

Jesus promises them the Comforter to cover his absence,
Comfortis, Latin, more to do with strengthening than cuddling.
The Greek word in the original Gospel is Paraclete,
sounds like a bird, which in a way it is,
the Spirit often symbolised as a dove,
brooding over God's chaos in Genesis, bringing light and life.
No dove; no Church, wrote St Augustine...

Paraclete literally calls you out of yourself, springing you
from your rut, encouraging, cajoling you to stop being boring.
I first met the Paraclete when I was just turned seven.
That autumn my dad took his parishioners from East Hull
on retreat to Wydale Hall, just o'er the top from Wrench Green.
Back then it was run by the Whitby OHP nuns:
OHP stands for Order of the Holy Paraclete.
The retreat was a silent one - no one had told me -
I thought they'd all had an almighty row and were sulking.

But one of the young nuns took pity on me,
and we scoured the grounds looking for horse chestnuts.
She stole a skewer from the kitchen to impale the chestnuts,
then threaded them with string and taught me to play conkers.
Soon the other nuns were drawn in to have a try themselves,
and we had a jolly league table going with lots of laughter
which put my dad's sulky parishioners to shame.

The nuns' have a dull grey habit, but with a bright red petticoat
hinting that they are up for mischief beneath their holy facade.

I have always connected the Paraclete with mischief,
knocking pompous people off their pedestals,
egging us on to not to be **Anglican'ts** but **Anglicans**,
to have the nerve to think out of the box and go for it.

The gravest sin is to make our amazing God seem boring.

In the Old Testament the word for spirit is ruach רוח
a feminine noun, shades of the naughty Whitby nuns.

In John's Gospel Mary has the touch of the Paraclete about her
daring her sulky son to make the wine flow like water at Cana.

That Paraclete enabled the nuns to deeds of daring-do,
Running a school, giving the gals a tender, first class education.

The headmistress, Janet, a physicist, as a novice decided
to measure the curvature of the earth, as you do, cajoling
another novice to stand in the sea, waves soaking her habit.

A couple of nuns helped me run Rievaulx,
with our Friday communion providing a safe space for women
from across the diocese whom the Church had not treated well,

One of those nuns, Bridget Mary, as an 18 year old novice
had crossed the Atlantic with the girls taking them to safety
in Canada when a Nazi invasion seemed immanent.

There's that marvellous film, *Inquiring Nuns*,
where two cherub-faced nuns went around Chicago in 1967
simply asking everyone, 'Are you Happy?'

Once you let God's Paraclete in, you achieve amazing things.

What is soiled, make thou pure;

What is wounded, work its cure;

What is parched, fructify;

What is rigid, gently bend;

What is frozen, warmly tend;

Strengthen what goes erringly.