

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 89 News and Notes for our Friends March 1991</p>

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

On April 13th. 1948 the first five monks arrived from Prinknash to restore monastic life in this old monastery. Our cover photo shows the group with the Prior (later Abbot) of Prinknash, Peter Anson and our architect, Ian Lindsay; it was probably taken the day after arrival. Today only Fr Maurus and Br Andrew are still with us, both hale and hearty. The forty years or so since have seen considerable development. The community has grown from five to more than thirty with a dependent house at Petersham in the U.S.A., and once-ruined buildings have been restored and additions built. All this has been possible because of the generous support of our friends and the great good will of local people. This little newsletter, begun in 1968, consisted of eight pages printed on the Gestetner by the late Br Symon in an edition of 100 copies. Today the Moravia Press in Elgin prints 1,200 copies which go to every part of the world.

I am sorry our Christmas issue was so late. We have made a Lenten resolution to get this one out for Easter. Since I last wrote, we have rejoiced in Dom Ambrose's Solemn Profession on 8th. December. In spite of snow and bad weather, his sister and a number of his friends were here, as was Fr Aidan Nichols O.P. from Cambridge, who received him into the Church while at Edinburgh University.

Snowy weather returned for Br Dunstan's Simple Profession, which took place on Shrove Tuesday, 12th February. Br Peter Protheroe was received into the noviciate on 15th. January and two postulants have joined us; Anthony McGrade and Stephen Holmes. Both of them spent some time living with the

Community during the summer. So our Noviciate is very healthy with 3 juniors, a novice and 2 postulants – and at Petersham another four.

Fr Mark has returned to us from Ghana after his illness and is making a good recovery. Br Finbar has also arrived back from Petersham; while Br André from Petersham, who spent two months with us at the end of last year, has now returned to the U.S.A. Before he returned he helped Br Gregory to glaze a window in the north transept aisle. This window was filled with corrugated fibre-glass as “a temporary measure” about 1950. The mullions had been destroyed, so the Moray Stonecutters have replaced these and we have filled the three lights with Flemish glass. In fact very little light comes through, since the Dunbar Vestry obscures this, but the new stone work gives added dignity to this part of the building. This was the last window which needed the stone mullions replacing, but there are a dozen windows in the transepts filled with temporary corrugated fibreglass, which has become very dark. Some day they should be filled with stained glass.

News came of two deaths at Prinknash, the first of Br Chad, the Prinknash carpenter who made, among other things at the Abbey, the fine wooden door in the north transept. As he had been ill for some time, his death was not unexpected, but it was a great shock to hear of the sudden death of Dom Hildebrand. A member of our community for a number of years after coming to us from Farnborough, he was our Cellarer and during his time Mr William Murray Jack became our architect. He also invited Mr Grenville Johnston to help us with our financial affairs: but for this the church might still be roofless and St Scholastica’s only a dream.

On Monday 18th. February, Requiem Mass was sung for Mrs Lucie Shiach who was one of our oldest friends. Her family and many friends filled the church. Bishop Mario Conti officiated at the interment in Elgin – may they rest in peace.

Winter speaks to us of death but the spring leads up to Easter and proclaims the joy of life eternal. The II Vatican Council

said, "Man has been created by God for a blissful purpose, beyond the reach of earthly misery." An old pagan, about to die, laughed gently at those who asked him where he wished to be buried. "Where to bury me? You must first catch me. My body; do with it what you like – but ME, I will be with the blessed." To all such "immortal longings" that have come to the minds and hearts of men Jesus Christ, in his Rising, proclaims a glorious Yes. The Church takes the prayer of Christ as he died and adds to it alleluia, "Into thy hands O Lord I commend my spirit. Alleluia Alleluia."

May the joy of him who died and rose again be in your hearts now and for ever.

Yours devotedly,

D.Alfred, Abbot

CISTERCIAN NUNS FOR WALES: DORSET TO DYFED

The only house of Cistercian nuns in Great Britain founded by refugee nuns from France in 1802 by the 8th Lord Arundel of Wardour at Stapehill in Dorset. At that time there were Cistercian monks at nearby IJaworth. The nuns made a foundation in Ireland in 1932 at Glencairn, but various reasons have compelled them to leave Stapehill. They first found a temporary home in a former Anglican convent at Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire and now, after two and a half years' search, they have discovered an ideal property in South Wales, near the site of the old Abbey of Whitland.

It is fitting that the nuns should restore Cistercian life to the Welsh mainland since Wales, in common with Celtic Ireland and Scotland, was always a predominantly Cistercian land, rather than "black Benedictine". In Wales especially, the Cistercians were identified with Welsh nationality and their monasteries were patrons of poets and bards.

The former Waungron Farm Hotel, now Holy Cross

Abbey, Whitland in Dyfed, is 21 miles from Whitland which was founded directly from Cîteaux in 1140. It soon became the mother-house of three important daughter houses, Cwmhir, Strata Florida (*Ystrad Flur* in Welsh), and Strata Marcella (*Ystrad Marcel*). They in turn were to found Cymer, Aberconway, Llantarnam and Valle Crucis. The other Cistercian monasteries in Wales – Tintern, Basingwerk, Dore, Grace Dieu, Margam and Neath – were all situated along the North and South coasts or in the Marches near England.

None of the Welsh houses ever compared in size or architectural glory with Fountains or Rievaulx. Wales was a poor country and sparsely populated; consequently, with the exception of Tintern and Valle Crucis (which is not unlike Pluscarden), very little of the buildings has survived. This is true of Whitland, though it is interesting to see on the map a place a few miles to the N.E. called Plascerdin. They suffered in the frequent clashes between Welsh and English and in the internal quarrels of the Welsh themselves. By the time of the Reformation, most houses were reduced to a handful of monks. At Cwmhir there were an Abbot and two monks. The Black Death in 1349 had severely cut down the communities in all Religious houses and it is very difficult to maintain a normal monastic observance in a community of four or five monks – some of whom may be old and ill. With few or no laybrothers, it was impossible to work the land, so granges were leased or sold. When the commissioners arrived at Cwmhir at the Reformation to suppress the house, they found the Abbot and monks had gone and the monastery stripped and desolate.

Renewal of monastic life was undoubtedly due by the 16th century. It is related of Abbot David ap Owain in 1485, that he rode to hounds – and on one occasion the Welsh *conversi* stole his horses because he refused them beer. Nevertheless he was the patron of poets who sang his praises in extravagant language. Generous in hospitality, wine flowed at his table.

Welsh literature owes much to the Abbeys. “The Chronicle of the Princes” (*Brut y Tywysogion*) seems to have been compiled

at Valle Crucis. Some noted poets retired to the Abbeys as “corrodians” in their old age. Such was Gufu’r Glyn who died c. 1495 “old and deaf”; and also Lewis Mon, whose will was drawn up at Valle Crucis, witnessed by two monks.

In monastic history little is heard of the day to day work of the monks: it is only lawsuits about property and the occasional scandal which survive. Doubtless there were many unknown monks at Whitland and elsewhere, praying quietly and working on their land, and abbots too, such as the last Abbot of Dore who, when Westminster Abbey was briefly restored by Queen Mary, hastened to join the Benedictine community there.

“The evil that men do lives after them, the good
is oft interred with their bones.”

There is a saying in Wales; “It is easy to kindle a fire on an old hearth.” May the return of the nuns to Whitland help to bring back the Faith to Wales.

D.A.S.

FROM MONK TO BISHOP

This is an abridged translation of a conversation with Bishop John Willem Gran by Lars Roar Langslet from the Norwegian Catholic periodical, *Sant Olaf*.¹

If life had been just as I planned and wished for myself, I would have happily worked in opera. I was only thirteen when I decided to become an operatic director. But then, God has uprooted me several times in my life. When I became a Catholic; when I entered a monastery; and when I was appointed bishop, I

¹ Beretningen opprinnelig skrevet av Lars Roar Langslet og denne oversettelse er en forkortet omskrivning zttoget av et tributt til Biskop Gran utgitt i Sant Olav, nummer 1, Januar 1991.

hardly had to lift a finger. It was fairly simple, it was something I just had to do. All my own plans were turned on their head. In retrospect I see that it was the way I ought to have followed.

As a boy I became an atheist. There was little religion at home, but religious education at school was decisive in producing exactly the opposite result from that which was intended. I refused to be confirmed and said I was an atheist; thenceforth I was one.

As a sixteen year old I left home and travelled to England, and two years later I went on to Munich to study music at the Conservatory. One day I was passing a bookshop which was having a sale and bought a pile of Buddhist writings for next to nothing. For days and weeks I was absorbed by the basic writings of Buddhism; it was a philosophical awakening. I declared myself a Buddhist. It was subsequent to this that I became a Catholic. I returned to England in 1938 and studied opera at an arts-college, going on from there to Italy for further studies.

Then came the next sudden change. It arose through a completely ordinary situation while I sat at home eating. All at once something struck within me; an overwhelmingly strong belief. I knew there was a God and that he wanted me to do something. Initially however, I did not inwardly feel that this new certainty of belief had anything to do with Christianity or a Church.

I had a little contact with a couple of Catholic seminarians in Rome, Lars Messel and Ivar Hausten-Knudsen, and plagued the life out of them with my many polemical questions. Finally Knudsen referred me to a Jesuit who had been in Denmark for many years Fr Poppe. There were some heated discussions!

It is impossible to say when it was in this process that I became a Christian, but one day in 1941 it suddenly struck home. I said to myself: "I will be a Catholic!" and as soon as I said it, I became one. I was received into the Church in 1941 by Fr Poppe, and confirmed by Bishop Smit, the former Bishop of Oslo. Early in 1944 I came back to England where I did my National Service in the Norwegian Military Intelligence. On the 9th May 1945 I was

sent to Tromsø and later to Bergen and Oslo. I ended up as liaison-officer between the British and Norwegian Commands in Ikershus. After the War, I lost faith in opera as an art form: it grieved me to admit that the medium of the future was film!

So I became assistant-director under Vibe-Muller. Our big project was a film about “heavy water”, concerning the extraordinary sabotage action carried out in Telemark. When it ended, a deep sense of apprehension came upon me, a feeling of expectation. I began to attend Mass daily. It was the beginning of a new conversion.

Home again in Norway, I took a year to reach graduation, postponed by the war, and to think. By autumn 1949, I knew I had to enter a monastery. It was not something I particularly desired, it was something I simply had to do! It was natural for me to go to England; it was from there that Christianity came to us. Thus I came to Caldey, an island in the waters off Wales.

As soon as I arrived, I knew that there was where I ought to be. I was there for ten years, then I was sent to Rome in order to take a licentiate in Theology. When I had nearly returned to Caldey, we received an urgent message to send me back to the Order’s house as the Order’s Oeconomus. They had noticed that I had mastered Italian and that I could drive! In 1962 word came to me that I was called to be Bishop of Oslo. I received the news with equanimity – Cistercians, as a rule, are never appointed as bishops. It was the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Hamer, who broke the news. He refused to allow me time to consider the matter: it was only secular priests who had need for that, he said. However monastic life had accustomed me to obey.

The process of familiarisation was a difficult transition to make. Afterwards, I appreciated that monastic life had been a good schooling for the task I was to undertake. I was consecrated in 1963. During my first year as Bishop I was elected to the Secretariat for Christian Unity and met with Bea, Congar, Willebrands and Hamer during the preparatory work on the central Conciliar documents.

In 1983 I returned as Bishop of Oslo. I have been

especially occupied with the Northern Episcopal Conference. After my retirement, I continued for two years as Chairman and hence became General-Secretary for four years, and now assist Bishop Schwenser as Vice-General-Secretary. It also means a considerable amount of travel since the Conference has a strong international involvement. I help in my own capacity here at home. So there is enough to keep me occupied!

Bishop Gran celebrated his 70th birthday on 5th April last year.

D.C.B.

WEST WING APPEAL NEWS

Since our Christmas number went to press, much preparatory work has been done for 1991. We are still discussing the plans with the Historic Buildings Directorate. Appeal funds are now marching on towards £160,000, boosted by your gifts and events organised by you, such as the Family Carol Service arranged here by Mrs Janey Roncoroni and directed musically by Martin Treacher, and the Hundred Club organised by Mr and Mrs J. McColgan in Glasgow. The St Scholastica's brochure shows what has been achieved already.

BOOK REVIEW

THE GENIUS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, Selections from his Writings; by Ian Ker. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989.

By this book, Ian Ker has put us in his debt a second time - following his biography of Newman with this new anthology of texts from the Master.

Most readers, one imagines, would ask two things of such

an anthology: that it reflect the full range of its subject's competence, and that it include not only the familiar but also something of the lesser-known, especially if that should speak to a temporary preoccupation. Fr Ker's selection substantially answers both expectations. He presents his 341 pages of material in five sections: the Educator, the Philosopher, the Preacher, the Theologian appropriately the longest), the Writer, each prefaced a brief introduction; and, while leaving none of the major written works aside, selects on occasion –heir less familiar portions or adds passages from minor works easily passed by, for example, the 3 volumes of *Historical Sketches* and the 2 of *Essays Critical and Historical*.

Newman often unfolds an argument at length, and Fr Ker never over-abbreviates. One never feels cheated of Newman's thought. The book could certainly serve as an introduction to a prospective student, amateur or otherwise. It could also function as a handy one-volume vade-mecum for those who simply wish to remain in Newman's company.

The only omissions this reviewer regrets concern Newman's writing and preaching on the Trinity and the Incarnation, while the sublime central chapters of the widely neglected *Lectures on Justification* surely deserve more than one brief quotation from Lecture 7. But one can only rejoice at Fr Ker's determination to redress what he sees as the undervaluing of Newman's literary versatility (evidenced especially in the sometimes hilariously exuberant *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics*); to highlight his devastating polemic against the Evangelicals; to do justice to the scattered but coherent ecclesiology of the Catholic period; and to give room to the ever-relevant philosophy of religious belief expounded in the *Oxford University Sermons* and the *Grammar of Assent*. The *Apologia*, of course, makes its appearances, and some of the *Letters*. But the stress falls on Newman's thought and its literary expression, rather than immediately on the story behind it. This selection, therefore, complements, as well as accompanies the Biography.

In the light of the Church's recent declaration on the reality

of Newman's heroic virtue, it is interesting to read the following comment of our anthologist: "For Newman real spirituality is characterized by its utter unpretentiousness, for it involves above all the minute performance of the duties of every day, Thus the hallmark of the saint is not spiritual ardour but the unexpected quality of 'consistency'" (p.121).

ANALECTA CARTUSIANA

Spiritualitat Heute und Gestern Bthade 7, 8, 9, 10 (AC 35)

Maître Bruno, Père des Chartreux, by Un Chartreux (AC 115)

Available from Dr J. Hogg, Institut fiir Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universitet Salzburg, Austria.

These latest volumes of the *Analecta Cartusiana* series comprise, on the one hand, varia of Carthusian interest, including a first modern edition of the Middle Low German version of St Birgitta's *Revelations*, and of a late medieval verse Chronicle by an English Carthusian preserved in the Bodleian, and on the other, a very competent modern life and study of St Bruno by a Spanish Carthusian (here translated into French).

A KENTISH PARSON: Selections from the private papers of the Revd. Joseph Price, Vicar of Brabourne, 1767-1786. Ed. G. M. Ditchfield and Bryan Keith-Lucas, Publ. Kent County Council, Arts and Libraries, 1991, 203 pp.

The editors of this interesting volume have kindly presented our library with a copy. Joseph Price was, as the title makes clear, an 18th century Kentish Parson. He was not a man of any outstanding qualities, but he kept a shorthand diary full of interesting observations on the men and manners of his time. This Diary eventually came into the possession of the late Reverend L. E. Whatmore, whose literary executor Pluscarden Abbey is, and it was thanks initially to him and Mr Frank Higenbotham of

Canterbury City Library that it was brought to public attention in the 1950s. Messrs Ditchfield and Keith-Lucas of the University of Kent at Canterbury have now made it the basis of this thorough study, of interest not only to Kentish men and men of Kent but also to students of 18th century English religion and ways of life. One entry may serve as a warning to the over-active: "Towers of Tonbridge School died of a complication of disorders under 50. Been too much alive, said Mr Conant. Lived too many hours out of the twenty four. Been awake too many of them." (p. 151).

D.H.G.

HALFWAY TO HEAVEN ON ROUTE 32

The town of Petersham, Massachusetts lies about 80 miles west of Boston, midway between Athol and Barre on Route 32. It is the quintessential New England town with elegant pillared buildings overlooking a neat and well kept common. While it is the third largest town in the state in terms of acreage it has one of Massachusetts' lowest population-density rates: 14 per square mile.

Once a community of farmers and tradesmen, Petersham (pronounced Peter's ham, "there's no sham in Petersham") later became a popular holiday resort for the well-to-do and so gained a number of huge secluded houses in large grounds. Too far from any major city to be a convenient home for commuters, and surrounded as it is by State Forest, conservation areas and wildlife preserves, Petersham was ideal for monastic communities seeking solitude and silence. And so today Petersham is home to five religious communities: the Sisters of the Assumption, the Monks of Adoration, the Maronite Hermits of St Francis and the Benedictine Monastic Center consisting of the nuns of St Scholastica Priory and the monks of St Mary's Monastery.

The Sisters of the Assumption were the first to arrive in 1951 when they began a boarding school in a former inn on the

common. This closed in 1973 due to a decline in enrolment and the sisters moved further up Route 32 where they built a retirement home and a Montessori school.

The small community of the Monks of Adoration arrived in 1985. They number three at present and, as their name suggests, their apostolate is the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Maronite Hermits of St Francis at Most Holy Trinity Monastery moved from nearby Palmer to Petersham in 1985. There are 13 in the community and they recently completed a large extension of monastic cells, each one self-contained with a small garden attached, similar to the Carthusian idea. Their chapel is small and beautifully panelled in pine but it is expected that a larger chapel will be built sometime in the future.

The other two communities are familiar to regular readers of this newsletter: St Mary's Monastery, a daughter house of Pluscarden, and St Scholastica Priory. They make up the "Benedictine Monastic Center at Petersham". The two monasteries are set on 175 wooded acres and plans are at present being finalised for the the construction of two new monasteries and a Church. The first phase, the nuns' monastery, will, it is hoped, begin in the near future, but first a massive appeal is to be launched across the country.

The 21 nuns support themselves by a book publishing business and a bakery, though they recently cut back the bakery output as it began to interfere too much with their prayer-life. The monks raise and sell Golden Retrievers and are hoping to get a fudge making business started soon. But their main business, as at Pluscarden, is the Opus Dei which is celebrated in common with the nuns, a constant reminder that "we are in the service of the same Lord and doing battle for the same King" (RB 61:10).

D.F.B.