

**FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

Every 8 years our Subiaco Congregation holds its General Chapter, and every 4 years the Benedictine Confederation as a whole has its Congress of Abbots. The first precedes the second. Both are held in Italy. As a result, it was in that country that I spent a good part of September. The ancient, beautiful and happily flourishing monastery of Praglia, near Padua in the north east of Italy, hosted our General Chapter and most hospitably. The Congregation of Subiaco is now the largest of the 21 Benedictine congregations, in number of monks and monasteries and geographical spread. It has 9 Provinces. Some 60 plus superiors and delegates attended. Figures, of course, are not the point. What is impressive is the catholicity and sense of Benedictine brotherhood: meeting and listening to Italians, Spaniards, Germans, French, Belgians, English, Africans, Philipinos, Vietnamese, a Brazilian, an Australian and a North American. And this list must have some gaps! Also Fr Giles, our Prior, attended as a translator. Much work was done in a short time, but the chief task of the Chapter was to elect a new Abbot President, the Superior of the whole Congregation. Abbot Gilbert Jones had served the Congregation with dedication for 8 years, its first English President. Now, on the completion of his term of office, he has been succeeded by Dom Thierry Portevin, hitherto abbot of En-Calcat in the south of France. He is 56 and has had 17 years of abbatial experience. We look forward to welcoming him to our English Province.

After the Chapter, I was able to spend two nights at the great monastery of Santa Justina in Padua itself. This was the

cradle of a 15th century reform of Benedictine monasticism to which our own Congregation is heir.

Then we all boarded a coach – what the Italians call a “Pullman”! – and were driven south west to a conference centre at Rocca di Papa outside Rome. There the Congress of Abbots met for some 10 days. This is naturally a larger affair than the General Chapter, since it involves the superiors of *all* Benedictine monasteries. It was rather awesome to be among more than 200 abbots and priors. Some Benedictine nuns and sisters, as well as representatives of other monastic traditions within and without the Catholic Church, further enriched the meeting. Various themes and issues were discussed. There were outings to Subiaco and Monte Cassino and to Sant’Anselmo, the Benedictine monastery and university in Rome itself. We also took part in the inspiring Evening Prayer of the Sant’Egidio community at Santa Maria in Trastevere. This is a lay community founded in 1968, committed to prayer, the fraternal spirit and the service of the poor, especially the urban homeless. It has already spread to many countries.

Once again, as at the Chapter, we had some electing to do. This time, of a new Abbot Primate to succeed the late Dom Jerome Theisen. The lot fell on another American, Abbot Marcel Rooney of Conception Abbey, Missouri. He has previously been Prior at Sant’Anselmo and a professor at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute. He is a man well-fitted to represent the Benedictine world at the turn of the millenium.

Here at Pluscarden, our church has recently welcomed two fine icons, the work of Sr Petra Clare. One is of St John the Baptist, the other of St Andrew – our heavenly patrons, with our Lady. We are planning other enhancements of our sanctuary. We are also eagerly awaiting the installing of a new gas-fired heating system. Autumn has been beautiful but November has had its cold moments!

By the time this reaches you Christmas will be close, and on its heels 1997. This will be the first year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of 2000, which Christians will be

celebrating, of course, as the 2000th “year of the Lord”, a very special anniversary of what we believe is the centre of human history: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” 1997 is a year devoted to reflection on “Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and forever”. We are encouraged to rediscover the Bible, revive the memory of our baptism and even re-catechise ourselves. Mary as Mother should be before our minds. Surely, it is in our faith that we find firm ground on which to stand.

Yours in Christ,

D. Hugh, Abbot

## **NEWS FROM ST MARY’S PETERSHAM**

We have been renovating the two monastic buildings. Br Isidore has helped the builder, Richard Shaw, in various ways. It is hoped that all this work will be completed before winter settles in. With our move to these monastic buildings in August, the guesthouse has been revamped by Br Jerome Leo. There has been a steady increase in guests coming on retreat which has kept brother rather busy.

Br Gregory continues his theological studies. One evening he stayed late at Boston College so as to be at a talk on St Augustine’s *De Trinitate* given by Dom Basil Studen OSB of Sant’ Anselmo (Rome). In September, Fr Anselm travelled to New Mexico to attend on the 8th the blessing of Dom Philip Lawrence as the first Abbot of Christ in the Desert. On October 24th Fr Bede went with our oblate, Phil Zaleski, to New York, to attend the tenth annual Erasmus lecture entitled “God and Culture as the Third Millennium Nears” given by Cardinal Lustiger of Paris. The Cardinal was introduced by Cardinal O’Connor of New York. Also in attendance were the papal representative to the United

Nations and Archbishop Couve de Murville of Birmingham (England) who had been a classmate of Cardinal Lustiger in France. The talk was excellent, highly organised and the product of an obviously brilliant mind. More importantly, it was also the fruit of a deeply spiritual humble person. Phil Zaleski stated that the Cardinal reminded him of Maltese peasants! The talk was in three parts with the headings – liberty, equality, fraternity. For a Christian, each of these involves the answering of a biblical question: “What is man?”, “Who is the greatest?”, “Who is my neighbour?” The consequence of these questions is creation, redemption, sanctification.

Each year there is a one day Formation Conference for the monastic communities in New England. This is in the spring, but due to a mix up, it was not held this year until November 6th. It was held at the Trappistine monastery of Mount St Mary’s, Wrentham (Massachusetts). Fr Bede, Brs Bernard and Isidore attended from Petersham. It was on the theme of how to put into practice in a monastery Pope John Paul II’s request to build a civilisation of love in our everyday lives. The nuns of Wrentham were very hospitable, and we had an enjoyable day there. Fr Bede was surprised to meet a nun, born in the Gorbals (Glasgow), who entered Wrentham in 1965.

## **MILLE MIGLIA**

Sometimes business is a fair substitute for pleasure, as was certainly the case when I set off for Italy, to translate at our General Chapter, with a preparatory few days in France, early in September.

I flew to Toulouse and was met by Fr Regis of En-Calcat. We parked underground, visited the very fine main square, surrounded by confident dignified buildings, public and private, and went on to St Saturnin (or Sernin), a large Romanesque church currently being restored. Viollet le Duc, like our own Victorian

restorers, saved it from destruction but imposed his own ideas, and now it is the late 20th century's turn. An amusing sculpture of pilgrim feet, protruding from a pillar, shows it is on the road to Compostella and the "Way of the Saints" in the crypt includes a large chest, labelled "Corpus Sancti Aegidii", the body of St Giles, whom I duly venerated. The Bollandist "Acta" in a hefty folio had promised this, but to find it true was pleasant. An hour brought us through fertile country to the Abbey, which lies beneath the Montagne Noire in a broad plain. Ten minutes' walk away are the Benedictine nuns of Dourgne, who share a similar history. Both communities are large and flourishing. The monks were in the final stages of preparing their new retreat-house for opening in mid-October. It can accommodate 40, and cost £1.4m. Like us, they make stained glass, they also produce very fine handmade pottery, their bees benefit from surrounding fields of sunflowers and rape. Their orchards were generous with figs, plums, pears. Their patented liturgical zithers are a speciality; nearly 2,000 have been made and sold worldwide. Their publishing industry is highly professional, as is their very large and well-stocked bookshop. They are blessed with a climate which makes solar hot water at 105°C an enviable reality. Their macaronic liturgy is led by a schola, their precentor's chironomy incarnated fluidity, like the movement of a filleted Balinese hand, quite fascinating.

A couple of serious walks, among forests and hills, rather surprised by the absence of visible or audible wildlife, apart from the scent and sound of wild boar. One afternoon I went to Albi, (its cathedral is an astonishing brick bastion), had an insider's tour of the city's less well-known areas, and rushed back to give a slide-show (already seen by the monks) to the nuns, who hospitably gave me supper. The monks have Vigils in the evening, so I ran no risk of being locked out.

On the Friday I went with Abbots Marie and Thierry, plus Prior Jean of Bouake and En-Calcat's then Novice-Master, Fr Joel, to Venière, near Tournus, an eight-hour train journey, half of it alongside the Mediterranean, past étangs flocking with pink

flamingoes, through places like Tarascon (where we bowed to the memory of Tartarin), Arles, Nîmes, Montpellier... and then up the valley of the Rhone and all the evocative sights and sites of that highway of history and civilisations.

Venièrre was celebrating the silver jubilee of the blessing of Abbess Marie-Joseph, and welcomed us kindly. Next day saw the arrival of Abbots Damase and Denis from La Pierre-qui-Vire, together with supporting cast from Haiti, Viet-Nam and the Congo, a cosmopolitan gathering. After Mass, a tour of the monastery, and alfresco lunch in the orchard with the community, we adjourned to the novitiate attic, where what it would be ungracious to call a song-and-dance-act had been laid on. In homage to their Abbess's known preferences, they had confected a pageant of the history of music and its arrival on her alpine native heath. This starred a large cast, variously got up, sporting pipes and hispidity wherever appropriate, who sang, danced and played with verve and skill. An intrepid alpiniste climbed to a giddy height, which swayed as Mount Fujiyama is said to, and played her rustic pipe, while a ballet swirled on terra firma. It was impressive and enjoyable.

Next day saw the famous five re-embark on the train, and set off through the Alps to Italy. There were a few hiccups, but the journey was good, the scenery spectacular, and after we reached Italy I had to mediate a conversation between Abbot Marie and a young Australian who had been to the Grand Prix at Monza. Abbot Marie wanted all the details.

We arrived at Praglia on Sunday night, and devoted Monday to Venice, leaving early and linking up with those who had travelled overnight from France. After we had "done" a few churches, including St Mark's (the mosaics never pall), we crossed to S. Giorgio, and found the monks at Office. We celebrated Mass there in the spacious Palladio church, and were entertained to lunch, a large undertaking for a small community outnumbered by unexpected guests. They gave us a tour of the monastery, confiscated by Napoleon and only partly restored to the monks. They proudly display the chapel where the stalls bear the names

and titles of the conclave, presided over by the Cardinal Duke of York, which elected Pius VII. The Cini Foundation occupies the rest of the buildings, and we saw these, too. Like S. Giustina and Praglia, it was designed to house General Chapters, and much is on an impressive scale. The Monumental Refectory dwarfs anyone, one of the corridors in the dormitory is 150m. long, and all is perfect proportion. There are beautiful grounds, too, but the niggardly Italian government refuses any to the monks, who have to make do with a minuscule paved courtyard. No wonder they boycotted the last visit of the Italian President!

The Chapter itself began next day, and as before was a wonderfully fraternal occasion, enriched this time by the presence of our Vietnamese brethren and a more generous African representation. The translation department sometimes had mechanical problems, while Br Stefano of Praglia stepped in at the last minute to translate from English into Italian, and did very well. We duly dealt with the legislative agenda, the reports from the President and Provinces and the preparation papers for the Millennium. The bells were rung for the election of the new President, and on the Saturday we had a monumental *pranzo* in the Monumental Refectory, which in the evening was the scene of a recital of 17th century Italian music on ancient instruments. The soprano was younger, and very good.

Next day we went to S. Giustina for Sunday Mass, where Abbot Thierry was given the presidential works, not his habitual style, including the crozier of Bl. Ludovico Barbo (buried in the Gothic Choir). The magnificent organ played, Br Luigi of Sorres translated the homily, our Vietnamese brethren sang a post-communion hymn, and we processed briskly back to the sacristy. It still took seven minutes, even with a short-cut, for this is one of the largest churches in the world, a fact disguised by its proportions.

Another monumental festal lunch in another monumental refectory followed a tour of the Abbey and its Liturgical Institute. Thereafter we visited Padua on foot. Only Red Square in Moscow

is larger than that on which the Abbey stands, and it can be taken as certain that the Italian square is the more animated! Fr Abbot had the good fortune to visit the Baptistry of the Duomo when a baptism was taking place, but even without that, the place is beautiful.

Next day we left with the other Abbots for the Congress near Rome, while I, with Br André from Malaybalay and Br Stefano, went to Venice. We got as far as Torcello, a bit like going “doon the watter”, and Br Stefano, a Former Naval Person, kept a critical eye on the crew, who contact parked at the piers, except when they missed altogether... When we got back to Praglia, I set off an excruciatingly loud burglar alarm, while showing Br André how to get in to an otherwise locked guesthouse.

The following day I flew back over the spectacularly rugged and snowy alps, and arrived in a dark, wet and windy Aberdeen, with clouds down to 1500' – all good things come to an end. Perhaps in 2004?

DGC

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Catholics and Their Homes*

It is an interesting fact that the proto-martyr of Great Britain, St Alban, was a layman who was put to death in 286 during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, for sheltering a priest. During the Penal Days from 1534 - 1829, surely the longest persecution in any country, it was the Catholic laity who sheltered the priests in their houses and supported them – but for them the faith would not be alive today. And perhaps the bond between priest and people has saved us from the anticlericalism of some countries.

Dom Bede Camm, who was novice master at Caldey, wrote a book, *Forgotten Shrines*, in 1910, retelling those days and describing some of the old Catholic houses with their hiding places



and memories of the martyrs.

Now Leanda de Lisle and Peter Stanford have given us a slimmer volume describing some twenty places – still occupied by the same old families, with fine colour photographs by Richard Surman. On the map they appear to form the backbone of the country from Warblington in the south to Traquair in the north. There are of course others which we hope will appear in a future book.

The Jesuits receive well deserved mention for their heroic work in the Penal days, but this reviewer was surprised to find St Ambrose Barlow OSB described as a Jesuit on page 69! The older Orders, Benedictine and Franciscan, also had their martyrs and missionaries, and not a few Catholic parishes today developed from a house chapel served by these monks and friars.

Most of these houses are open to the public and the book has three pages of visitor information.

Published by *HarperCollins*, 160pp, 20 illus, £19.99.

DAS

***Word & Spirit: A Monastic Review, No 17, Monastic Ongoing Formation*** (Petersham, Massachusetts; St Bede's Publications, 1995)

In his article "The *Collatio* in RB 42 and Tradition" for this review, Ambrose Wathen describes a *collatio* as a "collection of various points of view joined together in a single unit" (p 87). According to this description this collection of essays on the subject of on-going monastic formation could be described as a *collatio*. In his article he sees the unity coming about through different persons in conversation, which is not exactly what is happening in this publication, though the reader can allow the contributors to come into conversation with each other in the act of reading.

Each of the ten contributors to this edition of *Word & Spirit* approaches the subject of monastic on-going formation from a

different viewpoint. Their backgrounds and informing traditions are varied: four are Cistercians, while the other six come from various Benedictine congregations. Most are from the United States of America, and the three Europeans are French.

More than one contributor points out that only in the last twenty or so years have monks talked explicitly about Monastic on-going formation. Some articles approach the topic from a practical point of view, others look at it more philosophically. All are agreed that the true formation of the monk is the formation of Christ in the monk, a process which lasts as long as life.

Ambrose Wathen looks at RB 42 and Adalbert de Vogue examines the promises of RB 58 in the light of the topic. The late Jean Leclercq provides an article on the monastic life formed according to the Trinity. Kurt Belsole warns against taking the model of professional training too much to heart and proposes a healthy monastic lifestyle as the best way of providing on-going formation. All of these articles in their different ways set the subject against the background of monastic tradition.

The subject of “Monastic On-Going Formation” is of interest to monks and nuns. All the contributors are monks and consider the subject as monks. They assume that their readers too are within the monastic tradition. This collection of articles is probably of less interest to those outside the Benedictine family than other titles in the *Word & Spirit* series. It is of interest to those who are seeking to be conformed to Christ in monastic life.

DMS

## **NEW PIPE ORGAN FOR PLUSCARDEN**

We have recently decided to acquire a good pipe organ to accompany the chant. It is felt that the present organ does not fulfil the need for clear yet unobtrusive accompaniment, with a good variety in the tone, and a moderate scope for some solo work. The need is also felt for an instrument which is pleasing to the eye and enhances the appearance of the sanctuary. After much consultation, it seems that a new pipe organ is the best way to fulfil our needs. In the next few weeks we hope to finalise the choice of a builder and the exact specification of the instrument, so that it can be built by 1998, the Golden Jubilee of our foundation from Prinknash Abbey.

The cost is likely to be considerable, since it involves several months' work by experienced craftsmen: the project is in fact quite comparable to the building of a small house. In the next issue of the magazine we hope to include a more detailed description of the proposals. We would be very grateful indeed for any donations towards this project, which will be a lasting contribution to the beauty of the liturgy at Pluscarden.

## **MONASTERIES OF THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

### **No. 2 Monastery of the Annunciation, Nazareth Melkite or Greek Catholic Nuns**

Mother Jabrie, Abbess of the Monastery of the Annunciation, Nazareth, was born in 1923 in Morocco to parents whose origins were French and Spanish. When she was old enough to go to school, they encouraged her to learn the Arabic language as well as French. In 1954, she met Mother Veronique, Abbess of the Poor Clare Monastery at Rabat. Moved by this encounter she decided to leave the world, and enter the monastery as a spiritual daughter of Mother Veronique. We should note that Mother Veronique

guarded as part of her vocation an esteem and respect for Islam, which she communicated to her daughters, a rare feature in foreign convents of colonial countries.

In 1958, Mother Veronique visited the Holy Land and on this occasion met the Melkite Church in Galilee and its Bishop George Hakim (now Patriarch Maximos V. Hakim). This meeting brought her at once joy and astonishment: joy in the discovery of this local church in Galilee, and surprise at the absence of monastic life in this church, despite the fact that Palestine had been a cradle of ascetical life from the first centuries of Christianity.

This is what impelled Mother Veronique to propose to Bishop Hakim that she should send sisters to re-establish monastic life in Galilee according to the Byzantine tradition. Bishop Hakim gladly accepted.

When the news reached Morocco, Sister Jabrie, who was moved at this idea, secretly hoped that she would be sent. Even before she expressed her desire, Mother Veronique called her with two other sisters, confiding to her the responsibility for the group.

Between the years 1958 and 1962 the nuns lived at St Joseph's Seminary, doing manual work that was given them there, and at the same time discovering and making their own the liturgical and monastic traditions of the Orient and its spirituality, marvelling that this heritage of the Eastern Fathers had been kept alive in the body of a local Arab church. In 1962 they moved into their new monastery whose first building was just completed.

As to the spiritual construction of her monastic community, Mother Jabrie envisioned it as having two dimensions or goals:

- 1 to adopt and embrace the tradition of the Byzantine church, thus becoming an image of this tradition.

- 2 to do all possible so that this monastery might be the beginning of Oriental monasticism in the region.

After this first step in the establishment of the monastery, the Lord sent her in 1974, a sustaining help in the person of Fr

John Leonard. He helped her to affirm the basis of the liturgy and by his sacramental service, he was able to enrich the spiritual life of the sisters.

Another great step was taken in 1977 when she was officially made Hegumena, or Mother Abbess of the Monastery. Shortly afterwards, in 1979, the monastery was made autonomous, as befits oriental monastic families, and was finally incorporated in the Galilean Eparchy.

Mother Jabrie took great pains to guide her daughters towards a witness of an enlightened life, so that her community would be a living icon of the Church's presence.

Among other things to this end, she established a studio of icon painting as a help to and expression of the contemplative life of the community. The Lord sent her vocations to sustain this endeavour and this studio has become one of the important witnesses of the mission of the monastery.

In January 1994, Mother Jabrie was discovered to have a serious illness, which she accepted with joy and complete abandonment. She spent four months confined to her bed at the monastery, or at the hospital, but the joy of her faith never left her even in her worst sufferings.

On Friday April 28, she asked to receive the sacrament of anointing of the sick, although there was little sign that her end was near. After receiving the sacrament, she expressed her joy in being visited by Christ, then she asked to see her sisters who were able to visit her whilst she was still conscious.

Saturday her condition changed radically and her beautiful soul departed from her body, on Sunday morning, May 1, at the time when her community was celebrating the Divine Liturgy.

It was the Sunday of the Samaritan woman according to the Melkite Church calendar, and Easter Sunday in the Orthodox Church, thus she combined at her departure, as she always had done in her monastic life, the undivided Byzantine church. Her funeral was celebrated in an ambience of Easter joy at the monastery on May 3rd. She had re-opened the way of monastic

life. Now she rejoins those who preceded her on that way, our Fathers in the Faith, Hilarion, Chariton, Euthymios, Theodore and Sabas.

May her soul rest with those Holy Fathers and may she intercede for us.

A nun of Nazareth