

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 197 News and Notes for our Friends Lent 2022

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Cover: Pluscarden and the Milky Way by George Thompson

Back Cover: Reconstruction of 8th Century Mt Sinai Icon by Br
Cyprian Bampton OSB

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

We recently celebrated the Feast of the Presentation, “Candlemas”, commemorating Mary and Joseph bringing their first born, Jesus, to the Temple to consecrate him to the Lord according to what is written in the Law of the Lord. The Law imposes itself, as it were, on Jesus and his parents. As good Jews they obey it. Jesus however is not only under the Law. He “fulfils” it. In him its full meaning appears. He is not just one of many who must conform to what the Law says about firstborns. He is the firstborn. The Law was written for him.

Through his life on earth and particularly in his death and resurrection, Jesus will reveal the Law's full meaning. He will teach his disciples, and enable his Church, to find him in the Scriptures.

All prophecy points to Jesus. So it is fitting that his presentation in the Temple is accompanied by prophecy. Simeon and Anna prophesy concerning the child. Luke records Simeon's words. His long wait is over, now he has seen the Messiah. Simeon proclaims who the child he holds is. There is no foretelling of the events of Jesus' life. There is a prediction of suffering, but this recalls what Scripture says, that the Christ must suffer. We have no details of what the prophetess Anna says, only that she tells everyone about the child.

In the Church of the New Testament, prophecy was a normal phenomenon. Saint Paul says: “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28).

Within Judaism at the time of Jesus, it seemed that God had long ago stopped sending prophets to his people. Yet the promise made by Moses still stood: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like myself from among you, from among your brothers.” This promise did not seem fulfilled in any of the

historical prophets, so it remained as a hope for the future. Hence the question to John the Baptist, “Are you the prophet?” Hence also the reaction to Jesus: “A great prophet has arisen among us!”

The revival of prophecy with the birth of Jesus, and its normal occurrence in the Church, are among the signs that with the coming of Christ God begins to act in the world in a new way.

One might have expected, though, that with Jesus prophecy would simply cease: “God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Rather, prophecy has taken on a new aspect. It is remarkable that New Testament prophets are generally unnamed, and none left behind them collections of their prophesies. There is no New Testament Isaiah or Jeremiah. It seems the fact of prophecy is more significant than its content. It adds nothing to the content of revelation. It no longer looks to the future. It testifies to the reality that is present in Christ. Its value, like that of the sacraments and preaching, is in its effects in the souls of believers.

The Church must still have its prophets: we can’t think that God will remove this gift. Where are the prophets today? In line with the anonymity that characterised the New Testament prophets, they are likely to be ordinary people who would never call themselves and are not called “prophets”. They will be people whom God sends our way and who, through some word or gesture, bring us a word that we know is from God.

How do we recognise prophecy? In the Old Testament, a prophet was known because the Spirit of God had come upon him. In the Church, the Spirit has come upon all believers, and while not all prophesy, all have the grace to recognise the action of the Spirit. St John says: “Many false prophets have come into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God” (1Jn 4:1-2)

Simeon and Anna confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh. They recognise in the little baby of two very ordinary parents the Christ of the Lord. The prophets of the Old Testament spoke of wonderful things to come. Our prophets speak of what is here. They help us to see Christ present in the very ordinary

circumstances in which we live and especially in the people we are with and even in ourselves. They especially help us to see Christ in our difficulties and in the various weaknesses of human flesh. Prophets bring us hope: not hope in some imagined future, but a joyful insight into the reality of Christ's presence.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'F'.

Spiritual Combat

“St Benedict, following the Fathers and Cassian, suggests the spiritual combat as what defines monasticism. Spiritual combat defines the monk and describes his life, from the very first chapter of the Rule...

“The most natural movement, the most natural motive force of our lives, is love for self, flowing out into love of others and of God, the most desirable good to acquire for our own flourishing.

“But that self-love is perverted when, swollen up, it turns back into itself as the only good, and empties out every other love: God and others. That is egoism.

“Spiritual combat demands that we renounce this idolatrous ‘me’ in order to seek the true God. The whole Gospel invites us, following Jesus, to crucify this swollen false relationship so that we may rediscover the wisdom of love. We have to lose ourselves so as to win ourselves, to go beyond ourselves to love, to renounce self in order to go to the other.”

Fr Bernard Ducruet (trans. Fr Giles Conacher OSB)

FROM THE ANNALS

November 2021

26th: Storm Arwen struck and this afternoon we lost electric power. Br Michael has phoned the power help line. It seems that there are widespread power cuts. They said that they hoped to have the power restored this evening. The wind is coming from the Northeast, so we are probably being protected by the ridge of Heildon Hill to the north. For light we are using torches, candles, night lights and, in church and refectory, gas mantles attached to gas bottles. There was a rush to find batteries for hitherto neglected torches. The liturgy has been able to continue much as normal, though we cannot livestream it. Cooking is by gas, so we have hot food.

27th: The power cut has continued all day. We do have heating as we still have the gas boilers which the woodchip boiler replaced. There is gas in the tank and we are using a small petrol generator to provide electricity to run the boilers and the heating pump. This generator provides power to run the freezers when it is not being used for the boilers. Both lunch and supper were buffet meals, but we have eaten hot food.

Br Michael regularly phoned up the electricity information line; they said they hoped we would get power by 10.00 pm. We didn't.

28th: FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT. The power cut continued. We followed the usual Sunday timetable. We are now wearing violet vestments for the season. Lunch was again a buffet meal, though the gas cooker is still working, so we had hot meals. There is now no central heating as we are running out of liquid propane gas for the boiler and petrol for the generator. Br Joseph lit the wood fire in the calefactory.

After lunch four of the brethren went into Elgin to the vaccination centre to get flu jags and anti-Covid boosters. Elgin had electricity. Br Michael continued to follow the information given by the electricity company. Today they said that the power might come on at 6.00 pm, but that, if we did not have power by

10.00 pm, then we would probably not have power until Wednesday at the soonest. Six o'clock passed in the dark and most of us made up our minds that we would have another few days without heat. We were at supper by the light of a couple of gas mantles and then suddenly the lights came on at about 7 o'clock. We could not resist a little cheer.

29th: This evening we celebrated the first Vespers of the solemnity of St Andrew. Fr Prior Giles presided in the sanctuary. We also began the Novena for the Immaculate Conception.

30th: **SOLEMNITY OF ST ANDREW.** Fr Giles presided and preached at Conventual Mass.

December 2021

3rd: **Recollection Day.** Today was the regular December Recollection Day. Fr Abbot gave a conference at midday and then we exposed the Blessed Sacrament on the main altar from before Sext until after Vespers. The brethren watched before the Blessed Sacrament during the afternoon.

6th: Br Michael and Colin Sim set out today for the South of England today where Br Michael is going to his brother Martin's funeral, due to take place on 8th December. With Br Michael away the quality of the singing in choir has plummeted. This fact has not been broadcast to the world because it is also Br Michael who singlehandedly livestreams the services of Mass, Vespers and Compline each day. Since he is away livestreaming is not happening.

8th: **SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF OUR LADY.** Fr Abbot presided at Office and Mass today. He gave the homily at Conventual Mass. The day followed the usual solemnity timetable with a festal lunch and supper.

10th: Fr Benedict is suffering from tachycardia. He is to have defibrillation at Dr Gray's Hospital this coming Monday. Today he had to go to the hospital for a blood test and a Covid test before the procedure. For a while he has had to maintain 2 metres distance from all except his immediate household. Between now and the procedure he has to stay isolated and has gone to stay in the lodge.

12th: THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT. Today we hosted the annual joint carol service with the congregation of Pluscarden Kirk. Padre Paula Baker presided with Fr Abbot at the service. Due to Covid, there were very few who attended. Normally we would have provided tea, cakes and biscuits in the cloister after the service, but this year we could not.

13th: Fr Benedict went into Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin for his procedure. It seems to have been successful. He has returned from the hospital to the lodge where Br Edmund is staying overnight, as a carer during the night in case of problems.

17th: O Sapientia. Today we begin the series of great **O** antiphons in preparation for Christmas. Each day the monk responsible for a particular department, or a substitute priest-monk for those who are not priests, presides at Vespers in the Sanctuary and intones the Magnificat antiphon. Each antiphon addresses Our Lord under an Old Testament title and begins with the interjection **O**. Fr Abbot began the series by presiding at Vespers and intoning *O Sapientia*.

We have a tradition, inherited from Caldey, of having a "congratulation" after Supper. At supper we read articles from Pax, either on the celebration of Christmas at Caldey or giving details of how the days of the great **O** antiphons were celebrated in medieval times in England. The "congratulation" takes place in the calefactory in which candles and a fire in the grate give illumination. Brethren have set up tables with tablecloths earlier. Sweets, crisps and nuts and some fruit are set out on the table. Normally we would pass round a mazer or loving cup containing mulled wine from brother to brother. In these Covid days we fill polystyrene cups with a mouthful of wine each.

This year we invited the Dominican Sisters from Elgin to join us for the celebration. The sisters were distributed among the monks. This is the occasion when we first have mince pies over the Christmas period. The celebration ended as is traditional among us with the singing of the carol *Shepherds in the Fields Abiding*. The sisters then joined us for Compline, which followed directly after the congratulation.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

Since the last issue of Pluscarden Benedictines things have been fairly quiet here in Petersham and there is not much to report. Although we had a bit of excitement in early December 2021 when one of the sisters tested positive for COVID. Then the rest of us, brothers and sisters, all got tested too. We were all negative except for one other sister. Fortunately, the two sisters' cases were very mild. But to be on the safe side we suspended all contact with the sisters' community for a while. During this time the sisters only came to church for Mass and Vespers.

On December 17 we resumed contact with the sisters, and thus were able to have our annual *O Sapientia* ceremony together. Like last year we didn't drink the mulled wine from a common cup but drank from individual small glasses. We were likewise able to have our usual Christmas celebrations, which include a Christmas dinner at the sisters' priory on Christmas evening after an early Vespers at 4:00 p.m. We also had a common meal with the sisters of St Scholastica Priory in January to celebrate the feast day of Mother Mary Elizabeth's patron, St Elizabeth Ann Seton.

DIC

From the Annals

December 31st: End of Year Recollection Day. Fr Abbot gave a conference reviewing the past year. Activities have been restricted due to the continuing pandemic. Before Sext we exposed the Blessed Sacrament on the main altar of the church, where it remained until after Vespers. The brethren took it in turns to watch before the Blessed Sacrament until Vespers, which was first Vespers of Mary, Mother of God. Fr Giles, as prior, presided at Vespers in choir, while Fr Abbot presided at the Benediction which followed. According to our custom, we sang the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year.

NEWS FROM KRISTO BUASE

Upon the invitation of the Archbishop of Cape Coast (Charles Gabriel Palmer-Buckle), Prior Bede and Dom Antony went down to Cape Coast on the 4th of January 2022. The invitation was in connection with the New Foundation of female Benedictine Nuns invited to Ghana by the archbishop. Our visit was to help, give advice (and any input) to the archbishop; and to witness the opening of the new monastery of the Benedictine Sisters (Immaculate Heart of Mary Benedictine Monastery) who are going to occupy the former Poor Clare convent at Saltpond. This was a fantastic opportunity to witness such a historic event. The journey from Techiman to Cape Coast took us some time, almost 7 hours' drive. We were received by the Archbishop of Cape Coast and warmly welcomed. The archbishop briefed us on the reason he invited the Sisters from Nigeria and his inspiration of how he got the idea of getting a monastery in his diocese. He felt that the Mother of the Nigerian Monastery accepting to have a foundation in his diocese is divine providence. Hence, he invited Prior Bede of Kristo Buase to help and assist him and the nuns in every way possible.

There are 6 nuns from Nigeria and one Olivetan Nun to start the foundation. This in my own opinion is great, as many would agree with me a foundation needs to start with more than five persons. It helps with the workload and the mutual spiritual support. So, I felt for the Abbess of Umuoji in Nigeria to have sent six persons to start this foundation was ideal and I am happy to know that nuns from our congregation are in Ghana. It will give us an opportunity to compare notes, have a communal relationship spiritually and to support each other on our spiritual journey. I was happy to see the 6 Nuns from Nigeria are a mixture of different cultures from 3 tribes in Nigeria which is a good selection that will help with check and balance. The main idea, or say dream, for the Archbishop is to have contemplatives in his Archdiocese to pray for the diocese of Cape Coast to support them spiritually.

The official opening and welcoming of the nuns from Nigeria began with Vespers. They are using St Benedict's scheme. They have a beautiful liturgy, a mixture of Latin and English. We had Mass the following day, January 6, as the climax. Providentially the Archbishop was celebrating the 29th anniversary of his ordination as a Bishop, and Sr Miriam Regina OSB her Silver Jubilee of Profession. It was a beautiful ceremony. The Franciscans were there with a few priests from the archdiocese.

The nuns received a postulant, Sr Celestina, on the 5th of January, which is a sign of growth and hope.

One of the striking things for me is the enthusiasm of the nuns. My greatest joy is that there is much hope and that Mother Abbess Ruphina OSB promised them that she was going to send more sisters when available. The role of Kristo Buase in this new monastery through distance is a challenge, but Father Prior hopes that we will be able to help them in whatever way we can.

It is a blessing to have two monasteries in the country and it is our hope that this new monastery of Benedictine nuns takes root, and that they will receive many candidates. We pray for our monasteries here in Ghana that God will touch people who have a desire to serve God and to give their all to God in His service. It was a beautiful trip and an eye opener for me. It meant a lot to me. One of my joys is that we now have Benedictine Nuns in Ghana. From now on, when young ladies ask us for a monastery, we can point out to them the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the Cape Coast Archdiocese. I believe and I know the monastery will flourish.

Dom Antony Buaful OSB

IS THE POPE A CATHOLIC?

or

HOW TO COPE WITH A POPE

I want to speak about Pope Francis. Actually, I want to speak up for Pope Francis, and I'd like to ease the difficulties some have with him. Hence this reflection. For some – in the Church, I mean – he is just occasionally baffling or disconcerting. Others feel ill at ease, others disturbed. Some clench their teeth, bite their lips and just keep quiet. Others are vocal and vehement. That's more or less the range. Of course, for many, he's just the Pope and that's fine. And for many too, he's an inspiration. But, there is an issue...

We are not required to be papal fanatics. We are not forbidden to have reservations. We're not constrained to share every priority, rise to every emphasis or warm to the style. I'm not advocating unbridled enthusiasm. If possible, I'd just like to ease a burden some are carrying, to diminish an unhappiness. In this realm, it's not helpful to be disaffected. Not helpful, I mean, for our Christian and Catholic life. I'm not attempting here to answer every question or rebut every charge. I just want to suggest another approach.

In the 2nd Eucharistic Prayer, a passage runs: “Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world, and bring her to the fullness of charity, *together with* Francis our Pope, and N. our bishop, and all the clergy”. “Together with”, “*una cum*” in Latin; communion in theology; “being of the same mind, having the same love” in St Paul (Phil 2:2). There's a spiritual tradition which speaks of *sentire cum Ecclesia* and so *cum Papa*. There's no need to overegg this, but neither to exclude it. It's a translation into our Christian subjectivity of a revealed objectivity, of a given: namely, the mission conferred by the Lord on Peter and transmitted to his successors; the mission of the professor of faith, the rock, the keeper of the keys, the confirmer of the brethren, the shepherd of the sheep; the mission of visible head; the mission of being the principle and foundation of unity. It is sad if we have to bracket that off and live our Catholic life *etsi Papa non daretur* (“as if there were no Pope”), minimalistically.

So, a word on behalf of Pope Francis.

On the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus met the risen Lord and became Paul the Apostle. “God revealed his Son in me” (Gal 1:16). That occurred probably around 34/35 AD, a very few years after Christ’s death and resurrection. He then went off, he says, to Arabia, and for three years. Then he came back to Damascus. Then, he went up to Jerusalem for a fortnight to “visit Cephas”, that is, Simon Peter. He had, as it were, to check in. He went, he says, to “visit” him. The word means to visit in order to see, as one might visit a famous city to see it, says St John Chrysostom. If used of a person, it means to go and see them in order to get to know them, to learn about them. Paul went to Jerusalem to “learn” Peter.

St John Paul II, in turn, used to say that we have to “learn the Pope”. This is a way to the *una cum*, “together with”.

Here’s another preliminary: “Blessed are you, Simon bar-Jona ... and you are Peter”, Jesus famously says. Giuseppe Roncalli became John XXIII, Giovanni Battista Montini Paul VI, Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, and Jorge Bergoglio, Francis. A human being – with his personal name, an individuality, a biography, and with a family name, that is, with a family story, a nationality, a history – is chosen Pope, accepts, takes a new name and is taken up into what has been called “the mystery of Peter” – a mystery which is a mixture of weakness and strength, limit and grace. A taking up that doesn’t end on the balcony of St Peter’s with the cry *Habemus Papam* but continues through the years that follow. A process of a fellow-Christian responding to a more than human, impossible mission and who surely deserves, from his fellow-sinners, a hermeneutic of sympathy, a willingness to interpret benevolently, an accompaniment of prayer, a readiness to “learn”.

Most of us listening to this, given our own very different backgrounds, should surely expect to be taken aback, wrong-footed, left scratching our heads by a Latin American, Argentinian Jesuit: a man whose parents were Italian immigrants and whose family was not without conflicts, who has lived through a dictatorship and a dirty war, the post-conciliar upheavals of the

Society of Jesus and the controversies of liberation theology, who has had extensive pastoral experience of situations outside our ken and people of a different culture than ours, and who at the age of 76 has been abruptly translated onto a world stage. He will be different. We might at least be curious as to what he might bring, what fresh air may follow him from Buenos Aires, what opportunities he might present for realising that the one faith allows of many perspectives, and that the Church's universality might entail an enriching exchange of gifts. There might be much learning to do.

*

I have met him, to be precise, on 27 September 2018. I met him along with the other seven bishops of Scotland, and two of our secretariat. We were on what is called an Ad Limina visit to Rome, when every so many years bishops go to Rome "to visit Peter" and the departments of the Holy See, and to render an account of their ministry. A meeting with the Pope is part of it. We met him as a group in one of the rooms in the Vatican. There was him and a translator and us. We were with him for 1 hour and 40 minutes. It was pleasantly informal. It was a free-flowing conversation. We put questions and made comments. He responded. He livened visibly as the meeting went on. There was seriousness and humour. We came out joyful. But the real thing was deeper. Forgive the cliché, but it really was as though we were the only people who mattered. Consider the circumstances. Before we went in, I noticed the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith coming out. They would not have been talking about the weather. About 36 hours before, the Pope had returned from a 3-day visit to the Baltic States. The same afternoon there was some major celebration for him to lead – I forget what. This was an 81-year-old man. What he conveyed was not exhaustion or a going through the motions; rather, supernatural peace and total dedication to the Church. One felt a presence.

So first I would speak up for him as a man of God. In one of his early interviews, he was asked, "Who is Jorge Mario

Bergoglio?” After a pause, he famously replied, “A sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” This remark harks back sixty years to 21 September, St Matthew’s day, 1953, when “something happened” to him in the confessional of a church in Buenos Aires – he was 16 – and he realised he was called to the priesthood. In the Gospel for St Matthew’s day (Mt 9:9ff), Jesus “saw” / looked on tax-collector, a “sinner” and called him to follow him. Later Bergoglio would become aware of the commentary of St Bede the Venerable on that Gospel, and his words: Jesus “saw him, not so much with his bodily eyes, as with the look of inner compassion. He saw the tax-collector, and because he looked at him with mercy and chose him (*miserando et eligendo*), he said “Follow me””. Those words *miserando et eligendo* – “having mercy and choosing” – Bergoglio later took as his episcopal motto. The last strand in this story is the dramatic painting by Caravaggio of *The Call of Matthew*, found in the church of St Louis of the French in Rome and which, before he was Pope, Bergoglio would regularly visit when he came to Rome. Here’s the core of his self-understanding: a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon, a sinner aware of being “mercied” and chosen by grace.

Pope Francis is, first and foremost, a spiritual and evangelical man, someone looked at, touched by the Lord. Everything else has unfolded from this. He became a Jesuit, which gave flesh and companionship to this call. It gave him the formation of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, the purpose of which is help someone discern the will of God in their lives and commit to follow Christ whatever the cost. And so, through all the mutations and missions of his life, as Jesuit Provincial, Rector of a College, as set aside, then appointed an auxiliary bishop, then Archbishop of Buenos Aires and so on, there is a single source and centre, the Call of Christ. “I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” As for his normal daily routine, he rises around 4.30 am and spends the next two hours praying the Office, meditating, reading the Scripture of the day before saying Mass at 7 am. Inspired by John Paul II, he took up saying the whole Rosary, 15 decades anyway,

every day, and if he can, includes an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

So there's the first thing. Pope Francis is a man with a strong personal relationship to Christ. He is a man who has weathered many difficult passages in his life, physically, emotionally, socially, but has hung on. He has mellowed, he has grown, and he has persevered. He has heard the "Follow me" and been faithful. This must be acknowledged.

The other thing that shone out for me at our meeting was his love for the Church and his sense of people.

As a young man, he said he wanted to join the Jesuits "because I'm not going to be a priest in a basilica. I'm going to be a Jesuit, because I'm going to want to go out to the neighbourhoods, to the *villas*, to be with people."¹ This, after Jesus, is his other passion. He is a "people person". He is a constant advocate and defender of *los descartados*, the marginal, vulnerable, migrants, prisoners, the elderly, the unborn, and he verifies his words by actions (e.g., migrants from Lesbos, response to Rohingya; Friday visits during Holy Year). He can be swingeing about sin, especially what he calls "corruption", that is embedded sin. He is actually the fiercest of recent Popes. But he is no misanthrope. Reaching out is his standard response. In the phrase he has made famous, he loves "to get the smell of the sheep". He feels any failure to do so acutely.

One story indicates this. In his childhood, there was a working woman who came in twice a week to help his mother. They lost touch. Years later, when he was a prominent Jesuit in a big institution, he was told that she was at the door to see him. He was busy and preoccupied. He sent a note asking her to come back tomorrow. She didn't. A few weeks later, a strong sense of guilt came over him. He began to pray for her. The episode stuck with him for 25 years. Then he heard news of her. The truth was she hadn't come back that morning because she was returning to Italy. She had come to say goodbye. Things hadn't worked out in Italy,

¹ Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, p.36

and later she returned to Argentina. In 2006 they were able to meet up again. What strikes me is what he said: “It was the happiest day of my life.” She was now an old lady. She gave him a medal she wore round her neck; he still wears it.² He felt bad for 25 years for having asked someone to come back the following day. Let me go to the other end of the scale. In an interview (published on 24 August 2016), Pope Benedict XVI spoke of Francis’ personal kindness to him. “He has given me the gift of a marvellous fatherly-brotherly relationship. Often little gifts arrive up here, letters that were written personally. Before setting out on long journeys, the Pope never fails to pay me a visit. The human kindness with which he treats me is for me a special grace of this final phase of my life, for which I can only be grateful. Words alone are not proof of availability to others. He puts it into practice with me.”³ And on one occasion, one of his priestly jubilees, 28 June 2016, Benedict said a lovely thing to Francis: “My true home is your goodness. There I feel safe”.⁴

I don’t mention this so that we all bring out our handkerchiefs, touching as these stories are. I’m just trying to help us “learn” him, get inside him and glimpse what makes him tick; what forms his vision of the Church as “a mother with an open heart”, as a “field-hospital”; what irks him about a self-congratulating, self-preoccupied Church; what gives him, for example, his sensitivity as regards migrants, to the victims of natural disasters, to the people whose lives are run over by the money-making juggernauts, by the effect on the poor of ecological devastation. He’s not someone driven by “isms”. A socio-political interpretation breaks down. He lives from other sources.

To be continued...

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

² Ivereigh, pp.336-7

³ E. Guerriero, Pope Benedict XVI, p.667

⁴ Ibid, p.658

VIA CRUCIS – AN ARTIST’S WAY OF THE CROSS

The traditional devotion of following, in prayer and meditation, Our Lord on his final journey to Calvary began as far back as the fourth century, when pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land would retrace that journey via the actual sites of his Passion. They would start at the Praetorium, the Roman Judgement Hall, where Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and would walk through the city (now Old Jerusalem) to the hill of Calvary, pausing at each site or “station” to pray and meditate on each stage. Only the wealthy, however, could afford to do this; the poor had only their imagination and holy pictures; and eventually, due to wars, political upheaval and natural disasters, it became difficult or impossible for even the rich to travel to the Holy Land and so the practice of meditating on visual images of Christ’s journey gradually replaced the pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

When the Franciscans were awarded the guardianship of the holy sites, they encouraged the setting up of tableaux in their churches depicting the journey to Calvary; this custom spread to other churches. By the fourteenth century, the practice of the “Way of the Cross” had become a regular form of Christian devotion both in monasteries and parish churches throughout Europe.

Content and number of the stations have varied throughout the centuries, but the number was fixed at fourteen in the eighteenth century under Pope Clement XII. More recently, a fifteenth station representing the Resurrection of Our Lord has been added. Thus, nine of the Stations directly represent incidents recorded in the Gospels, while the other six are based on inferences from the Gospels or from popular legend. By travelling the Way of the Cross in our own churches, homes or wherever we happen to be, we may travel in prayer with Jesus in his Passion, to his death on the Cross, and beyond to the glory of his Resurrection.

In Lent 2004, an exhibition of a new Stations of the Cross was hosted in the complex of the Chapels of Santa Barbara, Sant’Andrea and Santa Silvia al Celio in Rome. The artist of these

unique Stations is Caroline Coate, Oblate and long-time friend of Pluscarden Abbey.

Caroline decided to concentrate on the hands of Christ, and of other “characters”, at successive moments on his journey to Calvary, portraying the hands in terracotta bas relief, alongside life-sized drawings of each Station of the Cross, drawing attention to where the featured hands are situated. There is a special poignancy in these sculpted hand panels, affording wide scope for meditation on each stage of Jesus’s journey to the Cross and the Tomb.

The choice of terracotta clay for the sculpted hands, wrote Mgr Marco Cocuzza, Rector of the Oratories, serves to remind us “that God used clay for the creation of man; the hands convey the whole body through their own language and expressiveness. The artist has chosen to depict in the hands of Christ and the individuals in the Stations of the Cross the pain and suffering of Our Lord who gave his life for our salvation, to give us all his love and our Heavenly Father’s love.”

As we move through the Stations, we contemplate the hands of Pilate as he tries to wash away his guilt; the hands of Jesus as he takes up his cross, as he reaches out to his Blessed Mother’s hand, then to the fluttering hands of the women of Jerusalem; as he falls three times; we see the gentle hands of Veronica as she holds out her veil to wipe the blood and sweat off her Lord’s face; we see Simon of Cyrene’s hand next to Jesus’s as he helps to carry the cross; the hand of a soldier casting dice for Jesus’s seamless garment; Our Lord’s hand nailed to the Cross, as he dies, as he is taken down and his hand is held in his Mother’s; and as he is laid in the tomb, his hands crossed over his breast.

“Caroline thus offers us images of great emotional intensity, enabling us to participate in a drama which is at the very centre of the heritage of our faith. Artistic expression is once more at the service of our reflection on the meaning and destiny of human existence” (Art Historian Carlo Savini).

Caroline’s Stations are depicted in a booklet and a CD slideshow, both available in the Pluscarden shop.

THE STAFF OF LIFE

As one reads or listens to familiar texts, questions and wonderings arise, and sometimes these questionings lead onwards...

Bread, we are told by Isaiah (3:1), is the “staff of life”, our basic nutrition – though he uses a different word for “staff”. Before the introduction into our diet of potatoes and other tubers, or exotic grains like maize and rice, bread was indeed central and critical to life, it needs but a glance at history to see how the fluctuating prices and availability of corn and bread were motors of civil unrest, revolutions and wars.

In various places the Bible speaks of “breaking the staff of bread” (Lev. 26: 26; Ps. 105:16, Ez. 4:16, 5:16, 14:13), always in the context of famine. But what was the “staff of bread”? Commentators, Jewish and Christian, are by no means unanimous. Some suggest that the “staff” was indeed a piece of wood, on which bread was threaded – think pretzels and doughnuts – as a place of storage, out of the reach of rodents. Others see it simply as a metaphor, “with the support of bread” – maybe like a big baguette? – for, as a staff supports whoever uses it for walking, so bread supports life. Another view is, “I shall break off the steady supply of bread,” with the staff of bread meaning simply the food supply.

St Benedict, of course, lived in pre-potato days, and continuity and security for the corn-fleet supplying Rome was one of the great concerns of Roman power. It is therefore not surprising that St Benedict makes provision for bread and its making in his Rule, and as something familiar to all, it is also a source of intelligible metaphor.

In Chapter 39, **On the Allowance of Food**, he suggests each monk should have a good pound of bread per day, and that the Cellarer may keep back a third of this to be eaten at the second meal. But what is a *libra*, a pound? Some suggest that this was a Roman pound, about 327 grammes, eleven or twelve ounces. Out of curiosity I once weighed a thick slice of bread, it was about two ounces, so that would work out at around four slices for lunch and

two for supper. On the other hand, a “commercial pound”, another candidate for St Benedict’s ration, would be 16 ounces, an avoirdupois pound, a good bit more generous. Delatte⁵ notes that there has been “endless discussion both of the weight of a pound and the volume of a *hemina*, the amount specified by St Benedict as the daily wine ration – a wag has pointed out that each and every piece of monastic legislation on the subject has demonstrated conclusively that it is faithfully specifying the exact amount laid down by St Benedict! It is said that when the monks of Montecassino went into exile in Rome they took with them the bronze weight which they used for doling out bread, and that this weighed 1550 grammes, getting on for three-and-a-half pounds. In Delatte’s day the Solesmes Congregation obviously enjoyed a large and uncomplicated spirit; bread was to be given to the brethren without restriction. At Pluscarden, nothing is laid down or prescribed. We eat something in the region of forty 800g loaves in a week, but since this includes guests’ consumption, the individual monk’s consumption cannot be determined.

Since bread is made from flour, that requires a mill, which St Benedict in Chapter 66, **On the Porters of the Monastery**, prescribes should be within the monastic enclosure. He also says that harvesting is a suitable monastic work, at least in places where the monks cannot delegate this to others. In Chapter 64 the Abbot is promised that if he keeps the Rule, in every respect, he will hear the Lord’s commendation to the servant who distributed wheat – for bread – in due season.

Bread, if leavened, involves yeast, and bread-making must have been a very familiar activity to his monks. In Chapter 2, **What the Abbot Should Be Like**, he suggests that the Abbot’s teaching should be like yeast, added to the lumpen monastic soul, to cause it to rise up and grow, filled with air, the Spirit. Like every Benedictine monastery – or so I imagine – we conform to St Benedict’s admonition that his Rule be read regularly in public, so that no one may say, “That’s the first time I’ve heard *that!*” about

⁵ Dom Paul Delatte, *Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*

some provision of the Rule – though of course, since it’s Scripture-based, the Rule is alive, and new things are always emerging from it for those who listen to it.

In our Refectory, we listen to Leonard Doyle’s translation, which at times I find jarring or questionable, with the benefit that I am driven back to the text of the Rule, to verify what it does say.

A case in point is the application of the abbatial teaching to the monks’ hearts and minds. Doyle says it should be kneaded into them. Anyone who has ever made bread knows that kneading is an energetic, even a violent process, involving using your fists to drive out the gas from the dough and to reduce it to a small volume. But violence is not part of St Benedict’s technique, so was Doyle right? Terrence Kardong suggested that this forceful translation was the common view, but a survey of various translations tends to show that his assertion is difficult to maintain. The Oxford Latin Dictionary offers “besprinkle, strew, cover with small particles” as a translation for *conspargere*, and other translators suggest, mingle, infuse, pervade, insert, sprinkle, permeate, spread, distribute – so “kneading” seems a little wide of the mark.

Of course, such thoughts will not arise in the heart of anyone who doesn’t make bread. At Pluscarden we have a number of exponents of the yeastly art. Fr Mark often makes such suppers, breads, pizzas and other things. Br Finbar offers us soda bread (no yeast!), but also sourdough and other breads. Br Benedict Joseph does a good brioche. Your scribe also makes bread but likes to keep it simple – here is a good basic recipe.

3lb strong flour, 1½ pints warm water, an ounce of dry yeast, 2 ½ dessertspoon of sugar, 1 dessertspoon of salt. You mix together the yeast, sugar and water, leave it about 15 – 20 minutes, till it froths. Mix the salt into the flour a little, then pour in the yeasty water, mix it all up till it’s one lump. Leave it for as long as it takes to double in bulk, more or less. Meanwhile oil or grease bread-tins or baking sheets. Once the dough has risen enough, knead it vigorously, divide it up and put it in tins, forcing it well into the corners, filling the tins about halfway. Cover them with a

cloth, allow to rise above the tops of the tins. Put them in an oven pre-heated to about 200C, and after about half an hour, take them out of the tins and set them to cool – job done!

If using coarse flour, it won't rise as much – mix it 50/50 with white flour. The quantities are not exact, and the translation to metric units can be pretty casual. Water-temperature is not critical. If increasing the batch-size, don't increase the salt in strict proportion with the flour. You can add seeds to the mix, sprinkle them on top, glaze the loaf with milk or egg white. If, when cooked, the bread sounds hollow when tapped, it's OK. If you slice it and can see the texture at the bottom is closer than at the top, you should probably have let it prove longer.

DGC

From the Annals

January 2022

1st: SOLEMNITY OF MARY MOTHER OF GOD, OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS. Fr Giles presided as prior at Office and Mass. He preached at Mass. Lunch today was a talking meal. At noon the brethren assembled in the calefactory for New Year greetings with a drink and some nibbles. Tomorrow is Sunday and therefore the Epiphany, so Vespers was at first Vespers of the Epiphany at which Fr Abbot presided. There was no Benediction after Vespers.

We had the New Year Gaudeamus at which we watched a video of the film, *The Man who Invented Christmas*. It was a dramatization of how Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*.

2nd: SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY. Fr Abbot presided at the Office and Mass of the feast. At Mass he preached the homily. On the Epiphany we follow a Sunday timetable and eat festive fare. We do not however have the Epiphany gaudeamus until 6th January, which is the traditional date of the feast.

6th: At 5.45 we had our Epiphany gaudeamus. This gaudeamus is a self-entertainment event. The noviciate provided a sketch and there were songs and music in addition.

Sung Into Being: Tolkien's Vision of Creation in *The Silmarillion*

There is a beautiful scene near the end of C.S. Lewis's novel *The Magician's Nephew* in which the lion, Aslan (a Christ-figure), sings Narnia into being. In the traditional English carol "Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day", each stanza ends with Christ depicted as the leader of a dance; more recently, in 1963, English songwriter Sydney Carter put new words to an old Shaker hymn and refers to Christ in this song as the "Lord of the Dance". It's easy enough to see God as an artist—one only has to glance at a starry sky, a sunlit ridge of mountains, or a peaceful seashore to be convinced of the beauty of His work. But is there a music behind the universe? Are we and all of creation *sung* into being?

Music is, after all, the universal language. It's true that when a person falls in love, they often feel a desire to burst into song, or to start singing along to love songs on the radio. One of our most fundamental religious instincts is to praise the Creator with songs, hymns, dancing, and sacred music; even that dour old sourpuss John Calvin didn't get rid of music completely with his reforms of the liturgy. The universality of music and its ability to transcend the limits of culture, race, and time can lead one to wonder if music isn't the language with which God speaks. I've recently been introduced to several YouTube videos by an organization called "Playing For Change." They've taken old pop songs and had them recorded by international rock stars and street buskers. Watching these videos is incredibly moving: for instance, an old folk song by The Band, "The Weight", is played by people from literally every continent, on instruments ranging from guitars and drums to a medieval lute and an Indian sitar. It's very stirring to see all these people united around music, creating harmony and bonds of unity. I think J.R.R. Tolkien and Lewis both intuitively felt that music serves as the best metaphor for God's creative action.

Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, which serves as a sort of prequel to his better-known masterpieces *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the*

Rings, begins with a short prelude called “The Ainulindale”. In it, Tolkien describes the creation of the universe. In his vision, before creating the physical universe, Eru-Iluvatar (the All-Father... God) creates a race of angelic beings known as the “Ainur”. These angels are given the task of helping God bring the universe into being. Note well: these Ainur are not divine or demi-gods... they cannot create on their own, and can only act as conduits of God’s creative power. God gives to these angels a “mighty theme” which they sing in His presence, in a great unitive harmony. As Tolkien puts it, “Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme of Iluvatar to a great music... in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths ... and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.”

One of the angels, however, the mightiest and most beautiful, known as Melkor (clearly a Lucifer-figure), grows vain. He begins to desire the power to create on his own, not in harmony with God but according to his own designs. Melkor wants to create beings subjected to him and to have mastery over other wills. Melkor attempts again and again to subvert the theme of God’s music, adding discordance that begins to bring sadness and despondency to the other angels attempting to sing God’s composition. Some of the other angels start to “attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first.” Iluvatar, smiling, begins a new theme of music, but Melkor’s discord rises up in strife against it, and many of the Ainur stop singing altogether. Eventually the two musics, Iluvatar’s and Melkor’s, are playing out their themes simultaneously—God’s theme is “deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came.” Melkor’s music, on the other hand, is “loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes.” Melkor attempts to drown out Iluvatar’s music with his own; Iluvatar, however, raises both of His hands and draws all of the music into one, final chord “deeper than the Abyss, higher than

the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Iluvatar”. And the music stops. Iluvatar then shows the product wrought both by His musical themes and the angels’ singing—the created universe is displayed before them in all its splendour and sadness.

In a truly beautiful and profound passage, Tolkien has Iluvatar remind Melkor and the other angelic beings that He alone is God. He says that all the music of creation has its source in Him, and no matter what Melkor wills, he cannot act or alter that music against God’s will. In fact, Iluvatar states that he who “attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.”

As Lent rolls out its long path through the desert before us, and as Passiontide and the Pascal mysteries play themselves out in our presence these next few weeks, it’s good to be reminded of this very Catholic theme: the Devil *never, ever* has the final word. The moment of his greatest triumph, his greatest attempt to subvert the theme of God, bringing about the death of God on the Cross, was the moment of his greatest and final defeat. The world brought into being by the Paschal mysteries is far more beautiful than anything imaginable beforehand. No matter what victories evil may win in our lives, we must believe that God will always and everywhere bring forth greater beauty and joy because of them. We would not have the gladness of Easter morning if we did not have the utter devastation of Good Friday. As Tolkien put it, the beauty of God’s music comes not only from its harmony, but also from the immeasurable sadness woven into it.

Realizing this, when we look at creation, perhaps we can see beyond the visual splendour of the universe, and with the ears of our soul hear creation’s Lord calling us to the dance.

Br Benedict Joseph

PRO TERRENIS CAELESTIA

Each day at Pluscarden, our grace at the end of both lunch and supper is concluded by the following little prayer:

“Tribuat Dominus benefactoribus nostris pro terrenis caelestia, pro temporalibus sempiterna” – “May the Lord grant to our benefactors, in return for their earthly gifts, heavenly ones, and in return for the temporal blessings they have bestowed, eternal ones.”

This is a nice little reminder to all the brethren that we depend on our benefactors for the necessities of our life. We pray that they be recompensed out of all proportion to their good deeds on our behalf. May the rewards of their goodness to us be both heavenly and eternal.

Our prayer formula is derived from the treatise of St Cyprian of Carthage, “On Good Works and Almsgiving”, written in about the year 252. St Cyprian was born into a wealthy pagan family in Roman North Africa, some time between 200 and 210. He was baptised around the year 246, and soon afterwards ordained Priest, then Bishop. But shortly after that the Emperor Decius acceded to power, and at once launched a new campaign of persecution against Christians. Early in 250 Decius decreed an automatic death sentence on all Christian Bishops. Cyprian went into hiding, but continued to rule his Church, especially through his letters and treatises. In its context, our prayer formula is far from being merely a pious wish, directed by those on the receiving end of charity, for the benefit of those who help them. On the contrary: it’s part of a crashing finale to Cyprian’s fervent, even blood-curdling exhortation to his people. They should give, and keep giving, until they have nothing left to give. Here a Bishop, known for his moral rigorism, addresses the faithful in a Church of martyrs. Compromise of any sort, for him, is anathema. He has already urged all the baptised to be ready for torture and death, rather than ever to deny their faith. So now he urges all to be ready to give away every last penny they have, in order to relieve the poor.

The context for Cyprian's remarks was not only persecution, but plague. In those days the attitude of State Authorities to plague victims was to get as far away from them as possible. Nobody in Roman antiquity thought of a free NHS, or social security, or government furlough scheme. Instead of that: the anti-Christian propaganda only increased. The plague, as the authorities were not slow to suggest, must be a punishment inflicted on society by the old gods, angry at the neglect of their cult by the Christians. So official and unofficial persecution intensified. For their part, urged on by their Bishop, the Christians deliberately sought out the sick, at grave peril of their own lives: "For I was sick, and you visited me" said the Lord (Mt 25:35). And not just the sick and dying. Many people as a result of the plague found themselves impoverished, homeless, starving, widowed or made orphans. Cyprian wanted all his Christians who had money to help them, not just out of their surplus, but to the last extent of their means.

Cyprian's horizon does not stop at the level of moral duty. He strongly presents good works and almsgiving in the light of our eternal destiny. The practice of heroic generosity here will unite us more closely with Christ the Lord, win pardon for our sins, increase our sanctification, and contribute to our heavenly reward. He reproaches those cautious and fearful about giving away too much:

"You are a captive and slave of your money. You are tied by the bonds of avarice. You, whom Christ has already freed, are bound anew. You save money which, when saved, does not save you. You accumulate a patrimony that burdens you with its weight. But no! Make Christ a participant in your earthy possessions, that he may make you a co-heir of his heavenly Kingdom" (ch 13).

But what about my children, and their hopes of receiving a patrimony at my death? "Why commend your children to the devil rather than to Christ? Do not teach them to love their patrimony more than they love Him" (ch 19).

And so, in the final chapter, to the promise of great rewards to come:

“What, dearest brethren, will then be the glory of the charitable! How vast and supreme the joy, when the Lord distributes his rewards for our merits and good works, granting heavenly things for earthly, everlasting for temporal! Then he will give great things for small. He will bestow eternal immortality on us, for which he prepared us by the life-giving outpouring of his blood. Then he will bring us back again to paradise! Then he will open up the Kingdom of heaven, according to his promise!

“Dearest brethren: the performance of good works is a very wonderful and divine thing! Great solace for believers; a bulwark of hope; a fortification for faith; a healing for sin; something placed in the power of the doer; something both of enormous consequence and also easy. Let us gladly and promptly enter the contest of saving good works, with this palm for reward! Let us all run in the race of justice, as God and Christ look on. Let us not be held back by cupidity for this life and this world! Thus we shall run swift and unencumbered in our contest! The Lord will certainly not fail to bring our merits to their reward. In times of peace he will give to those who conquer a white crown for their good works. In times of persecution he will double that with an additional crown, a purple one, for what we have to suffer.”

St Cyprian was martyred at last for his faith under the Emperor Valerian, in the Year of our Lord 258. For a contemporary account of that, see the Roman Office of Readings for St Cyprian’s feast day, 16 September.

DBH

From the Annals

January 23rd: THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Benedict presided at Office and Conventual Mass. He preached the homily at the Mass. Today is both the Sunday within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and also the Sunday of the Word of God. We placed a table before the altar and enthroned the lectionary and the Book of the Gospels on a cushion on the table.

BOOK REVIEW

***The Way of St Benedict* by Rowan Williams** (Bloomsbury Continuum London 2020); ISBN 978-1-4729-7307-8; Available as: TPB/eBook/ePDF; TPB 150pp

This book is relatively short and consists of 7 chapters, or rather essays, divided in two parts of five and two chapters respectively.

In a sense, the whole of Part 1 is Williams' answer to the final paragraph of Alasdair MacIntyre's study *After Virtue* which concludes: "We are not waiting for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St Benedict."⁶

What Williams believes is needed, is not a *very different Benedict*, but a re-appropriation and renewed appreciation of the virtues and wisdom of *the same old Benedict*. This book proposes a kind of "Benedictine alternative". As such, it may be both of interest and help not only to our oblates, who have chosen to live "the Benedictine way" in the world, but anyone who may wonder at both the longevity and importance the Rule and Benedictine monasticism has had in the past and may potentially hold for the future.

The Introduction sets out the overall purpose of this book is to *flesh out in various ways something of the appeal of Benedictine life. It speaks to people of the extraordinary power of stability – a solid commitment to accompany one another in the search for the way to live honestly and constructively in the presence of God* (p.4). It is *stabilitas* that Williams believes is an essential Benedictine virtue which all Christians and the wider society need to cultivate together with the related *tools of the spiritual craft* (RB 4, 75) with which it is intimately related. This book does not purport to be a *systematic introduction to Benedictine spirituality* but an invitation to look at some current problems taking the Rule as guide.

⁶ *After Virtue*; a study in moral theory Duckworth 2nd ed. 1981 p. 263

Chapter 1 entitled **Shaping Holy Lives** – is concerned with using the right tools of good works in the right way. It contains a key quotation for Williams for understanding “Benedictine holiness” from an essay by Henry Mayr-Harting⁷ that it is: *completely undemonstrative, deeply conventual, and lacking in any system of expertise*. Williams proposes three headings to look at the practices St Benedict commends for nurturing stability: transparency or honesty, peace-making and accountability. In our “throw-away” culture of mass production and consumption, Benedict has a rather different idea of what is being produced in the workshop of his monastery; properly formed human beings capable of being shaped and shaping holy lives.

Chapter 2: The staying power of Benedict opens with a well observed line characterising Benedictine asceticism: *The Rule of St Benedict, in one sense, is all about stability. That is to say, it’s all about staying in the same place, with the same people. The height of self-denial, the extreme of asceticism, is not hair shirts and all-night vigils; it’s standing next to the same person quietly for years on end* (p. 27). Williams looks again at the tools of good works and goes into more explicit detail concerning the three “prosaic values” already touched on in the previous chapter. These he sees as converging in *a new configuration of political ethics (politea)*.⁸ He arrives at the same conclusion, that *the tools of good works are simply tools for becoming human* (p. 42).

Chapter 3 is about Monks and mission from an English perspective. The story of the evangelisation of the European continent being too well known to need retelling, Williams simply wants to highlight *a few aspects of how that mission worked and what its long-term effects were ‘in the hope of opening up some reflection on the missionary dimension of monastic life*. He does this is by unpacking Bede’s account in his Ecclesiastical History of

⁷ *Holiness, Past and Present* ed. Stephen Barton (London & New York, 2003) p. 261

⁸ *Politeia* was also used by the Desert Fathers and mean ‘the monastic life’ and corresponds quite closely to the *conversatio morum* of the Rule.

Augustine's mission and how Augustine's most effective missionary strategy was in essence the imitation of the way of life of the Apostles and of the early Church.

Chapter 4: From solitude to communion: monastic and ecumenical hopes takes up an idea from, Enzo Bianchi, founder of the Bose ecumenical Community, that monastic life is *epicletic*, meaning *that it prays for the Spirit, not only to create diversity in plurality, but to focus life and prayer on the one 'Word' in which we express our growing-up into Christ and our dependence on his indwelling* (p.65). Thus "liberated" for hospitality at a more profound level and because the monastic community stands a little aside *from Christian conventions of hierarchy*, it more straightforwardly represents the people of God – *laos*. This "lay character" makes encounter by monastic communities easier since they are more clearly based on friendship, understanding and sympathy.

Chapter 5: Benedict and the future of Europe rounds off part 1. Here, Williams poses a series of questions about what Benedict, the Patron of Europe, and his Rule have to offer for the future orientation of Europe in the context of contemporary geopolitics. To answer these questions, he sets out three aspects of the Rule *that are of cardinal importance in understanding the crisis of modern Europe* (p. 67): what the Rule has to say about the use and meaning of time, obedience and about participation.

He sees the future relevancy of the Rule not just as strategy for cultural conservation but as a sketch of necessary political virtues (*politeia*). *In fine*, Williams' answer to MacIntyre is that *We need to recover Benedict as that kind of patron for our presently confused continent...his Rule may open some windows in a rather airless political room and create a true workshop for the spirit* (p. 83).

Part 2 consists of two essays of a more formal academic type.

Chapter 6: Reforming monasticism; an early medieval debate is a historical survey in which Williams is interested in how *rule and law led to a new approach to the Rule of St Benedict* (p. 88) This he sees in a shift over time from the Rule being understood as *a supremely useful digest of monastic theology* and

repository of monastic wisdom towards becoming a legal code and of absolute legislative authority subservient to “an ideal”. He charts this drift through a history of monastic reforms starting from the Carolingian period through to the rise of Cluny and finally the appearance of the Cistercians. The novelty of this essay lies in the final assessment of St Bernard, contrasting him with the great Benedictine abbot, Peter the Venerable of Cluny.

He says of St Bernard that he was *not only the last of the fathers; he is one of the first great ideologists of the medieval Western church, and we should not forget this side of him.* However, in Peter the Venerable he finds a representative of “traditional Benedictinism” which carried Gospel and civilisation through the dark ages, whereas St Bernard represents a kind of drift towards secularisation.

Chapter 7. A Benedictine on ‘mysticism’ is a detailed study of Edward Cuthbert Butler’s (1858-1934; Abbot of Downside 1906-22) work *Western Mysticism*’ (1922 & 2nd ed. 1926) set in the context of the largely continental intra-mural neo-scholastic debates about the place and nature of mysticism in the life of the Christian and in the pursuit of Christian perfection in the Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council.

From a close reading of the book, despite its manifest defects in organisation, method and argumentation, Butler nevertheless made a case for a return to *a simple practical mysticism*, a position which was at variance with contemporary continental Catholic thinking focused on Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and conducted in terms of Thomist theology and concepts. Butler also undermined his own position to a certain extent by reintroducing a kind of “double standard” that argued that only some Christians are called to true contemplation. Nevertheless, through advocating a return to an older more “catholic” tradition of mysticism he was an important precursor of later developments; today there is more or less a general consensus that mysticism is not a special higher or elite form of Christian perfection.

DCB