

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 85 News and Notes for our Friends March 1990</p>

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Reader,

Early on Ash Wednesday we were shocked to receive the sad news that Fr Cyril, the Superior of our little monastery at Petersham, had been killed the previous afternoon, when his car left the road and hit a power pole. I left immediately for Boston and remained with the community for two weeks. The large parish church at Athol was filled for the Requiem, a witness to the love and esteem in which Fr Cyril was held. The Bishop of Worcester officiated with two other Bishops, the Chor Bishop of the Maronites, five Abbots and many priests. The Greek Orthodox Bishop was present in the sanctuary and at the grave-side. People came from as far away as Canada, California and Florida.

Fr Cyril was born in the Lebanon 63 years ago. He was a graduate of the American University in Beirut and came to the U.S.A. where he received a philosophy degree at Harvard. In 1948 he joined the St Benedict Centre and was professed in 1949. He was ordained priest on December 12th 1976 by Archbishop Francis Zayek in the Maronite rite. In 1981 the community was received into the Benedictine Confederation. Four years later he founded St Mary's Monastery, Petersham, which was subsequently united with the Subiaco Congregation as a dependent house of Pluscarden. In his homily at the Requiem Mass, Abbot Augustine Roberts of St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, said of Fr Cyril, "He became not only a theologian, but a spiritual theologian and above all a spiritual father." We commend him to your prayers.

While I was still at Petersham, Mother Prioress received a rescript from Rome affiliating St Scholastica's Priory to Pluscarden, within our Congregation and under the care of our

Abbot President. We welcome these good nuns into our Province, which now numbers ten monasteries.

I have appointed Fr Anselm as Superior of Petersham and Br Finbar will be going out to join the community after Easter.

During January and February three postulants were received as novices. Alex Kirkwood from Fife began his noviciate on 14th January, taking the name of Br Francis; a day later at Petersham U.S.A. Fr Cyril clothed Timothy Castor as Br William and on the 14th February Br Patrick Robertson became Br Dunstan. In our two houses we now have three Juniors, four novices and two postulants; others are hoping to come very soon. We ask your prayers for their perseverance.

One event which unfortunately occurred while I was in America was Fr Basil's Golden Jubilee of Priesthood. He sang the Mass in a splendid new gold chasuble which Br Michael had made for the occasion. The heavy snow at that time, combined with local road-diversions, prevented a larger attendance. At an evening Gaudeamus the day's other Jubilarian, Fr Bede Griffiths, was also remembered, as the brethren watched a film about his monastery in India.

The storms which have caused so much damage in the south of England have scarcely affected Pluscarden. No trees have been blown down, no floods and hardly enough snow to cover the ground. Lord Cochrane of Cults has given us a red chestnut, or more precisely, chestnut Briotii, in memory of his old friend the late Mgr Murdoch of Buckie. We hope it will weather many storms.

There are a number of forthcoming events. On 10th June the Rt Rev. Prof. Davidson, Moderator-designate of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, will be here for our biannual service with Pluscarden Kirk. On 24th June we welcome our Bishop and the Aberdeen diocesan pilgrimage, which this year happily coincides with the feast of our Patron, St John the Baptist. This year the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre hope to be here in force, in their splendid regalia which Br Michael is making. On 11th August, during the Aberdeen International Youth Festival, the

Stord Ungdomskor, a choir from Norway, will sing here as they did a couple of years ago. They have said they will only come to Aberdeen if they can sing again at Pluscarden! There will also be a brass ensemble from Essex. On 8th September we hope to have "*The Messiah For All*"; Major Colin Hunter is organising the event at which Graham Wiseman will be conducting and Peter Zanre leading the orchestra.

In September, Elgin will commemorate the sacking of Elgin Cathedral by the Wolf of Badenoch in 1390. A modern "Wolf" will lead a band of retainers from the Castle of Lochindorb along the traditional route to Elgin – which tradition says included the destruction of Pluscarden, and though there is no written evidence for this, there was certainly a fire at Pluscarden which did great damage at this time. There is to be a Son et Lumière in Elgin Cathedral ruins.

At the beginning of each year the Scottish Tourist Board asks us for statistics of the numbers of visitors who have been to the Abbey. We estimate that about 20,000 people came to the Abbey last year, but it is impossible to give an exact figure since there is no charge for entry, and many do not sign the visitors' book (there were over 600 here for last year's Pilgrimage, but only 30 signed the book), so last year's total of 6,300 signatures is certainly conservative. There are names from every country in Europe, as well as Poland, the U.S.S.R. and the Baltic States, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. The majority of visitors are from the U.S.A., Germany, Canada and Australia, in that order. There are of course many people of Scots descent across the Atlantic and in Australia and New Zealand, while Elgin and several neighbouring towns are "twinned" with places in Germany. In August we look forward to welcoming friends from our twin-town of Landshut in Bavaria.

When religious houses are closing in many places, it is good to hear of new foundations. After 123 years, 5 monks have returned to the ancient monastery of S. Nicolo all'Arena in Sicily. It was built in 1347. The recently beatified Cardinal Dusmet was Abbot of this monastery. In France, Cardinal Gagnon dedicated the

church of the new Abbey of Barroux, assisted by two Archbishops, three Bishops and seven Abbots. In Italy, Bishop Paolo Gibertini who was a monk of Parma and for 17 years Prior of Sorres in Sardinia and then Bishop of Ales Tertalba in that Island, has been transferred to the diocese of Reggio-Emilia Guastalla on the mainland. He has just celebrated his Golden Jubilee as a monk. Near Naples, the community of the Abbey of Monte Vergine, which belongs to the Subiaco Congregation, has elected a new abbot, Dom Pio Tamburrino, a monk of Novalesa and Prior of Sant'Anselmo in Rome. Monte Vergine is a place of pilgrimage and also a "territorial abbey", that is to say, it has a diocese attached to it, so the election of an abbot has to be approved by the Holy See. He may or may not be a Bishop, but "he governs the diocese in the manner of a diocesan Bishop, as its proper pastor" (canon 370).

The cause for canonisation of a Benedictine nun has taken another step forward. She is the Ven. Mother Adeodata Pisani, Abbess of the monastery of S. Pietro di Moina in Malta, who was known as the "apostle of the poor" – she died in 1855.

Wishing you the joy and blessings of Easter,

Yours devotedly,

+ D. Alfred, Abbot

NEWS FROM OUR MONASTERY IN GHANA **(Extracted from Fr Mark's letters)**

We have had our first African Advent, Christmas and New Year. It is certainly strange for us Europeans not to have short dark days as we come to Christmas. For Br Emmanuel the sign of Christmas is the leaves blowing from the trees as the Harmattan begins to take a grip.

Br Emmanuel was involved with the chickens at Bamenda and had been waiting for the workmen to go so he could start a

poultry venture. He had been given some poultry but remarkably it was always his chickens which happened to die and the workers' which happened to thrive. Arrangements were made for all chickens to go except ours. We gave yams for the chickens left behind. Two days later someone turned up for the chickens he had bought from the carpenter and which he said he'd been told he could pick up from here. To save problems we gave him his money back. The local Police Inspector also gave us a male and a female turkey. They are dafter than the chickens, but sometimes attack the smaller ones which can't get out of the way fast enough. Over Christmas we were also given a few chickens, two were sacrificed for New Year and two still remain, a cock and hen.

Over the Christmas period there were several delegations who came to bring us gifts and to greet us. Greeting is very important here. People travel out of their way simply to come and greet you. I think we are permitted some serious lapses from good manners because we are broonis and cannot be expected to know better. It is for example impolite to ask someone to take a drink by asking a question like, "Would you like a drink?" This implies that you expect the answer "No". One has to say something like, "Come and drink with us." This can be very difficult as the polite English expression comes to your tongue so easily. There is a formal process to be gone through when such groups come. I am still learning it, so I won't say what it is until I can speak with some authority. Even meeting involves a formal exchange, usually short, but one in which it is polite to say where you are going and what you intend to do there.

The Land-Rover recently required repairs, after an encounter with a charcoal lorry. The repairs were to be done in the magazine in Kumasi, 140 km. away. The magazine is difficult to describe. It is a large area of waste ground with sheds and shacks dotted around with cars and bits of cars all over the place with people climbing over them hammering at them and welding them. Just think of thousands of Br Meinrads all working at the same time, but possibly just a shade faster. The most amazing thing looking at the shells of vehicles strewn about is that some of them,

even most of them, are meant to go again. Br Bede spent most of the afternoon with the electrician looking for parts: you pay for labour in the magazine, but provide the parts yourself. After we left a fault was found in the steering, so off we went to another part of the magazine to have a pipe welded. This place had Land-Rovers of every vintage and configuration. To cut a long story short, we all got home safely for a late supper at the monastery.

We were all ready to tell our tale of derring-do in the big city, but found the rest of the community had been fighting bush-fires most of the day. Fire is used as a way of clearing ground and, especially at this time of year, for hunting, when game is scared out of hiding by fire. The first thing we had done when we hired workmen was to put them to clearing firebreaks round the fences, so we had comparatively little damage round the monastery itself. Damage to our own crops was not great on other parts of the land, though others suffered.

Communications are difficult here. Br Bede went off to the Provincial Chapter in Burkina Faso, then set off home via Dzogbegan. This we were sure of. But two weeks went by, and no sign of Br Bede, so the bidding prayers at Evening Prayer grew slightly more frantic as the days passed. Br Bede had taken a bout of malaria, which laid him up for a week, and there is no quick way of communicating from Dzogbegan to here.

At present we are moving from one season to the next, the dry season is ending and the first rains beginning. The Harmattan is very dry and the humidity is very low during the day, but at the moment it is over 90% in the early morning, falling to 50 or 60% in the afternoon. The temperature tends to get up to 34° for 3 or 4 hours from noon onwards. Occasionally it gets up to 35° and I find that very hot. I can give these figures because we have a thermograph set up in one corner of the refectory, it records temperature and humidity on a graph over a week. The temperatures are centigrade.

I will have to end now. Excuse spelling mistakes etc. Between myself and the typewriter, we make a word-processor,

that is to say that we have the same effect on words as a food-processor has on food.

Fr Mark

BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS: WEST WING AND ST SCHOLASTICA'S

At the time of writing our funds, given and promised, plus tax reclaimable on them, total just under £60,000, ranging from \$15,000 from Mr Allan Shiach and a gift of £5,000, with the promise of two further gifts of the same size, from the Columba Trust, to numerous widows' and pensioners' mites. Many of you have kindly responded to our Appeal by completing Covenants, ranging from £4,000 to sums which, when measured against our target may seem small financially, but as a measure of generosity are often great.

On Easter Monday the Countess of Cawdor has kindly agreed to come and mark the official inauguration of work on the new St Scholastica's, the building of which is due to be completed on 31st August this year, though it will probably take a little longer to complete its furnishing and equipment.

REVIEWS

CLOTHED WITH THE RAYS OF THE SUN:

Gregorian Chant in Honour of the Mother of God

This is a second tape of Gregorian Chant sung by the nuns and monks of Petersham, Massachusetts, in their series of "Raven and Dove Productions". The standard of performance, so evident on their earlier production, "The Force of Love – Music for St Scholastica", is fully maintained on this recording, with the added benefit of richer acoustics. Side One has a Mass of Our Lady, including Kyrie X and the Ambrosian Gloria (Ad lib. IV); side two comprises chants from the Divine Office, including the

Assumption hymn “Solis, O Virgo”, from which the cassette title comes.

Since the recording was made, the Petersham community have lost both Br Stanislaus Ribera-Faig (+ June 1989) and Fr Cyril Karam, whose tragic death has caused great sorrow. The cassette is a fitting memorial to both of them, closing with their sung prayer: “And after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus”. Amen.

D.M.de K.

WORD & SPIRIT, a monastic review, #11 Women in Monasticism, 128pp. (St Bede’s Publications P.O. Box 545 Petersham Massachusetts 01366).

Issue #11 of Word & Spirit presents the reader with ten articles broadly focused on the role of women in monasticism from “ancient times till the present”. Previous volumes of Word & Spirit which have concentrated on an individual (e.g. St Basil, St Teresa) have been more successful than those devoted to themes with a larger scope like the issue under review, perhaps a narrower focus would have been more effective. Nevertheless the articles are of the usual high quality. Topics include Monasticism and the promotion of women, enclosure, and double monasteries. Individual monastic women are represented by articles on St Eanswythe of Folkestone, St Walburga, St Teresa and, though not strictly a monastic, Dame Julian of Norwich. (Perhaps, in view of the current interest in her, an issue in honour of Dame Julian would be worthwhile?) The volume closes with an article by Augustine Roberts OCSO telling the sad story of the Cistercian nuns of Lima, Peru who “can be considered as the oldest surviving monastic community in the Western Hemisphere”. In their golden age in the mid-17th century the community numbered 300 members who were able to perform the “laus perennis” or uninterrupted celebration of the liturgy day and night. Now, alas, after much hardship and mismanagement by the ecclesiastical authorities, the last few nuns continue to live in the ancient

monastery bringing to an end, it seems, the history of this once flourishing convent.

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THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

Armenia is a mountainous region of Western Asia occupying a somewhat indefinite area to the south-east of the Black Sea. Not being delimited by permanent natural boundaries, the territory covered by Armenia has varied at different epochs in the world's history. The heart of the country is Mt Ararat where, it is said, the ark rested after the flood; Noah still plays a great part in Armenian traditions.

The Armenian Church, in spite of the fact that there were Christians in the country earlier, and in spite of her alleged foundation by Ss Jude and Bartholomew, was founded really by St Gregory the Illuminator in the 3rd and 4th centuries. He was ordained at Caesarea in Cappadocia, as were his early successors.

The Armenians broke away after Chalcedon and became nominal Monophysites. Prevented from attending the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), they were used as a pawn by the opposing armies of Byzantium and Persia. When the decrees of Chalcedon were translated into the new and still underdeveloped Armenian language, some fifty years later, the Armenians saw only heretical teachings and rejected the decrees. Their attitude in this entire matter was dictated not so much by a love of orthodoxy as by a desire of promoting the welfare of their country; and century after century of blood-stained and almost fruitless struggle for independence only confirmed the people in their dissent. Nevertheless the Armenians have played an honourable part in Christian history. They are an able and highly intelligent people, which no doubt partly accounts for the popular dislike of them (as of the Jews) in the East, a dislike expressed as long ago as the fourth century by St Gregory Nazianzen. Their history is one long record of oppression and persecution; the massacres of the

Armenians by the Turks between 1890 and 1915 made the very name of this unhappy people suggest horror and blood. Their homeland is now within the Soviet Union and more blood was shed in the recent crisis in Azerbaijan. Little, however, is known of the state of the church there. There is a large diaspora mainly in Syria, Lebanon and North America. Non-Catholic Armenians are referred to as Gregorian Armenians.

From the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries an Armenian colony in Cilicia (Turkey) maintained a separate kingdom. They were on good terms with the Crusaders and after the Third Crusade came into a union with Rome which lasted till the fall of the kingdom in 1375. This accounts for the many latinisations still to be found in the Armenian rite both Catholic and non-Catholic. A group which returned to union in 1740 is the foundation of the present Armenian Catholic Church. There has been a Catholic Patriarchate since 1742, with the title (commemorating its proximate origins) Patriarchate of Cilicia of the Armenians. The Church was reorganised in 1928 in the wake of the Turkish massacres during which 30,000 Armenian Catholics lost their lives. Several dioceses were eliminated and others created. The Patriarchate was moved from Constantinople to Bzommar, Beirut. The present Patriarch is his Beatitude John Peter XVIII Kasparian (the Patriarch always takes the name Peter).

The great glory of the Armenian Church is the Mekhitarist order of monks, founded by Fr Mechitar, an Armenian Catholic priest, who follow the rule of St Benedict. From their motherhouses at Venice and Vienna, they do missionary and educational work in the diaspora. Their House on the Island of S. Lazzaro at Venice is a repository of their culture and houses many precious manuscripts and fosters their culture through its long-established publishing and printing activities.

D.F.B.

MONASTERIES OF THE SUBIACO CONGREGATION NO. 60
The English Province, No. 9
Monastery of Our Lady of Solitude

Benedictines in Guanajuato, Mexico. The Benedictine Monastery of our Lady of Solitude (Monasterio Nuestra Señora de la Soledad) was founded by Fr Aelred Wall in 1973 as a hermitage after he had left the monastery of Christ in the Desert for health reasons. Fr Aelred had been the founder of the Monastery of Christ in the Desert and its first prior. Divine Providence led him to a beautiful place, La Soledad, with an arid desert climate and arable land, located near the famous pilgrim shrine of “Atotonilco”, in the state of Guanajuato, some 12 miles from the city of San Miguel de Allende.

La Soledad functioned as a hermitage for a bit more than ten years, until Fr Aelred’s death in November 1984. In 1985 the Monastery of Christ in the Desert sent monks to try to continue this work in old Mexico, now as a community rather than a hermitage. In 1987 the Abbot of the Monastery of Tepeyac near Mexico City assigned two monks to help at La Soledad. One of these monks has now transferred his vows and the other hopes to do so in the near future. These two monks, together with another from Christ in the Desert, form the professed community at the Monastery of La Soledad. There are two or three postulants already living at the Monastery.

There are at present no adequate buildings for a Monastery, and so the community has launched an appeal for financial help in constructing a Monastery. For now, the brothers must live in different buildings on the property and in parts of the Guesthouse.

The life at La Soledad is very similar to that of Christ in the Desert: a simple monastic life with an emphasis on prayer, lectio and manual labour. The Divine Office is completely sung in Spanish, using the melodies and arrangements of Santa Escolastica in Argentina.

The work of the community includes a small guesthouse – which is less available because of the necessity of some of the

monastic community living there – a woodworking workshop, craftwork and some small gardening projects.

On the property is a convent of Benedictine Sisters (Catequistas de Queretaro). These sisters do pastoral work in the nearby village, operate a small clinic subsidised by the Monastery and manage a food distribution programme for the poor and hungry of the area.