

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pluscarden Benedictines</b> <b>No. 92 News and Notes for our Friends December 1991</b></p>
--

## **FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

In September 1966 our General Chapter met in the Abbey of Subiaco and it was then that Pluscarden was given the status of a Conventual Priory. It was to be no longer a dependent house of Prinknash, but had its own Conventual Chapter, its own noviciate and the right to elect a Conventual Prior. In his letter to us at Prinknash on 19th September Abbot Dyfrig reported that he "had been given independence by acclamation" As a result of this, the English Province had been re-formed since there were now three *sui iuris* monasteries. Since 1960 we had been a Pro-Province. Today we have five autonomous monasteries, three dependent houses and three affiliated monasteries of nuns.

Abbot Dyfrig returned from Rome to Prinknash on 10.11 October. On 16th November, the feast of St Dyfrig, Fr Abbot received the Solemn Profession of ten of the Brothers and gave them the Cowl. The following day Fr Abbot left for Scotland. On the 21st it was the turn of the five Pluscarden Brothers to be Solemnly Professed, thus giving them a Chapter vote to elect a Superior. So the Pluscarden Chapter met for the first time to elect a Prior and the lot fell upon me. Such an election has to be approved by the Abbot President in Rome and in those days there was no FAX. The confirmation came through on 5th December. From 10th to 12th December the Provincial Chapter met at Prinknash and immediately afterwards, I left on the night train for Aberdeen with Abbot Dyfrig, arriving on Wednesday 14th December, being met there by Fr Maurus and Dr Macfarlane. After Mass at Queen's Cross Convent, we called on Bishop Michael Foylan, who had invited us for lunch, then drove over the snow-covered roads to

Elgin, arriving at the monastery as the bells were ringing for Vespers. Abbot Dyfrig lost no time in installing me in the Chapterhouse and then, before Vespers, in my stall in Choir.

It is these significant events in the life of the Community that we have been recalling in the past weeks. A threefold silver thread: the Silver Jubilee of the Solemn Profession of Brs Andrew, Bernard and Mungo: the Silver Jubilee of the Monastery as an independent house and the Silver Jubilee of the Superior. We kept these quite simply with a Mass in thanksgiving, a festive dinner and a recreation in the evening. We did so with deep gratitude to God for the blessings of the last twenty-five years.

Two members of the community have celebrated their eightieth birthdays in recent months: Fr Maurus on 30th August, and Br John on 15th October. Fr Maurus was Prior and Novice Master for a number of years. He is still the Master of Oblates. Br John was Sacristan and also what St Benedict calls “the wise old man who answers the door”.

On 140 October the Abbot Primate, who was over from Rome visiting monasteries in England, was at Fernham Priory to bless the new retreat house which the nuns have built in their grounds. It is a most attractive Scandinavian log cabin and I recommend it.

A week later the monastic Union met at Hawkstone Hall. The Abbot Primate was there with the thirty five Abbots and Abbesses, Priors and Prioresses as well as some laymen who gave us the conferences. It was an excellent meeting. The Abbot Primate told me he intends to visit the monasteries in Scotland next June. Pluscarden will look forward to this occasion.

Ten years ago we published in this bulletin some notes on Queen Joanna, the wife of King Alexander II, the founder of Pluscarden in 1230. She was the daughter of King John of England and sister of Henry II. While on a visit to England she died on 5th March 1238, and was buried in the church of the Cistercian nuns at Tarrant Crawford in Dorset of which she was the joint foundress with Bishop Richard Poore of Salisbury. I had been in contact with Mrs Joan Aborrow who lives in Dorset who had sent me

photographs of Tarrant Crawford. This summer she came up to Pluscarden with a little book she has compiled, comprising some thirty photographs and several pages of hand-written text.

We are very grateful for this. At the suppression of the monasteries the buildings and Abbey Church at Tarrant Crawford were destroyed and the Queen's tomb and that of Bishop Poore were moved to the village Church where tradition says they are buried on either side of the altar. But the beautiful gilded effigy which was once part of the tomb has been lost. Perhaps the site will one day be excavated.

As I conclude this letter, the Benedictine Year Book for 1992 has just arrived and we have copies available. There is a slight increase in price, but well worth it for the 300 pages and many illustrations: statistics of Benedictine houses throughout the world as well as news and information concerning some 40 of the English speaking houses of monks and nuns. The Cistercians are also included as well as the Anglican houses. Perhaps this issue is unique in recording the election of no less than five new abbots, Portsmouth (U.S.), Downside, Fort Augustus, Prinknash and Ealing, and the Abbess of Malling.

At the end of another year I thank you for your continued support. May the Christmas Season and the New Year bring you all the blessings you need. With the prayers of all the Community,

Yours devotedly,

+D. Alfred, Abbot

## REFECTORY AND CHOIR

Monastic life in common revolves about two poles, the Choir and the Refectory. This statement may seem disedifying, raising satisfaction of the belly's needs to the divine level, and simultaneously reducing Mass and Office from celestial conversation to a matter of the earth earthly. Such a reaction would be quite misplaced, as, one hopes, will appear from what follows.

Firstly, monastic life, following and forming Christian tradition, makes no opposition between body and soul: *caro salutis est cardo*, salvation revolves around the flesh, and this is as true of us as of Christ's Incarnation of which it was first said, we are body and soul, temples of the Holy Spirit, and if the resurrection of the body is so central to our faith, we cannot downgrade it. So nourishment of the body and soul go in tandem.

This equivalence of Choir and Refectory comes out in many ways, some so minor that they may very easily be overlooked. We sit in the same community order in both places. When we process from Refectory into Choir, we do not take holy water as we enter the church – why not? Because there is a continuity, an identity, between the two, despite the distance that separates them. Lateness at both is dealt with in the same chapter of St Benedict's Rule, “On those who come late to *Office or to Meals*”, chapter 43, and in the same terms and same way. “Or to Meals” is a personal addition by St Benedict, showing how he put both on the same level. Readers and Servers are both blessed in Choir. In both places, we are fed corporally and spiritually. In Choir, the tangible Bread and Wine we consume is become Christ's Body and Blood, but we receive it in the context of a Sacrifice – which usually implies communion, eating part of what is sacrificed, consuming it, a gift of God to man, returned by man to God, and shared as a sign of communion. This is true whether the victim be the Lamb or a lamb.

The Liturgy affects our feeding habits more directly, too. We commonly talk of feasts, but it is only in places like Pluscarden that the meaning becomes clear, for on solemn feasts,

there is a festal quality to both meals and liturgy. In St Benedict's Rule, the meal-times are determined by the liturgical seasons.

The Mass is the Last Supper, a meal eaten by Christ's disciples, the Apostles, with Him there in the midst. Not surprisingly, it is a favourite subject for depiction on the walls of refectories. In both Choir and refectory there is *diakonia*, ministry by those serving the brethren at tables, in the one, priests and deacons at the Lord's Supper, at the other, simply serving at tables the guests and brethren.

To be invited to share a meal with someone is, especially in Biblical thought, a sign of special favour, of communion, and St Benedict reminds us that, in our guests, we receive Christ, whom we welcome in another way in Choir.

Conversely, exclusion from community life, excommunication, is a sign of diminished or broken fellowship, applicable to both refectory and choir, a sort of reverse sacrament, an outward sign of inward disgrace, by which the inward reality of his condition is made clear to the offender by the external exclusion from fraternal communion, from refectory for lesser offences, from choir for serious offences.

God's Providence is shown in feeding us with the Eucharist, as also in feeding us with corporal fare, for which we really rely on him, for we can neither earn enough to keep ourselves, nor control the conditions in our garden so as to ensure unfailing good crops. There are allusions to this in the Grace we say before and after meals, and in the Mass. at the Offertory, we say what is essentially a Jewish Grace before meals. "Blessed are you, Lord, God of the universe..."

In both places we receive double nourishment by hearing and eating, in Choir from liturgies of the Word. in their various forms, and in the refectory from the reading there, and so we keep silence during the readings in both. Caesarius says, in his Rule for monks, that a soul not nourished by the Word of God is like a drought-stricken land or an unfed body. In both places, too, silence is an appropriate response to an awareness of the presence of God

At Mass we are told, "Happy are they who are called to the

banquet of the Lord”; in the refectory there are explicit reminders of the same wedding feast of the Lamb, a meal eaten by Christ’s disciples, gathered in his name, with his promised presence in the midst, a communion of brothers dwelling together in unity. Both refer to and are directed towards participation in the eschatological heavenly banquet. May the King of eternal glory make us sharers in the heavenly table.

D.G.C.

## **APIARY NOTES**

The valley of Pluscarden seems, from all accounts, to have been one of the most favoured sites in the country for apiculture in 1990 and 1991. The prolonged droughts, or summer spells of cold, wind and wet that have elsewhere so depleted honey crops, have been locally much mitigated, and so have scarcely hampered the Abbey bees. The sun has shone at all the right times, and the various flowers, especially the clover and heather, have yielded their nectar in copious abundance. This has been a welcome change after a series of very poor years.

It is easy, so the saying goes, to keep bees, but very hard work to be kept by them. Time and labour are strictly limited here; nevertheless, these last couple of years our bees’ contribution to the domestic economy has been not inconsiderable. The secret of success is to have huge bee populations, ready to take advantage of nectar flows whenever they might occur. Only very strong colonies are capable of storing a surplus of honey. Large number of weak colonies will always produce nothing. The trouble is that strong colonies tend, by nature, to swarm. This is the bees’ method of reproduction, and it has served them well for millions of years. No honey, however, is to be expected from bees that aren’t there anymore.

Management of bees once depended on a constant watch being kept over the hives, so that swarms could be caught as they emerged. All except the parent colonies were then killed at the end

of the season. Since the invention of the moveable frame hive this has been made unnecessary. Now we can discourage, anticipate or delay swarming; we can artificially strengthen colonies, and breed strains which swarm less frequently. We can also swap queens about. This is most useful, since a colony headed by a brand new current year queen will not swarm, in normal circumstances. Commercial honey farmers therefore always rear their own queens early in the year. Others, such as ourselves, can profit from their skill and labours, by buying queens in the spring via the G.P.O.

D. B. H.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Basili Regula, A Rufino Latine versa.* Edited by Claus Zelzer. (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*) vol. LXXXVI, Vienna, Holder-Pichler Tempsky, 1986. pp. xxxii, 330

In his Rule, apart from the Bible, St Benedict quotes directly from a couple of dozen authors, according to Fr Adalbert de Vogüé's reckoning: but, again apart from the Bible, he recommends but four other hooks by name. These are the "Institutes" and "Conferences" of John Cassian (RB 42:3 and 73:5), the "Lives of the Fathers" (ibid.), and the "Rule of our holy Father Basil" (RB 73:5).

Cassian's works exist in numerous editions and translations, of which the most accessible are probably those in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series; in English there is an incomplete but reasonably-priced translation in the "Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers" series. The "Lives of the Fathers" have always been popular reading, and are currently most easily approached through Helen Waddell's translations; although entitled "Lives of the Fathers", Norman Russell's translation introduced by Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G. and published by Mowbrays in 1980 is a different work, though of the same genre.

For St Basil the case has long been otherwise. He wrote in Greek, but his Rules were quite early translated into Latin by Rufinus, and it appears to have been through Rufinus that St Benedict met St Basil, at least in this case. The Latin Basil was edited by Lucas Holstenius at Rome in 1661 (it was his text that Marianus Brockie used), taken from Benedict of Aniane's *Codex Regularum*, manuscripts available to him in Rome plus a few personal touches, and this was in turn used by Migne (PL 103).

In English there is W.K.L. Clarke's "The Ascetical Works of St Basil" (S.P.C.K., 1925)) and M.M. Wagner's "St Basil's Ascetical Works" in the "Fathers of the Church" series, published at New York in 1950. Probably the French translation of Dom Leo Lèbe O.S.B.. *Saint Basile: Les Regles monastiques*, published at Maredsous in 1969, is handiest for most readers who lack Greek.

For monks, the lack of a good edition of the Basil used by Benedict has been made more painfully obvious by the outpouring of very fine editions of Rules: Augustine, the Master, Benedict and many others are now easily accessible, thanks to the work of (†) Hanslik, Verheijen and de Vogüé, to name only three. On St Basil, much work was done by the late Jean Gribomont. O.S.B.; work on the Rufinus-Basil was long ago announced as having been begun by Henri Ledoyen, O.S.B. Unforeseen events led to a meeting of the present writer with him, and an introduction to Dr Klaus Zelzer of Vienna, to whom he had by that time passed the torch. Dr Zelzer, a disciple of the late Professor Hanslik, and now in charge of the CSEL of Vienna, was most kind, and displayed proofs of the work (which he was then correcting), and a couple of years later the book appeared. (The delay in part stemmed from the fact that this was the first volume of the CSEL produced with electronic assistance).

Like much ancient literature, it has something of a dialogue character: the Rule is divided not into chapters, but as questions which form the titles and answers which form the bodies of the chapters. (This was not the path followed by Benedict, who diverges from the Master in this, as in much else).

The Rule (or Rules), like many ancient documents, exist in



several versions – one might say corruption is the sincerest form of flattery, for the more popular and influential a text, the more often would it be copied, translated, edited to suit present need or taste, and the more involved became its textual history. This is all the more true when the author is long-lived and prolific, re-editing his own work and providing a ready-made pool whence additional matter may be culled.

In the present case, it seems now to be established by the work of Gribomont that Basil's ascetical works or monastic rules have come down to us in three recensions. The first, the *Haiká*, or moral Rules, (about 358 A.D.) consists of 80 rules taken from the New Testament, in which Basil's only verbal contributions are the chapter headings. Next was the *Little Asceticon*, (about 365 A.D.) a prologue and about 200 questions and answers, lost to us in the Greek, but surviving in a Syriac translation and in Rufinus' Latin version (with a preface by Rufinus).

The last version was the *Great Asceticon* (mid to late 370s – Basil died in January 379), consisting of 55 Longer Rules and 313 Shorter Rules (of these, about 30 of the Longer and 121 of the Shorter are new – this is the work translated in Lebe). It is now clear that Rufinus did not edit down the *Great Asceticon* to form the *Little Asceticon*. This *Great Asceticon* has itself come down to us in various forms, the 'Vulgate' (in PG 31) and 'Studite' are the most important.

The Rules of St Basil combine eminently and perennially relevant matter with the prestige of authorship of a Saint and Doctor plus the encomium of St Benedict, guaranteeing wide diffusion and differences. Thus there are the *extravagantes*, four Shorter and two Longer Rules which Gribomont rescued and, one could say, provided with birth-brieves. In fact Gribomont suggests that even St Basil was unsure of how many of these there were; some are off-the-cuff replies, noted down and collected by disciples. This informality accounts in part for the repetitions here and there, and where Basil has edited them out, reverent disciples, fearful of lost crumbs, have restored them.

Rufinus, at any rate, in his work of 396 A.D., gives 203 of

these Rules, which vary in length from the 112 verses of the reply to Question 2, to the two words of the reply to Question 201: “If some priest gives orders to the sisters unbeknownst to the mother superior, does it seem reasonable for the mother superior to be angry?” Reply: *Et valde*, which might be colloquially translated “And how!”

Most of the replies are too long to quote here, and although by no means always predictable, a sampling of the questions to which they respond may give something of the flavour.

How does one *do all things for the glory of God?* (Q.56); How is it we keep nodding off, and how can we overcome this? (Q.55); Please tell us how to fulfil the most important commandment, the commandment of love. (Q.2). If anyone murmurs about the food, how should they be treated? (Q.93). What does *racha* mean? (Q.145). If someone has been doing penance for a sin, and then commits it again, what is to be done? (Q.22). May the superior speak in a loud voice or shout? (Q.130)

Like all works of this nature, the text is introduced by prefatory matter, here a succinct score of pages in Latin.

There follows the text, versified for easy reference; the references to Scripture and other recensions of the Rules, together with the textual apparatus, are at the foot of the page. There is an Appendix, followed by a Scripture index, and index of names and lastly an *Index verborum* of just under 90 pages. It is not properly a concordance, for references, not lemmata, are given, but it may fairly be described as comprehensive, as the entries for such words as *ad, de, ex, hic* and *ille* show. *Et* has simply ‘1349 loci’

All in all, we have here a very worth-while work, worthily brought to completion. The whole monastic world is in debt for this labour of love, for so it may truly be called, in view of the very active part played in it by Dr Zelzer’s charming wife Michaela. The Zelzers thus join that constellation of great scholars and editors whose work, if it does not always live for ever, endures for centuries and remains as a monument. We are most grateful to the Zelzers for the gift of this valuable book.

D.G.C.

*The Sea Apostolate in the Port of London* by Peter Anson.  
Published by The Apostleship of the Sea, England and Wales.  
1991.

This is positively Peter Anson's last book, written at the age of 82, on Caldey Island, whither he had returned in old age as a Cistercian Oblate. Structured rather as a handbook than a novel, it traces the history of the apostolic activities, of all sects and denominations, from the middle-ages to the present, among the sailors in what was once the world's greatest port.

Those familiar with Anson's work will find here all his usual hallmarks: the easy prose style; the thoroughness of research, with meticulous, if uneven, accuracy of detail, which yet never degenerates into mere lists of facts; the comprehensive scope: the beautiful paintings and drawings as well as his sharp eye for architectural infelicities and his not-always charitable treatment of his fellow creatures, their eccentricities and endeavours.

The author had been well acquainted with the long miles of London docks at varying intervals for much of his long life. His own connection with the apostolate there is honourable, for he was one of the founders, in 1921, of the Apostleship of the Sea, which society still exists, and thrives. It was partly the desire to undertake the work which led him to leave our own community on Caldey Island. He is reticent, however, about his part in it.

Yet it is true that seamen have often been not only members of the Church forgotten, but also outcasts of society, cared for by none, ready prey for the sinks of vice and squalor into which they would plunge on disembarking. It is depressing that so little was done for their welfare when Britain's wealth and power depended on them so largely. Now the fleets, the docks and the sailors are gone from London. An unromantic chapter in our history is finished: it is useful to have it chronicled in this book.

D. B. H.