

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 98 News and Notes for our Friends September 1993

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

“My Father is working still and I am working” (Jn 5:17). It was this saying of the Lord that came to Pope Gregory the Great's mind when he heard from St Augustine of the first conversions among the English. It's a saying that sheds light on the more ordinary events of life, too. Genesis tells of God finishing the work of creation on the seventh day, and then resting. But that rest, which was seen as a type of the Jewish Sabbath, prefigures another: the rest that will follow on the resurrection from the dead. And until then, and in view of it, “my Father is working still and I am working”. And work is asked of us too: the “work of God” (Jn 6:29), the “work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

Summer, in fact, is a busy time. This year Scots are commemorating the 900th anniversary of the death of their great Queen, St Margaret. On 27 June, the annual diocesan pilgrimage was held here in her honour, our Metropolitan, Keith O'Brien, presiding. The Archbishop caused a stir, literally and metaphorically, by arriving on our front lawn in a helicopter, complete with a relic of the saint – the first time she had flown? Less than a month later, Abbot Alfred and I were to concelebrate with the Archbishop again, this time in Edinburgh, at the funeral of his much-loved predecessor, Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray, who had died on 19 July. The occasion was memorable: the cathedral packed and overflowing, with laity, religious, priests and bishops, civic dignitaries, the papal pro-nuncio and the Cardinal Archbishops of Westminster and Armagh. Cardinal Gray now lies in a vault beneath the high altar.

Our own church was full again on the 6 August, this time

for a performance of sacred music by an outstanding choir of Polish youth from the ancient city of Poznan. The concert formed part of the Aberdeen International Youth Festival.

Quieter domestic events included a visit by Archimandrite Maximos, a monk of the Great Lavra of Mount Athos. He is living presently in Cambridge. He spoke to us of the Orthodox understanding of monasticism, reminding us that the vision of the risen Christ is the goal of the spiritual life and its asceticism. Late in July, Dr Janet Nelson of King's College, University of London, gave us a stimulating talk on the ancient practice of child oblation: boys being dedicated to the monastic life from childhood by their parents, something St Benedict himself provided for, but which the Church eventually forbade. The monastic commitment can only be a fully personal one. About a month later, Dom Augustine Roberts, Abbot of St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts (near our own Community at Petersham) paid us a brief visit. He and his brethren have given our small American house, and its sister Community, much vital support over the years, and close bonds have been forged. Dom Augustine spoke to us of his own monastery, of aspects of his own experience, and of how the tradition of Christian monastic spirituality provides the surest basis for a community's flourishing. On a different, but not unrelated line, Fr Andrew Mann and Mrs Barbara Simpkin recently came to give us a presentation of the pastoral plan in process within our diocese of Aberdeen. How can we all be brought to a greater awareness of our mission in the Church? This is the question.

On the ecumenical front, Br Mungo and I were happy to attend, on 3 September, the ordination and induction of Mr Ronald Scotland, the new Presbyterian minister of Birnie and Pluscarden. We wish him well in his ministry to the local flock. A few days later, we had the privilege of a visit from a retired Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Dr Selby Taylor. He spoke hopefully of the future of that suffering country.

I mentioned above the passing of Cardinal Gray, who always gave our Community his support and encouragement. We have lost other friends too, among them Earl Cawdor and the

Marquess of Bute. The former was received into the Church shortly before his death, and his funeral was held at the Abbey. The latter, who never forgot his family's connections with the monastery, was a constant and most generous benefactor over many years. We extend our sympathies to the bereaved, their widows especially. Our own Fr Camillus has unexpectedly lost his own brother, while the Community of Kristo Buase, Ghana, has had the shock of the death of its superior, Fr Martin Symons, a monk of Ramsgate who dedicated himself heart and soul to the new foundation. We have just heard, too, of the death of Archie Sullivan, a friend and oblate, who did much hard work here in the pioneering days. May they all enter God's rest.

On a happier note, we celebrated on 14 September the solemn profession of Br Gabriel Potter. Br Gabriel is 34 and from Lancashire, and many friends, clerical and lay, from there and elsewhere, joined his parents and brother for the occasion. We pray he will be faithful to what he has promised, and experience the joy of being upheld by the Lord.

The sound of hammer and drill have been with us all summer as the new West Wing rises before our eyes. The building is already roofed, and the work well up to schedule. Another reminder that "my Father is working still and I am working"? Our hope is that everything we do connects with this.

Yours in the Lord,

+ Fr Hugh OSB, Abbot

CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN ARABIA

We are reading in our refectory an absorbing book, *Desert Storm* by General Sir Peter de la Billière. For the most part Christianity is not welcomed in Arab countries and our forces had to be very careful about this issue. Chaplains could not wear dog-collars or crosses – Mass was only celebrated behind locked doors and

Christmas celebrations had to be severely muted. Nevertheless there is a Christian presence in these countries.

Arabia covers three million km and has a population of about 24 million. It comprises Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Because of its deposits of oil, the region has acquired an immense importance economically and politically. In this land Islam was born, the second most important religion in the world.

The Church prospered here in the first four centuries – that is, before the advent of Islam (622) when it almost completely disappeared. It was only in the last century that it began to find a very limited place once more. In 1840 a Vice-Prefecture was established at Jeddah in the present Saudi Arabia but the following year was transferred to Aden in the Yemen and it was confided to the care of the Servites until 1851 when it was attached to the Vicariate Apostolic of Gallas in Ethiopia under the future Cardinal Gulielmo Massaia, a Capuchin. Italian and French friars worked on the mission. In 1889 the Prefecture of Aden became the Vicariate Apostolic of Arabia, comprising the whole peninsula of Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt with Mgr Louis de Gonzague Lassère, a Capuchin, as Vicar-Apostolic. Today the Vicariate covers the whole of Arabia with the exception of Kuwait and friars from Italy, India, USA, the Philippines etc are to be found there.

All missionary work is forbidden. The life is very hard, there is some risk to life and always to health in a torrid climate. They are separated from one another by huge distances. The population can be aggressive. Their work is confined to the care of foreign residents, business people and oil workers. There are about 500,000 Catholics in the Vicariate. There are schools, dispensaries and social works which are much appreciated.

With the discovery of “black gold” in the Gulf countries there has been a big influx of foreign workers, technicians etc and so the friars have multiplied their presence. The first church in the Gulf was built in Bahrain in 1939 and since then many other posts have been opened and churches built.

YEMEN

Aden: Church 1845, Hodeida 1882
Bishop's House 1892 Ta'izz 1968
San'a 1972

BAHRAIN

Manama 1939

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Abu Dhabi 1967 Sharjah 1974
Al-Ain 1968 Fujayrah 1991

QATAR

No church but a priest in residence since 1970.

SULTANATE OF OMAN

Ruwi 1960	Salalah 1981
Ghala 1987	Sohar church began 1992

SAUDI ARABIA

Jeddah – Capuchin presence from 1977 to 1987 when they were expelled.

Dhahran (Camp of Aramco) – presence since 1951. Riyadh – presence 1970 -1985 when expelled.

The American friars provide the presence in this difficult country.

There are 18 Capuchins from Italy, USA, India, the Philippines and the Lebanon. The liturgical language is generally English – sometimes Arabic and French. Salesians from India and six diocesan priests are also working there, as well as Religious in schools and charitable works. Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity perform a magnificent apostolic work. The present Vicar Apostolic is Mgr C. Grimidi OFM Cap.

Arabia is a spiritual as well as a physical desert and for the most part those who live there can only be a "Christian presence". They must water the arid ground with prayers and tears so that one

day others may reap the harvest.

D A S

ANALECTA CARTUSIANA

This latest batch of *The Evolution of the Carthusian Statutes* (Analecta Cartusiana 99, Vols 1220, Salzburg 1992-3) brings us down to our own day with a reprint of the 1991 *Statuta Ordinis Cartusienensis*. Unlike their predecessors these are printed with a parallel French translation of the Latin text, which makes them considerably more accessible to those who wish to study at first hand the monastic ideals, the daily organisation and liturgical round of a contemporary Charterhouse.

The 1991 text takes its place in a long line of statutes (1259, 1368, 1509, 1681, 1926, 1932, 1969, 1971-3 – all reproduced in this series) which have been derived from the original codification of laws and regulations drawn up by Guigo, fifth Prior of La Grande Chartreuse, c1127.

St Bruno had founded La Grande Chartreuse, which was to become the mother-house of the Carthusian order, in 1084 and the life established there was a conscious return to the solitary life lived in ‘sketes’ of the early Egyptian and Palestinian monastic fathers. The original community numbered only six but it grew and, early in the twelfth century, began to make foundations elsewhere. It was the danger of losing the spirit and customs of St Bruno and his first companions which led three of the dependent priors and Bishop Hugh of Grenoble to request Guigo to codify the living tradition in a written document. The statutes are thus a combination of rule and customary; a statement of general principles but also a concrete expression of how these principles should be applied. They are of spiritual value to Benedictines too in that they articulate great monastic themes which are of concern to us all: the search for God in solitude and silence; fidelity to our cell and calling; a life of obedience and simplicity.

The 1991 Statutes reprint Guigo’s eulogy of the solitary

life (chap 2., cf. *Const. Gui.* chap 80) and consider his words as 'sparks' flying out from a soul filled with the Holy Spirit: sparks capable of being rekindled in the hearts of each successive generation.

This autumn may well mark the 800th anniversary of the foundation of Val-des-Choux, the Burgundian mother-house of Pluscarden from 1230 1454. The legend has it that Viard, a Carthusian monk of Lugny, withdrew into the forest of Villiers-le-Duc, near Chatillon-sur-Seine, in search of a greater solitude. He was found there by Eudes III, Duke of Burgundy, who vowed to build him a monastery if he returned victorious from a military expedition. As Eudes III became Duke in 1193, and the first recorded gift to the monastery was made in 1195, these presumably mark the earliest and latest dates for the foundation.

18th century French antiquaries have preserved the words of an old inscription in the Priory church at Val-des-Choux which recorded that on the 2nd November 1293 “introivit frater Wiardus in chorum Vallis Caulium” – the year is evidently wrong but it is tempting to read 1293 as a slip for 1193. Viard brought some of his Carthusian heritage with him and I hope to write something about the influence of the *Consuetudines Guigonis* (Vol 1. in Dr Hogg's series) on the *Ordinale Conventus Vallis Caulium*, which governed life at Pluscarden during its first two centuries, for a future issue.

Two more volumes in the series *Spiritualitat Heute and Gestern* (Anal. Cart. 35:16 &17) have appeared. Vol. 16 contains a facsimile of a Syon Abbey MS brought back from their Portuguese exile. It is an English translation of a work by the Carthusian Antonio de Molina made in 1707 by John Thorpe, priest of the English College in Lisbon, given the title “A Treatise containing some Rules and some important Advise, how to say the Divine Office with due Attention and Devotion”. It is written in a clear cursive hand but unfortunately the reproduction is, in places, so faint as to be almost indecipherable.

Vol 17, besides a reprint of a 1915 work on 15th century mystical theology by E. Van Steenberghe (in French), contains an

original article by Dr Hogg of great interest to Scottish Catholics: “St John Ogilvie: an Interim Portrait” (pp 222 -258). It outlines the present position of the historical questions and controversies, and gives a critical assessment of existing biographies suggesting lines for further research.

Also received *The Chartae of the Carthusian General Chapter*, Part 4, (1475-1487) Anal. Cart. 100:12:2. All volumes are available from the Editor: Dr James Hogg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, A - 5020 SALZBURG, Austria.

DAF

HOMILY FOR 900TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST MARGARET Given by Fr Abbot at the Diocesan Pilgrimage in honour of St Margaret, 27 June 1993

St Margaret had a great love of the Bible: She had studied it from childhood. She knew it well. She enjoyed discussing it with the Scripture scholars of her day. And, as we might expect, she had her favourite passages and texts. Fortunately, too, we are not completely unaware of what they were. One of them was this, from the Letter of James, Chapter 4, v.14: “What is [our] life? For [we] are a mist (a breath) that appears for a little while, and then vanishes.” Forty-seven years in Margaret’s case: a breath, a mist, smoke – vanishing, quenched. Yet 900 years later, this breath that vanished is being venerated by all of us, by very many Scotsmen and women, by many who are not Scots, by Hungarians and Italians, and even by the odd Englishman such as myself. “What is [our] life?” What was this life? Breath that vanishes? Yes, but also a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”. Cardinal Newman once wrote, “A few highly-endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come.” He was thinking of, among others, St Athanasius. He could have been thinking of St Margaret. Certainly it is not a wild exaggeration to put Margaret in such a category.

“Mist, breath, that vanishes”; certainly, but “rescuing the world”, even “for centuries to come”.

Let me simply recall her story. It’s a moving one. Margaret was a child of exile, just as she died in exile. Her Saxon father and uncle, as small boys, had been put on board ship in England to be sent to Sweden to be murdered. Canute the Dane had defeated and killed their father in battle (Edmund Ironside), but he thought it impolitic to kill the heir to the throne in the country they belonged to. Fortunately, the King of Sweden had scruples too, and passed the boys on to another king, St Stephen of Hungary. And in Hungary they grew up. Prince Edward married Agatha, a Hungarian princess, and had three children by her. Margaret was the second, born in 1046/7: a child of exile.

When she was nine, though, her father decided to return to England. There was an English king again, Edward the Confessor. Almost immediately they reached home, Margaret’s father died. The Confessor became a second father to her. She was an intelligent girl, and spent much time studying. All went well till 1066 and all that. Edward died, Harold succeeded, and the Normans came. Margaret’s brother had a claim to the throne, and, after the battle of Hastings, some Saxons proclaimed him King. But “what is our life? ... a mist that appears for a little while”. William conquered, and the family took to travelling again. Probably they meant to go back to Hungary. Anyway, they took to the sea, and a wind took them the other way. It took them north – a breath of wind. They landed at Wearmouth where Malcolm, King of Scots, was raiding. They asked if they could take refuge in Scotland. They could, and they sailed further north, into the Firth of Forth, landing, so tradition has it, on the north shore at what is now St Margaret’s Hope, and so making their way to the Palace at Dunfermline.

Malcolm was a widower, and he was rather taken with this half-English, half-Hungarian twenty-two year old princess. He has been called a “fiery Celtic ruffian”, but one must admire his judgement in this instance. He asked for Margaret’s hand. She

didn't exactly grab it. Probably she wanted to be a nun; her sister became one anyway. But he pressed his suit, and conquered. (One wonders if it was the last time!) And so she became Malcolm's wife and Queen of Scots, and began the work of her life – in exile, be it noted.

“What is our life? ... A mist, a breath, that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” But “a few highly endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come”. Margaret rescued Scotland for two centuries at least. In many ways, the happiest years of Scotland's history were the years when Margaret's children, and their children, sat on the throne: She raised a family – eight in all, six boys, two girls – and that family raised the nation. The Holy Father has often said that the future of humanity passes by way of the family. And Margaret's family is a proof of it. The future of Scotland passed by way of that one family.

But Margaret didn't just civilise her husband and children. She was one of those people who somehow lift everything they touch, and touch practically everything. And this wasn't just because of being Queen. It was because she had felt the touch of God herself, and been lifted by it. And so she gave what she had been given. There's nothing else we can give. She had felt the goodness of the Lord, and gave it out to everyone...

To be continued

THE WEST WING

Work on the West Wing goes on apace, and as the stone covers the completed brickwork, the attractive final product emerges. The timberwork of the roof is also complete, and the shape and scale of the building are now clear. Inside, much remains to be done, and is being done, as joiners, electricians and plumbers struggle amid the racket of power drills, saws and nail-guns – at times it sounds like the show-down at the O.K. Corral! We are rather hoping the building may be in use for Lenten retreatants.

Dr Mary Berry helped our funds by leading a very

successful Gregorian Chant weekend here in June.

We are pleased to announce that the West Wing has received a Glenfiddich Living Scotland Award, which besides being a useful £1500, is a very tangible sign of the local support which means so much to us, and confers additional prestige on our fund-raising efforts. The money will be used to pay for the West Wing's double front doors.

“Our Purpose & Method”

Abbot Aelred's little book of this name has been reprinted once more by the Sisters at Petersham, and so is available again. It is, if you like, the monastic manifesto of Abbot Aelred and his Community at Caldey, and as their spiritual descendants, it is ours too. It is available from the Abbey Shop.