

# GILBERT SHAW: A Teacher of Prayer in the Twentieth Century

*Extracts from a talk given at the twelfth International, Interdenominational Congress of Religious (CIIR) at Subiaco, Italy, September 2001 by Sr. Isabel SLG*

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## PRAYER

*Prayer is only prayer when it becomes the whole person. That is to say, the whole of life, its relationships, its use of memory and imagination, its energies, above all the activity of understanding, affection and will are to be offered for radical transformation.*

*The veracity, the truth of our prayer, can only be tested by the level of our purgation. And purgation, both of sense and of spirit, is what we shall need till the end of our days to set us free to love as God loves, and to allow his divine energies free course in all the channels of our nature. So, for instance, *renewal of the mind* through *lectio divina*, *brooding on the words of scripture*, *recollection round a point of truth* could not be relaxed, however familiar the Bible might have become; *Obedience* which both expresses and strengthens the *re-direction of desire* to choose God rather than self is enabled by the steady rhythm of surrender and response in which our loving conversation with God is maintained.*

## PRAYER AND THE HEART

His cosmic vision and his often agonised awareness of human alienation from God enabled him to see *prayer—the dialogue of love's response to love—as the most direct means of entering into Christ's work of reconciliation* by bringing our own small, twisted hearts into harmony with the boundless love of the divine heart and the boundless energy of his will for the healing and hallowing of the entire creation.

## INTERCESSION

*Intercessors are not people with long lists, but those who persevere in standing at the foot of the Cross, for the sake of the world.*

## INTENTIONAL LIFE

The intentions (...) with which his life was offered to God, and which were also the intentions of every Mass he celebrated, were these:

- ❖ *The sanctification of the priesthood—holy men of prayer to guide God's people to holiness.*
- ❖ *The care and nurture of contemplatives—men and women in ordinary walks of life, often very lonely people—whom he spoke of as *lighthouses*.*
- ❖ *The recovery of the great tradition of contemplative life and prayer—within this process he saw religious (and the contemplative communities in particular) as *citadels* or *fortresses* in the forefront of the battle against evil.*

All these intentions combined to serve the strongest intention of all: that *humankind, drawn to respond to God's love made known in Jesus Christ, should be restored to its original beauty in the image and likeness of its Creator.*

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

*Direction is the art of guiding souls so that they shall respond most readily to their graces. ... It implies a settled relationship between director and directed, not merely by way of giving and seeking advice, which would leave open the private judgement of the one directed, but rather a relationship resulting from prayer and careful search in which the soul has found the guide upon whom it feels it can depend.*

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*Fr. Shaw (1886-1967) was an Anglican priest and Warden of the Sisters of the Love of God at Fairacres, Oxford. Extracts in italics are from the writings of Fr. Shaw. Full text available at: [https://www.slgpress.co.uk/CMS/FREE\\_PDFs/E\\_GSH001.pdf](https://www.slgpress.co.uk/CMS/FREE_PDFs/E_GSH001.pdf)*