

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Easter has come and gone, and now summer is coming in currently a rather wet one. One sees moist, bedraggled monks toiling among the vegetables...

After Pentecost, we feasted on four stimulating lectures by Fr Ian Ker, the leading Newman scholar. The lectures were devoted to *Newman and the Church of the new Millennium*. In a sense, they were answering the question, what would Newman make of the 2nd Vatican Council and all that has happened since – both positive and negative? One was made aware, once again, of how prescient Newman was, how rooted in the heart of the Church, how reliable a guide still.

At present, we look forward to the diocesan pilgrimage on the last Sunday of June, and beyond that to the Provincial Chapter of the English Province of our Congregation. That will be in August, and is a gathering of the Superiors and Delegates of our various houses, of which more are outside England than within.

In May I was able to visit our community at Petersham: small in number (7), but sturdy in spirit. They, and the nuns with whom they celebrate the liturgy, have recently adopted the Benedictine Rule's practice of 12 psalms at Vigils. We do this also at Pluscarden. It sounds a great deal, especially when one adds the "bits and pieces" (Invitatory, Hymn, Readings & Responses). But, as I realised afresh in America, it gives a unique substance and expanse to the day's first moment of prayer. St Benedict too, like Newman in his different sphere, remains a good guide...

On his feast, 11 July, I hope to be witnessing the simple

professions of two Ghanaians at our monastery of Kristo Buase. It will be my first visit to Africa, and an opportunity to see the valiant Fr Ambrose of Pluscarden. He is currently Novice Master of the young community which will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in early August. Please pray for them, as for all who serve under the Rule of St Benedict and be assured of our prayers too.

Yours in Christ,

+ Fr Hugh O.S.B. Abbot

THE EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

We have chosen for our cover a picture of St Benedict Patron of Europe. In the Benedictine Calendar we have two feasts of St Benedict. That on March 21 is the day of his death and birthday in heaven, c.543. His other feast is on July 11 and originally commemorated the Translation of his relics from Monte Cassino to the Abbey of Fleury in France in the seventh century. We now honour him, in Europe at least, as *Patron of Europe*. Patrick O'Donovan wrote of him: "If one wanted to find a person who most shaped its glory – it would not be Caesar or the Emperor Charles V or Napoleon or Metternich or the Duke of Wellington, they presided over its agonies. The man under God who did most for its foundation was Benedict of Nursia." Today we see the countries of Europe growing closer together and so we have an article about Robert Schumann who might be called the architect of European Union and was inspired by St Benedict.

Hilaire Belloc said "Europe is the Faith, and the Faith is Europe", but that is not true. The Faith is Catholic and is to be found in every continent and so too are the sons and daughters of St Benedict. The spread of the monasteries across Europe, in what have been called "The Benedictine Centuries", is being repeated today in the Third World. Since the Second Vatican Council some 200 monasteries have been founded in Africa, Asia and South

America. So we give some notes about the latest of these. The German Congregation of St Ottilien is specifically dedicated to work in the mission fields and has more than 1,000 monks in 17 monasteries and 15 dependent houses, while their 1395 missionary nuns are to be found in more than 100 monasteries.

Our own Subiaco Congregation of 1287 monks and more than 60 monasteries is found on every continent. Our French Province has been foremost in this apostolate. It has founded no less than two whole Provinces: in Vietnam and West Africa with the first African Abbots. Nor should we forget our nuns who have gone out to Africa and India with their brethren as did the Anglo-Saxon nuns with St Boniface. One of these nuns, Abbess Patricia Alufoso of Nigeria has founded a monastery of 135 nuns – single handed. On page 13 you can read about her second foundation.

If we have found something good – whether it be the Faith or monastic life – we must share it with others. Pope Pius XI said “if a parish or a religious house ceases to be missionary minded, it stagnates and dies.” On the other hand, whatever little we can do – God is never outdone in generosity. On 3 July two of our African novices will make their simple profession at Kristo Buase in Ghana and Abbot Hugh will be with them – and Fr Ambrose, their novice master – on that great day. Pray for them.

Your Editor

Dom Alfred

PLUSCARDEN BUILDING PLANS

The North Cloister

People often ask, “What are you going to build next?” and the reply is usually “Nothing at present.” However, as the title of this informative piece betrays, that is no longer the case.

We plan to replace the existing temporary north wing of

the Cloister, built of concrete blocks, roofed with corrugated iron and fitted with steel-framed windows, with a stone built slate-roofed structure like the restored east and south cloisters.

We intend that this cloister will house four cells for monks, a bit more comfortable and a lot more accessible than the usual run of our accommodation. They will have wash-basins with hot and cold, be well-insulated, double-glazed and have an independent central heating system. The idea is that these cells will be destined for those for whom the ground floor is better for answering the door, or because of age, infirmity or one of the other states which St Benedict says should call forth our “sympathetic consideration”.

There will be a shower and a WC nearby, and one window will light up the north-east corner of the cloister. We have received Planning Permission for the work, and hope that cutting stone can begin in the summer. That will be a job in itself, and only then will construction begin. We hope to complete the work in the year 2000, just when will depend on weather and other imponderables.

The cost of this work will be about £125,000. Partly because it is cheaper and simpler, we have planning permission for the West Cloister, too, but would not build that straight away, for three reasons: we probably wouldn’t be able to afford it; it would be a bit too much disruption, following immediately and time would be needed to cut the stone.

Those “temporary” cloisters have lasted a long time. We were given the timber for their roofs by the Earl of Moray, at a time when post-war restrictions made such materials difficult to get. His gift has given good service, and sheltered many monks and retreatants from the elements over the years. May the new buildings serve as well!

SOUTH!

with apologies to Shackleton

Living in the world’s northernmost Benedictine Abbey, and with plenty (apart from a vow of stability and the well-grounded doubts

of one's superiors) to keep one at home, it is not often that I get south of Dallas, never mind south of the border, yet this year, before May was well begun, I'd already been thrice to the deep south, even if not down Mexico way.

My third trip, unlike the first two, was not made in wintry weather and on business, but in sunshine and with pleasure, and took me to our Sisters at Minster, on the Isle of Thanet in Kent. There they were blessing ("not *installing* – you do that to machines") their newly-elected Prioress, Mother Nikola Proksch, with a suitable gathering of friends in support.

I flew down with Fr Abbot to Gatwick (cheaper than the train!), where our paths diverged, his to the west, mine to the east, and after a train journey almost twice as long as the flight, with several changes, I reached Minster, after sharing a compartment with the Bishop of Dallas's wife and family, who, needless to say, got out at Canterbury.

Minster is a small village, and the monastery less than five minutes' walk from the train. In its origins it considerably antedates Pluscarden, incorporating Roman brick in its Saxon structure. It is on the edge of the village in about twenty acres of lovingly-kept land. The gardens occupy only a small part of this, for the Sisters have very productive fruit and vegetable gardens, and a small farm, and manage to supply most of their own and their guests' needs from the produce.

They are very responsible in their attitude to their land and stock, and do everything organically. They have hens (a number of very proud cocks were strutting around with their harems), ducks (whose eggs appeared with salad for supper) goats both dairy and fibre (you may have seen and tried their "knit-kits", a supply of their goats' mohair wool and a pattern, to turn into a jersey or whatever, which we sold in our shop), as well as various sheep. The goats' milk they drink ("It's not everyone's tipples," I was warned, but after half-a-century I'm quite happy with it), and the ram lambs and billy kids go into the freezer, to reappear later – not seethed in their mothers' milk.

Having arrived on Thursday, I spent a fair bit of Friday with relatives in Ramsgate, (where a tunnel is being driven to the harbour, with the assistance of huge machines which, true to Walter Mitty, were going “gloppeda-gloppeda”) and visiting an aunt who is 101, and rejoices in the full possession of all her faculties. Then, as throughout my stay, the weather was perfect, with sun and a cloudless blue sky.

At Minster, as well as the main monastic range, their buildings consist of a guesthouse for their retreatants, a large detached wooden building housing a shop, kitchenette and large meeting room, plus their church, modelled on a Saxon church. They also have their stables, a workshop area organised on the lines of a cross between our Cellarer’s office and Br Meinrad’s workshop, and an extensive range of farm outbuildings.

The church is a very successful building, light and bright, dignified, noble and simple, consisting of a single aisle, at one end is the choir and sanctuary, with altar in the middle, lit by large plain lancets in the north-facing end wall, while the congregation occupies the other half. At the back is a small gallery, spanning sacristy, entrance porch and confessional beneath. Externally the walls are flint, with a steeply-pitched slate roof, complete with a little belfry. The side windows are small but adequate.

There are some very pleasant tapestries depicting the sainted Anglo-Saxon forebears of the present community, and there is a large bronze statue of Our Lady and her Child, a cast of the sculpture of Our Lady of Fifth Avenue. This was immediately recognisable as the work of Sister Concordia, Mother Nikola’s predecessor in office. That weekend she finished her latest sculpture, a low relief of St Cuthbert, about three feet high, complete with otters drying or warming his feet, as legend relates they did after one of his habitual penitential immersions in the sea. In this little church the Sisters sing their Office, partly in Latin, mostly in English. Their Gregorian chants are partly from the German tradition, and so full of traps for the unwary, who after a score of years think they know everything by heart... They sing

prayerfully and well, accompanied by one of the zithers made by our brethren at En Calcat. At an early stage I was dragooned into singing with them, it reminded me of one of the Caldey Carols: “And ass his voice is blending, the burden for to bear.”

On the morning of the blessing I was made to feel very much at home, as a minor crisis had manifested itself in the plumbing arrangements, my help was diffidently but confidently requested, and after successfully dealing with this, my attention was transferred to a couple of ball-cocks where brawn rather than brain was required.

Next I was informed that I would be singing an Ethiopian Orthodox Kyrie at the Mass, and was summoned to intensive tuition, which I needed – music with five lines and round notes is even less intelligible to me than that with four lines and square notes. This was interspersed with furniture-moving, preparing the church for a larger congregation and for refreshments on the lawn afterwards.

Lunch was *alfresco*, on the lawn, and as a special treat was fish and chips, which arrived wrapped in paper. Some used fingers and others cutlery in consuming this – the ice creams which followed were in cornets. Mother Nikola’s family are pretty cosmopolitan, and like Sister Aelred’s mother, found nothing untoward in this. By this time Abbots Aldhelm and Francis from Prinknash, Mother Ignatius from Fernham, Abbess Mary John from West Mailing and Sister Kate Coombs had also joined us, so there was quite a merry throng.

For the ceremony itself came a contingent from Ramsgate, led by Abbot Laurence, who presided over the liturgy, with Abbot Gilbert and full supporting cast. The representation of the English Province was completed, at least for the British houses, by the presence of Fr Cuthbert from Farnborough. Although limited by the size of the church, there was a wide ecumenical representation, and Mother Nikola’s parents, two of her brothers and sister had come from Germany. For once in my life I was not last on the scene, as some of the more important guests had

mistimed their arrival by a large margin. The Liturgy was followed by refreshments, clearing up and furniture moving, Office and eventually by bed.

Next day was Sunday; unbeknownst to me the timetable was different, and when I rose for Matins I found the church empty and no one afoot. It was a pleasant morning, and so I went for a walk in the fields, along the network of public footpaths and rights of way which characterise the area. I was struck by the relative absence of wildlife, feathered and furred. In the Minster marshes there were some birds, but nothing like Pluscarden, and I saw no quadrupeds at all. Is this a function of industrial farming? I do not know, but it cannot be blamed merely on a denser population, and there is certainly plenty of habitat available for wildlife. There are plenty of birds around the monastery, where I heard my first cuckoo of 1999.

Later we had Mass, a polyglot affair, with Latin, Spanish, Italian and Dutch being sung, as well as some English, the international element provided by Mother Nikola's family – her brother Michael is a parish priest in northern Holland, and involved, like his family, in work to help the Church in Mexico.

My journey home was refreshed by a packet of sandwiches in which quantity and quality vied, and Sisterly love and skill contrasted with the usual offerings one receives from brethren everywhere! My travels continued in the same sun which had bathed the entire weekend, and since it was a bank holiday the trains and stations were very quiet, even to the extent that passengers were making use of the shining hours to improve their tans, stripping off and lying on the platforms to enjoy the weather. The sun still shone in Inverness, but no one lay about the airport, worshipping Sol – a good deal more than distance separates us from the Southern Region!

DGC

A CONCERT DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 5th August at 7.30 p.m.

It is some years since the Aberdeen International Youth Festival were here last, but this year they return, in the persons of the Regensburger Domspatzen, the Boys' Choir of Regensburg Cathedral, who have offered to sing for us at 7.30 p.m. on Thursday 5th August 1999. They are about fifty in number, and if past form is anything to go by, should be outstanding. Their name means the "Cathedral Sparrows" and they were founded over a thousand years ago, in 975 A.D., by St Wolfgang. Their repertoire covers the whole range of European music, and their travels have spanned the globe, but their main responsibility is the provision of the Cathedral's liturgical music, which won the praise of Pius XII, Paul VI and John Paul II, so we are clearly in for something rather special.

The concert is in aid of "Hospice in Moray.

NEW MONASTIC FOUNDATIONS

The latest *AIM Bulletin* gives news of a number of new foundations:

A AFRICA

1 BENIN at Hekanme. The monks were formerly at Zagnando but were forced to leave in 1989 and exiled to Koubri.

2 NAMIBIA at Waldfrieden, founded by St Ottilien monks from the Abbey of Inkamana.

B LATIN AMERICA

3 BRAZIL at São Sebastao do Alto founded from Belo Horizonte.

C ASIA & OTHERS

4 INDIA The Benedictine Sisters of St Lioba have been in India since 1975 and have eleven houses, four of these celebrate the liturgy in the Syro-Malabarese rite. The new houses are Lalipur (founded in 1996), Meghanagar and Kengeri (both in 1997).

5 PUNALUR founded by the Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. The foundress is Mother Edeltrud Weist, former Prioress General.

6 KURISUMALA founded by Abbot Francis Mahieu of Scourmont/ Caldey in the Syro-Malankara rite. It has now been affiliated with the Cistercians. Fr Bede Griffiths spent ten years with this community.

7 LEBANON The Cistercian Abbey of Latroun, Holy Land has founded Sounich, with its liturgy in the Maronite rite.

8 PHILIPPINES Nuns of the community of Bastia Umbra in Italy have made a foundation at Linamon

D EUROPE

9 LITHUANIA The Abbey of Solesmes now has a simple Priory at Palendriai. The liturgy is in Latin.

10 POLAND The Camaldolese monks who have been in Poland for 50 years established in 1997 a new monastery at Tyszowce. The new monastery will eventually also have several hermitages.

New foundations are also being prepared for Burma, India, Mexico, Norway, Tunisia and Ecuador.

DAS

PLUSCARDEN'S RIGHT OF SANCTUARY

When we returned to Pluscarden fifty years ago, the Catholic Truth Society published a pamphlet *Pluscarden Priory – a Benedictine Restoration* by the Abbot of Prinknash with historical notes by Archdale A. King, Obl OSB, price 3d. In these notes it is recorded that in 1263 “Pluscarden received the right of Sanctuary from Urban IV.” He said, “they may receive to conversion those fleeing from the secular power.” There were some 22 places in England

which enjoyed this right. I have found no records for Scotland. Henry VIII reduced the number in England.

A person accused of felony (but not of treason or sacrilege) might fly for safeguard of his life to sanctuary. Canon law allowed the protection of those guilty of serious crimes of violence for a limited time in order that some compensation might be made and to check vengeance. In some places there was a stone seat near the altar, called the *frith stool* or *peace stool*. There is one at Hexham; or it might be a knocker, as at Durham. The fugitive had to make confession of his crime to one of the priests, surrendered his arms, put on a black gown with a cross on the left shoulder. Within forty days, clothed in sackcloth, he had to go before the coroner, confess his felony and take an oath of abjuration of the realm, undertaking to quit the Kingdom and not to return without the King's leave.

H. V. Morton in *The Call of England* says that at Beverley Minster, in 60 years, 186 murderers, 280 debtors, 54 thieves and over 500 other criminals came clamouring at the great sanctuary knocker as if all the devils of hell were after them, as no doubt they were. Some came from as far away as London. There is no record of what happened at Pluscarden but King James VI & I abolished the rite of sanctuary everywhere in the Kingdom. But for the repentant sinner, Pluscarden is still a place where one may find peace.

DAS

ROBERT SCHUMANN: BENEDICTINE STATESMAN

Men and women who see visions are usually artists, poets or musicians. More rarely, statesmen. Such a one was Robert Schumann, the French politician whose vision was the European Union. His cause for beatification has been introduced by the Bishop of Metz.

Schumann was born in Luxembourg. His father came from

Lorraine and throughout his life he considered himself a man of Lorraine. He was the architect of the European Community, which during half a century has worked for peace and reconciliation between France and Germany.

Born on 29 June 1886, Robert Schumann gained his Baccalaureate at Metz in 1904, studied law in Bonn, Berlin, Munich and Strasbourg where he became a Doctor of Law.

In 1912 he returned to Metz. The Bishop, Mgr Benzylér OSB, invited him to organise the 60th German Katholikentag, a task he acquitted with great success. Willibrord Benzler was until 1912 Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach restored in 1896 and where Schumann frequently stayed for retreats when a student. He often considered becoming a Benedictine monk but his friends persuaded him that his true vocation lay elsewhere.

Emigrating from Luxembourg to Metz, he was obliged to adopt German nationality because of the victory of Prussia over France; Bismarck had annexed Alsace and Lorraine in 1871. After the First World War at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 these two provinces were returned to France. Schumann then became a French citizen. The same year he stood as a candidate for Lorraine in the elections of the National French Assembly as a Christian Democrat. He was elected and re-elected in following years. Following the defeat of France in 1940 he was Secretary of State for Refugees. He refused to collaborate with the new regime, was arrested by the Gestapo and interned at Neustadt in the Rhine Palatinate. He escaped and found refuge in the Benedictine Abbey of Ligugé near Poitiers, and then with the Trappists in the Massif Central and finally with the Benedictines again at En Calcat in the south of France.

In 1946 he returned to Metz again for the legislative election, became Minister of Finance, President of the Council of Ministers (1947-48), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1948-55). It was in the last post that he acquired historic importance, for he was the initiator of the foundation of the European Community. The idea came from Jean Monnet. The German Secretary of State, Walter

Hallestien, helped, as did Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gaspari of Italy.

Many other things will be made known about him, his spiritual life, his family origins, the activities of his political adversaries and the innumerable temptations he resisted with the force worthy of a saint, this Christian of a Benedictine spirit.

DAS

**MONASTERIES OF THE
SUBIACO CONGREGATION**
No 75 Benedictine Nuns of the Monastery of
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Ozumulo, Nigeria

Founded in 1978 by Cardinal Francis Arinze, the Monastery has a community of more than 135 nuns twenty years later and has become the first African Abbey of nuns. Abbess Patricia Alufuo began a new monastery in January 1998 in another diocese and though the buildings are not yet complete, for lack of funds, thirty nuns were able to begin living there this year. It will eventually have a community of 40. There is no shortage of vocations. Last September thirteen nuns made their Solemn Profession.

Our picture shows a nun working at the altar bread machine, given by the German organisations *Missio* and *Kirche in Not*, which provides a small income but there is no central electricity supply and it is too expensive to operate their little 12.5 kW generator which cannot carry the load of the three machines at the same time. In addition to these two monasteries of nuns which are affiliated to our Congregation, there is a monastery of Benedictine monks in Nigeria of Ewu in the Diocese of Benin founded from Glenstal Abbey in Ireland.