



King's College Library



Sunray Gardens, Herne Hill



Amwell Road, Cambridge



University Botanical Gardens

2005 in London and Cambridge

BY THE TIME that you will receive our letter it will be almost nine months since we left Ewell. I often wondered in the past what the monks and nuns felt at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century in England. The country was populated with them. For of course, apart from their spiritual calling, it was a much better life style in the monasteries than in the dwellings of the common folk outside the walls. How did they cope when they were pensioned off? In the nineteenth and twentieth century, on the other hand, monasteries were much less 'cosy' places to

be than the majority of homes 'outside' - the re-introduction of the monastic calling in the church went hand in hand with a definite asceticism.

At Ewell we were privileged to be able to go forward into a simplicity of a life style centred in the appropriation of the gospel as the reason for our commitment there in Christ. So now, this life in the gospel remains with us. One of our friends wondered how, as I said in the last letter, one was going to witness to the kingdom here, in Cambridge suburbia. The answer is that we keep true to that gospel commitment and just be ourselves in Christ. The Christian outreach from the parishes is just that - individuals sent out into daily work and society to remain faithful and true. So for us, in London and Cambridge, it feels 'right' to be here - an extension of what we were doing, or 'being', at Ewell.

Of course there is a great difference. We have to rely on our own resources for support - there is no community to lend balance, inspiration and quality of living. But we were prepared for this change, gained through our life together over the years. We have never for one moment looked back to Ewell as a place. For social life, we learned then, is bound up with a theological outlook, surprising as that may seem! Above all: the extraordinary seepage of the gospels into one's mind, orientating one's outlook in worship and life and work.



'The Trinity'. Andrei Rublev (1370-1430). Moscow.

Tim writes:

I was amused to come across the following line in Yeats: "Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has



shone". I've been more aware of puzzlement than truth - but this has all been part of a stimulating and certainly very challenging start to my studies in London. The transition from monastery to student has been encouragingly smooth, though sometimes I cannot resist a wry smile at just how different life has become.

On the other hand the sole grounds for my coming to London has been to continue work in philosophy

and theology that I began at Ewell. A question that I have long reflected on (albeit in idle fashion) has been the concept of God's action in the world. This type of question can become pressing in times of terrible natural disaster or other evils. The wisest comment I have heard is simply, We do not know how God works in the world. This must, I think, express more than simple ignorance.

The New Testament writings make the very remarkable claim that Jesus, the risen one, is 'lord' of all creation. Yet this is never interpreted (as far as I can tell) as ever meaning some sort of control over the world. So what can it mean?

I received a Chinese puzzle from the innards of a Christmas cracker. After deciding it was a physical impossibility for those bits of wire to come apart, I looked at the instructions and saw the solution. I am not sure that the word 'solution' is ever going to be relevant for our understanding of the gospel and the world. But maybe, if we resist the temptation to look to the wrong type of answer, the belief that is expressed in the New Testament can become a transforming element in our own lives - and perhaps then we can begin to understand a little more about God and the world than we do now.



44 Amwell Road before

Aelred writes:

Wherever I have been in the past half century there seems to have been a 'plan' that I should rescue gardens from dereliction and to make the desert bloom! The small garden round two sides of my two roomed house here has been no exception.

Situated at the end of a cul-de-sac and bordering the main Kings Hedges road, it offered in the past a convenient way for students to jump over the low wall (trespassing on the house's property) to reach the Cambridge Regional College across the road. It had to change! And you will see from the photographs that it has indeed, thanks to the help of a neighbour who had been a landscape gardener. Fences were put up, beds were dug and shrubs planted and now bulbs are appearing. Not least a shed, surrounded by access paths, erected by myself and neighbour to house my bike and tools. So I have been very fortunate. Cistercian life was indeed a preparation for all that has happened here in the past nine months.

It is a privilege to be here with access to the University and to my old college of Queens'. I can get to the Divinity Faculty library, 3 miles away, in 15 minutes on my bike. Not having ridden a bike for almost the whole of the past half century it has been a delight, not to say a thrill, to be on wheels again! I can get out into the country when it is fine and also do the shopping. The very good Cambridge bike shop where I bought the bike, said they had given me a new nickname - 'the racing Rev'!

All this is the daily background to a peaceful life of reading and prayer in this spot. Poaching on Tim's main stock-in-trade, I have been delving into philosophy as a prelude to mapping out what I may be able to communicate in the future about the theology of Christian worship. It has seemed to me that in the prevailing culture in the West of the 'absence' of God it is important to make the attempt to re-focus our ideas of Christian worship on a God who is believable. That is not to say that we are going to understand who God is but at least we can begin to think of our Christian commitment in terms of a God who is personal, creative, caring and remembering. Can we begin to think of God as one who is not simply obsessed with our sin(s); as one not requiring a sacrifice from us or to perform miracles for us, in our worship? Christian worship has not necessarily freed itself from these pagan notions of a god who appears less than human or else purely a convenience for us in our tragic dilemmas of daily living - a god of the gaps.

Taking these confusions of God into account it is perfectly understandable how most people cannot accept that the world is the sphere of God's rule or even that there is a god. Nevertheless, the witness of Jesus to the God who is love and compassion spurs us on to refine the ideas about God that have become skewed since his time and to make sense of both life and worship in our world today.



44 Amwell Road now.