

There is a love that transcends our own. There has to be because our love is so imperfect: love, that is, for ourselves, for one another, and for God. And, because our love is always less than this love, we live in hope rather than in love. This is what I think I mean from a passage by Laurence Freeman in *Beauty's Field*. He's reflecting on the three-hour-long film attempting to show something of the life of the Carthusian monks of the La Grand Chartreuse, in the hills bordering the Alps, near Grenoble, in France. They live as hermits, each with his own house but in community, eating and living alone but coming together for worship and weekly recreation. It's an austere life which has survived without the need for reform, unlike so many other monastic congregations, and the film portrays the monks essentially happy and at peace. Dom Laurence concludes that the attraction of the film *Into the Great Silence* is that of a love story:

The monks seem happy but are not in love with each other. If they love each other it is because they are in love with some invisible yet apparently ever-present person. Unnamed, unseen even unspoken to, God plays in every scene. At first, one assumes it is the visible actors who are the lovers. Slowly it dawns that they are mirrors: the love we speak of is not our love for God but God's love for us.

This may go some way to explain the erratic and, at times, decidedly erotic, nature of Israel's passage to God through a cast of people no one in their right mind would have assembled for this play. They not only frequently forget or fluff their lines but are, at times, downright deceitful. No, it is not their love for one another that is the deciding factor; the deciding factor is always God for only God can transcend our own limited love and bring it to completion. We honour Mary not for any personal qualities of her own – we scarcely know her – but because God has chosen her to play her part in the only drama which can transcend our human limitations and give us hope. We are actors on a stage which is not our own: the only true actor is God. God plays in every scene and through Mary

*. . . we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight.*

G. M. Hopkins: *The Blessed Virgin compared to the air we breathe.*

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour