become our best friend.

Read St Mark's Gospel right through and it could be the beginning of a love affair that lasts a lifetime.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

The way we live decides what we see. We may only see people's weaknesses and not their strengths. We may see the world as a dreadful place and miss its wonder.

How many times I've been in a room and not noticed the pictures on the wall, or met interesting people and not heard what they said, or missed the birdsong in the morning because I was wrapped up in myself.

There's a story of a drunkard who said to his friend, 'You must be drunk you've got two noses.' How easy to peer into the stable, smell the animals – and miss the child in the manger.

I remember a student coming to Oxford who complained that the students around him were a rotten lot. This person changed his life and soon he was saying how lucky he was to be surrounded by so many first-class people.

Mother Teresa said: 'If we really want to pray, we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks; to be able to hear God, we need a clean heart, for a clean heart can see God, can hear God, can listen to God.'

There was a great African 16 centuries ago called Augustine. A book of Cicero turned him towards faith when he was 16 and he began to read the scriptures, but apparently he found them clumsy. What, in fact, was clumsy was his own life. He wrote in his *Confessions*: 'I wanted impurity glutted rather than quenched . . . My conceit was repelled by the simplicity of the scriptures.'

Later, through the prayers of his mother, Monica, and the help of friends like Bishop Ambrose, he sorted out his clumsiness. One day he was in the garden and he seemed to hear a child's voice saying, 'Take up and read.' He did that. He opened the

Bible and read this verse: ‘Not in riotings and drunkenness, not in chamberings and impurities, not in contention and envy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh and its lusts.’

He accepted that and the old life dropped from him like a garment. So one of the great minds of history came into its own. And his books were a great light of civilization through the Dark Ages and beyond. His classic, *The City of God*, gives a long but brilliant picture of Rome falling and the Dark Ages beginning. It is remarkably topical. In it he says: ‘We are all destined for the immortality for which purity of heart is the preparation Purity is a virtue of the mind. It has courage as its companion.’ And: ‘We must not give a hearing to those who praise the fire’s light and find fault with its heat.’

In 1992, I had a mini-stroke, which removed most of my energy. A prayer of Augustine was specially helpful: ‘Light of my heart, do not let my darkness speak to me.’

Desert Island Books

Here is a list of books to take to a desert island. Conveniently I don’t know how long I’m going to stay there, or how much luggage I can take. I can even take a library!

Novels:

Les Miserables, by Victor Hugo.

The Betrothed, by Manzoni – the great Italian novel. The unscrupulous and mysterious character called ‘The Unnamed’ is suddenly confronted with ‘that other life which they told me about when I was a boy’ – with amazing results.

The Brothers Karamazov, by Dostoevsky. Also his *The Possessed* – a story of how evil works.

If there is room, I will take all the novels of Scott, Dickens, John Buchan and George Eliot.

Fortitude, by Hugh Walpole.

Robert Falconer by George Macdonald – given by Queen Victoria to all her grandchildren.

Light reading:

The latest Wisden's Cricketer's Almanack.

A book to identify birds with, depending where my desert island is.

Some nature books including: W.H.Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life*, Laurens Van Der Post's *The Heart of the Hunter*, David Lack's *The Life of the Robin*.

A book on astronomy, including a chart of the stars. There will be plenty of time to watch and wonder.

A History of the Great Western Railway (I'm an old train-spotter!)

Autobiographies:

Mahatma Gandhi: *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Winston Churchill: *My Early Life*.

Neville Cardus, *Autobiography* (Cardus – cricket and music writer),

Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*

Biographies:

John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott*.

G.M.Trevelyan, *Grey of Falloden* (Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary
1905-1916)

Garth Lean, *Frank Buchman, A Life*

Vincent Cronin, *A Wise Man from the West* (the story of Matteo Ricci, the
first Jesuit into China in the 16th century)

Spiritual books:

Augustine's *Confessions* and *The City of God*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Henry Drummond: *The Greatest Thing in the World* (a book of his collected
addresses).

William Temple: *Readings in St John's Gospel*

George Adam Smith: *The Book of Isaiah* (commentary, around 1900)

Pope John: *Journal of a Soul*.

Mother Teresa – *In the Silence of the Heart*.

Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender*

Bishop David Brown, *For All Their Splendour* (draws out the salient truths of
the great faiths).

Father Eloi Leclerc: *La Sagesse d'un Pauvre*, a Life of St Francis

Through the Year with J.B.Phillips

Esther de Waal, *The Way of Simplicity* (the story of the Cistercians)

Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand* (commentary on Ephesians)

Poetry:

The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling and John Masefield

Francis Thompson, 'The Hound of Heaven'

Thomas Gray, 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' – the first long poem I learned
by heart.

The Oxford Book of English Poetry

Coleridge wrote: 'Not the poem which we have read but that to which we
return with the greatest pleasure possesses the genuine power and claims the name of
essential poetry.'

That is what I feel about the books I have mentioned. I would like to read
them all again, and here is my chance.

Children's books :

A A Milne, *The Pooh Stories*.

Francis Hodgson-Burnett, *The Secret Garden*.

C.S.Lewis, *The Narnia Stories*

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in wonderland*

Kenneth Graham: *The Wind in the Willows*

Violet Needham, *The Woods of Windri* – perhaps all of her books.

I keep thinking of books I've forgotten. I must stop. But I will add
R.L.Stevenson's *The Art of Writing*.

C S Lewis in his introduction to one of the fantasy novels of George
MacDonald wrote: 'Reading Phantastes, I knew that I had crossed a great frontier.
The whole world had about it a sort of cool morning innocence. What it did to me was

to convert my imagination. The quality which enchanted me was the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live. I should have been shocked in my teens if anyone told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness.’

There is so much treasure to draw on ‘to convert the imagination.’

The Cross

Laying down our lives for others, That is part of the nature of all living things. It is the instinct of a mother, human, animal. Nothing is too much.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: ‘The image of Christ which I saw in the Vatican is before my eyes at all times. The body was covered only by a small piece of cloth, such as is worn by poor men in our villages. And what a wonderful look of compassion He had. I saw there at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way.’

Here is a Hindu who loved Christ, expressing a truth which Christians easily forget, that Christ and his Cross are for everyone, not just for Christians.

The Koran says: ‘Did He not find thee an orphan and protect thee? Did He not find thee wandering and direct thee? Did He not find thee destitute and enrich thee?’

God’s will crosses my will, and I choose God’s will. That is the Cross. But it is more than that. It is putting no limits to what God may use me to do.

Limitless.

Dante wrote: ‘The world’s existence and my own, the death he bore that I might live, have drawn me from the sea of perverse love to the shore of the love that is just.’ And: ‘The love that rests on faith and hope is more than affection. It contemplates the whole of life.’

The Chinese martyr, Watchman Nee wrote: 'I need forgiveness for my sins, but I also need deliverance from the power of sin. The blood of Christ deals with what we have done The Cross deals with what we are Man's way is to suppress the sin, God's way is to remove the sinner. You are powerless to do anything. God has done it all. Such a discovery brings striving and self-effort to an end. Think of the bewilderment of trying to get into a room where you already are.'

Charm needs a Cross

There was a great Anglo-Saxon poem called 'The Dream of the Rood,' by an unknown author. I have just rediscovered it for myself. The rood is the Cross, which suddenly speaks:

'I was deemed in former days the direst of torments
I was hated and abhorred until I made a highway,
The right way of life, for the human race.
Lo, the King of Glory favoured me above all the trees of the forest.
Death he drank there; yet from death the Lord arose
With might and power to be man's helper ...
He will ask in sight of many where is the man
Who for the Lord's sake would give up life,
Drink bitter death as He did on the beam...
But none need be afraid to abide His appearing
Who has borne in His bosom this brightest of beacons.
For through this Cross shall come to the Kingdom,
From this earthly life, each and every soul

Who longs with his Lord to live in life everlasting.’

The poem goes on:

‘Then I prayed to that blessed Beam. . . I live my life in hope
That I may trust and seek that Tree of Triumph,
Alone honour and serve it above all the others
This is my heart’s desire; in this is my delight.’

The hymn which begins, ‘When I survey the wondrous Cross,’ has been a favourite for people for three centuries. It ends: ‘Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.’

It was Gandhi’s favourite.

His autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, is a must for anyone who seeks to be a nation-builder. He writes: ‘To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics. Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification. I must reduce myself to zero.’

Charming people without the Cross only draw people to themselves.

It is not that I deliberately choose the difficult road. But I reject the ways of the world which put me in the centre of things: my success, my glory, my fulfilment.

The disciples of Christ at the beginning of their three years’ training had to give up all they possessed. Only at the end of their time did they begin to give up

themselves. In fact whenever Christ mentioned the Cross, they began fighting Him or each other. They held to the idea that His Kingdom would be political not spiritual.

Michael Green, who was rector of our church in Oxford, St Aldates, wrote in his book, *To Corinth with Love*: ‘The Cross is the corrective for false ideas of leadership.’

I remember first taking God seriously in my life when I was confirmed in the church at 14. In a general way I gave my life to God and began to walk a new road. Then when I was a student at 22, the road became more definite. I was confronted with a challenge to give my will to Jesus Christ.

I love that word of the sixth century Irish monk, St. Brendan: ‘If you become Christ’s man, you will stumble on wonder upon wonder and every wonder true.’

Living at the Cross, walking the road of purity, means I can genuinely love people. The Pope said: ‘You either love people or you use them. If you love people you make friends, if you use them you make enemies.’

The French 19th century saint, Charles de Foucauld, wrote: ‘To love anyone is to hope in him for always. From the moment we begin to judge anyone, to limit our confidence in him, identify him with what we know of him and so reduce him to that, we cease to love him, and he ceases to be able to become better. We should expect everything of everyone. We must dare to be love in a world that does not know how to love.’

The Cross can enable us to express that kind of love.

St Paul wrote to the Philippians: ‘Do nothing in a spirit of selfish ambition and in a search for empty glory. Do not concentrate on yourself and your own interests.’ Concentration on self inevitably means to eliminate others.

I'm always reading through the Psalms and discovering verses that I've missed. Recently I found this in Psalm 26: "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all Thy wondrous works."

Wash, worship, publish, thank God.

Washing myself enables me to become a cleansing force. Listen to this word from Amy Carmichael, missionary and writer one hundred years ago: 'Very earnestly I would say to anyone who is responsible for the purity of a work, at all costs keep it pure. To do so would cost far more than you dreamed it would. Do not falter. To falter is to sap the very foundations of that which was committed to you to guard. Cost what it may, resolve to build only precious stones into your garden wall.'

As you look at the future, marriage, career and the long adventure ahead, I would make a suggestion. Sit quietly and unhurriedly before a crucifix or a picture of Christ on the Cross – maybe in a chapel – and think on these words of an old hymn:

'This hast Thou done for me –

What have I done for Thee,

Thou crucified?

I long to serve Thee more;

Reveal an open door,

Saviour to me;

Then, counting all but loss

I'll glory in Thy Cross,

And follow Thee.'

William Penn wrote: 'No Cross, No Crown.'

Bunny Austin

(Talk at funeral, September 1, 2000)

Bunny Austin gave the address at our wedding. He was a wonderful friend.

If you look at the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanac* of 1926 you will find what a very good schoolboy cricketer Bunny was. It says, 'Bunny was a sound and imperturbable opening batsman, a capital foil to his opening partner, Brian Valentine.' (Valentine later played for England). 'But,' it says, 'he may transfer his allegiance to another game at Cambridge.'

What a remarkable all-round sportsman he was, especially bearing in mind that his health was always poor, with a permanent jaundice that often sapped his energy in his tennis years.

When he started wearing shorts he was playing in a tournament in Monte Carlo. He set forth from his hotel one day, wearing a long overcoat over his shorts, and a hotel porter came up anxiously and said, 'Excuse me, Mr Austin, but I think you have forgotten your trousers!'

How do you cope with being a celebrity? How do you cope with being charming? Bunny had an abundance of charm. The world falls in love with you. A friend of ours said only recently, 'We were all in love with Bunny.'

Charm needs a Cross. And Bunny found that Cross. Christ said, 'If you follow me, the world will hate you.' Bunny, the idol, soon became vilified, smeared, persecuted, because of what he stood for.

I asked an old sporting friend what stood out about Bunny. The reply was – ‘years and years of persecution, and his colossal range of friendship with people across the world including the leaders of nations.’

What struck me was his amazing courage under persecution. He did not turn back, nor did he hit back.

There is a sentence in a book by Tolstoy about one of his characters: ‘Now he knows that all the time he thought he was succeeding in his career, he was actually failing in his life.’

Bunny was that rare person, a star successful in his field and in his life – and so free of self-importance that he had time for everyone: people easily talked to him and confided in him.

He loved the Psalms. His favourite verse towards the end was Psalm 62, verse 1:

‘Leave it all quietly to God, my soul,
My rescue comes from Him alone.
Rock, refuge, rescue, He is all to me
Never shall I be overthrown.’ (Moffat translation)

I must end with a crazy story. Bunny was a great skipper of rope. I used to compete with him to see how many double-throughs we could do. When Stan Smith and Arthur Ashe paid one of their visits to his home, Bunny arranged a skipping competition in Victoria Square! And Bunny won it by doing a triple through!

He was 70! Life with Bunny was never too serious. Laughter was never far away.

On his wife's gravestone are these words: 'Phyll loved Jesus and the world was her stage.'

Bunny loved the Lord, and the world was his court.

'Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest to dwell in Thy courts close to Thee.' (Psalm 65)

The Loneliness of Leadership

When I look at war memorials, I often count their names. The sheer numbers are staggering. Even in the smallest village there is a list. Two world wars point to one big reason why the world in this century has been short of leadership.

In the chapel of my old school, Uppingham, are the names of the dead, from the two world wars. They number 697.

Some memorials have the names of my mother's three elder brothers who were killed in France, 1914, 1915, 1916.

I also think of my father who survived the Battle of the Somme, 1916, and Passchendale, 1917, and said he could never recover his faith afterwards – although I'm sure that his sheer kindness and encouragement came from a deep inner source.

But what are the ingredients of this leadership that the world is short of?

Not long before His end, the disciples of Christ had a dispute as to which of them should be the greatest. Christ set a child in their midst and pointed out that to be great was to be childlike – simple, teachable, with a sense of wonder.

Then, soon after, at the Last Supper, Christ washed their feet and so underlined for all time that His Gospel was one of love and humility and not power.

Think of the powerlessness of the life of Christ. He who could have had the highest place, chose the lowest, and no one has been able to take it away from Him.

Archbishop Anthony Bloom of the Orthodox Church took Christ's words, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven,' and added, 'not your talent., not your intelligence, not your gifts, but God's light shining through you.'

I used to think that personal success would give me a platform. But such a platform only raises me up. C.S.Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* wrote: "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels he is finding a place in it, while really the world is finding a place in Him.'

No one through history can have been more lonely than Christ was on that last fateful night. His enemies were conspiring with such hate that they were able to stay up all night. His disciples were sleeping. They seemed to understand so little. Later, when He was arrested, they all forsook Him and fled.

Yet Christ was ready to die and to entrust His work to these people. Such courage is beyond human comprehension.

Indian author, Russi Lala, in his book *In Search of Leadership*, quotes an article by an Israeli leader, Shimon Peres, written after the assassination of President Sadat of Egypt: 'Sadat told me of his search for loneliness. It was this loneliness which freed him in many ways from daily routine and permitted him to remain alone to meditate. This inclination he had to be alone – to think without being interrupted, to be in command of his time, to prefer a tree to a desk, a flower to a file – made him into a model leader, with more time for contemplation and less time for fussing.'

Isaiah writes (chapter 32): ‘If the rulers live righteously and rule justly they will be like running streams in a dry country, like shadows of a great rock in a weary land. People will listen and the hasty will learn, and the decadent world will no longer be called noble.’

And (chapter 49): ‘He made my tongue His sharp sword and concealed me in the cover of His hand. He made me a polished arrow and hid me out of sight in His quiver. I said, “I have laboured in vain.” The Lord said, “It is too slight a task to restore the tribes of Jacob. I will make you a light to the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth”.’

‘An arrow hidden in the quiver of God. A light to the nations.’ Unselfish, unlimited. When Isaiah complains of his inadequacy, the Lord gives him a task that is bigger still.

Farsightedness.

Henry Drummond wrote: ‘It is given to some to work for immediate results, and from year to year they can reckon up a balance of success. But the men who get no stimulus from any visible reward, whose lives pass while the objects for which they toil are too far away to comfort them; the men who hold aloof from dazzling schemes and earn the misunderstanding of the crowd because they foresee remoter issues, who even oppose a seeming good because a deeper evil lurks beyond; these are the statesmen of the kingdom of God.’ (*The Greatest Thing in the World*)

They may be lone voices, prophets, eagles.

Peter Howard (1908-1965)

(written in 1990)

‘One man one hundred per cent committed to God is better than 99,000 99 per cent committed.’

So said Peter Howard. And he lived that commitment as fully as anyone I’ve ever known.

He died exactly 25 years ago. I remember the day well. It was my birthday. I heard the news in London after an evening play, and got home to Oxford late. There was a telegram from Peru, where he and his wife were making an official visit. It said: ‘Happy Birthday, Peter and Doe.’

I shared a room with Peter Howard at the Connemara Hotel, Madras, India, in 1953. The lizards on the wall, I remember, seemed rather large and frightening, but I soon got used to them. I rose each morning at six for a quiet time. Peter rose at four for the same purpose, and to begin his letter-writing. The rest of the day was full of engagements, except that about 2.30 he had a nap and then wrote his wife – each day.

It was for me a remarkable two weeks.

All-outers are not easy people. They remind me of Gothic architecture – dynamic, attractive but not always symmetrical. There was nothing cut and dried about Peter Howard. He was unexpected, unpredictable and very, very, very good company.

He used to say that being honest does not make you right. But it does mean that you live in the light and let in the light, and the light is God. Leadership, in his

mind, meant the complete readiness to make mistakes. In fact, he said, the more all-out you are, the more mistakes you're liable to make, because you're not God. 'I reserve the right to be wrong,' he said.

He wrote about 15 plays. Personally, I find all of them good and some great. I remember seeing *The Hurricane* and *The Ladder* for the first time as a double-bill. That remains for me the most powerful theatre evening of my life. These plays are being produced today but I would also say that they are waiting to be rediscovered.

'I write with a message,' he said, 'and for no other reason. Do not believe those who say the theatre is no place for a man with a message of some kind. Some writers give their message without knowing they do it. A man who writes as if life had no meaning is the man with a strong message. My plays are strong propaganda plays. I write to give people a purpose. The purpose is clear. The aim is simple. It is to encourage men to accept a growth in character which is essential if civilisation is to survive. It is to help all who want peace in the world to be ready to pay the price of peace in their own personalities. It is to end the censorship of virtue which creates a vicious society. It is, for Christians, the use of the stage to uplift the Cross and make its challenge and hope real to a perverse but fascinating generation.'

It was once said of Henry Drummond that 'his love had the temper which is jealous for a friend's growth and had the nerve to criticise.' Peter had that rare quality and encouraged you to care for him in the same way. This is a delicate and dangerous expression of love. Christ made enemies because He told people the truth. Saying nothing is much easier and costs nothing: but the result is that people easily choose the second-rate road in life when a spur in the flank might have sparked greatness.

‘Passion is good,’ said Howard, ‘but passion needs firm friends at its side to see if it is passion guided by God. If we live that, I believe, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (St Paul) could become the normal salt of our life.’

In 1950 he wrote this: ‘I have been thinking a lot about youth. My heart is very much with them. I feel that many of them, if not most, have never known this deeper experience of the Cross where their self-will is handed over. What you get is a steely philosophy, garlanded and rendered charming by the attraction of youth, which has made up its mind to have its own way on many points, and yells “Dictatorship!” if anybody tries to stop it. Adults must not be allowed to stifle, smother or stereotype youth. Equally we must change this spirit in some of the young who think it is rendering the world a pioneering service by rebellion and brashness.’

I have not mentioned his international rugby – a quite extraordinary achievement with his lame leg – his 15 books, his remarkable journalistic career, his effectiveness on the international scene, and the deep love for his family which made all the more poignant the sacrifice of being away from them so much. But you can read *Peter Howard: Life and Letters*, the absorbing biography written by his daughter, Anne Wolridge-Gordon.

To a conference of American Indians in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he said: ‘To meet the needs of modern man takes clean hands and a pure heart. It takes pure hearts because the problem is not colour. It is chastity and the passionate commitment, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” so that we live, speak, breathe, work, sweat and fight to help God’s will be done in the affairs of men.’

He read and re-read *The Greatest Thing in the World*, Henry Drummond's collected addresses. Drummond wrote about the farsightedness of 'the statesmen of the Kingdom of God', and Howard underlined that passage.

He was surely such a statesman himself.

I remember him with huge gratitude. He had a vision for me far bigger than anything I'd thought of. I remember his courage, his encouragement, his kindness and his blazing faith. I recommend people who did not know him to discover him. I was lucky enough to know quite well one of the great spirits of the century.

Marriage is Sacred – Singleness Too

My wife, Juliet, and I were married in 1957.

I had a fairly ascetic approach to life, with my feelings strongly under control. Falling in love was not for me. It seemed like a sign of weakness. But somehow it happened!

John Buchan, in his autobiography *Memory-Hold-The-Door*, wrote: 'I have been happy in many things but all my good fortune has been as dust compared with the blessing of an incomparable wife.' How much I echo that.

Charles Dickens wrote in *David Copperfield*: 'There can be no disparity in marriage like the unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

One of his characters says: 'It will be your duty to estimate your wife by the qualities she has, not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her if you can. But, if you can't, you must accustom yourself to do without them.'

St. John wrote: 'If you live in the light, as He is in the light, you have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.' (I

John 1,7) If you live in the light in marriage, love is all the time renewed. A sense of romance need never be lost.

Alcide de Gasperi, Prime Minister of Italy and one of the great leaders of post-war Europe wrote to his future wife, proposing marriage, in these words: ‘The personality of the living Christ pulls me, enslaves me, comforts me, as though I were a child. Come, I want you to be with me, to be drawn to that same attraction, as though to an abyss of light.’

R L Stevenson wrote: ‘Marriage is a field of battle not a bed of roses.’ It is an obvious point, but easily missed, that marriage always has to be worked at. I would suggest that wooing is a lifelong part of it and not just the beginning!

Paul Tournier, Swiss psychologist and writer, wrote in his last book, *The Listening Ear*: ‘I was always lecturing my wife but I never actually listened to her. I began listening to her when we meditated together.’ Elsewhere he wrote: ‘A marriage that is a real union is always a miracle.’ And further, ‘Men without women live in monasteries, barracks or slums.’

Agatha Christie, in her fascinating autobiography, wrote: ‘My parents achieved a happy marriage. Up-to-date I have seen four completely successful marriages.’

Nicholas Zernov, Russian Orthodox priest and author, dedicated his classic, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the 20th Century*, to ‘my wife, supporter, critic and inspirer,’ and added in the text. ‘I’m grateful to my wife for the joy of shared convictions which shaped this book.’

The joy of shared convictions. Marriage without it easily dries up.

Every marriage is uniquely personal.

Gandhi's grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, in his outstanding biography of his grandfather writes that his vow of chastity, taken in South Africa in 1888, gave him a 'great sense of power, with limitless vistas of service.' This led, Rajmohan writes, 'to a widening of his horizon beyond race and country.'

Tolstoy, despite his own turbulent marriage, wrote this: 'The goal of our life should not be to find joy in marriage but to bring more life and truth into the world. We marry to assist each other in this task. The highest challenge is that of the man who has dedicated his life to serving God and doing good and unites with a woman to further that purpose.'

The Devil Seems Reasonable

Christ faced three temptations in particular: satisfy yourself; magnify yourself; compromise yourself.

Satisfy yourself with food, sex, money and power – and as soon as possible.

Magnify yourself. Make a sensation of yourself. Make your mark. Climb a ladder so that you are in a better position to influence things.

The devil seems very reasonable, keen to help.

Compromise yourself. Come to terms with the world. Don't overdo it.

It is very unattractive to be fanatical. You can easily presume that going all-out for God will make you a fanatic, when rather it can make you unselfish, and give you the sanity that comes when you're not in love with yourself.

These temptations all contain half-truths, and they all have one thing in common, yourself. They aim to put me in the centre.

‘A lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies. A lie which is all a lie may be met with and fought with outright. But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.’ (Tennyson)

In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Satan sets out to win Adam and succeeds. In his *Paradise Regained*, he sets out to win Christ and fails. Christ is walking in the desert and meets an old man in rural clothes ‘following the quest of some stray ewe, or withered stickes to gather, which might serve against a winter’s day’. Christ immediately recognises this unlikely person as Satan. Later He meets him in another guise ‘seamlier clad, as one in city or court or palace bred, and with fair speech.’

Respectable, reasonable, persuasive, working to draw people away from the Cross.

The American psychiatrist, Scott Peck, wrote in *The Road Less Travelled* (1978):

‘All of us who postulate a loving God and really think about it, eventually come to a single terrifying idea. God wants us to become Himself. It is a very old idea, but by the millions we run away from it in sheer panic. For no idea ever came to the mind of man which places upon us such a burden.

It is the single most demanding idea in the history of mankind. Not because it is difficult to conceive: to the contrary, it is the essence of simplicity. But, because if we believe it, it then demands from us all that we can possibly give, all that we have. We don’t want to work that hard. We don’t want God’s responsibility. We don’t want the responsibility of having to think all the time. As long as we can believe that Godhood is an impossible attainment for ourselves we don’t have to worry about our spiritual growth, we

don't have to push ourselves to higher and higher levels of consciousness and loving activity. We can relax and just be human. . . .

The idea that God is actively nurturing us so that we might grow up to be like Him brings us face to face with our own laziness. . . .

Laziness is love's opposite.'

Alan Paton of South Africa wrote years ago in his book *Instrument of Thy Peace*: 'To love is to bring one's whole life under discipline.'

T.S.Eliot wrote:

'A condition of complete simplicity,
Costing not less than everything.'

What a contrast to the mediocrity that Satan offers.

The Wonder of the Night Sky

(written in 1990)

Some 50 years ago we could identify two galaxies in space. Now, scientists tell us, we can identify two billion.

A galaxy is a band of luminous stars. American astronomers have recently identified what they say is the largest galaxy ever discovered. It is more than 60 times the size of our own, the Milky Way, and contains 100 million million stars.

Amazing facts. Remarkable too that scientists can discover these things.

There is something particularly magical and mysterious about a clear star-lit sky on a winter's night.

Overhead in the Northern sky at a certain time of year are three impressive constellations, one leading into the other. Perseus, shaped like a sickle, leads to Andromeda, which then leads to the Square of Pegasus. One of the bright stars of Andromeda has a faint fuzz above it which you can just see if your eyesight is good. It may be the furthest thing you can see with the naked eye. It is the famous nebula in Andromeda, two million light-years away.

So what we see is not the nebula as it is now, but as it was two million years ago. We can get some idea of the sheer scale of this distance if we realise that the sun is 93 million miles away and its light takes eight minutes to reach us. Another lovely constellation is Orion, containing seven bright stars which include the conspicuous three-in-a-row, usually called Orion's Belt. Another is Betelgeux, a red giant with a diameter of 260 million miles. If you went round it in a car at 60 mph (96 kph) it would take you more than 1000 years to go round!

While Betelgeux is on the shoulder of Orion there is another dazzling star at the foot, Rigel. It is 50,000 times brighter than the sun, and it loses 800,000 million tons a second.

Most of these star-names were given by the Arabs centuries ago.

You may want to put on a coat and go out into the night and just marvel. Readers in the tropics need no coat! If you are feeling very full of yourself, or burdened with life, the stars can give a sense of proportion. They have the same effect on me as a tree or a forest. They seem to say "Slow down".

It all makes me think of the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis and how 'God created the heaven and the earth.' The present Pope once said that anyone who wants to understand the world must read the first three chapters of Genesis.

Psalm 19 begins 'The heavens declare the glory of God.'

When I go to India or Australia I love being able to say ‘Hello’ again to the Southern Cross. It is like meeting old friends. And it is so beautiful.

The Great Bear in our Northern sky is also beautiful. Two of its seven stars are going in opposite directions to the other five. But two of them can still point to the North Star, and we can steer our ship by it, as sailors have done for centuries.

The night sky is a fascinating book, to read and re-read.

In the book of Revelation comes this passage. ‘To him that overcometh will I give power over the nations and I will give him the morning star.’ The morning star, which is the planet Venus, is a glorious sight in the dawn sky, perfect and glowing, and I like to think that God is offering me something of his perfection.

At Christmas, we read about the wise men who followed the star ‘till it came and stood over where the young child was . . . and when they saw it they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.’

I know it may seem a childish thought to think of heaven being somewhere in the sky. But you do see grandeur there, which reminds me of God. And the atmosphere is so clear that we can see fabulously far, reminding me of eternity!

The largeness of the heavens and the smallness of a baby – two sides of the character of God.

Through that child, God, who made the heavens, can become my closest personal friend. This is the wonder of Christmas. The night sky may reveal it to us afresh.

The Art of Encouragement

In the first paragraph of his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Charles Dickens underlines the self-importance of the Chuzzlewit family and their ‘immense superiority to the rest of

mankind.’ He describes the family as ‘jealous, stony-hearted, distrustful, who were all shut up in themselves and had no faith in anybody.’ They disliked each other mainly, he said, because they belonged to the same family, and they disliked everyone else because they did not!

Martin Chuzzlewit in his twenties was as selfish as the rest. He has a feud with his grandfather and goes off to Africa, taking with him a sort of valet, Mark Tapley, a delightful, unusual person. The result of Tapley’s influence is that Martin begins to face his own selfishness. He saw that his life was ‘self, self, self’ and determined to root it out. On their return, Martin goes to his grandfather and says these remarkable words:

‘Upon that subject which first occasioned a division between us, my mind and heart are incapable of change. But that I might have trusted to your love, if I had thrown myself upon it: that I might have won you over with ease if I had been more yielding and considerate: that I should have best remembered myself in forgetting myself and recollecting you: reflections, solitude, and misery have taught me. I came resolved to say this and ask your forgiveness: not so much in hope for the future but in regret for the past.’

This surely must be one of the great apologies of literature. Grandfather is astonished, but only responds slowly. In fact it is only after some time that he responds totally. ‘The curse of our house.’ He says, ‘has been the love of self.’

The old man changes, and becomes unrecognisable.

F.B.Meyer, in his book *Christ in Isaiah*, begins with these lines of A.E.Hamilton:

‘Ask God to give thee skill

in comfort's art:
That thou mayest consecrated be
and set apart
Into a life of sympathy.
For heavy is the weight of ill
in every heart:
And comforters are needed much
of Christlike touch.'

Meyer says, 'To bind up a broken heart requires a delicacy of touch which is a divine art.'

He quotes Isaiah, in chapter 43, 'Thou hast brought me no sweet cane,' and comments: 'It is possible to do right things from a hard sense of legalism in which the sweetness and loveliness of true religion are painfully wanting. How often we do things because we must and because we will, united to the law instead of to God whose service is perfect freedom.'

In helping people we may need salt and sweetness. Salt brings the flavour out of food and people.

Sometimes I make a list in my mind of all the people through my life who have given me encouragement or spur, starting with my father. It is a long list and I keep adding to it, suddenly remembering old incidents or conversations.

Encouraging people in the battle of life, even helping them to choose God's road, is not a technique. It is an art built round a love and vision for people.

In his Introduction to *Martin Chuzzlewit* the editor says, ‘Dickens had never shown the imaginative insight in which he now sent his humour and his art into the core of the vices of his time.’

Humour and art.

Helping people requires the lightest of touches. Heaviness can easily discourage or crush.

Dr Charis Waddy – from Australia, Jerusalem and Oxford – has been a lifelong friend. I first saw her father’s name on the wall of the Oxford cricket pavilion, in the sides of 1896 and 1897! In her very topical book, *The Muslim Mind*, she quotes Dr Jamali, former Prime Minister of Iraq, who was primarily a teacher throughout his life. He says, ‘To bring out man’s essential humanity is the aim of education. Intelligence and conscience are the pinnacle of evolution. Faith, profound and sincere, is the highest aim of the educator.’

Dr Waddy quotes the great Sufi philosopher Abu Hamid Al Ghazali, who was at the height of his power and fame round 1100 AD: ‘The way of the Sufis lies in overcoming the appetites of the flesh and getting rid of its evil dispositions, so that the heart may be cleaned of all but God.’

God and greatness are waiting to be drawn out of everyone. People can be released from the life of self to enable this to happen. We can act in the certainty that there is a divine spark in everyone waiting to be lit. Of course in multitudes of people it has already been lit. But the winds of the world can blow candles out very easily, and our friendships may be able to keep some candles burning. And in the words of Dante, ‘a great flame follows a little spark.’

Isaiah says in chapter 50, ‘The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher and skill to know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakes me morning by morning to hear, to listen like a disciple.’

Skill – in season – morning by morning – listen. We can learn from God how to talk to people and when to be silent.

A recent collect in church appealed to the Lord ‘to look with compassion on the anguish of the world and by your healing power make whole both men and nations.’

In today’s dangerous world, we can choose to help that process.

The Challenge of Father Gratry

Each of us has a sort of inner clock. At a certain point in life we set it and then seldom change it. Some people are only at their best in the evening and especially as midnight approaches: ‘That’s the way I am.’

But we can if we choose adjust the clock. Some conversations can be curtailed, some TV programmes missed. But most of all, we may have to deal with the image we have of ourselves.

Rising early to be serious about God sounds like a bit of holiness which may not be at all the image we want. So we settle for an easier road. We would rather be easy-going than be new and centred in God. The last thing we want to do is to become saints. Se we settle for the second rate.

Father Gratry, French priest and philosopher, who died in 1872, wrote a book *Les Sources*, meaning ‘The Springs’. In the first chapter he presents this extraordinary challenge:

‘The advice which follows is not for everyone. Only a few choice spirits, in the present state of the world, are capable of following it or will want to do so.

It is addressed to that man of 20, sane and privileged in mind and even more in heart, who had understood at the point where his fellow students have finished their education his own begins; who, at the age when the crowd is swept along by the love of pleasure and of freedom, of the world, its honours and its riches, stops to scan the wide horizon of life for a worthier object of love.

It is to this man alone that I am speaking and to him alone.

First I say this: you must know that wisdom is only to be possessed on stringent terms. Are you courageous? Can you face silence and solitude? Are you willing to see your equals, who have chosen an easy way, advance in their career faster than you and occupy the space in the world that might have been yours? Can you sacrifice everything, without exception, to justice and truth?’

Then listen to what follows:

‘If you have this extraordinary determination and are able to overcome innumerable obstacles, reasonable and unreasonable, which will bar your way, let me tell you who your teacher is to be.

God is to be your teacher.

St Augustine wrote a book called *De Magistro* in which he shows that there is only one master, a single master who is inside us. Moreover God is the universal light which illumines every man who comes into the world. Do you believe it? If so you must accept the consequences.

Say to this master! “Master speak, I am listening.” Then you must listen. What is this inner chatter of vain thoughts, uneasy desires, passion, prejudices planted by your education, or those more formidable prejudices which are part of the age in which you live and which influence you without knowledge? Before you can reach the consecrated silence of the inner sanctuary there are important battles to be won. You need those supernatural victories of which God says “To him who conquers I will give authority over nations.”

We must stop being slaves to ourselves and slaves of the age in which we live. I do not say that this struggle has to be over. I do say that it has to have begun. It is in fact in the morning before the busyness and distractions of the day that we must listen to God.

Augustine says “This is what you must do: ask for strength and for help in finding what you are looking for, then write it down so this creation of your heart may be a source of life and strength.”

Is it not certain that God is continually speaking just as the sun is continually shining?

If you seek silence and solitude you will at times wake up to the realisation that you are no longer alone.

Do not trust your memory . . . You must seize the occasion and write. Try to capture the whole panorama of the inner spectacle!

Education: A Vision of Greatness

When I took the Diploma of Education at Oxford, I first met the writings

of Sir Richard Livingstone, classicist, educator, and vice-chancellor. I have never seen the purpose of education expressed more arrestingly.

‘For hundreds of years,’ he wrote, ‘the people of the west have been walking through country signposted and fenced by the precepts of a religion which they accepted. The great majority followed the beaten track and kept within the fences.’

‘Now we live in a different world,’ he wrote. ‘The road is still there. But people have broken through the fences, defaced the signposts, and questioned the accuracy of the map. We are back in the moral confusion of the Greek Age of the Sophists.’

‘All we need are firm standards and a clear philosophy of life which distinguishes evil from good, and chooses good and refuses evil.’

‘The quality of civilisation depends on its standards, its sense of values, the idea of what is first-rate and what is not.’

‘Aeschylus, Plato, Shakespeare and Dante of all Europeans have seen furthest and reached highest, and best reveal the greatness of human nature. They meet some permanent need not only of their own epoch but of all time.’

‘The true name of education is a discipline by which a man from first to last hates what he should hate and loves what he should love.’

Livingstone quotes Plato: ‘The noblest of all virtues is the study of what man is and how he should live’, and goes on to quote the early 20th century philosopher, A.N.Whitehead: ‘Moral education is impossible without a habitual vision of greatness.’ Livingstone adds: ‘No profounder statement has been made about education since Plato.’

These thoughts mainly come from Livingstone’s book *Education for a World Adrift*.

I remember Churchill's phrase, 'The rut of inertia, the confusion of aim and the craven fear of being great.' In his *Great Contemporaries* (1937), he wrote 'Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.' I suggest that the root of greatness is unselfishness, the quality that enables people to grow around you and not diminish.

There is an old saying that if you're 5% self-centred you are ineffective, 15% self-centred you are unhappy, and 85% self-centred you are locked up in an asylum.

One of the great educators of the 19th century was Edward Thring, headmaster of Uppingham School, Rutland, 1853-1887. I went to the same school half a century later, and his statue looked at us in the school chapel.

In 1862 he wrote: 'I feel jaded, badgered, faithless and hard, I long to plunge into some fierce reality instead of holding on in patience and power, instead of the long restraint.' What a splendid expression, 'the long restraint' – surely one of the ingredients of greatness.

He said: 'Every step of ground has been won inch by inch.'

Here are some of his remarkable observations:

'The business of a school is to train up men for the service of God.'

'May God make me a prophet.'

'Love of truth must be set on its throne if any nation is ever to be really educated.'

'Nothing is more obtrusive than obtrusive religion.'

‘Of all the problems which the training of boys present to parents and teachers, the one for dealing with impurity in thought and word and deed is the most perplexing. I suppose everyone is acquainted with the current lies about the impossibility of being pure. The means under God in my own case was a letter from my father; a quiet simple statement of the sinfulness of the sin, and a few of the plain tenets of St Paul saved me. A film fell from my eyes at my father’s letter, All fathers ought to write such a letter to their sons.’

‘The value of good reading aloud has never been fully recognised.’

‘Genius is an infinite capacity for work growing out of an infinite power of love.’

“For the young the best is just good enough.”

‘Music is the only thing which all nations, all ages, all ranks, and both sexes do equally well, It is sooner or later the great world bond, the secular Gospel.’

It was Thring who pioneered the first full use of music in schools. But, above all, he will be remembered for being the first to assert boldly that the dull boy has as much right to have his power fully trained as the boy of talent. ‘Everybody can do something well,’ he said.

‘Life’ was the word must on his lips. And his aim ‘the right love and the right hate.’

Saint Francis (1182-1226)

In my 20s, at the urging of a good friend, I was encouraged to read every life of St Francis I could find. In the next years I read about twenty!

Here are some of the salient points I noted:

‘The first Franciscans had all the virtues, including the one which is nearly always wanting, willingness to remain unknown.’

‘Francis was the incarnation of the Italian soul of the 13th century, as Dante was 100 years later.’

‘Francis loved France. He owed France his name, his mother, and so much of the poetry, song and music that came into his life.’

‘He wasted his life up to his 25th year.’

‘No one before Francis, or since, or planned the future of an organisation, with such sublime abandon.’

Masseo, one of his followers, said to Francis: ‘You are neither beautiful, learned, nor of noble family. Why does the world run after you?’

Francis: ‘God looked down and could not find a smaller, more worthless person to confound the grandeur and learning of the world.’

Francis: ‘Conscience is like a flea: when it comes to the weakest part of a person it bites. It’s a wonderful thing that you can have a conscience without having the brains for it. You keep it, and it keeps you.’

‘I can’t make you do anything, Juniper, that isn’t in you to do.’

Elias, his successor, loved Francis, but only thought he could organise his ideas better than he could himself – was this not what Judas thought? When Francis

died the despotism and love of power came out in Elias. His ambition was never cured, and no one except those who gave in to him found favour.

Francis to a brother: 'With the Lord's help you have overcome your demand for power and privilege, but you need to do this not only once but 10, 20, 100 times.'

Father Eloi Leclerc, author of *La Sagesse d'un Pauvre* paraphrases Francis's message in these words: 'God has not called me to found a religious order, a university, or a machine of war against heretics, but to live according to the Gospel, to live, simply live, just that but fully. People who live that way will create everywhere they go free communities of friends. They will be free because nothing will limit their horizon.'

And: 'To detach oneself from one's lifework is beyond human strength. You cannot create without enthusiasm. But in creating something man runs his greatest danger. His work becomes the centre of his world. It puts him in a state of radical unavailability. It takes a break-in of God to deal with it.'

And: 'The depth of a man lies in his power of reception.' 'La profondeur d'un homme est dans sa puissance d'accueil.'

Cardinal Ugolini, later Pope Gregory IX, became Protector of the order. He was the soul of the group which compromised the Franciscan ideal. He succeeded in extracting from Francis a year's novitiate. And when he was Pope, he declared the Brothers were not bound by the observation of Francis' will. And the will was destroyed.

Everything that was done in the order after 1221 was either done without Francis' knowledge or against his will.

There were 12 in 1210, 300 in 1216, 3000 in 1221, and over 5000 at the last chapters. Francis felt swamped. Many did not know him personally or his ideas. 'I am

like a father rejected by his own children. They do not know me any more. They are embarrassed by me. My simplicity has made them ashamed.’

Bonaventura, when head of the order in 1260, was commissioned by the Chapter-General to write the official life of St Francis. He left out Francis’ approach to learning, manual labour, lepers, poverty, and passed over in silence Francis’ will. The Assembly-General, over which he presided, forbade the friars to read any other life in future, and even ordered the destruction of the legends that till then had appeared on Francis. The result is a vague and pious figure.

The real St Francis began to be rediscovered six centuries later through sources that had been carefully hidden.

‘I was studying at Bologna, I, Thomas of Spalato, archdeacon in the cathedral church of that city when, in the year 1220, I saw St Francis preaching on the Piazza before almost everyone in the city. The theme of his discourse was the following: angels, men, demons. He spoke on all these subjects with so much wisdom and eloquence that many learned men who were there were filled with admiration at the words of so plain a man. Yet he had not the manner of a preacher, his ways were rather those of conversation: the substance of his discourse bore especially upon the abolition of enmities and the necessity of making peaceful alliances. His apparel was poor, his person in no respect imposing and his face not at all handsome: but God gave such a great efficiency to his words that he brought back to peace and harmony many nobles whose savage fury had not even stopped short before the shedding of blood. So great a devotion was felt for him that men and women flocked after him, or he esteemed himself happy who succeeded in touching the hem of his garment.’

‘All Have Glaring Faults’

Bramwell Booth, who succeeded his father as leader of the Salvation Army, wrote:

‘Love trust, value men. All have glaring faults. But it is the good in men you have to work with and conquer with. Some recent letters have distressed me intensely in their slowness to express any satisfaction in your officers.’

I pick out the phrase ‘glaring faults,’ vainly preferring to call mine ‘minor blemishes’. Some years ago a close friend asked me how I got on with an older colleague. I said I did not get along at all and did not agree with his approach to life, that he was too moderate compared with passionate me. Moreover he seemed to pour cold water on most of my bright suggestions. So I said I was summoning up the courage to tell him exactly what I thought of him. This friend replied, ‘You feel things about him, which are true. He feels things about you which are also true. So what? Why not forget about it and make 500 new friends?’

This was a turning point for me. My feelings about him had become an obsession. In fact, my enthusiasm and his commonsense began to blend rather well. I began to learn much from him. Later, his wife said to me, ‘Do make allowances for us, we are getting old’, echoing the words of St Paul, ‘Make allowances for one another because you love one another.’

This does not mean being sentimental about people, But it does mean that the salt which Christ urged us to have – ‘Be salted with the fire of the discipline’ – needs to be rooted in affection.

‘Julius Caesar’ is the story of a struggle for power. William Shakespeare puts these famous lines in the mouth of Caesar:

‘Let me have men about me that are fat.

Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.
He reads much, loves no plays, hears no music.
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort
As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit
That could be moved to smile at anything.
Such men as he never be at heart's ease
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves,
And therefore are they very dangerous.'

Beware of those who want to pull down high-flying eagles, because they resent strong leadership.

'Speaking for Themselves' – The Churchills

Notes on Mary Soames (ed.) *Speaking for Themselves: the personal letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill* (Doubleday, 1998)

Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940 at the age of 66, having entered public life at the turn of the century. How did he maintain his vigour?

One of my favourite books has been his autobiography *My Early Life*, published in 1930. He wrote: 'I passed out of Sandhurst into the world. It opened like Aladdin's cave. When I look back upon those years I cannot but return my sincere thanks to the high Gods for the gift of existence.' And he appeals to young readers in these words: 'You must take your place in life's fighting line. Don't take 'No' for an answer. Never submit to failure. Don't be fobbed off with mere personal success or acceptance. You will make all kinds of mistakes, but as long as you are generous and

true and also fierce you cannot hurt the world or even seriously distress her. She was made to be wooed and won by youth. She has lived and thrived only by repeated subjugations.’

The language may be old-fashioned, but the sense that nothing is impossible is clear and has to be re-expressed in every age. The letters between Winston and Clementine Churchill continue and complete the story through 57 years of marriage – 1908-1965. The sheer zest for life, resilience and affection flow through these years, and Clementine shares them.

Here is the story of a marriage that works, of politics that is not sordid, of faith that is definite but not obtrusive. It is also a cameo of modern history, easily told and easy to follow.

The book, edited by their daughter, Mary Soames, is entitled ‘speaking for themselves’. I cannot do better than let them do that.

‘Clementine was not a good arguer. She quickly became vehement and over-emphatic, often spoiling her case by exaggeration. Winston, under such fire, presented a defensive obstinacy, which further exasperated her, but rarely did the sun go down on their anger.’ (Mary Soames)

Clementine: ‘When I get excited and cross I always say more than I feel instead of less. There are never any dregs left behind. . . . The only times when I feel a little low is when the breaks in the bustling existence are few and far between I am a very greedy cat and like a great deal of cream.’

Both of them had bouts of depression. Winston called his depression ‘black dog’.

‘Winston always wanted Clementine to “be there.” But his self-centredness, combined with his total commitment to politics, did not make him very companionable.’ (Mary Soames)

Winston: ‘At times I think I could conquer everything but then again I am only a weak and vain fool.’

He quoted from the Book of Revelation in a letter to Clementine: ‘He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.’

Winston – from the trenches, 1916: ‘I can’t help feeling the lack of scope for my thought and will-power. I see so much that ought to be done, that could easily be done, that will never be done, or half done. And I can’t help longing for the power to give those wide directions which occupied my Admiralty days.’

Clementine: ‘I have dispatched all letters you sent me to forward (from the trenches), with the exception of the one for Lord Northcliffe (the newspaper proprietor), which I earnestly beg you not to ask me to post but to destroy. . .

We are still young but time flies, stealing love away and leaving only friendship, which is very peaceful, but not very stimulating and warming. . .

I have no originality or brilliancy but I feel within me the power to help you now, if you will let me. Just because I am ordinary and love you, I know what is right for you and good for you in the end.’

Winston at 60: ‘I’ve altered my method of speaking, under Randolph’s tuition (their son), and now talk to the House of Commons with garrulous unpremeditated flow. What a mystery the art of public speaking is. It consists, in my judgement, of selecting 3 or 4 sound arguments, and putting them in the most conversational way possible.’

‘When Clementine was ill with mastoid Winston spent much time with her, and read to her passages from the Psalms.’ (Mary Soames)

Clementine: ‘The temper and behaviour you describe in Lord Beaverbrook is caused, I think, by the prospect of a new personality, equal perhaps in power to him and certainly in intellect.’ Beaverbrook was in Churchill’s war cabinet.

‘Chartwell (house and gardens) has on her bridal dress. She is a lovely, untidy bride.’

Winston described Yalta as the ‘worst possible place in the world for a meeting.’ The conference was held there in the Crimea in January 1945 because ‘Stalin’s doctors forbade him to leave Russia.’ Remembering that Churchill was 71 and in shaky health and that Roosevelt was ailing and dying, you understand something of why the conference was so difficult, and the fate of Eastern Europe was disastrously sealed.

When Winston entered the world of horse-racing, he had 70 winners, and when he gambled at Montecarlo, he received no encouragement from Clementine.

In a speech at Margate in 1953 Winston welcomed Germany ‘back among the great powers of the world.’

Winston: ‘How little can I express my gratitude to you for making my life and any work I’ve done possible and giving me so much happiness in a world of accident and storm.’

‘Clementine could be immensely touchy and difficult, especially with arthritis, and Winston could be maddening and behave like a spoilt child.’ (Mary Soames)

‘When Clementine wanted to make a point with Winston she often committed her arguments to paper, even if they might be under the same roof.’ (Mary Soames)

Likewise, Winston might leave a note under her door. For instance: ‘I am so sorry that I was wayward at dinner. My heart was full of love, but my thoughts were wayward.’

‘It was the love between them which quickly kindled and took deep root that was the key to their enduring and heroic partnership.’ (Mary Soames)

All in all, a very appealing book by two very human beings, edited with such fairness by Mary Soames that there is no false adulation.

But greatness emerges.

And the Churchills were not afraid of greatness.

Laying Foundations – Pope John Paul II

(Written in 1995)

A common fallacy abroad today is that you cannot express strong moral and spiritual truth because young people in particular will not take it.

The prophets and founders of the great faiths did not take that line. Purity, including sexual purity, was hardly a characteristic of the ancient world. Yet it was suddenly confronted with the dazzling purity of Christ.

The Pope was once a fun-loving student. His great loves were sport, especially skiing, and the stage. A fellow student said, ‘Everyone was sure he was going to be a great actor. Part of the secret was his voice. It was powerful and hauntingly beautiful.’

Nearly 60 years later that voice continues to be heard. In his new book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he writes, ‘In the past younger generations were shaped by the painful experience of war, of concentration camps, of constant danger... The heroism of my contemporaries helped me to define my vocation.... Today’s young people certainly grow up in a different context. They live in freedom,

which others have won for them, and have yielded in large part to the consumer culture.’

It is difficult to make moral choices in a climate of prosperity. There seems no urgency. But prosperity is often only skin deep. Uncertainty and despair can lie underneath. Where there is so little certainty ahead, of home or job, it is easy to eat and drink and take drugs to gain at least some enjoyment. St Augustine in *The City of God* addressed Rome in these words: ‘Prosperity depraved you: adversity could not reform you.’

Let me quote further from the Pope’s book:

‘About 150 years after Descartes (he died in 1650) all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside.... This was the time of the Enlightenment in France, when pure rationalism held sway. The French Revolution knocked down the altars dedicated to Christ and introduced the cult of the goddess Reason. The spiritual and in particular the moral patrimony of Christianity were thus torn from their evangelical foundations. In order to restore Christianity to its full vitality it is essential that these return to their foundation.

The struggle against God, the systematic elimination of all that is Christian, has dominated thought and life in the West for three centuries.... People and nations need to hear Christ’s words: ‘Be not afraid.’ Their conscience needs to grow in the certainty that someone exists who holds in His hands the destiny of this passing world – the keys to death and the netherworld. Someone who is the Alpha and Omega of human history – be it the individual or collective history. And this someone is Love.’

In Psalm 11, David writes, ‘If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?’ The Pope seems to answer that question. He puts his finger on the secularization of society as the number one issue. The bird has to rebuild its broken nest. He acknowledges that ‘seeds of the Word’ are present in all religions. The Christian church seeks to identify those seeds in the great traditions of the Far East, ‘in order to trace a common path against a background of the needs of the contemporary world’.

Astronomers have told us that the Universe can ‘only’ expect to survive for 2,000 million more years! We are still laying the foundations. They are surely worth building on rock. The price of doing that well is well expressed by Kipling:

‘They that dig foundations deep
Fit for realms to rise upon,
Little honour do they reap
Of their generation . . .
Not by lust of praise or show . . .
Doubted are they, and defamed . . .
Lesser men feign greater goals.’

Reading the Pope’s book, I was moved again, and grateful, that the author had sacrificed the mountains and lakes of Poland, which he loved, as well as the stages of the world, to walk the world’s stage with a message so clear and full of hope.

Christ in Shakespeare

Half an hour's drive from where we live on the Welsh border is Hay-on-Wye, well-known for its beautiful surrounding country and its many second hand book shops.

An easy place to browse and find surprises.

One such surprise was *Christ in Shakespeare*, a series of addresses given in a church in Glasgow by a Scottish divine, George Morrison, in 1928. In it, he writes:

‘There are temptations peculiar to the hour of failure. Men are tempted to fall back on things they have foresworn – lose heart, grow bitter, begrudge the success of others, take up a quarrel with the world, forfeit the sunshine of the love of God.

But other temptations strike at men in the hour of success. Success is always apt to dim the grandeur of the moral law. The witches met Macbeth in the hour of his success, and they appealed to his ruling passion, ambition.’

‘Macbeth gains the world, and loses his soul.’

‘Evil alone ruins and destroys. It may be the evil of indecision as with Hamlet, or ambition as with Macbeth, jealousy as with Othello, ingratitude as with Lear.’

‘Choice depends on character. We choose by what we are.’

‘Nowhere in literature is the power of conscience more pictured than in Shakespeare.’

I read Shakespeare through in my 30s but reading this book encouraged me to read him through again, and explore him further. It took me 3 weeks. It is an exciting thing to soak yourself in a great mind.

He left school at 16 – never went to college, partly because his father got into debt. He helped his father at the butchery and the glover's bench. He spent about 20 years of his life on the road, writing his plays principally round the team of actors that

◻mpresar with him, often acting in the plays himself. And he sent his earnings home to his wife, who never moved beyond Stratford in her life. While he ◻mpresar he read the history that gave the content for his historical plays. But most of the content came from his daily life as he met it on the road. His fortune, he said, was that he remembered what he saw and heard ‘so that I could draw from a deep well of images.’

He had grown up reading the bible and the Prayer Book, and knew some of the Psalms by heart. In this way he was nourished by the riches of the English language.

I was almost taken by surprise to see the spiritual thread that runs though his plays and poems, as well as the sense of humour – ‘Enter fool’, ‘enter clown’, ‘enter ghost’, ‘enter murderer,’ – what wonderful original ways to bring in a different note.

A love of country shines through. ‘The fair green lap of good King Richard’s land’ was my father’s favourite line.

Shakespeare died at 58. His years were 1558-1616. He had exhausted himself. He leaves behind an amazing legacy of thought, and a unique insight into human nature: and deep truths round which we can build our lives.

Here are some of them:

‘Our doubts are traitors
And make us lose the good we oft might win
By fearing to attempt.’

Measure for Measure

‘Happy are they that hear their distractions
And can put them to mending.’

Much Ado about Nothing

‘The man that hath no music in himself
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
Let no such man be trusted.’

The Merchant of Venice

‘Be not afraid of greatness.’

Twelfth Night

‘Truth hath a quiet breast.’

Richard II

‘The strawberry grows underneath the nettle.’

Henry V

‘The empty vessel makes the greatest sound.’

Henry V

‘Smooth runs the water when the brook is deep.’

Henry VI Part I

‘A heart unspotted is not easily daunted.’

Henry VI Part I

‘Look, when he fawns, he bites.’

Richard III

‘He hath no friend but what are friends for fear.’

Richard III

‘Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee: corruption wins not more than honesty.’

Henry VIII

‘Those moral laws of nature and nations speak aloud.’

Troilus and Cressida

‘Perseverance keeps honour bright.’

Troilus and Cressida

‘I talk of dreams

Which are the children of an idle brain

Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.’

Romeo and Juliet

‘Cicero will never follow

any thing that other men begin.’

Julius Caesar

‘Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself.’

Macbeth

‘To be honest as this world goes
Is to be one man picked out of 10,000.’

Hamlet

‘Death, the undiscovered country’

Hamlet

‘Where I could not be honest
I never yet was valiant.’

King Lear

‘In nature’s infinite book of secrecy I can read.’

Antony and Cleopatra

God’s Promises from Isaiah

‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’

‘He will destroy death for ever and wipe away the tears from all faces.’

‘Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because
he trusted in Thee.’

‘He that believeth shall not make haste.’

‘The Lord waits to be gracious unto thee. Your ears will hear a voice behind
you saying: “This is the way, walk ye in it”.’

‘His breath is like an overflowing stream.’

‘The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose – the blind shall see, the lame will leap like a deer, the dumb sing for joy. Streams will break out in the desert, and a stainless highroad will appear.’

‘They that wait on the Lord will renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not lose heart.’

‘Fear not, for I am with thee. I have paid your ransom. I have called you by name and you are my own. I have taken you by the hand and I will keep you and give you to be a light to the nations. ‘When you pass through deep waters, I am with you. No river shall overflow you.’

‘I will put out my spirit on your children, and they will spring up like willows by flowing streams.’

‘Even to your old age I am He: I have made and I will bear . . . I have refined thee and chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.’

‘The Lord called me before I was born. From my mother’s womb He pronounced my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, made me into a polished arrow, and hid me in his quiver, and He said: ‘I will give you to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.’

‘I have set my face like flint.’

‘He will turn the wilderness into the Garden of Eden’

Chapter 53 foretells the coming of a saviour: ‘Through His wounds we are healed, upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole.’

‘Enlarge the place of your tent, for you will spread abroad to right and left, and your descendants will possess the nations and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.’

‘Come unto Me, hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you . . . Nations that knew thee not shall run unto thee because of the Lord the God.’

‘I choose to break every yoke, so that you feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked. Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and you will be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not.’

‘All who accept these things will be called oaks of righteousness.’

‘Since the beginning of the world, eye has not seen, nor ear heard the things God has prepared for those who wait for Him.’

‘All our righteousness is like filthy rags, but Thou, Lord, art our Father. We are the clay, and Thou our potter, and we are all the work of Thy hand.’

These promises come from different translations. I have carried them round for many years. They deal with sin, death, sorrow, old age, deep waters, despair – and offer peace, life, strength, unhurriedness, a world that is ours to love and possess, and his guidance moment by moment.

Breathtaking!

Success

In Kipling’s book, *The Light that Failed*, two artists are talking and this conversation takes place:

MAISIE: Why am I wrong in trying to get a little success?

DICK: Just because you try. Good work has nothing to do with it, doesn't belong to the person who does it. It's put into him or her from outside The instant we begin to think about success and the affect of our work, to play with an eye to the gallery, we lose power and touch with everything else.

MAISIE: Don't you ever think about the gallery?

DICK: Much too often, but I'm always punished by it by loss of power. If we make light of our work by using it for our own ends, our work will make light of us. Success isn't got by sacrificing other people. You must sacrifice yourself and live under orders.

Success is a natural instinct. When I'm watching a sporting event I can feel the nervousness, and the competitor that I still am. Blood pressure goes up. I want certain people – or teams – to succeed, passionately – and other equally to fail and often without any logic to it!

It is no good taking competition out of life and school. It is a good instinct to make the most of ourselves, to be the best we can. The danger is when it remains the only motive.

Henry Drummond wrote: 'A man's motive must grow if God's grace would grow. Many a man has to live on old grace, because he lives on an old motive.'

He adds: 'You may be doing God's will and with one hand consecrated to Christ, and making your own autobiography with the other consecrated to self.'

C.S.Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*: 'You will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making. Even in literature and art no man who bothers about originality will ever

be original. Whereas if you simply tell the truth you will nine times out of ten become original without even having noticed it.’

Siegfried Sassoon wrote these lines in 1958:

‘I saw that smiling conjuror- SUCCESS –
An impresario in full evening DRESS –
Advancing towards me from some floodlit PLACE –
Where fame resides. I did not like his FACE.

I did not like this too forthcoming CHAP
Whose programme was “to put me on the MAP.”
Therefore I left his blandishments unheeded,
And told him he was not the man I needed.’

It is an old saying – ‘Nothing succeeds like success.’ But equally true is the word of G.K.Chesterton – ‘Nothing fails like success.’ The answer surely lies somewhere in between – an unselfish aim in life, and the ambition to pursue it.

Kirste Morrison

(For 70 years associated with St Anne’s College, Oxford, where she was a founding fellow, and tutor in English; address at funeral)

Kirste loved her childhood. Born in India, she spent three years there before the family came back to Scotland. She talked of the ‘deep well of a happy childhood,’ quoting the poet Vaughan:

‘Happy those early days when I

Shined in my angel-infancy.’

Reminiscing, she said: ‘Walking in the Highlands; the splendour of childhood; the sea at St Andrews; the hills at Edzell, in Forfar, mountains and hills. I want to be a shepherd, and live forever on the hills. My parents said I must finish my schooling first!’

In the last years, Kirste’s mind has been constantly on those hills.

A passionate love of Scotland. She was a devotee of Robert Louis Stevenson. Her grandfather met him. Stevenson said: ‘I must meet a man who can laugh like that.’

Love of literature. Kirste called it ‘the great nourisher.’

When asked what was best to read on ambition she replied immediately *Macbeth*, then added *Richard III*, and *Kenilworth* by Walter Scott.

I told her I’d just read *Weir of Hermiston*, the last novel of Stevenson. She recited at once the first paragraph.

She specially hated jargon, and strongly recommended to people the chapter on ‘Jargon’ in Quiller-Couch’s book, *The Art of Writing*.

She was a genius at conversation. She had the art of the great tutor. She drew you out, and you hardly realised it was happening.

She used to say that nothing good was ever created by a committee. ‘With one exception,’ she said, ‘the Authorised Version of the Bible.’ It was put together in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, by forty-seven people over seven years, 1604-11. ‘The greatest book in the English language,’ said Kirste.

She initiated a conversation on the theme ‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.’ ‘What do you mean by “holy”?’ she asked. In matters of faith she was

always exploring, always questing. She was a believer, profoundly so – but did not find God easy.

Her journey of faith was quickened in the 1930s by her meeting with the Oxford Group, including theologians like Canon Streeter, Provost of Queens' College, and Julian Thornton-Duesbery, Principal of Wycliff Hall and later Master of St Peter's College. Streeter warned Kirste against overwork. She replied: 'Don't worry. I'm as strong as an ox.' Streeter added: 'But you mustn't make the ox an ass.'

Kirste loved Oxford, loved the university motto 'Dominus illuminatio mea' – 'God is my light'.

She loved her pupils and her family with intense pride.

She loved the words of St Paul: 'Whatsoever things are pure and lovely, think on these things.'

The world passed through her home – 12 Norham Road, Oxford – for sixty-five years, and found conversation, common sense, faith and vision.

Dear Kirste, what a journey it has been, and it's only just begun. The 2nd innings never ends. Goodbye for now, abundant gratitude, and we'll see you there.

St Andrew's Church, Oxford, August 13, 1998.

Never Too Old

In 1944 Konrad Adenauer, the future Chancellor of Germany, was in prison under Hitler. The prison commissar asked him not to take his own life, 'Why should I?' he said. 'He replied that I was nearly 70 and had nothing more to expect from life.' So Adenauer wrote in his memoirs. For 14 years after the war he gave outstanding leadership to Germany and Europe.

Mahatma Gandhi, assassinated at 78, maintained his leadership to the end. Sophocles and Goethe wrote or completed some of the greatest plays in their 80's. Churchill was 66 when he became Prime Minister, and so came to his prime.

This gives rise to the question, 'What is your vision for older people?' In George Macdonald's masterpiece for children, *The Princess and the Goblin*, there is another heroine, apart from the Princess. Her name is Irene and she is the great, great grandmother. She says: 'It is so silly of people to think that old age means crookedness and witheredness and feebleness and sticks and spectacles and rheumatism and forgetfulness. It is so silly. Old age has nothing to do with that. The right old age means strength and beauty and mirth and courage and clear eyes and strong painless limbs.'

An old friend in her early 90's invited me to speak at her retirement home on 'Birdsong.' There were about twenty ladies present. I began with some of my imitations and then played a tape of the real thing. Some of the ladies were deaf, but I could increase the volume and the birds were in tremendous form!

The first bird on the tape is the blackbird. With his flute-like song he tells us to dream. A great Christian missionary, Temple Gairdner, one of the first to build a great bridge with the Muslim world, once said: 'The blackbird's song is the most beautiful thing you ever heard in your life.' You can shut your eyes and dream, as he sings, and allow yourself to be warmed up inside.

The second bird on the tape is the song thrush. He tells us to leave our laziness behind and get into action. His message is 'do.' One of his phrases sounds like, 'Do it, do it, do it, do it.'

I thought as I prepared this talk that these two birds between them have a good message for us. Dream and do. They are a reminder that winter always gives way to spring.

John Buchan wrote:

‘There is the mind that loves law and order and which exults in the continuity of things, and there is the mind that craves adventure and change and likes to think of the world as each morning a new birth. It is the distinction not so much between age and youth as between the conformist temper and the non-conformist: between static and dynamic: between ordered people and disordered ecstasy: or in the words of Isaiah, between those who say “in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” and those whose cry is “we shall flee upon horses, we will ride upon the swift”.

Define these two moods by their virtues, and it is the opposition between learning, discipline, tradition, service, the slow labours of art – and freedom and originality: define them by their vices, and it is reaction, ossification, convention, set against revolution, slovenliness, wilfulness, impatience It is cool blood against hot blood, sobriety against enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact, of course, the opposition is never complete: for the most fiery voluntary is not independent of tradition: and the most stubborn conservatism has its romantic moments.’

Juliet has told me much of her great grandmother, Louisa, Countess of Antrim, who was for twenty years lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria and Queen Alexandra.

When she met the Oxford Group in the 1930s, she said, ‘I learned at eighty what I should have learned at eighteen’ – that is, learning to listen to God and change as part of her Christian life. She continued a vigorous friendship and contact with people in public life till she died at ninety-four.

Pope John in his book, *Journal of a Soul*, writes the diary of his life. In 1948 he wrote, ‘This year I become 68, I now consider my life has come to its end.’ Nine years later he became Pope and initiated the famous Council, known as Vatican II, which opened the doors of the Catholic Church which had been almost closed for four centuries.

And think what Abraham did after he was 75. When God told him to leave home he did not say ‘I’m too old.’ He gave the next decades to found a great nation.

There is no human age limit to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Fly High – Stand Alone

I’m a bird person. Since I was twelve. When I think of South Africa, India, America and Australia, I think of bee-eaters, orioles, hoopoes, cardinals and kookaburras – as well as people!

John Buchan described the call of the curlew as ‘the true voice of the wilderness – eerie, fantastic, untameable.’ A good description of nature itself. To me birds are magical and mysterious.

There is a voice from Isaiah, chapter 40: ‘They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.’ If we wait on God, we can soar, run and walk, and need never lose heart.

Do you want to be an eagle? Or rather, are you ready to be an eagle? It looks rather lonely up there, though your eyesight is good and you can see things from a distance.

Of course all other birds have their own uniqueness – the ordinary sparrow, the gracious swallow, the blackbird with its lovely song, the dazzling kingfisher, The favourite bird of St Francis was the crested lark. His vision for his team of friends was that they should all be larks, meaning, I imagine, that larks rise and soar and sing and never stop.

But there is something special about an eagle. Apart from anything, it is rare.

My wife and I were in Durham cathedral. At one end lies Bede and at the other lies Cuthbert – two great saints some twelve centuries ago. They remind me of St Paul's challenge long ago that our calling was to be saints.

But you may not want to be a saint.

The word for 'saint' in Greek is 'hagios', meaning 'utterly different'. You may not want to be so different from the world that you lose all your friends, or think you will. The demand for personal success and popularity is very strong.

Victor Hugo, in *Les Miserables*, wrote: 'Contemporary admiration is nothing but shortsightedness.'

C.S.Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, gave a superb picture of how to be a saint and why:

'The real problem of the Christian life comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for a day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving them all back, in

listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting the other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on all day standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings, coming in out of the wind.’

He goes on:

‘When Christ said “Be perfect” He meant that we must go in for the full treatment.

It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird. It would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot. Go on being an ordinary decent egg, We must be hatched or go bad. . . .

. . . If we let Him He can make the feeblest filthiest of us into a God, a dazzling radiant immortal creature pulsating with such energy and joy, wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror.

Flying high and alone, and standing alone, does not mean working alone. The Scriptures are full of the heritage of people past and present whom we join when we walk the road of the saints. We become part of God’s network through the world, not isolated stars.

Henry Drummond wrote: ‘There is no more dramatic scene in history than when Jesus entered the church in Nazareth and read to the people the programme: it deals with the real world – cold, cruelty, fever, famine, ugliness, loneliness, pain. There is not one burning issue of the human race which is not represented here. Liberty, comfort, beauty, joy. No life that is occupied with such an enterprise could be other than radiant.’

This programme is also spelt out in the book of Isaiah. In fact Jesus quotes it. A part of it, in exact words, is ‘to give a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.’ What a programme – that attempts to remove the world’s heaviness of heart.

If we choose to fly high like an eagle, to stand and walk alone as the saints have done, we can be part of this fantastic programme.

There is a River

An old friend, Klaus Bockmuehl, from Germany and Canada, died some years ago. With great difficulty he managed to finish his last book. Devoted care from his wife and friends enabled him to overcome pain and comas and leave us *Listening to the God who Speaks*. Small wonder it is a deep book and simple enough not to be long.

He traces the story of God speaking to people through the Old and New Testaments. He writes: ‘Jesus listens to God and again and again turns to Scripture He displays an unreserved availability for God, something we call holiness The Holy Spirit speaks, rebukes, reminds, and guides To act out of receiving, to be a people of prayer, will build God’s Kingdom.’ He quotes from Isaiah chapter 48, verse 18: ‘Oh that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! Then hadst thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.’

What an amazing thing water is! Think of what it does. It washes, purifies, refreshes, softens, enables to grow, satisfies thirst, brings dryness to life. The water of the Spirit of God does all these things. Christ told the woman of Samaria that what He came to offer was ‘living water.’

One of my favourite Bible verses comes in Psalm 46: 'There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.' What a wonderful picture, that we can each be a stream of God's river.

Think of the refreshment we can receive from a waterfall, a stream, a river, the beginning of the monsoon rains, the sound of the sea.

St John writes in 'Revelation', 'I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life, freely,' and, 'He showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God.'

There is no pattern for listening to God and drawing on this living water. Everyone can work out their own way of doing it. It is a good challenge, I think, to live so openly that I can be prompted by the Spirit of God at any moment of day or night.

I choose the early morning as a foundation for this, and I like plenty of time. Time to remove the mentality that believes that there are too many things to do and not enough time to do them! Time to listen, think, pray, look at the Cross, wonder, read something that feeds the spirit. Honesty and purity are a good mirror to look at myself and life during the morning watch.

Sometimes when I read the newspaper I write down bits that interest me, and I pass them through my quiet time. The same with books. Studying history at University got me into the habit of making notes on all the books I read. C S Lewis wrote in one of his *Letters*: 'One of the main rewards of conversion is to be able to see at last the real points of all the old literature, which we are brought up to read with the point left out.' The classics are full of spiritual insights.

In his book *The Art of Writing* (1916), Quiller-Couch gives his list of the greatest works of literature as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (Homer), *Purgatory* (Dante), *The Tempest* (Shakespeare), *Paradise Lost* (Milton), Plato's *Republic* and *Don Quixote* (Cervantes). 'I will commend these classical authors to you,' he writes, 'because they conserve the norm of literature, the steady grip on the essential.'

And he puts the Bible into the category of great literature.

Dr Samuel Johnson wrote some 40 sermons and aimed through them to deal with what he called 'the hunger of the imagination.' He suggested that unless the imagination was nourished it would turn inwards upon itself to what he called "the treachery of the heart.' 'The hunger of the imagination,' he said, 'could be redirected towards the stability of truth.'

Psalm 103 tells what God will do for us if we let Him: 'The Lord forgives all thine iniquities, heals all thy diseases, redeems thy life from destruction, crowns thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, satisfies thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's, removes our sins from us, as far as the East is from the West.'

A quiet time offers the leisure for these remarkable things to happen.

I resisted Psalm 119 for years as being too long. But I was wrong. It is full of treasure. Listen to this: 'I have chosen the way of truth I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage I am a companion of all them that fear Thee and keep Thy precepts.'

What wonderful language, as well as message. Nothing rigid, rather a road to walk. Way, truth, pilgrimage, companionship.

With these truths to feed on day by day, I write down the thoughts I get. Of course I do not presume that all my thoughts come from God. But they do come from an attempt to seek Him and seek His mind and seek His face. Writing them down helps me to remember them, helps my mind to move from one thought to another and enables me to share with my wife before the day begins.

With the bounty that God offers, we can indeed, each of us, be a stream of His river.

‘The Letter Kills, the Spirit Gives Life’

‘The letter kills, the spirit gives life’ was one of Gandhi’s favourite verses.

There is a famous saying of Louis Pasteur, the great French scientist (1822-95): ‘In the field of investigation, chance favours the prepared mind.’

I was introduced to this statement by Dr Honor Smith, a neurologist and aunt of my wife. She was decorated for her part in discovering the cure to tubercular meningitis. The key thought came to her when she was having a beer in a pub in Oxford. ‘But I was ready for it’, she said.

In her last years, I used to read aloud regularly to Honor and her conversation was a sheer delight. When I discovered that in her youth she had been coached in cricket by the great Frank Woolley, I was very impressed!

Gary Player, the golfer, is often quoted: ‘The more I practice, the luckier I get’.

St Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ‘The letter kills, the spirit gives life’.

Strong language.

Echoed by Robert Browning: ‘Cold correctness’.

What is your game plan? It may be a good idea, as long as there is room for spontaneity, and surprise. Otherwise 'it kills'. And it bores!

The 'mission statement' can do the same.

The English are good at the 'letter'. The Welsh, Scottish and Irish at the 'spirit'.

Sweeping statements! But true enough to show much we need each other. A roomful of persevering English needs balance!

My background is Huguenot, English, Scottish and Irish, and my wife Juliet is a similar mixture. And we live on the Welsh border. So we should be able to combine the letter and the spirit!

There is a saying of the Sufis:

'Could there be a better customer than God?

He buys our dirty bag of goods,

And in return gives us an inner light

The borrows from his splendour.'

There is something special about the oak tree. It is the pride of Herefordshire. There is a famous one near us, which is probably a thousand years old. The roots, mainly hidden, make possible its beauty and its grandeur.

I love the story of the woman at the well in St John's Gospel (chapter 4). Christ is tired and thirsty. The woman is ashamed and alone – and drawing water. The ensuing conversation is surely one of the great conversations of history.

Christ offers the woman 'living water', and, amazingly, she believes. 'She left her water pot behind and went into the city and saith to the people: 'Come, behold a man who told me ALL that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? They went out of the city and made their way towards him'.

Was she the first missionary?

When St Paul crossed the desert on his historic road to Damascus, he passed through Samaria. Maybe he met this woman, and heard her story. I like to think there's a connection between the two!

I cannot imagine a less strategic person than this woman, but Christ, with his dazzling naturalness, changes the world through unlikely people.

