

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

The Millennium is nigh – as all the talk of Bug and Dome reminds us. Indeed, it is now only months away and we're bound to be wondering quite what we're going to do about it. Nothing? That would certainly be one option – but evasive and depressing. Engage in an endless succession of celebrations? Hard to keep up, surely, and all too likely to be little more than communal exercises in good-natured non-belief. We need to think, first of all, what is a millennium. It's an event in our calendar and our calendar is a Christian one. Large parts of the world do not follow it, or follow it only in certain domains. Their measurements of time have other determinants – religious also. For us, though, what we call the Incarnation (the “enfleshing” of God's eternal Son) is the centre: an irruption of Eternity into time, giving time meaning and direction. It's hard to improve on a famous sentence of St Paul written to the Galatians (4:4-5): “When the fullness of time had come [i.e. at the climax of history], God sent his Son, born of a woman [and therefore a human being like one of us], born under the Law [a Jew, Jesus of Nazareth], in order to redeem those who were under the law [i.e. to usher in a new, definitive period of human history] so that we might receive adoption as sons i.e. enter into an intimate relationship with God the Father, source of our being, becoming sons and daughters in the Son, sharing the Son's eternal relationship of knowledge and love with the Father].” As the great writers of the early Christian centuries put it: “God became man so that man might become God”; “the Son of God became the son of man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God.” This is the heart of our Christian faith, and it's this – for us – the Millennium is about. It is the 2000th anniversary of

what took place in the womb of a Jewish virgin, Mary and of the birth in Bethlehem. It is a “great Christmas”.

The Holy Father, John Paul II, whose horizons are nothing if not large, has been pointing us towards a Christian celebration of the Millennium ever since becoming Pope 21 years ago. He speaks of it as the “Great Jubilee”. It’s a reference back to the Jewish year of Jubilee – a sort of grand sabbatical – held every 50 years and described in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, which is part of the Pentateuch, part of the Mosaic Law, the “Torah”. And what was this Jubilee? It was:

- a year of *rest* for the Land, nothing being sown
- a year of *return*: “you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (Lev 25:10)
- a year for *setting free*, with debts being cancelled and slaves emancipated
- a year of *honesty, justice, equality* “you shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God” (Lev 25:17)
- a year for *remembering* that the Land and the people are the Lord’s and no one else’s: “for to me the people of Israel are servants, they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt” (Lev 25:55).

This Jubilee year began with a blast of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement, and clearly it was meant to be a return to the order of things willed by God, a return to right relationships: with the land, with one another, with the Lord God. When our Lord began his public ministry, according to St Luke, in the synagogue at Nazareth, he read from the prophet Isaiah: “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, *to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour*” (Is 61:2; Lk 4:18-19). He was proclaiming that the true Jubilee year was about to begin – in his person, in his ministry, in his death and resurrection. On Christmas Eve this year, the Pope

will symbolically open the “holy door” in St Peter’s: it’s a symbol of our access to grace, of the return to the paradise opened by our Lord. “Today,” he said to the penitent criminal on the cross beside him, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43).

For us, then, the Millennium is more than a date. It's an occasion:

- to *remember* the Incarnation and all it means: “God became man etc”
- to make specific *gestures* on behalf of justice, freedom, charity
- to *look* beyond time to the consummation of history.

In the providence of God, it’s we who are alive at this moment. Not another generation, but us. It's we who will be “crossing the threshold” into the third millennium. Is it fanciful to look on this as a special historical vocation? Can’t we say that it falls to us, by our prayer and effort, to consecrate the coming millennium to God: to diminish its potential for evil and increase its potential for good; to invoke God’s mercy and blessing on it; to help it, in the Holy Father’s words, “give glory to the Trinity, from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 55)? If so, it will not be a wasted year.

Yours in Christ,

+ Fr Hugh, Abbot

THE EDITOR’S JOTTINGS

I am writing this on the feast of Ss Cyril and Methodius who, with St Benedict, are the patron saints of Europe; he of the West, they of the East. And I have been reading the Holy Father’s letter *Orientalis Lumen*, Light from the East. It is of special interest to monks because of the space he gives to considering the monastic

life. In fact sixteen of the fifty three sections are concerned with monasticism. Under the heading *Monasticism as a model of the baptismal life* he writes: “I would like to look at the vast panorama of Eastern Christianity from a specific vantage point which affords a view of many of its features – monasticism ... This has always been the very soul of Eastern Christianity – it is a model of the baptismal life, not a separate condition but rather a reference point for all the baptised, according to the gifts offered to each... The strong common experience of the East and the West make it a wonderful bridge to fellowship where unity as it is lived shines more brightly than may appear in the dialogue between the churches.” He shows that this comes about, in the East and the West, in the liturgical experience. “With regard to monasticism, in consideration of its importance to Eastern Christianity, we would like it to flourish once more in Eastern Churches and that support be given to all those who feel called to its revitalisation. In fact, in the East, an intrinsic link exists between liturgical prayer, spiritual tradition and monastic life.”

In this spirit we have provided an article in this newsletter about Eastern Catholic monasticism. You will find an article about the Maronite nuns of Yarzé in the Lebanon. The Vallombrosian monks of the Abbey of Montenero in Italy have made a foundation in India in the diocese of Kottayam and one of their monks, Fr Mathem Moolakati, has been appointed Auxiliary Bishop in this Syro-Malabar diocese. I must also record the foundation of another monastery of nuns by our Congregation in Nigeria at Ozubulu made by Abbess Patricia of Umuoji. Thirty nuns have taken up residence and more will follow when the buildings are completed. This is a remarkable achievement since the “mother house” was only founded twenty years ago. Also the Abbey of Solesmes has made a foundation in Lithuania. Lent is here again and I hope you will receive this before the feast of St Benedict and Easter.

Your Editor

Dom Alfred

NEWS FROM AMERICA
A VISIT TO PLUSCARDEN
My trip from St Mary's Monastery, Petersham
by Br Bernard Osbaldeston, OSB

My first trip to Britain and Pluscarden Abbey was very memorable. My flight from Boston to London arrived on Sunday 6th September, a couple of hours late. In consequence I missed my connecting flight, thus causing a six hour wait at the airport. Two days after my arrival at Pluscarden I had the pleasure of taking part in the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Abbey. The visit gave me the opportunity to meet all the monks. This was something which was especially desired as up till now most had just been names to me. The stay became something of a retreat in its own right – a period of study as well as *lectio divina* and meditation.

After living the life of a Pluscarden monk for over three weeks, I took the train to Prinknash Abbey. During my stay, some of us went on an outing to Oxford, which proved itself to be a delightful visit to one of the most famous and historic universities of the world. After five days I left Prinknash for the Lancashire village of Osbaldeston. I stayed there at St Mary's Parish in Bamber Bridge, hosted by monks from Ampleforth, Frs Mathew and John OSB. I was visiting Osbaldeston because this is my family name. While visiting Osbaldeston Manor, I discovered that it was, at one time, the home of Blessed Edward Osbaldeston, a secular priest martyred in 1594. I headed back to Pluscarden on 10th October and took part in their community retreat (12-19 October).

On 22 October (the day before I returned to Petersham) Fr Abbot and I went on an outing. We left shortly after Mass for Ullapool with a little boat trip in mind when we got there. Owing to the wind and turbulence of the water boat trips were cancelled for the day, so we had tea and did some sightseeing. When we left Ullapool, we decided to take a different route home which was well worth it. I was very impressed by the beauty of the Scottish Highlands. One spot especially struck me, the beauty of which

lingers in my mind.

To thank the community for all the kindness shown to me, the night before I left I shared my 'hair-piece' (a comic recitation) with them.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR AT ST ANSELM'S COLLEGE, MANCHESTER, USA

As part of their USA tour, the Choir of Westminster Cathedral gave a concert on 1 November 1998, of sacred music at St Anselm's Abbey Church. In Europe, the status of this choir has never been higher as it has just won the prestigious Gramophone Award for the best recording of 1998 (Martin's *Mass for Double Choir* and Pizzetti's *Requiem*). The choir is directed by the Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, James O'Donnell. Although he has spent his life in England, James O'Donnell was born in Broughty Ferry in 1961. Before the concert began the choir was introduced by Mr Donald Cox of St Anselm's College. Then Monsignor George Stack, Administrator of Westminster Cathedral, gave a short history of the Cathedral and the choir. He presented the Rt Rev Dom Mathew Leavy OSB, Abbot of St Anselm's, with a book on the history of Westminster Cathedral.

The concert began with the choir processing into the Abbey church. The programme of music was varied, including organ solos by Andrew Reid, Assistant Master of Music. In age, the music ranged from *Mater Christi* (superbly sung) of John Taverner (died 1545) to *Deus, Deus Meus* of Roxanna Panufnik (born 1968). The latter piece is part of the *Westminster Mass* which was commissioned and composed in honour of the 75th birthday of the present Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Basil Hume OSB. It was first performed on Ascension Day 1998.

The concert lasted one and a half hours without an interval. The choir had had a rather long day as it had sung, earlier in the day, at St Anselm's Conventual Mass for the Solemnity of All Saints.

DBK

FOLK MUSIC AT MASS?

One of the subjects discussed at the recent meeting of the Panel of Monastic Musicians, held at Belmont Abbey, Herefordshire, was the relationship of Gregorian Chant to traditional English folk song. Some of the monastic musicians present were interested in using folk music in the liturgy. This one was only really interested in the Chant, but found the comparison of the two enlightening. Obviously, they are different in that one is sacred, the other profane: but there are also striking similarities.

First of all, both come from an oral/aural culture. Both had a time of natural flourishing, during which no one thought of trying to fix them in writing. Both have been painstakingly reconstructed and analysed by experts, who nevertheless agree that in the very act of being preserved, something of their original freedom and suppleness has been lost.

What comes first, in both Chant and folk song, is the text. The melody grows, as it were, out of this, and is there to enhance and reinforce it. Sometimes melody takes over from words in exuberant ornamentation, as in the jubilus of an Alleluia verse, or the Fa la diddle dee of the song chorus. When sung properly, both should sound entirely free and natural, even spontaneous. But this belies the high degree of skill and discipline actually required for performance.

When the oral tradition was alive, slightly different versions of the same melody, of both Chant and song, might be current in different regions. Nevertheless, it can be shown that basic melodies could survive unchanged for centuries, crossing an astonishing number of cultural boundaries intact. Both Chant and folk song permit considerable flexibility of melody, adding or omitting notes as required, and if necessary drawing on a repertoire of stock formulae. An exercise set at Belmont was to fit the different verses of a particular folk song to the melody given, ensuring that the words were given their full natural expression. It was found to be not at all an easy task. One could appreciate all the more the skill of those who originally adapted or combined

standard Gregorian Chant melodies for different texts, often with very happy results.

The history of the preservation of English folk song is also instructive as an illustration of the way Gregorian Chant has come down to us. The first collectors of folk songs recorded words, but not the music. So with the Chant. Later, people became anxious to preserve original music also, and where possible wrote it down. But sometimes they were too late, since the living tradition had by then already died. On occasion, however, it was found that a song no longer sung in Britain had crossed the Atlantic, and could still be heard, albeit with an American flavour, among descendants of the early emigrants. In the same way, the living tradition of music in the Roman Church virtually died out under the weight of many calamities, but was revived by being imported back across the Alps, albeit with a Gallican flavour, from the Frankish Empire.

Unfortunately, sometimes the work of preservation of folk song was gravely hampered by a lack of understanding of the original tradition. When the first compilers found irregularities in rhythm or metre, they would often ascribe these to rustic carelessness, and adjust what they heard accordingly. In doing so they might have been ironing out what would now be recognised as the most technically interesting features of a piece. Gregorian Chant suffered a similar fate in the later Middle Ages, when its golden age had passed, and people started to adapt it to suit quite alien canons of taste. The most authentic norms of interpretation were forgotten, and it came to be known, and sung, only in debased forms.

Nowadays, however, by comparing early manuscripts and various versions, we can reach a fairly accurate idea of how the Chant was sung in its best period. Some work on these lines was also done by the assembled monastic musicians at Belmont. This bore fruit in a Gregorian Mass, whose Chant, beautifully sung by so many musical monks and nuns together, certainly helped to lift the mind and heart up to God, and to express something of the glory due to His name.

DBH

REVIEWS

Word & Spirit: A Monastic Review Vol 18: Monastic Profession
St Bede's Publications, Petersham, Mass, USA; distribution in UK
by Gracewing.

This is the final volume in the series and it continues the previous format comprising a number of articles by different authors on a single theme of monastic interest. The subject chosen for this last volume is *Monastic Profession*; and an impressive array of authors of international repute has been assembled, including such well known figures as Michael Casey OSCO, Ambrose Wathen OSB and Joel Rippinger OSB. All except two of the articles are by monks, Benedictine or Cistercian. *The Western Ritual of Religious Profession* is presented by the Dominican Bishop of Metz, France, Pierre Raffin and a German layman, Hubertus Lutterbach, deals with a medieval Celtic theme *In Se offerre Deo et Sancto: A Basic Concept of Becoming a Monk in Ireland in the Early Middle Ages*.

The articles are short and concise, nine subjects being dealt with in this slim volume of 141 pages, and the subject matter is quite comprehensive ranging through theology, spirituality and sacramentality and covering the aspects of history, liturgy and current issues.

In the first brief article *Monastic Profession* Joel Rippinger OSB of Marmion Abbey considers why the subject needs to be studied afresh and this leads in very neatly to Christophe Vuillaume's assessment of *Theological Background and Spiritual Meaning*. A monk of La Pierre-qui-Vire, a French monastery of our congregation, he includes a detailed commentary on the *Suscipe* verse of the profession liturgy.

It was interesting to read that the second half of the well known dictum "the habit does not make the monk" his "religious profession does" (*monachum non faciat habitus, sed professio regularis* – from Clement II's decretal *Porrectum* 1187-1191). In a lively article Kurt Belsole of St Vincent's, Latrobe and Sant' Anslemo, Rome agrees with the validity of this statement but

wisely cautions that as practices that are “non-essential” in themselves, such as vigils, the habit, silence, refectory, poverty are abandoned, they corrode the whole, which is monastic life – more than a sum of its parts. It is a warning we all need to bear continually in mind.

Bernard Bonowitz’s personal analysis *Report from the Lockup: Monastic Profession and the Battle with Evil* is delightful and can, I am sure, profitably be applied by anyone to his own situation. He is an American Cistercian now at Campo de Tenente, Brazil. Although in his conclusion he claims to be “just getting into things” he does have some very wise comments to make about what shapes our personal experiences and how these relate to monastic profession.

This volume will be profitable reading for anybody approaching their monastic profession and indeed for any of us trying to live our vows or general readers interested in the 'why' of vows.

DGP

CD: *In the Silence of the Word: A Carthusian Plainchant Meditation* by the Monks of Parkminster. Published by DLT, London, 1998: 73.5 minutes.

It is astonishing that the Carthusians of Parkminster, renowned for their allergy to publicity, and with such a reputation for awful singing, should have produced a CD of their Chant. Perhaps even more astonishing is its quality. It is very good indeed. Here are young voices singing, if not with professional polish, at least with accuracy and sensitivity, assisted by the best of modern recording technology. Here we are given a very direct window into the heart of the Carthusian life, which comes across, not as grim and forbidding, but as full of life and rigour.

Excellent accompanying notes, providing complete texts and translations, invite the listener not merely to enjoy the nice

sound of a chant medley, but to join the monks in their prayer. The programme follows the structure of the long night office, comprising Vigils, Lauds and Mass, suitably abbreviated. The antiphons, psalms and responsories of Vigils are sung in Latin, with short readings, spoken in English, taken from contemporary Carthusian sources. Reflecting recent liturgical changes at Parkminster, Lauds are sung in a mixture of Latin and English, though retaining Gregorian modes throughout.

There is of course no instrumental accompaniment. Those accustomed to Benedictine chant, as interpreted by Solesmes, will readily spot the peculiarities of the Carthusian Chant tradition. Most striking is the extreme deliberation with which the *Gloria Patri* is sung.

Beautiful words and music can only hint at the reality and meaning of the Carthusian silence and solitude. But this recording is offered as a few “stepping stones”, leading the listener into the “vast, tranquil stream” that is the silence of God. It is to be recommended on its own merits; but all the more so, if purchase will help to support the only Charterhouse in the British Isles, whose hidden life of prayer is valuable beyond price.

MORE TROUBLES IN THE APIARY

There is an old weather saw: *greet a fine February as you would a troupe of wolves*. February 1998 was not just fine: it was positively hot. The sunshine brought the bees out, but there was nothing for them to do, so they wasted valuable energy flying round looking for non-existent flowers. When the blossom did come, it was very early: the rape was in full flower by early April. Neither bees nor beekeeper were ready for that. We finally managed to move some strong colonies to the rape fields in May, hoping for a quick bonanza of white rape honey. But no sooner there, than the sun disappeared, and it started to snow. And the weather remained foul, more or less, from then until October. We scarcely saw the sun all summer: certainly never a warm, sunny spell. On the few

days the sun did shine, we almost always had some showers with it.

One effect of wet summer weather is that new queens miss their mating appointments, or are lost when they do fly to mate. So although we managed to keep a tight control of swarming, several colonies landed up queenless, and many others ended the year headed by old queens: a sure way of storing up trouble for the future.

Sudden showers can easily catch flying bees unawares. They tend to land somewhere, quickly become chilled, and never rise again. Rain also has the effect of washing nectar off plants. This means that the bees might gain little profit, even if the rain gives way to sunshine. In prolonged cold and wet weather, bees are confined to their hives. Too much confinement causes stress, hunger, overcrowding and susceptibility to disease. So in 1998 we had outbreaks of *chalkbrood*, which kills larvae before they hatch; *nosema*, a fungal infection of the gut which greatly shortens a bee's life, and *acarine*, a parasitic mite which lives in the bee's trachea and sucks its blood. There are remedies for these plagues, but they are extremely expensive, and are needed precisely at a time when almost no income is being produced from honey. You might think all of this trouble enough for one year; but not so. We observed large piles of dead and dying bees in July and August, and sent some away for chemical analysis. Sure enough, they had perished from poison sprays: *Permethrin* and *gamma HCH*, to be precise, the sources of which we have yet to determine. There is no guarantee that these poisons will not continue in local use in the future.

Despite all this punishment, the bees worked hard at the heather, feeding themselves well for the winter, and even getting a little bit of surplus. At the time of writing, all our colonies are still alive, except for one very weak one that gave up the struggle in the late Autumn. This February has been cold, with unusually frequent and heavy snow falls. Bees seem to like a nice cold winter, which they have certainly had. So we live ever in hopes of better things in 1999. The bees will need all their strength and resilience when

they finally meet the Varroa mite, which is not many miles to the south of us now, and heading North, destroying all in its path.

DBH

MONASTERIES OF THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES No 7

The Maronite Church

The Monastery of Unity, Sisters of St Clare Yarzé, Baabda, Lebanon

Founded from France, these Sisters have adopted the Maronite Rite of the local church in the Lebanon. The Maronites look to St Maro as the founder of their country and its monastic life. He was a bishop who lived in solitude on the Mountain of Cyr. Crowds flocked to him and disciples joined him. He died in 410 and his monastery was said to have housed 600 monks.

After the outbreak of heresy 350 were massacred for their faith and the monastery destroyed. The remnant, monks and laity, took refuge in the mountains of Lebanon which became the homeland of the Maronites under the government of their Patriarch.

At the time of the Greek schism they remained united with Rome, so that today this Church has never been out of unity and has no Orthodox counterpart. The people look to the monks with great esteem and affection. Their monasteries were centres of spiritual life and culture. Today there are about 50 monasteries and some 600 religious. In 1977 Pope Paul VI canonised the hermit monk St Sharbal Makhlof (1828-1898).

The nuns of Yarzé live in this same tradition, a contemplative life of prayer for Christian unity. They suffered much in the war in the Lebanon when their convent was severely damaged. They organise meetings between Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants under the Presidency of their Archbishop and look forward with hope to a spirit of renewal in their country after the visit of Pope John Paul II and the Synod of their Bishops.

There is a Council of Churches in the Middle East, CEMA.
It consists of

1 *Family of Oriental Orthodox*: Armenian Apostolic, Coptic and Syrian Churches

2 *Orthodox Family*: Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and the Autocephalous church of Cyprus

3 *Catholic Family*: Maronite Church, Greek Catholic Melkite Church, Coptic Catholic Church, Chaldean Church, Armenian Catholic Church, Syrian Catholic Church, Latin Church, Assyrian Church of the East

4 *Evangelical Family*: All the Protestant Ecclesial Communities.