

EDITORIAL

In the 1,000-year tradition of praying that developed from around 300 to St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) we find a wholehearted acceptance of the truth that God has bound bones and veins in us, fastened us flesh. So when I pray, I do so as a “living being” (Gen. 2: 7) and not as a disembodied spirit.

The Christian writers of this period—most readily accessible in the “Writings from the Philokalia on the Prayer of the heart”—present us with a profounder understanding of human nature than we can find until we come to the modern period. They help us to see what it means that we are fashioned in the flesh. They show us how we can come to our fullness as human beings, and how we can pass beyond our limits and transcend ourselves. They give us guidance about how we can move from depression to peace, from loneliness to communion. Above all, they show us how we may reach that perfect stillness and silence in which the union of love between ourselves and God is made real.

They help to remind us that we pray with our bodies. If we depend too much on verbal language when we pray, we will let other powers within us atrophy. “While you are talking,” Zorba said to his English friend, “I watch your arms and chest. Well, what are they doing? They’re silent. They don’t say a word. As though they hadn’t a drop of blood between them.”

For many of us it is a new skill to learn to pray with our bodies. It may involve breathing: sitting still, beginning to breathe in a rhythmical way, and saying a simple mantra like, “Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me”, or, even more simply, the name Jesus alone. It may involve walking. St John of the Ladder used to tell his followers that, if they got tired, they should get up and pray: “Walk around,” he said. Running or swimming, for some, is a good way of praying. So, supremely, is dancing. The whole universe, if we explore the subatomic world, is engaged in a continual cosmic dance of energy, as Fritjof Capra calls it. When we dance, we join the cosmic dance—and whatever we do can be part of the dance. “Dancing as dancing,” Alan Watts said, “is the ritual form of dancing while cooking”—or dancing while writing, or dancing while grocery shopping.

The whole point of praying with the body, as the desert fathers used to put it, was to “bring the mind into the heart”. To use the very processes of the body, they said, was a way of centering on my innermost and realest part. There I discover that my life is

hidden with Christ in God and there, in Christ, I discover how bound I am to all who also bear a human name and nature.

The end of it all is that encounter in silence of the lover who is me with the Lover who is God in the Love which is the bond of fellowship with all created beings.

So we are made to be hungry, and we will always be, until we are filled with God.

R. M.

It is with great regret that I have to announce, at the time of going to press, that this issue will be the last number of *Liturgical Review*. Due to ever increasing costs the Church Service Society and the Scottish Academic Press have come to the inescapable conclusion that publication cannot continue. On behalf of the Society and of the Press I would like to thank all those who have been contributors and subscribers to the journal over the years.

The Council of the Church Service Society has been discussing how best the aims of the Society might be carried out in the future. Included in these discussions has been the possibility that another form of publication would be made available. Members of the Society will receive a report early in 1982 outlining these proposals, and any others interested in future publications by the Society should contact the Secretary, the Rev. Colin R. Williamson.

DOUGLAS M. MURRAY,
Editor.