

Methodists and Mary

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From my title you might well be excused for thinking that this will be a very short paper, because there is little material available on the subject. That would be a very natural reaction. Neville Ward, one of the few Methodist scholars who have published significant studies of Marian theology, is on record as confessing that, "In Methodism the silence about the Mother of Jesus is positively deafening. It is so complete that during a ministry of over thirty years I have begun to wonder what anxiety is behind this surprising mental hang-up". He then goes on to give his own surmise as to the reasons that may lie behind this silence on the part of Methodists:

Probably because of ignorance and misunderstanding through the many years of disunity we tend to look at the Blessed Virgin Mary with a mixture of love and fear. It must be that we love her, even if we do not know this yet, because we love the Saviour. But we fear being trapped by certain forms of Marian devotion which we suspect come dangerously near to superstition or suggest processes of psychological compensation which we want to question.¹

Neville Ward wrote that in the Preface to his study of the Rosary, *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*, which was published by Epworth Press, the imprint of the Methodist Publishing House, in 1971. There has been, however, some lessening of the Methodist silence about Mary since that date, for a variety of reasons, not least because of Neville Ward's own writing and preaching.

Another positive influence has been the series of Conversations, at both national and international levels, which have been taking place between Roman Catholics and Methodists. These ecumenical conversations, and the reports which have flowed from them, have encouraged Methodists to understand more deeply the vital significance of Mary for the Church and in the whole economy of salvation. Methodists have been encouraged to see more clearly Mary's utterly crucial role in the Incarnation, in which the loving purpose of God needed her response of faith and obedience in becoming the Mother of the Saviour, expressed in the total self-offering of her Fiat, "Be it unto me according to thy word".

Within the context of Roman Catholic/Methodist conversations, I believe that the Second Vatican Council's Document on the Church, the *De Ecclesia*, has proved extremely helpful in stilling some of the Methodist misgivings about Mary. The *De Ecclesia* places Mary firmly within, rather than above, the Church. It affirms that she has a unique place in the Church as "Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. Redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son, and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the supreme office

¹ J.N.Ward, *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy* (1971), Preface, p.ix.

and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God". Yet, as this same paragraph (53) goes on to emphasize, "At the same time.....because she belongs to the offspring of Adam, she is one with all human beings in their need for salvation."² Again, while acknowledging the proper honour due to Mary for her unique role in the economy of grace, *De Ecclesia* goes on to stress that her role can, "neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator. For no creature can ever be classed with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer".³ This section of the Document which deals with Mary draws to a conclusion by declaring that, "...this Synod earnestly exhorts theologians and preachers of the divine word that in treating of the unique dignity of the Mother of God, they carefully and equally avoid the falsity of exaggeration on the one hand, and the excess of narrow-mindedness on the other".⁴ These careful Catholic elucidations can hardly fail to be helpful to Methodists, and to other "separated brethren" to whom the Document refers.

So much for the influence of ecumenical conversations and official doctrinal statements on Mary, insofar as they impinge on Methodist understandings. At a different and simpler level, Methodists may be helped to appreciate the profound significance of Mary through their reflection on the fundamental importance of human motherhood. Proverbially, "Mothers are the makers of spirit", that is to say, a mother's love and nurture are central to the growth in goodness and the formation in character of her child. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98) has recorded in his autobiography the huge debt he owed to his Christian mother, and acknowledged, "I still live, humanly speaking, by the strength and gentleness of her love". Behind every truly good man or woman, we can find a good mother. For Methodists, the truth of this received wisdom is especially exemplified by the influence of Susanna Wesley on her son John, the founder of the Methodist movement. Susanna cared devotedly for all her ten children, and yet she had a particular concern for John, whom she believed had been protected from childhood by a special providence.

John was special in his mother's eyes for a number of reasons. First, if we may say so, he was -humanly speaking - nearly never born at all. In what sense? In the sense that, after a deep and principled clash of conviction between Susanna and Samuel, his parents, the father left his wife, promising never to return. Yet, as he rode away from his home, he met another clergyman, who, after hearing Samuel's account of the quarrel, persuaded him to return to his wife and family. Samuel and Susanna then resumed marital relations, and the first child of the reunion was John. After that, when John was six, a great fire destroyed the rectory at Epworth, having broken out in the middle of the night. The child John was trapped in his bedroom after all the rest of the family had fled to safety. At the last moment, a young man mounted the shoulders of another villager, and managed to pull the child from his bedroom window just before the roof fell in. Susanna recorded in her devotional journal afterwards, the following vow to God: "I do mean to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child, for whom Thou hast so mercifully provided." She was indeed to prove more

² *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, SJ, (1966), p.86.

³ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.95.

particularly careful of him, and the profound influence of her prayers for and nurture of him was to shape him for the rest of his life.

From that human example, which is so central to their own tradition, Methodists may better appreciate the Motherhood of Our Lady. Jesus was indebted to her not only for his flesh, his physical nature, but also for his nurturing, his formation, his being shaped by her love. She was the one who, from the first moments of his life, loved and cared for him as only a mother can. As an infant of days, he lived in the light of her countenance and, as the saying goes, "knew no heaven but her face". For good or ill, then, the mother-child bond, we now recognise, is utterly crucial for the whole future development of the child. Let us hold that truth steadily before us, then, as we look at Jesus, son of Mary, and acknowledge his humanity as complete, whole, unwarped by selfishness or sin. "He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin". That being so, as we "Behold the Man", the true human being, full of grace and truth, we may realize the wonder and perfection of Mary's mothering of him.

In his writings on Mary, Neville Ward is fully aware of these truths and he sought to commend them to his fellow-Methodists. He was a committed member of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as was his cousin, Dr. Marcus Ward, who served with distinction in the Church of South India. But how typical of the Methodist people generally were such men as these? It must be admitted that they were, in many ways, exceptional, rather than characteristic. Yet, that said, I believe it would be a mistake to regard them as wholly untypical. They were both representative of the High Wesleyan or Catholic strain in Methodism, which has an honourable history, and which goes back to John Wesley himself. Wesley had a lifelong and consuming passion for holiness, and continually urged his people to press on to entire sanctification or Christian Perfection, as he termed it. Hence he was attracted to the Roman Catholic emphasis on holiness, and so was drawn to Catholic mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, extracts from whose works he published in his Christian Library, for the instruction of his preachers and people.

It is in this tradition of Catholic Methodist churchmanship that Neville Ward stood, a stance typified by his membership of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, which was founded in 1935, and has maintained a steady witness ever since. The aims of the Fellowship, as restated in 1998, are threefold:

- (1) To re-affirm the Catholic faith based on the apostolic testimony of Holy Scripture, witnessed to in the Historic Creeds and professed by the Church down the ages.
- (2) To encourage standards of excellence in worship and, in particular, to emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist, as set forth in the lifelong practice and teaching of the Wesleys.
- (3) To work and pray for the visible unity of Christ's Church.

As to the centrality of the Eucharist in the life and teaching of the Wesleys, it is exemplified, both in John's pamphlet on *The Duty of Constant Communion*, and in Charles's publication of some 166 hymns in his *Collection of Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), with its strong celebration of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament.

In its early years, the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship was viewed with considerable suspicion by some Methodists, as a markedly High Church, if not Romanizing Fifth Column within the Church. Such suspicions were intensified when one or two of the founding members were led to become Roman Catholics. Among them were two leading ministers, T.S. Gregory and William Barr, the latter going on to become an officer of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Gradually, however, the Fellowship became accepted within the Methodist community, helped by the fact that its early leaders included outstanding and representative members of the Church, such as the Revd. Dr. Ernest Rattenbury and Sir Henry Lunn, and at a later date Dr. Gordon Wakefield and Dr. Donald Soper.

This, then, was the Catholic Wesleyan tradition in which Neville Ward stood; and in the remainder of this paper, I should like to make a brief survey of his writings, particularly those on Mary, which have been widely read, both within Methodism and beyond.

His first book was entitled *The Use of Praying*, and was commissioned as the Fernley-Hartley Lecture of 1967, to be delivered at the Methodist Conference. It is typical of the writings of one who was apt to confess that he found the heart of his spirituality in contemplative prayer and the Eucharist. In the book he draws on a wide range of sources, which include: Augustine, Pascal, the Wesleys, Simone Weil, and above all the French Jesuit, Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751). The quality of *The Use of Praying* may be gauged from the author's definition of 'private prayer', which, he writes:

..is principally a matter of thinking and reading about the Christian image of the free and happy life (Jesus Christ), understanding its implications, intensifying one's desire for it, seeing one's experience in terms of it, and all this in order to free the mind and direct it for loving as many persons and things as possible and responding creatively to events, because this is the way one loves God, the only way God can be loved in this world.

That is the purpose of prayer, to help one to love. The praying itself is 'exercise towards' loving, 'reflection in depth' on what God and life and love are as understood in the Christian tradition. It is part of this teaching that life reaches its fulfilment of meaning and joy as God rules in men's responding hearts and they do his will. God's purpose is to bring about this fulfilment of life. Indeed, this is what is happening all the time. Life is God fulfilling his purpose and doing so in love and by love.⁵

He also draws on the poets to illuminate the understanding of prayer, and cites, among others, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Philip Larkin.

He contributed significantly to Dr. Gordon Wakefield's *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, first published by SCM Press in 1983. His contributions included articles on Abandon, Contemplation, The Lord's

⁵ J.N. Ward, *The Use of Praying* (1967), p.51.

Prayer, and the Rosary, as well as a study of his own spiritual master, de Caussade. In this study, he not only expounds the Frenchman's teaching in his seminal work, *Self-Abandonment to the Divine Providence*, but in so doing also provides a summary of his own understanding and practice of the Christian life, so deeply was he influenced by de Caussade. He writes, with an opening sentence that John Wesley would thoroughly have approved,

Perfection is open to all here and now by God's grace, since it resides in our self-giving to God's providence and doing his will as it is signified to us. Whatever our present situation happens to be, it is to be seen as God's will for us in the limited sense that he clearly consents to its being the context of our present service to him.... de Caussade spoke of each passing moment as being the veil of God and so also, when scrutinised and interpreted by faith, the unveiling of God. He gave the term 'the sacrament of the present moment' to this understanding of time and continually expounded the Christian life as an active and passive co-operation with God moment by moment. The kind of prayer he recommended is a prayer of simple waiting on God, of discernment of his presence, and of co-operation with him in the doing of his will.⁶

This same emphasis can be seen in Neville's *Dictionary* article on 'Abandon', where, following de Caussade, he writes:

Christian life is a matter of accepting the present disposition of things as from the hands of a loving Father and actively co-operating with him in doing his will as this is variously signified....
. . . .[Abandon] ..is not to be confused with simple acceptance, much less with resignation. It is that giving of oneself to God in which one wishes to do his will whatever the situation and at the same time not only accepts the situation as the current context for this but actively wills it, since faith interprets it not as mere happening but as divine providence.⁷

It is clear, I believe, and was so to Neville Ward from the evidence of his writings, that this 'self-abandonment to the divine providence', this active and wholehearted embracing of God's will, is supremely exemplified in Mary's Fiat, 'Be it done to me according to thy word', when she consents to become the Mother of the Christ. Ward's acceptance of de Caussade's teaching is therefore important for an understanding of his writing on the Rosary, and of his devotion to Our Lady, to which I now turn.

In writing of the use of the Rosary, he is fully aware that it must seem extraordinary to many of his fellow-Methodists that one of their ministers should enter this field of spirituality. He therefore points out the little-known fact that John Wesley himself used the Rosary, and that the beads he used are to be found in the archives of one of the Methodist boarding schools, The Leys School, Cambridge. In a chapter of *The Use of Praying* entitled 'Helps', he considers various aids to prayer which Christians may discover from other traditions of the Church than their own. Sometimes a pattern of prayer may have grown rather stale to those who have always

⁶ *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G.S. Wakefield, (1983), article by J.N. Ward on 'J.P. de Caussade', pp.81-82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, article by J.N. Ward on 'Abandon', pp. 1-2.

known and used it, but may come alive with a vivid freshness to Christians of another tradition, who encounter it for the first time. He uses the Rosary as an example:

Some time ago an article in the Roman Catholic Newsletter Search [March 1965] discussed the boredom which many Romans find with their traditional pieties, such as the Rosary ('merely a monotonous and boring relic of past ages when few could read'), and ended by making recommendations which look horrifyingly familiar to a Methodist, such as more extempore prayer, weekday Preaching services, some kind of class-meeting - the very things that have died on us.

All this is promising. Part of the price we have paid for Disunity is that we have been (in a sense) forbidden to nourish our spiritual life on any other fare than that produced by our own Co-operative society, and we have simply grown tired of it. Unity must mean a sharing of each other's knowledge, and the fun of savouring some strange tastes whose very strangeness can bring a new interest into our devotional life and even the possibility of finding helps for prayer for which we may have been vainly looking for years.

In this much-desired exchange of valuables, Methodists might consider taking the Rosary into their system. And certainly some are already doing this. It is an interesting question how they could ever have begun such an (to them) outlandish lark.⁸

In his article on the Rosary in the *Dictionary*, he makes a similar point about the use of this form of devotion beyond the bounds of Roman Catholicism, and as extending, in however small a way, to Free Church Christians:

The Rosary is usually considered a Roman Catholic devotion, but there is an Orthodox form of it, it has been and is present as a minor theme in Anglican spirituality and, under the influences of twentieth-century ecumenical experience, it is not unknown now in Free Church private prayer.⁹

It is in the opening words of his Preface to *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*, however, that he gives his own personal reasons for using the Rosary in his devotions. He is conscious that some eyebrows will inevitably be raised at the sight of a Methodist minister publishing a book commending such a pattern of prayer, and makes response thus:

If anyone were to ask why a Methodist minister comes to be using a Rosary I would give two reasons. There has to be change and variety in the means one uses for maintaining Christian outlook and aspiration or else the life of faith becomes dull. An obvious way of doing this, in these days of increasing ecumenical encounter and exchange, is to attempt to pray with helps not used in one's own tradition but widely employed elsewhere in the life of the Church. There is a double

⁸ J.N. Ward, *The Use of Praying*, pp.116-117.

⁹ *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, article by J.N. Ward on 'The Rosary', p.340.

advantage, the stimulus of praying in a new way, and the widening of one's experience of the Spirit.

He gives as his second reason his experience that:

In Methodism the silence about the Mother of Jesus is positively deafening. It is so complete that during a ministry of over thirty years I have begun to wonder what anxiety is behind this surprising mental hang-up.

He surmises that,

Probably because of ignorance and misunderstanding accumulating through the many years of disunity we tend to look at the Blessed Virgin Mary with a mixture of love and fear. It must be the case that we love her, even if we do not know this yet, because we love the Saviour. But we fear being trapped by certain forms of Marian devotion which we suspect come dangerously near to superstition or suggest processes of psychological compensation which we want to question.¹⁰

In this book, *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*, he goes on to describe the classic use of the Rosary, with its prayers and meditation on the Five Joyful Mysteries, the Five Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Five Glorious Mysteries, relating to God's redeeming acts in Christ, and Mary's participation in them. His writing on the Rosary makes clear that his devotion to Our Lady springs from a faith that is profoundly rooted in the Incarnation, the Word made flesh. So, in his Preface, he points out that the Hail Mary, "is a way of bringing to mind our belief that the Incarnation of the Son of God is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened in history, and, therefore, of restoring the mind to the joy which is at the foundation of the Christian life."¹¹ This incarnational faith means that he will have no truck with any false religiosity. That is one of the most refreshing qualities of all his writing. He takes seriously – as the Lord God does – time, the body, human nature in all its frailty and strength. He is constantly aware that whoever confesses Jesus, must also truly honour Mary, his Mother, for he is 'born of the Virgin Mary', and therefore bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh.

At the deepest level, Jesus is indebted to her, not only for His flesh, His physical nature, but also for His nurturing, His formation, His being shaped by her love. It is Mary who from the first moments of His earthly life, loves and cares for Him as no other can do. As an infant of days, He lives in the light of her countenance, and 'knows no heaven but her face'. It is proverbial wisdom that 'Mothers are the makers of spirit', the prime shapers of character. For good or ill, the mother-child bond is utterly crucial for the whole future development of the child. Hold that truth steadily before your eyes, as you look at Jesus, Mary's son, the one whose humanity is whole, integral, unwarped by selfishness or sin. 'He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin'. That being so, as we 'Behold the Man!' – the true human being, filled with the divine love, that Jesus is – we can realise the wonder and perfection of Mary's mothering of him.

¹⁰ J.N. Ward, *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*, Preface p.ix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xi - xii.

So Neville Ward's devotion to Mary is rooted in the Incarnation, and that is the first and fundamental thing to be said about it. But he goes on from there to emphasise that in Mary we see the pattern and exemplar of the Christian life of discipleship – humble, trusting, obedient, joyful. In her obedient acceptance of God's will for her, in her humble Fiat – 'Be it unto me according to thy word' – she abandons herself utterly to divine providence, as de Caussade would put it. She gives herself utterly to the gracious will of God, a decision that brings fulfilment to herself and joy to the world. Neville discerns here, as he meditates on the First Joyful Mystery of the Annunciation, a pattern of the beginning of the life of faith for all Christians:

The normal way in which Christian faith becomes real is first the announcement of the gospel, that you are greatly favoured, that the Lord is with you and means to make the present substance of your life the bearer of his love and truth, and then your decision to see how it goes when life is lived in terms of that annunciation. ¹²

In considering the Second Joyful Mystery – the Visitation – when Mary goes to visit Elizabeth and breaks out into the great paean of praise and joy which is the Magnificat, Neville comments on the fact that, "Those who live the undemanding [i.e. not wanting to get things for themselves all the time] and giving life, experience the grace of things and find life lovable and accommodating, as though humility is infinitely creative and worth all the attention usually given to status and success in this world." ¹³ His phrase here, 'the grace of things', is typical of his whole attitude to life and faith. He was no shallow optimist. He was deeply aware of the *lacrimae rerum*, 'the tears of things', or, as a First World War poet renders it, 'the heartbreak in the heart of things'; and yet he was continually thankful for the goodness of life, the deep power of joy, the grace of things.

If Mary, then, is the type and pattern of the Christian disciple, Neville Ward is also clear that she may also be seen as representing the Christian community, as showing what the whole Church in the providence of God is called to be. She is a type or figure of the Church, not only in her primal, whole-hearted response of obedience to the divine will – 'Be it unto me according to thy word' – but in the whole pattern of her life and suffering. Her words to the servants at Cana, when the wine supply has given out, are typical of her attitude to her Son, and may stand as an indication of the Church's calling, in all its life and teaching. Mary bids the servants at the feast, 'Do whatever He tells you' (John 2: 5). The simplicity of those words should not blind us to their profound implications, not only for the doing, but also for the suffering, to which the whole Church is called. In his reflection on the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple – the Fourth Joyful Mystery – he brings out this truth with reference to Simeon's words to Mary: 'This child is destined to be a sign which men reject; and you too shall be pierced to the heart'. He goes on to expound this text: "The sword that went through Mary was all the pain that came from seeking to be at God's disposal in her time and place as she played her role in the Christian drama, all that was involved in being what she could be to him and letting

¹² Ibid., p.6.

¹³ Ibid., p.10.

Him be what he could be to her." He then quotes Max Thurian's study, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, to reinforce his argument:

*The sword of the word of God will make plain the thoughts of her heart, will test her faithfulness and prove her faith, and it is through much suffering experienced in her flesh and in her soul that she will know the victory of faith and the spiritual resurrection of which Simeon speaks. In that, as mother of the suffering servant who is the Son of God, Mary is the figure of the Church, of the community of believers who have been tested in their faith by suffering.*¹⁴

Ward goes on to link Mary's acceptance of suffering with the call to Christians implied in St. Paul's words in Colossians 1: 24, 'It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His body, the Church'. (Jerusalem Bible). He follows that searching text with a commentary that reflects both his own pastoral insight and his understanding of Mary's suffering:

What is lacking in the sufferings of the Jesus of history, which we must fill up, is precisely the incarnation extended in time, what it costs to be a Christian in my place, to be myself but as offered to God for his own use. Jesus could only be himself. He was not married, or a soldier, or an artist, or a mother whose child has just been killed in an accident, or a criminal struggling to return to a world that accepts all but criminals, or an old woman of ninety waiting for death and wondering why it does not come — all this is lacking in the archetypal son of man who could only be one man. What is lacking in the sufferings of the historic Jesus can be and must be filled up by the sufferings of the body of Christ, the Church, as its committed members all become part of his passion. The eucharist is the sacramental means of repeatedly realizing this and, entering into it, making his passion and his self-offering to God and its price all ours.

*In such terms we may understand the Virgin Mary's 'Be it unto me according to thy word'. The words sum up a process extending over years, they are the theme of a vocation with its sense of being haunted by some huge possibility, as being marked for some unknown glory or responsibility or pain which may make the world quite different from what it is. And the words involve her in keeping this in her heart and brooding on it, drifting between doubt and acceptance continually but holding on to her vision, and still holding on at the foot of the cross.*¹⁵

He returns to this theme in another of his writings, his meditation on the Seven Last Words of Jesus from the Cross, a study which he simply entitles *Friday Afternoon* (1976). In the third chapter, 'Belonging', he takes the word spoken by Jesus to Mary as she stood beside the Cross, where we read in St. John's Gospel: 'When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your

¹⁴ Thurian, p. 107.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.35-36.

son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother". And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.' (John 19: 25-27).

In this chapter, Neville brings out not only Mary's stature as a figure of the suffering Church of Jesus, but also as one who is at the heart and centre of the Communion of Saints. He underlines the truth that the Church on earth, often weak and suffering, frequently marred by mediocrity and poor discipleship, is nevertheless bound up with, and strengthened by, the prayers and life of the saints and heroes of the Faith, who have gone before us, but who, in the Spirit of Jesus, are one with us. And of none of the saints is this more true than of Mary the Mother of the Lord. Hence Neville urges that we need continually to recall the fact of this living communion, and take heart from it:

*The sufferer needs to recall it. The suffering Church of today, dismayed at the poor impression it makes for God, needs to recall it. Devotion to the mother of the Lord, first and most loved Christ-lover, figure of the Church in God's purpose, is a means and mode of such recall and to that kind of faith and love in which the blemishes of the Church, its failures and sins and even the prospect ahead of it, are seen in no way to jeopardize the joy and peace of believing.*¹⁶

In the later part of this splendid chapter on the suffering of Mary, the author highlights the grace she embodies by being willing to stay with her pain and suffering, not seeking to escape it, but bearing it creatively in faith and love and so bringing new possibilities of goodness out of it:

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the loved image of the vast world of mutual giving and receiving into which we have entered through faith in Christ; she is a living part of it, who in being loved and honoured gives access to the whole and to all that grace which God has chosen to mediate through the fellowship of the spirit.

One such grace, expressed in her standing at the foot of the cross, is that of remaining with the pain into which life has brought us.

We may not see what good can come of this refusal to turn away and withdraw. The situation may be one of those whose terror is most vivid precisely in the fact that if there seems nothing we or anyone else can do about it.

But if it is clearly our life's structure just now and we stay with it, living it through, with as little reservation as possible, it does in fact change, it leads into the next situation. The next situation will have some newness which, though small, may make all the difference, brighten the problem with a more manageable look. And we have changed too. We are certainly more used to its presence, a little more familiar with it, a little less daunted by it.

One final quotation from this same chapter sums up not only what Neville has to say about this Third Word from the Cross, but so much of what he believed and taught about the Mother of God. He writes:

She has a unique place in the Christian understanding of holiness. She carries a marvelous statement of holiness as a trust in and

¹⁶ J.N. Ward, *Friday Afternoon* (1976), p.59.

*communion with God learned and maintained (like her son's later obedience) through the things one suffers, a belonging to God worked out through the needs and decisions of every day. And this belonging to God is a matter of saying 'Be it unto me according to thy word' and sustaining all the action that flows from such desire, such commitment.*¹⁷

I have quoted Neville Ward's writings at some length, not least because he is so eminently quotable. He is so sane, perceptive, rooted in the realities of daily life, and yet steeped in the life of prayer and devotion. He never goes into religious overdrive. As a pastor and a believer he was acquainted with grief. Yet he is genuinely stirred by what he once called 'the devastating richness of life', and his writings are full of joy, thankfulness and a sense of wonder.

I think it was a theologian of the Eastern Orthodox tradition who insisted that Christian doctrine is not simply to be thought and expounded, but is also to be lived and to be prayed. I believe Neville Ward was a theologian of that kind. I am sure that his writings have much wisdom to impart to Christians today. Through them he speaks powerfully to us yet, and we may give thanks that he is still one with us, in the communion of Our Lady and of all the saints. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

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¹⁷ Ibid., pp.62, 64.