

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 196 News and Notes for our Friends Advent 2021

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Cover: Diaconal Ordination of Br Joseph Carron OSB

Back Cover: Nativity Icon by Br Cyprian Bampton OSB

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

November is dedicated to prayer for all the holy souls, who died in the love of God but need to be purified so they will have the holiness needed to enter heaven. The love of God, to whom they surrender themselves now without restraint, purifies them. We believe they are supported also by our love, through the bonds between them and us and the saints in heaven, in the body of Christ. We help them by our prayers daily, but since there is special strength in the prayer of all the Church together, the Catholic Church devotes this time especially to prayer for them.

The month begins beautifully with the feast of All Saints, and on the following day is All Souls with its Masses and prayers for the dead and visits to the cemetery, then throughout the month individuals continue this prayer following their own attractions. One of the biblical readings that might be useful at this time is St Luke's account of the Passion with Jesus' promise to the Good Thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise". The Good Thief is the very first of all the Saints of the New Covenant whom we commemorate on All Saints.

What of the other thief crucified with Jesus? If the Good Thief is admitted to paradise because of his prayer to Jesus, "Remember me, Lord, when you come into your kingdom", are we to assume the other was refused paradise because he reviled Jesus? The Gospel does not say so! Since we do not know that he finally refused God's love (and there is no human being of whom we know that), then he should not be excluded from our prayers.

It might be objected that if Jesus intended to admit both the thieves to paradise, at least in the end, then he would have said so. He speaks to one, with the other he is silent. What does the silence mean?

The silence of Jesus is a remarkable feature of the Passion narratives in all the Gospels. He speaks to defend his disciples at the arrest in the garden; when asked to testify as to whether he is

Son of God, and whether he is King; to console the women of Jerusalem, his mother, and the beloved disciple; to answer the prayer of the Good Thief; to pray to the Father. He is silent before false accusations, insults, and proposals, sincere or not, to use his power to save himself. Before all these his silence does not represent contempt, rejection, or stubbornness. One of the roles of the Martyrs in every generation is to keep a living witness to what was in Jesus' heart when he died. The martyr dies loving his or her enemies, particularly those putting them to death. Jesus dies loving his enemies, and it is in precisely this love that we are all included. To paraphrase St Paul in Romans 5:7-10: we were all sinners and enemies of God when Christ loved us and gave his life for us.

Jesus' silence is that of the suffering servant in Isaiah, who was "like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb", who "poured out his soul to death and was numbered with transgressors, while he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors". (Is 53:7,12) Jesus' silence towards the thief and all who revile him contains their hope of salvation, because he is interceding for them.

Only St Luke tells us about the Good Thief. In Matthew and Mark, both the thieves revile Jesus. (Harmonising the two accounts we can suppose that the Good Thief was a reviler but, observing Jesus, he changed.) The contrast between the two accounts is not so great. Matthew's and Mark's accounts also contain the promise of places in the Kingdom with Jesus, it is just that we have to look for it a little harder. It is in the request that James and John earlier made to Jesus, to sit one at his right and one at his left in his kingdom (Mt 20:20-28 and Mk 10:35-45). Jesus said then, "This is not mine to give, it is for those for whom it has been prepared." For whom? There is only one place subsequently in the Gospels where persons are placed one on his right and one on his left, and this is on the Cross, where the kingdom begins.

Does this mean it is a matter of indifference whether one is the good thief or the bad thief? Certainly not. May every one of us be a good thief! But the good thief doesn't abandon his friend. And what does it mean to be with Jesus, in paradise? In fact, after death

Jesus, in the words of the Apostles' Creed, "descended into hell". He went in search of the Holy Souls, to bring them with him to paradise. We might imagine, if we like, that the Good Thief accompanied Jesus to lead the great procession out of Sheol.

In our prayer we accompany Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd, who goes and takes on his shoulders every sheep that is trying to find its way into paradise.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a cross symbol at the beginning.

Diaconate Ordination of Br Joseph Carron

Br Joseph is from Birmingham, England. After taking a B.Sc. degree in Ecology, and spending some time working for the Environment Agency, he was enrolled as a candidate for the Priesthood in the Diocese of Lancaster and entered Allen Hall seminary in London. He changed course to enter Pluscarden in September 2008, making his solemn profession on 25 March 2014. Br Joseph is Sub Prior of the Pluscarden community. In recent years he has had charge of our fruit and vegetable gardens.

On September 30, the Memorial of St Jerome, Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB ordained Br Joseph to the Diaconate. Unfortunately, due to Covid and their frail health, his parents were not able to be present. Bishop Hugh presided at Mass, preached the homily (see p.14), and then ordained Br Joseph as deacon. George Brand acted as MC for the Ordination.

Br Finbar cooked the lunch of Cullen skink, followed by chicken Monique, and for dessert, pineapple upside-down cake. It was a talking meal. After lunch the timetable was that of a Sunday or Solemnity.

FROM THE ANNALS

August 2021

4th: Canon Luke Smith arrived. He is to give conferences to our oblates by livestreaming in the next few days.

6th: Feast of the Transfiguration. This is the patronal feast of Kristo Buase Monastery.

8th: NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Although Fr Giles presided at today's Conventual Mass, Fr Luke Smith preached the homily.

9th: Feast of St Theresa Benedicta of the Cross. Today is the tenth anniversary of Fr Abbot's election. We decided to celebrate the event with a gaudeamus. We saw the animated film *Ratatouille*, a Pixar film. Canon Luke Smith attended the gaudeamus as did Fr Jamie McMorrow, a priest from the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

11th: From Vespers, we have returned to taking our places in choir without spaces in between. The same applies in the refectory and at Chapter.

12th: At recreation this evening a bat had somehow got into the calefactory and flew about, giving a topic of conversation to the monks below.

13th: This evening during recreation Fr Bede, prior of Kristo Buase, arrived. He has to spend ten days in isolation.

14th: Vespers this evening was first Vespers of the Assumption. The Assumption is our patronal feast and Fr Abbot presided at Vespers, rather than the new hebdomadary for the coming week, Fr Mark.

15th: SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY. As today is our Patronal Feast, Fr Abbot presided at Mass and Office and also preached at Conventual Mass.

23rd: Martin Lusty, a local friend of the Abbey's died recently. Fr Giles buried his ashes this morning. The ceremony was livestreamed to allow his family from all over the world to participate.

Fr Giles then left to spend a week in Skye doing a supply and for a rest. He drove himself in one of our cars. Bishop Richard Moth arrived to spend a few days here with us.

24th: Bishop Moth concelebrated. He sat, masked, separate from the community concelebrants. He had his own chalice, host, and paten. He purified the chalice at a separate table.

25th: There was a Chapter Meeting today. It concerned various building proposals.

29th: TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

Although Fr Abbot is the hebdomadary for the coming week, Fr Bede presided and preached at today's Conventual Mass. In the evening there was a *gaudeamus* for Fr Bede and for Br Simon.

30th: Our Visitation is due. The Visitors arrived this afternoon at Inverness Airport. The Visitors are Abbot Cuthbert of Farnborough, who is the Abbot-Visitor of the Province, and Abbot Paulinus of Chilworth, who is his *socius* for this Visitation. As Abbot Anselm was the Abbot Visitor of the Province for many years until the last Provincial Chapter, he could not undertake the Visitation of Pluscarden and so, during his term of office, it was the Abbot-President or his delegate who performed the regular Visitation here. The Visitation began officially this evening.

31st: The Visitors interviewed the brethren, more or less in Community order, beginning with the most senior brethren.

September 2021

3rd: Recollection Day. Abbot Cuthbert delivered the Visitation Report at a Community Meeting after Mass this morning. He did make the point that this was the first Visitation for some time which had been made by the Provincial Abbot Visitor.

4th: Before Vespers Fr Abbot gave a conference touching on matters raised in the Visitation Report. One of these things is that one of the Offices presently attached to Mass, that is Prime and Terce, should be separated from it. Therefore, we will have Prime during Mass and then Terce following Mass, after all the priests have unvested and returned to choir. Prime will be sung *recto tono*.

5th: TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Benedict presided and preached at today's Conventual Mass. Br Joseph will be going to the bishop's room in St Benedict's for his mandatory retreat before his diaconate ordination.

8th: Birthday of Our Lady. Today is the anniversary of the resumption of monastic life at Pluscarden. We traditionally have a common-room tea to celebrate. The weather was so warm that we held the tea in the cloister garth. We had Benediction after Vespers at which we sang the *Te Deum*.

9th: Br Simon left today for Prinknash where he is to spend a year.

14th: Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. This is a traditional change-over time in the monastic year. For example, there will be no recreations on Friday until Easter, apart from during Christmastide.

15th: Br Joseph is preparing by a retreat for his Ordination to the diaconate next week. He is coming to much of the Office but is living in St Benedict's and is taking his meals at different times and sometimes in different places to the rest of the community.

18th: Today we are hosting a television crew for the first time in a while. There is a *pilgrimage* in which fairly well-known people are going for a walk and taking in various places, including Iona and Pluscarden. The pilgrimage group are staying overnight. They were at Vespers. Fr Mark presided in the sanctuary at Vespers in amongst the four television cameras.

19th: TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. The pilgrimage group left this morning before Conventual Mass.

20th: This evening after supper, we greeted Fr Matthew for his feast day. We had chocolates at recreation. Fr Matthew himself was able to participate in the recreation. He was glad to take the chocolates as his sweet tooth has become more pronounced in recent months. Despite his dementia, he seems cheerful and pleased to be among the community.

23rd: For some time now there has been a very large pile of logs, some of them very thick, in front of the chip store opposite the back door. There are, or were, also logs piled up beside the back drive. Today we hired a large chipping machine, which could deal

with the thick logs. It arrived in the afternoon and in the course of the afternoon it filled up four bays of the wood store. This is probably the largest amount of wood chips we have ever had at one time in the store.

24th: We greeted Br Finbar for his feast after supper. At recreation, we had sweets to celebrate Br Finbar's feast day.

25th: Mass today was a Mass for the dead for the repose of the soul of Abbot Alfred.

27th: There was heavy rain overnight after a long mostly dry spell. This has revealed the presence of many leaks including at the east wall of the chancel.

28th: We greeted Bros Michael and Gabriel for their feast days and celebrated with chocolates at recreation.

29th: Feast of the Holy Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Br Michael is the cellarer and by a tradition of the house we have bacon and eggs on the cellarer's feast. In former days we had it at supper, but more recently we have had it at lunch. Today therefore we had a lunch of chips, bacon and eggs.

October 2021

2nd: The community watched a webinar introducing the new edition of *In God's Image*, the basic document for safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland. We watched it on a large screen we have in the calefactory. It was connected to a laptop, which was in turn connected to the internet. There were some technical hitches. Br Michael met the problems and overcame them.

11th: TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Abbot presided at Mass and Office. He preached at Conventual Mass. It is the tenth anniversary of his Abbatial Blessing and to celebrate we had the choice of cider, beer or soft drink at lunch.

6th: Fr Benedict went to St Andrews where he gave a talk to students. Br Benedict-Joseph Millar arrived from Petersham. He is a professed member of the Community of St John and wishes to transfer to Pluscarden. He did spend a year here and then a year at Petersham. Fr Benedict-Joseph is staying at the lodge until he can

leave quarantine.

9th: Fr Abbot gave a conference before Vespers. He told us that Fr Giles would take over from Fr Benedict as Prior from Vespers tomorrow. He also said that the St Andrew Community would be staying for some time in St Scholastica as they did not have accommodation for the present. He thought their stay might be short. In addition, the Chapter would have to meet soon to look at questions of the election of deans and of live-streaming.

10th: TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

Fr Benedict presided at Mass and preached the homily. At Vespers Fr Giles took his place as prior while Fr Benedict moved to his position by community rank in choir.

11th: Br Benedict-Joseph was in isolation in the Lodge. Today he joined the community, having taken tests and fulfilled the obligations of a traveller from foreign parts.

12th: Today at 11.30 Deacon Tony Schmitz of Aberdeen buried the body of his wife Gail, who died on the 4th, in our cemetery. The Schmitz family have had connections with Pluscarden for many years. Gail had been in ill health for many years.

Br Michael got news that his oldest brother Martin had fallen from an attic window to the ground causing himself severe injuries. He is 75 years old.

13th: Martin de Klerk underwent a 6-hour operation today to repair his lungs and ribs. His legs are still to be dealt with.

16th: The novices went out on a Scottish Catholic History excursion with the members of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. A local ex-teacher, Bryan Miller, was their guide and told them what had happened in what place in various churches of the diocese. Someone else was also giving musical information as to what had been sung and played historically by various congregations. Fr Len Black, the local Ordinariate priest said Mass for the group.

18th: Feast of St Luke. Today is an important day in the early history of the Caldey/Prinknash communities. Several students from St Andrews University arrived here for a reading week, together with Fr Galbraith, the Catholic chaplain.

October 23rd: Our retreat begins tomorrow. Fr Stuart Chalmers of this diocese is the retreat-master. He is rector of the Royal Scot's College in Salamanca, Spain, and had intended to come to Pluscarden in person to give the retreat. At the very last moment he tested positive for Covid (thankfully, later found to be negative) and so could not take a flight for the UK. Since he cannot be here, we have arranged that he will give his conferences via Zoom.

It is our custom to have a community long walk after None on the final free afternoon before our annual retreat begins. This year it was optional, but the novitiate and a couple of the seniors did take part. Br Joseph, the sub-prior, led the walk which went to Ness End by road and then turned up into the woods where we came back by the forestry road to the footpath above the abbey, and so returned home. A common-room tea followed.

24th: THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

The first conference of the retreat took place at 4.00 in the calefactory. There we have a large screen which can be connected via laptop to the internet. Fr Stuart gave the conference via Zoom.

As he has now spent some time in Spain, Fr Stuart has become interested in the Spanish mystical tradition. He gave his first conference on *Spiritual Exercises and the Ars Vivendi*. He constantly refers to important figures from tradition and uses extensive quotations from his sources, connecting them into a long conference. Visually, he shows pictures and text onscreen, using a *Power Point* presentation. This one took about an hour. Fr Stuart has also provided reflection sheets with some of the quotations he has used in the presentation. It seems that there will be a sheet each day with the main points of the conference written out and to be used for reflection.

25th: There is one retreat conference each day at 10.40. Fr Stuart's conference today was on the subject of the *Experience of God in Prayer*. Again he linked together many long extracts from writers on prayer and the search for God into a long conference.

26th: Today's conference was entitled, "*Consult the Spouse*" – *The Song of Songs in Mystical Prayer*.

27th: Conference was on the subject of *Woundedness*.

28th: We heard Fr Stuart on the topic of *The Saints on Humility*.

29th: Today's topic for the retreat was *Detachment*. During a retreat we have one day as a recollection day, which was today. We exposed the Blessed Sacrament from Sext until the end of Vespers.

30th: Today was the final day of the retreat. Fr Abbot presided at Mass at which he gave a homily, touching on some of the points raised in the retreat conferences. After the homily he renewed his monastic vows and then the members of the community renewed theirs. At 10.40 Fr Stuart gave the final conference which was on the subject of *Going Green – Life in the Spirit*, following the same format as he had throughout. Thus ended the retreat.

31st: THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. The clocks went back one hour during the course of the night. It is much lighter early in the morning and darker earlier in the afternoon. Fr Benedict presided at Conventual Mass and preached the homily. Vespers was first Vespers of All Saints, at which Fr Abbot presided.

NOVEMBER 2021

1st: SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS. Fr Abbot presided at Office and at Mass. He preached at Mass.

2nd: ALL SOULS. Those priests who could celebrated three Masses today. Today's vestments were black.

In the afternoon Br Edmund placed lights on each of the graves in the cemetery. After Compline there was the traditional visit to the cemetery. It had been raining heavily until shortly before Compline, but the rain cleared, and we were able to go ahead. We processed out of Compline to the cemetery where the red lights shone at each cross. Fr Abbot said the prayers and then blessed the graves. The community and congregation then went round the graves, pausing to pray at the graves of those they knew.

3rd: Mass for the Dead of the House. Again, we had black vestments as we had Office and Mass for the dead again.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

This year on August 21 we venerated a relic of St Pius X which was given to us by our friend from New Jersey, Fr James (Jamie) King. Likewise, on September 14, we venerated a relic of the True Cross which had been donated to us by another priest friend, the late Fr George Berthold.

The veneration of these two particular relics so close together was a fitting prelude to the clothing of our new novice. Our postulant, Stephen Watson, became a novice on September 14 (Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross) taking the name of Br Pius, in honour of St Pius X. A native of Texas, who lived for several years in Nebraska, Br Pius had some experience of religious life before joining us. He was with the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter in Nebraska, and later entered Conception Abbey in Missouri, where he became a novice. His main work in life was as a bank manager. Br Pius has been occupied in various tasks here in the monastery, such as cleaning, cooking, baking bread, tending the new lawn in front of the monastery, and grass cutting. In addition, he is keeping busy with formation classes.

On September 6, we had a special festive recreation in order to say goodbye to Br Benedict Joseph. After living in Petersham since December 2019, Br Benedict Joseph decided to return to Pluscarden to pursue his vocation there. He went to spend some time with his mother in Omaha, Nebraska, before travelling to Europe. We were glad to have Br Benedict Joseph with us for this time. We will miss him, but we wish him well with his vocation.

On October 29 and 30, the two communities here in Petersham were being filmed. A young woman named Rose from Steubenville, Ohio, came to make two vocation videos – one for us and one for the sisters. This service, offered free of charge, is operated by the Vocations Outreach programme of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. The short films, roughly ten minutes in length, are available on YouTube, in order to help young adults who are discerning a call to the religious life. The format focuses on a day in the life of one member of the

community. Br Pius was chosen as the representative of our community, and Sr Maria Isabel was chosen for the sisters. However, we will all be seen in short clips depicting scenes from our daily round of activities. Rose filmed us in places such as the church, refectory, chapter room, kitchen, garden, gift shop, and recreation room. She also recorded some of our chanting which will appear in a separate video accompanied by still photos.

Finally, on the weekend of November 5-7 we had another “Monastic Experience Weekend”. Due to the COVID pandemic we hadn’t had one since November 2019. Two young men, Brian and Connor, ages 21 and 28, took part this time. They had the opportunity to live in our monastery, pray with us in choir, do some work, and have a chat with one of the monks. It was a rewarding experience for all.

DIC

A Time to Die

“Monasteries are places where one learns to live and die in an atmosphere of silent prayer, the gaze always turned toward the beyond and the One who made us and whom we contemplate because. All those who pray consider life, the world, and death with confidence and emotion, and, at every moment, discern the presence of God within them. It is certain the monks, too, are familiar with the difficult and tragic reality of death. They experience the anguish, the fear at the approach of the “6:00 am. bus that disappears into the darkness”. But, in these elevated places of prayer, since the Resurrection of Christ, death is an Easter, a passage. We lay aside the bodily exterior with which we could not move into the divine atmosphere. Those who leave us ... continue to live, to know, to love, without being limited by the fragility of their bodies or hindered by the shackles of sin. Their death is a passage into a life that man has prepared here below and that God continues without end. Death places us in the infinity and depths of God.”

Cardinal Sarah in Foreword to *A Time to Die* by Nicolas Diat

The Diaconal Ordination of Br Joseph Carron OSB

Pluscarden Abbey, 30 September 2021

Dear Br Joseph, it's good to be here. It's good to know that something already precious – you! – will be further enriched with a spiritual gift from above. And not just you, but everyone here, everyone connected to this holy place, and beyond. Pluscarden is a place where, as it were, life's flowing waters are momentarily gathered, or where the earth provides shelter through stone. It's a barn holding a harvest of spiritual gifts. Each of the brethren is such, each carries the call to prayer and the monastic charism, some have received the laying on of hands as priests, Fr Abbot has received the blessing of spiritual fatherhood. "Each has his own gift from God, one in this way, another in that" (1 Cor 7:7; cf. RB 40:1). And now, you will receive what the Prayer of Diaconal Ordination calls "the gift of ... sevenfold grace", the gift the Apostles gave St Stephen and his six companions way back when (cf. Acts 6:6). So, the garden is further enhanced, the living stones newly adjusted and the light that is here shines that little bit more brightly.

The other day, feeling miserable and useless, I asked for a consolation. An unexpected email came, from someone I had confirmed as a young adult some years before and who had subsequently, let's say, gone off track. They wrote to announce that they were now very much on the path again. Such is the power of the Sacraments. They have an inbuilt patience to them. They are sown and yield their fruit in due season. So you know, I know, we know, today is not an empty day, not a sowing on the path or thin soil or thorns, but the power of God unto salvation.

Today, Br Joseph, without ceasing to be a monk, you become canonically a "cleric", a member of the clergy. Here is today's Saint, St Jerome, on that very topic and sounding so Benedictine: "A cleric then, as he serves Christ's church, must first understand what his name means; and then, when he realizes this, must endeavour to be that which he is called. For since the Greek

word κλήρος (*klēros*) means lot, or inheritance, the clergy are so called either because they are the lot of the Lord, or else because the Lord Himself is their lot and portion. Now, he who in his own person is the Lord's portion, or has the Lord for his portion, must so bear himself as to possess the Lord and to be possessed by Him. He who possesses the Lord, and who says with the prophet, "The Lord is my portion, can hold to nothing beside the Lord" (Ep 52:5).

"Most Reverend Father, holy Mother Church asks you to ordain this man, our brother, to the *responsibility* of the Diaconate." Behind "responsibility" lies the Latin *onus*, usually rendered "burden". But that would be a dispiriting translation. So, after much discussion, the lot fell on "responsibility" – a good choice. On 13 June 1824, John Henry Newman was ordained a Deacon in the Church of England. He wrote the next day: "I have the *responsibility* of souls on me to the day of my death."

So, the two-fold effect of the Sacrament: *klēros* and *onus* – a greater closeness to the Lord and to souls.

Today's readings give us food for thought too.

Ezra, priest and scribe, dominates the first. In 2017, a Museum of the Bible opened in Washington DC. It's of the inter-active kind and you are first walked and talked through biblical history, including crossing the Red Sea with virtual water heaped up to your left and right. The audio narrator has a rich New York accent and leads you persuasively on. And after taking you through exile and return, he reveals himself as – Ezra the scribe. Our first reading is vivid: the people gathered as one on the square before the Water Gate, men, women and children, the raised dais, the opening ritual, the long, long reading, a full week of it if you read on. The setting would be September / October. After the reading comes the Feast of Tabernacles and after that a great corporate act of penance and – the goal of the whole thing – a solemn renewal of the Covenant. Here, of course, is an origin of the Synagogue Liturgy and so of our Liturgy of the Word, which in its turn culminates in the renewal of the Covenant embodied in the Eucharist. Ezra is a priest. He is surrounded by the Levites, the

liturgical types of our deacons. (I notice in passing, Br Joseph, that one of the jobs of the Levites is to “calm the people”; you’ll be good at that!)

Today, Br Joseph, this ancient event is somehow rekindled for you. You are handed the Book of the Gospels – the one *traditio* at diaconal ordination. From today, like Ezra and better than Ezra, you will proclaim the Gospel from the lectern, the Word of God in its fulness. You become a *herald*, says the Liturgy, a *praeco*, someone who “publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Is 52:7). Tertullian calls the dove of the Flood a *praeco*. He brings back the freshly plucked olive leaf. “So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth” (Gen 8:11). The proclamation of the Gospel counters the flood of nonsense that is forever drowning the world. From today, a voice is born, a *vox evangelica*. From today, Br Joseph, your voice – your unique voice – your vocal organs attain the purpose they were formed for in your mother’s womb. From today that voice will thunder the Gospel over the waters of the people. From today you have the grace to “calm the people” with the word of the Gospel, to announce something beyond the Flood, to herald the peace of the Covenant.

Then, in Luke chs 6 and 9, our Lord calls and sends the Twelve. In Luke ch. 10 as we have just heard he sends out 70 or 72 others. In Acts ch. 6, the Apostles chose seven men to serve at tables. Tradition isn’t wrong to see in this the adumbration, and more, of the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons.

So, like Ezra and Jerome, cherish the word and, as a good cleric, hold to, cherish the Lord who cherishes you. It is he who appoints and sends. “Start off now”, says our version, literally just “go”. Now that, of course, is precisely what we don’t want you to do! It’s what St Benedict is worried about in his references to monks who become clerics. So, what does mission mean for monks? Maybe “go” means “grow”. Through the grace of this sacrament, may your love for your brethren grow; for the sick, the children, the guests, the poor, for all sent you to serve as deacon

(cf RB 31. The most visibly diaconal person in the Rule is the Cellarer.). And may love for you grow in the hearts of the brethren.

Enough rambling. The waters of a pandemic have covered the world and we have ridden it out in our “arks”, our households. And now as the waters recede, what do we most need to do? Noah, on coming out, offered a sweet-smelling sacrifice, and the Lord made a covenant with him and his descendants. I think this is a time, amid so much washing away of things, to make and remake the covenants that hold us firm. Br Joseph, as we emerge from the ark of lockdown the Lord is making a covenant with you and you with him. Cherish him above all things, cherish the word, cherish those you serve. And most of all know that you are cherished too.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

From the Annals

November 4th: Outing to Glenlivet. With Bryan Millar as guide, the community went to Glenlivet where we visited notable places in Scottish Catholic history. At Chapeltown we drank coffee, then sang Terce in the chapel before Bryan gave a short talk on the Abbé Paul Macpherson and on the Catholic communities of the Braes of Glenlivet. We went on to St Michael’s Centre in Tomintoul, where we sang Sext. After lunch Bryan told us some more of the history of the Braes and in particular about the church of St Michael. Sadly, this is now in a dangerous state and cannot be used or entered. The St Michael Centre used to be the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in the Braes. The intention is to use the chapel at the centre for the parish Mass at Tomintoul. To this end repairs and renovations are being done. After Bryan’s talk, we sang None before setting off for Scalan.

EXPERIENCE AS NEW STUDENT PONTIFICAL BEDA COLLEGE IN ROME

This has been a life changing experience for me. Arriving at the college earlier than expected, due to Covid protocol adherence, brought mixed feelings about whether settling in would be easy. I arrived to meet another student from Mauritius who had come in to help with the freshers, but also to go through the ten days isolation like myself. The induction period which lasted a fortnight, with its high and low points, scattered the gloomy cloud that had settled. It started with a Mass in the Lady Chapel of St Paul's Outside the Walls, in which I could not participate, unfortunately, because I was still in isolation. However, I was able to participate in the closing Mass at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, St Peter, not to mention the glance and wave the Pope gave me, at one of his several audiences we attended, when I had mentioned the name of our college as he was approaching us on his way out of St Peter's Hall.

The next trip was to the Colosseum and the several Basilicas, Castel Gandolfo and the Nami and Albano lakes; the catacombs, the Piazzas, and many more historical sights one can think of in Rome. This ended with a huge meal of about ten courses which the whole college enjoyed on a night out. The highest point of all the excitements has been the trip to the monasteries in Subiaco and I don't have words enough to express how I felt in that holy place. I do hope to spend my mid-semester break with the community of Monte Cassino, in order to experience that part of Our Holy Father St Benedict also.

I then had information that the Abbot President Guillermo Arboleda OSB was in town, and my superiors in Rome had made arrangements for me to see him. Thus, I was privileged to appear with the rector of the college, Canon Philip Gillespie, at the curia in St Ambrogio near the Jewish quarter. It was a very convivial night, and the feedback I got later was very encouraging. I had the opportunity to meet Abbot Primate Gregory Polan OSB informally

at St Anselmo and we had a very good, hearty conversation. He promised to come and visit me at the college.

I have for the past three weeks been joining the St Paul's community in choir for Saturday and Sunday Vespers; they were glad to know that my profession anniversary was just around the corner (All Saints).

Lectures started about three weeks ago and the lecturers have been so wonderful so far, with clear introductions to their courses. I enter the fourth week with expectations to be able to finish off two of the three essays we have to do, in order to deal with other study activities.

In my four years in Rome, I hope to make our little-known monastery in Ghana more widely recognised in the Benedictine Order and in the Catholic Church.

Br Louis Kwadwo Osei, OSB (Kristo Buase)

From the Annals

November 4th: We drove back past Chapeltown to the little car park about a kilometre from Scalan. There we gathered and made our way by the path to Scalan, which was the site of the seminary from 1719 until 1790. Here boys were prepared for priestly studies at the continental colleges, though some few did complete their priestly formation there. There Bryan told us about Bishop Hay in particular. We went around the house, looking at the places where the boys ate, slept, and studied and where Bishop Hay himself was ordained bishop. In the end room upstairs on the left, at the stair landing, the community congregated to sing Vespers and Compline. It was quite necessary to say them as soon as possible because there was no artificial light available and we had to complete these Offices by the light of a late autumn day in the north of Scotland. There are two windows in this room and brethren had to be asked to stand away from them to allow enough light for the rest to see their choir books. Vespers was first Vespers of the solemnity of the dedication of the Abbey church.

DOM NINIAN SLOANE AND GLASS

Stephen Gerard Sloane, one of five children, was born in August 1908 in West Derby, Liverpool. He spent his childhood and was educated, however, in Gourock and went on to study at Glasgow School of Art. Art remained dear to him throughout his life, but on the 6th of October 1935, he entered the Community at Prinknash Abbey, where he made his Simple Profession in May 1937, taking the name of Ninian; and made Solemn Profession in 1940. In 1945, several members of the Prinknash Community, including Br Ninian, were sent to an “overflow” house at Millichope in Shropshire. It was here that he was ordained priest on August 15, 1946. Millichope closed in 1947, after which most went on to Farnborough; some, including Br Ninian, went to Pluscarden in 1948, in a group of “pioneer” monks, charged with the task of rebuilding the ruined Priory.

Dom Ninian, Fr Aelred Baker of Prinknash tells us, was a vigorous, bustling man dedicated to what he was doing; He lived his own life in community and probably found it hard to conform to the routine; and was criticised on occasion as an eccentric loner. Fr Aelred does not recall him as such. On one occasion, in 1959, some novices were sent up to Pluscarden for a time; Fr Aelred reminisces that “we saw very little of him, usually in choir and at some meals but he never gave us any news or orders. He was a kindly man, a rapid talker and often interesting. He explained to me what modern art was and gave me a book on Braque and cubism. On art he was lucid and sparkling. I was not an artist and knew nothing, but he very kindly explained French modernism without paternalism or talking down to me.” Obviously, art remained a passion, along with his faith and, it is said, Celtic Football Club. He and Br Mungo must have got on well!

At Pluscarden, for many years, Dom Ninian was in charge of the stained-glass workshop where he worked with, among others, Br Duthac and Martin Farrelly, and with them produced beautiful stained-glass windows, not only for Pluscarden, but also for churches throughout Scotland. As well as for Catholic churches,

Dom Ninian and his team worked on commissions for the Church of Scotland and the Episcopalian Church. At Pluscarden, one of his most striking works is the centre light depicting the Virgin and Child in the Lady Chapel window, “The City of God and the Monk’s Journey”, in 1958; he was responsible also for the right light, and Br Gilbert of Prinknash the left light. The previous year, a smaller window of the Crucifixion was installed in the Refectory (where male guests and visitors on special occasions may view it.)

Dom Ninian was responsible also for several beautiful windows in the Catholic churches of St Lawrence, Dingwall (SS Jude, Lawrence, and Antony in 1972); St Thomas, Keith (St Andrew, St Margaret, Our Lady of Aberdeen and Bl. John Ogilvie, over several years); Holy Family in Aberdeen; St Columba’s in Lossiemouth (St Columba and St Andrew); St Ninian’s, Gourrock, and St Joseph’s, Stepps, Glasgow. Perhaps his workshop’s greatest triumph was a window for the church of Bl. John Ogilvie, Easterhouse, Glasgow, commissioned by the vice postulator of the cause of Bl. John Ogilvie, in time for the canonization in Autumn 1976.

Under Dom Ninian’s supervision, the Pluscarden workshop executed commissions for the Episcopalian church of St Margaret, Lossiemouth, and for several Church of Scotland churches in Ellon, Aberdeenshire; St Ninian’s; Aberdeen; Advie; Morayshire; and a poignant memorial window in Whitehills Kirk to commemorate a young fisherman lost at sea.

During his final years, his work was curtailed by illness and at the end of his life he became the first resident of the newly completed Infirmary room, so that he was able to breathe his last at home, rather than in hospital. He died very peacefully on Tuesday, 16th October 1984 and many people wrote to express their condolences and to request Masses for this supposed “eccentric loner”. His obituary in Pluscarden Benedictines said of him: “He would want but one thing: that you remember him at the altar of God. From his boyhood he had a great love of the Mass and it was this which was the centre of his life. He infected all those around him with this love. St Augustine tells us that stability is in heaven,

in the City of God. As a Benedictine monk, Fr Ninian took a vow of stability. Throughout his life, he was stable in his search for the face of God in the Eucharist and the Divine Office.

“Two weeks before he died, a member of the novitiate visited him in our infirmary. Fr Ninian said: ‘People talk of what is the best way to die. Some say the best way to die is with your boots on; but the best way to die is the way you die.’

“So it was for Fr Ninian. Everything he wanted happened: he died in his monastery having been fortified by viaticum and the anointing. The final touch of his dying was the typical master stroke of the artist: he died at the time of one of the hours of the Divine Office (None) so that one of the monks had to come into None to tell Fr Ninian’s fellow monks that he had just died. He departed this life during the liturgy which he loved, and which he hoped one day to sing in heaven. None on 16th October was a bit longer than usual because at the end the monks had to sing: ‘Come to his aid, O saints of God; come forth to meet Fr Ninian, angels of the Lord: receiving his soul, presenting it to the Most High. May Christ, who has called you, now receive you, and may the angels bring you to Abraham’s bosom.’”

Dom Ninian has a resting place in the peaceful cemetery at Pluscarden and his memory lives on in glass, the beautiful windows he designed and helped make for the abbey and for churches elsewhere. His nephew Paul has added a website, commemorating his uncle’s legacy (<https://www.destination-innovation.com/dom-ninian-sloane-osb>).

For the last word, we return to Fr Aelred Baker who remembers him with affection. “I was lost in Pluscarden. It seemed bleak and the seniors dour. Ninian wasn’t. He was human and friendly. He talked a lot and I found him interesting. Artists tend to get airs about themselves and their unfulfilled achievements. Ninian wasn’t like that. He was human and kindly. May he rest in peace.”

Fr Aelred Baker OSB and an Oblate

FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND THE SCANDAL OF THE INCARNATION

As the Western world moves rapidly into a full embrace of modernity, religious values, and specifically the Christian values upon which its culture is based, are rejected ever more fully. This should come as no surprise. Both Christmas and Easter, the two high points of the liturgical year, have by now been mostly stripped of religious symbols and sentiment, leaving only a shell of warm, family feelings and a consumerist desire for gifts or candy. Most folk now would far rather receive the newest smartphone under the tree at Christmas, or a box of Cadbury Eggs at Easter, than look for any deeper meaning behind the holiday. We have, as moderns, by and large succeeded at rejecting any signs of the Incarnation of Christ.

This rejection of the Incarnation is nothing new. Since Christ's birth, God's coming among us in human flesh has caused scandal to many "right-thinking" people, starting with Gnostic heretics, through Islamic jihadists, and again with the violent Iconoclastic movements through the centuries. How could the transcendent God of glory, Creator of the universe, they cry, become man? This rejection has been the source of heresies and controversies for hundreds of years, up to and including the Protestant Reformation. Many of the reformers, and John Calvin in particular, were so against any depiction of the Word made flesh that they and their followers desecrated churches and images by the thousands, all in the name of protecting God's otherness. Taking Christ's words out of context, they insist that God must only be worshiped in spirit and in truth, and any physical representation is deemed anathema. Flannery O'Connor, the American Catholic author of several amazing short stories in the middle of the last century, was particularly critical of the covert rejection of the Incarnation of Christ in many Christian Evangelical denominations and sects. In her story "Parker's Back" (her last published original work), she takes this Gnostic tendency and shows it for what it truly is—a full, head-on denial of the Incarnation.

Although all of her stories include Christian themes, her last stories became so overtly religious as to border on allegory. This is especially true of “Parker’s Back”. (WARNING: spoilers ahead!) This remarkably shocking, yet humorous and moving story, has as one of its main themes one to which O’Connor turned to often: the unwilling person called to be a prophet. The main character, O.E. Parker, is a true ne’er-do-well, a vulgar, dishonourably discharged, atheistic sailor (when asked if he’s been saved, he states flatly “Naw ... I ain’t got no use for none of that. A man can’t save his self from whatever it is, he don’t deserve none of my sympathy”) who can’t seem to find a good-paying job. He falls in love, in spite of himself, with an ugly, ignorant, young woman named Sarah, the daughter of an itinerant, fundamentalist preacher. When they eventually get married, they have to do it in a registry office because Sarah thinks churches are “idolatrous”. As O’Connor writes the scene with her characteristically biting humour, the registrar ... “married them from behind the iron grill of a stand-up desk and when she finished, she said with a flourish, ‘Three dollars and fifty cents and till death do you part!’”. Parker cannot for the life of him understand why he married such a woman, but he loves her and begins to think only of ways of making her happy somehow. He is a man covered with tattoos all over his body (his back excepted), which causes Sarah much disgust and disapproval. She only allows him to take off his clothes in complete darkness, declaring that his tattoos are nothing but “vanity of vanities”. His desire to please his unpleasant ogre of a wife becomes, oddly enough, the source of a religious conversion and much suffering.

As he is at work one day, baling hay for his employer, (I’ll leave the details for readers of the story to discover) Parker has a religious experience, a theophany that slowly makes him accept the work of grace in his life. He decides that to please Sarah, he will get his back covered with a religious tattoo. He goes to a tattoo artist, Jesus the Physician’s Friend), and hears an inner voice that tells him to pick a Byzantine image of Christ Pantocrator, yet only the face, with its huge, all-seeing eyes. Although it takes two days, he has the image tattooed onto his back, and excitedly drives

home. At first, Sarah won't let him into the house. He stands knocking, but she refuses to open—perhaps a reference to Christ's words in the Apocalypse—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock...”? Sarah repeatedly asks him to identify himself, and he will only give her his initials, O.E. (he has always hated his full name and viciously attacks anyone who dares use it in his presence). Seeing that she will only open the door upon hearing his full name, he whispers “Obadiah... Obadiah Elihue”. At that moment, grace rushes into his soul. As O'Connor puts it, “...all at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colours, a garden of trees and birds and beasts.” He has not only accepted himself fully and his love for his wife, but he has finally taken on his prophetic name [Obadiah (“servant of God”) Elihue (“God of him”)] and task. Once allowed into the house, Parker takes his shirt off to show her his back (just as God showed His back to Moses), yet Sarah is too prudish to look at first. When he insists that she looks, she doesn't even recognize the image of Christ for what it is, saying that God is a spirit, and no man shall see His face. When Parker groans that it's a picture of Christ, Sarah screams “Idolatry! ... I don't want no idolater in this house!”, grabs a broom and begins to beat the image on Parker's back until she knocks him nearly senseless and raises ... “large welts on the face of the tattooed Christ.” Parker stumbles out the door, leans against a tree, and under Sarah's relentless and hardened gaze, weeps inconsolably—like a baby, states O'Connor. Having taken on Christ's image, Parker has been ultimately rejected like Him.

Under the effects of transforming grace, Parker has become not only a prophet, but a Christ-figure. Like Christ, he loves his spouse unconditionally, in spite of her ugliness, her hard-heartedness, and her refusal to see him for what he truly is. But Sarah, raised in a hard-line, radical Christian sect, will not accept the Christ image on her husband's back, an image he placed there out of love in order to try to win her affection. She, like all Christians of her ilk, rejects images of God as idolatry (as does much of modern humanity), and categorically denies the reality of

Christ's love, that all-encompassing love that embraces the frailty of human flesh in the mystery of the Incarnation. She would rather beat and mar the image, chase her husband out into the darkness, and leave him to his solitary tears than accept the gift of his love. We modern men and women would far rather strip Christianity of its intrinsic beauty and meaning, take the Christ out of Christmas, and leave only a hollowed-out, yet ultimately more palatable mush of bonhomie and philanthropy.

And yet, let us heed the implicit warning in O'Connor's tale— if we reject the image of Christ, we reject God's love, the Incarnation, and the very means by which God has saved us. When we reject the Babe in the manger, we reject the reality of Christmas.

Br Benedict Joseph

From the Annals

November 5th: SOLEMNITY OF THE DEDICATION OF THE ABBEY CHURCH. Fr Abbot presided at Mass and Office today. He did not preach at Conventual Mass, delegating the task to Br Joseph, who therefore gave his first public homily at Mass. We keep today as a recollection day and so the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the High Altar at the end of Mass and remained there until after Vespers when we had Benediction.

Fr Samuel OP and a group of young men from Edinburgh University arrived for the weekend

7th: THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Martin, the hebdomadary for the week, presided at Mass and preached the homily.

8th: Fr Crombie, a Missionary of Africa, arrived as a guest.

10th: This evening we greeted Fr Martin for his feast-day tomorrow and partook of chocolates at recreation in celebration.

11th: Feast of St Martin of Tours. Fr Martin presided at Office and Mass today.

BOOK REVIEWS

Seeking Byland: Poems through the Seasons from Stanbrook Abbey, by Sister Laurentia Johns, OSB; Foreword by Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB; Gracewing, 2020, pp. ix, 74. Paperback, ISBN 978-0-85244-965-3; £9.99, £9. 50 from Stanbrook Abbey shop.

In my youth, when every year we were issued with a new set of textbooks, I would lay hold of whatever “poetry book” fell to our lot and read it right through. I did this for pleasure, and in a spirit of discovery and exploration. Once I’d done that, I had a rough idea of the treasures within, and could return at leisure and indulge in selective grazing and rumination of “Other men’s flowers”. So when handed this little book of almost seventy poems I went off and sat in the garden on a beautiful warm afternoon, reading it from beginning to end. I thought I saw the metaphorical hand of U. A. Fanthorpe, as well as those of others acknowledged in the Notes and References. In fact, the sheer variety of forms Sister Laurentia uses is astonishing, not for her the single, well-trodden path. She is fond of one-word lines of interesting typography, experiments, like her “Epiphanytide” with its rising tide. She has the alert and seeing eye, that stops to dwell on what is before her, and intuits the inward grace behind the sensible sign.

Some years ago, Abbot Albert told me I should write poetry... I did write a poem for Abbot Albert, it looked like a poem, used some poetic diction, expressed a (profound?) thought, but it wasn’t really so – in fact it was probably fit for pseud’s corner, *ersatz*; its German recipient replied with one of his own, exemplary in all respects, including its English.

Needless to say, there is nothing pseudo about Sister Laurentia’s work, written over a span of years which demonstrates persevering effort and application to her task – which probably does not involve use of George Mackay Brown’s “small Pluscarden paper”. The half-dozen publications in which some of these poems have previously appeared are evidence that her poetry is widely appreciated and of a high standard.

Naturally, as a Benedictine nun, she drops her bucket into a number of wells. Liturgy, of course, source and summit, supplies inspiration, subject-matter, and the vocabulary, in its widest sense, in which to express herself. Gospel scenes pass through the transmuting fires of lectio and poetry, the seasons, botanical and liturgical, interpenetrate. Holy Week has a sequence of eight poems to itself, but naturally the Paschal note is sustained everywhere. The beauty of the wild – and cultivated – flower captivates and inspires her, especially those harbingers of new life, the snowdrop and the daffodil. From the Creator, to creation, all the *mirabilia Dei*, the marvellous works of God, which surround her, birds, beasts, flowers, trees, seasons, all are stimuli to lifting mind and heart to God, to putting pen to paper. And then there is the inscape, the inner landscape where God is present and active. As in our lives, all these interpenetrate and fertilise each other.

We thank Sr Laurentia for her labour and our delight and await with hope what must surely follow.

DGC

Lanterns of the North (Palladio Press/Amazon; 188 pages), is an architect's view of eleven churches throughout the Catholic Diocese of Aberdeen, plus the "Secret Seminary" at Scalan. It includes many full colour photographs as well as Oliver Humphries' architectural drawings of the buildings, exterior and interior. There is also an Appendix containing the beautiful line drawings of all our churches, done by John R. Hume. Copies of the book may be obtained, price £9, direct from the publisher Deacon Tony Schmitz: email tony.schmitz@gmail.com

"Among the many satisfactions of my office as Bishop in Aberdeen (1977-2002), one of the greatest must be the provision and care of so many beautiful churches; and the fruitful friendship of those engaged in their design, adornment, preservation and recording.

"My thanks are due to two gentlemen, my friends and friends of the Church, Mr Oliver Humphries, architect of some of the fine churches illustrated herein; and Mr John R. Hume, sometime

Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings with Historic Scotland.

“The concept of the book was motivated on my part by gratitude to these two architects for their friendship and professional support over the years, and for what is most outstanding, the initiative both have separately taken in producing very beautiful drawings of churches in the Diocese of Aberdeen, in which they have had a hand in designing or altering or having observed and recorded in the course of their work.”

Archbishop Emeritus, Mario Joseph Conti

L'Ascèse Chrétienne by Dom Anselm Stolz (Arouca Press 2021; pp. xxxii, 158; £13.50.

Fr Giles has done us a service by translating Dom Anselm Stolz's *L'Ascèse Chrétienne*. The anglophone world now has easy access to the companion volume to Stolz's classic *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection*, nearly eighty years after his premature death in 1942.

Christian Asceticism has the stated aim of “set[ting] forth some essential concepts related to the ascetical life.” What he means by “ascetical life” is in the first place what we might more naturally now call consecrated life; but his point is to explore the life which leads to the fullness of Christian perfection. “Asceticism” is not, in his view, something to be considered in a different category from ‘mysticism’. The logic of Christianity, he insists here too, is the same for all Christians, and of its very nature always points towards mystical union with God. His account of the “ascetic life” is thus *both* an account of what characterizes a particular, special mode of Christian life, *and* an account of the inherent logic of the Christian condition.

Christian Asceticism was published posthumously, first in Italian (1943) then in French (1948), based on conferences given in 1939. Stolz had intended his two books to be a first essay towards a theology of asceticism, and had he lived, he might have written a longer and fuller work. As it is, *Christian Asceticism*

remains a short book, renouncing a detailed treatment of prayer as already studied in *The Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, and making no pretence of covering all the possible ground. One will not exhaust the content of this book quickly. It bears rereading and pondering.

Stolz takes the traditional view that hermits represent the peak of Christian life, and so it is from the desert that he draws his most fundamental inspiration. While acknowledging that predominant forms of ascetic life will vary according to time and place, and touching on some suggestions for historical reasons for this, he insists that the deepest impetus behind the ascetic movement was theological, and the justification for the existence of ascetic life in the Church is likewise the theological necessity of such a form of life in the heart of Christianity.

Yet from the desert, Stolz draws a rather surprising initial conclusion. The “fundamental concept” of Christian asceticism, he thinks, “was summed up in the idea of complete separation from the world, in order to be able to give oneself to God with greater freedom. The Christian ascetic is essentially someone who frees himself from the world; he is *extra mundum factus*, he moves outside the world.” While the “flight to the desert” in the fourth century certainly did involve a very radical separation from the world, even those of us who live in relatively strict enclosure might not see this as *the* essence of our vocation. A vital means, and a potent sign, yes; but the essence of consecrated life?

I think that *extra mundum fieri*, “becoming outside-the-world”, serves for Stolz rather as purity of heart does for Cassian. Monks (and all Christians) are aiming ultimately at the Kingdom of God; but their immediate aim is purity of heart. They cultivate whatever it takes to acquire this, knowing that this will bring them to life with God. It’s easy to put Stolz’s point in parallel with this. Renouncing everything that keeps one bound to the kingdom of the world and prevents total attachment to God is what is meant by becoming “outside the world”. Making the journey from the “world of sin” to the “world of God” is what it takes to reach union with God.

This, clearly, is in its essence for all Christians, just as Stolz had earlier insisted that mystical union with God is not the special charism of a very few, but the proper flowering of the union with God already given in reality in baptism. All Christians who seek to understand the fullness of their baptismal commitment can certainly benefit from Stolz's brilliant exploration of its essential logic. The ascetic, however, is called to an absolute pursuit of this freedom of soul. Stolz has a bracing, not to say daunting, view of what is undertaken by anyone who hears and accepts the call. Monastic/ascetic life is in the first place, in his view, a life of renunciation and mortification, a battle which will continue until death. In speaking of the "world of sin", and in being unafraid to take up the idea of the "sinful flesh", he is not being at all Manichaeic. He simply has a very clear view of our need for conversion and of the impermanence of this world, and indeed of our current bodies. He also has a very clear view of the responsibility of ascetics to maintain their commitment. In explaining the traditional view of monastic profession as a "second baptism", he comments that this "means that the act of charity involved in the spontaneous renunciation of self-will and consecration to the service of God not merely purifies the soul from every stain of sin but also brings the effects of the act of baptism to perfection". Clearly this depends on an important condition. "The difference between [the monk] and the ordinary Christian is proportionate to the degree of love with which he has consecrated himself to that kind of life and to the degree of love with which he lives it out." Any monk or nun reading this will feel prompted to a serious examination of conscience. It need hardly be added that there are plenty of "ordinary Christians" who, in fact, live their lives with a greater perfection of charity than plenty of "ascetics".

But how is this possible at all? For Stolz is no Pelagian either. The key is, of course, union with Christ. It is sacramental union with Christ in His death, resurrection and ascension which is the primary reality. Stolz's chapters on "imitation of Christ" and on the liturgy are particularly striking here. The ascetic's imitation of

Christ is often characterized in terms of the evangelical counsels. Stolz, however, says little explicitly about the counsels. His “imitation of Christ” is based on the Lord’s words, “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father” (Jn 16:28). The Incarnate Son’s path was as a pilgrim away from His home with the Father (so his coming *into* the world is the example for our *leaving* the world), through suffering and death (the model of our mortification), to glorious union with the Father in heaven (the model of prayer and, eventually, complete union). We follow this way as those who have been incorporated into Christ by sanctifying grace, an incorporation fed and strengthened by the Eucharist. Stolz emphasizes that the Eucharist gives us “a sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross and in the Resurrection and Ascension, a sacramental anticipation of the life to come”. We would probably say today that the Eucharist gives us a share in the whole Paschal Mystery. Stolz insists on the dynamic character of this sharing – “In the Eucharist we already undergo that death which we have not yet reached, that death that one day will definitively free us from our sinful body ... it also makes us sharers in the glorious state of our Head and in his perfect spiritualisation ... Asceticism and prayer are the ‘natural’ continuation of what the sacrament has set in motion.”

There is much more one could say. Better, probably, to suggest that we meet this fine monastic teacher for ourselves through his writings and allow him to influence us. And to end where Stolz ends: when reading this book, I wondered where Our Lady was, but it turned out that Stolz was saving the best until last. The Epilogue is entitled, “Mary, Mother of the Church and Ascetics”, and summarizes how Mary’s graces and privileges make her the perfection and model of every aspect of the ascetic life. Thus, her example and intercession are “one of the great spiritual resources for the disciple and imitator of Jesus Christ... Mother of Christ, Queen of martyrs, pray for us”.

M. Mary Thomas Brown, St Cecilia’s Abbey, Ryde