

Foreword

Thomas F. Best

THIS BOOK IS A precious gift offered by the Community of Grandchamp to other monastic communities, to churches of all traditions, and not least to the ecumenical movement. Sr. Minke and the Community have given us a work combining recollection, reflection, meditation, church and ecumenical history and more, all offered in a highly personal and engaging style. It brings us in a unique way *into* the Community of Grandchamp, exploring the faith from which the Community lives and how it puts that faith into practice: in life together, in worship, and in service to the world.

For those familiar with monastic communities, *The Fruits of Grace* will deepen their understanding of the unique rewards, challenges and opportunities for service in this distinctive form of the Christian life. For those unfamiliar with monastic communities, I cannot think of a better introduction to their life and to their importance for the whole Church. And for many in both groups, this book will open a new world: that of monastic communities within Protestant churches—within the Reformed churches (as is Grandchamp), but also within Anglican and Lutheran churches, and perhaps more. Such communities have recovered, for the Protestant world, a form of Christian life and service which has been integral to the Church from its earliest days. For this the whole Church owes them a debt of gratitude.

Reflecting on my own experience with the Community of Grandchamp, I am moved to mention two aspects of its life in particular: its worship and its ecumenical commitment.

First, at the heart of the Community's life is *its life of worship*. This takes place in the chapel ("the Ark"). This is a large, open room with warm wooden walls and a high ceiling braced by soaring wooden beams. On

entering one sees the altar, lectern with Holy Scripture, and a large cross standing against a wall; then a modest number of profound icons, most familiarly that of the Trinity; and candles. The overall impression is one of simplicity, of focus on the essential, and of welcome to a place of encounter with God. In daylight the space is bright, sparked by splashes of color from strips of colored glass set into the walls; at nighttime it is a space of holy mystery, a darkness illumined by God's light. Even during non-Eucharistic services, Bread and Wine seem to be present on the Lord's Table. God is present; Christ is present; and the Holy Spirit is moving within. For me it is a precious and beautiful space, one which transcends the divisions of our churches. One could say: the chapel itself is an "icon" of our unity, filled with Sisters and visitors from various churches and countries, all coming together in the presence of Christ.

Notably, worship has been a center for renewal at Grandchamp. Drawing on the Community's experience, the liturgy has been modified over the years to include additional elements, particularly from the Orthodox tradition, while (as Sr. Minke says) "keeping its evangelical simplicity." The latest fruit of this continuing liturgical renewal is the book *Louange des Jours à Grandchamp: Temps de l'Église* (Communauté de Grandchamp and Éditions Ouverture, 2015).

Second, the Community's understanding of the Christian faith, and of its own experience, means that *its life is inherently ecumenical*. Over the years the Community has included Sisters from many Christian traditions and from many different countries. Small communities of Sisters have extended Grandchamp's presence, notably in Jerusalem and Algeria, but in several other places as well—and, crucially, always in contact with local churches. There are extensive contacts with other monastic communities, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, with Sisters sometimes sharing in their lives for periods of time. In addition to extensive ecumenical contacts, there are links also to inter-religious dialogue and to movements for reconciliation in the human family and with the natural world. And the fact that Grandchamp, in French-speaking Switzerland, has its spiritual retreat house, the *Sonnenhof*, in German-speaking Switzerland is itself an ecumenical statement—as those with some familiarity with the country will understand!

All this diversity is no accident. In forming its own distinctive pattern of life, Grandchamp has drawn from the experience of other monastic communities whether Protestant, Roman Catholic or Orthodox. Remember too that the Community's earlier years coincided with a time of great ecumenical ferment and hope—the First and Second World Conferences on Faith and Order in 1927 and 1937, the emergence of the Life and Work

movement in the 1930s, the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s . . .

Formed in this ecumenical climate, the Community has made a significant impact ecumenically. I mention only a few examples which I know from personal experience: a Sister of Grandchamp produced the beautiful Vesper services for the 5th World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993 (a highpoint of the entire Conference); Sisters have accompanied the Graduate School at the WCC's Ecumenical Institute, Bossey; and Sisters have contributed to several WCC Assemblies. Nor can one forget *The Way of the Cross*, prepared by Sr. Minke at the request of Pope John Paul II for this celebration in Rome in 1995, and republished in 2015. (Typically, she included material adapted from Mère Geneviève, so important in the earliest years of the Community, a Passion hymn beloved by Protestants, and a text from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*.) Examples of the Community's ecumenical witness could be multiplied in local, regional, national and international contexts.

The ecumenical engagement practiced by the Community of Grandchamp is not a "programme." It is simply the sharing of the Community's *faith and interior life, put into practice*. It is simply the sharing of the unity-in-diversity which the Community *already* experiences within itself, within the one Body of Christ. That is why its ecumenical witness is so authentic and effective. There are lessons here for the rest of us.

Worship and ecumenical commitment are, of course, but two central aspects of the Community of Grandchamp. This book carries us into the history and life of the Community in all its dimensions, revealing the truly astonishing range of contacts, relationships, and commitments which have marked its life over the years.

One thing is abundantly clear: this is a Community which looks toward the future. Recent events abundantly confirm this. It is great communities which produce great leaders. Sr. Minke was succeeded by Sr. Pierrette in 1999, and she in her turn by Sr. Anne-Emmanuelle in 2016: the Holy Spirit is at work. Since the original language versions of *The Fruits of Grace* were published, signs of continuing renewal abound, some of which are mentioned above. And, perhaps most heartening of all, women continue to explore the possibility of entering the Community in order to follow its vocation of unity and reconciliation. Surely the ministry of Grandchamp to the Church and to the world will continue to flourish.

It has been an honor to be asked to contribute this Foreword. The Community of Grandchamp has inspired and nurtured me—and in equal or even greater measure my wife Isabel—for more than 30 years. It gave her special pleasure to say "thank you" to the Community by translating its

texts and annual Newsletter. And here, in my own way, I join my heartfelt “thanks” to hers.

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