

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 99 News and Notes for our Friends December 1993</p>
--

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Our last issue featured the solemn profession of Br Gabriel Potter, which took place on the 14th September, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. God willing, by the time this reaches you, Br Cyprian Bampton will have made his solemn profession. Br Cyprian was born in Nairobi, grew up in Essex and came to us, five years ago, from Norway! He has a great love for the early monastic fathers and writers. And we pray that, inspired by them, he may run in the way of the Lord's commands and experience what St Benedict calls the "unutterable sweetness" of love.

Several local events have marked this autumn. On 19th September, Dom Barnabas and I attended the 150th anniversary celebrations of our local parish of St Sylvester. It was a pleasure, in return, for us to have the parish priest, Canon Robert McDonald, to lunch and recreation here on the 26th November, St Sylvester's day. On the 21st September, I was present at the dedication of the new interdenominational church at the nearby RAF base of Lossiemouth. On the 7th November, I accepted a kind invitation to evensong at St Andrew's Episcopalian Cathedral in Inverness. On this occasion, Bishop George Sessford formally laid down his pastoral charge, laying his crozier on the altar at the end of the service. He has not felt able to accept the Anglican Communion's endorsement of the ordination of women, and so resigned for reasons of conscience. Our prayers are with him. On 1st November, our new local Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Ronald Scotland, joined us for lunch. We look forward to the annual Advent carol service with his flock.

As is well known by now, Scotland has been celebrating

this year the 900th anniversary of the death of St Margaret. On 16th November, St Margaret's day, Abbot Alfred and I went down to Edinburgh for the Mass in St Mary's Cathedral, presided over by Archbishop Keith O'Brien. Three members of the Hungarian episcopate had come for the occasion and a good number of Britain's Hungarian community. Bishop Mario Conti, who has taken a leading role in the celebrations of the Year of Margaret, emphasised in his homily the degree to which the figure of Margaret had caught the popular imagination of contemporary Scots. Pluscarden itself, in early October, had the honour of a visit from HRH Princess Margaret. I was away at the time, but Fr Prior was able to give the Princess and her retinue a tour of the monastery. This was the first time, since the Middle Ages, that we have had the privilege of welcoming royalty.

In the last week of September and the first of October, I visited our dependent house in Massachusetts, St Mary's monastery.

While there I was able to clothe Larry Lewis, a Canadian, as a novice. He was given the name Ambrose. Please pray for him and the several other men in formation in that house. There is no lack of applicants. Shortly after returning from the United States, I visited the new monastery at Alton, Staffs, of which there is an account on another page. Then Abbot Alfred and I attended the Union of Monastic Superiors general assembly at Hawkstone Hall, Shropshire. Some 40 monastic superiors, men and women, Catholic and Anglican, were present. It was a chance to meet one's fellow superiors and benefit from their wisdom and that of the outside speakers who addressed us.

The second week of November was given to our annual retreat. Fr Aidan Nichols, o.p., provided us with rich fare in a series of inspiring conferences.

And so to the present. Advent is upon us: the season of silent waiting. On behalf of all of us, may I wish our readers every blessing for the Christmas season and the coming year. We receive many cards, letters and gifts at this time, and try to acknowledge each of them. If we fail to do so, please attribute this to

incompetence, not to ingratitude. Indeed, we are grateful for everything.

Yours in the Lord,

Fr Hugh OSB, Abbot

THE EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

At the end of each year I have to send in an account of what we have done for AIM in Scotland during the past twelve months. AIM is an association of monasteries which assist monasteries in the Third World. The General Secretariat is in Paris. It was founded after Vatican II by Abbot de Floris. At that time there were very few contemplative monasteries outside Europe (Brazil was an exception). Today there are more than 300.

So before I render an account to Paris I wish to thank you for your generosity which has made this possible. Mass intentions are sent to the Benedictines at Makkiyad in South India. Help has gone to our own monastery in Ghana and to La Soledad in Mexico where they are building a simple monastery, also to the Tyburn nuns in Peru. The Middle East is also on the AIM map and you have been able to help two monasteries of nuns of Eastern Catholic rite: the little Melkite monastery in Nazareth and Maronite Poor Clares of Yarze who suffered terribly during the war in the Lebanon. Aid was also given to the Studite Sisters in the Western Ukraine who are still living in poverty after years in the Communist prison camps in Siberia.

In 1992 we were able to help the Benedictine Abbey in Poland which was publishing patristic texts for other monasteries and also a Cistercian monastery in Eastern Europe.

We print 1400 copies of the newsletter and nearly all are sent out by post. The postage has increased from November. The newsletter is not a profit making business – it is simply a link with our friends and a “thank you” for your many gifts and prayers. It

costs 30 pence to print – postage is extra.

Dom Alfred
Editor

STUDITE SISTERS IN THE WESTERN UKRAINE

The order takes its name from St Theodore the Studite, a monk of the eighth century. The Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Archbishop Andrew Sheptytsky and his brother Archimandrite Clement refounded the order in 1906/7 in the Western Ukraine. In 1924 they established the same order for women. In their Liturgy the sisters follow the Byzantine rite and Eastern traditions. Until 1950 their Mother-house and Novitiate were in Jaktoriw. Moreover, they had seven convents in different places. Up to 1950 the order consisted of 170 sisters. They worked in orphanages, on their own farms and with young people, teaching religion etc. In 1950 the Soviet government liquidated all monasteries. The library of the order was burnt, all property confiscated and given away. The sisters were all expelled and were not allowed to do other than the most menial work.

Their Superior, Mother Josepha Witer (+ 1988), together with seven other sisters, was imprisoned. Mother Josepha was sentenced to eight years hard labour in Siberia; her seven companions were sent to prison camps. The other sisters worked on collective farms, in factories or in poorly paid jobs. Only on Sundays and Feastdays had they the possibility to visit one another and to pray together. After Mother Josepha returned from Siberia she cautiously and prudently tried to strengthen the connections between the sisters. During the time of suppression 20 sisters secretly joined the order. Whenever possible, two or three sisters lived together. The militia and the state secret police knew these shared flats and the sisters were constantly controlled. Religious articles were taken away, especially religious literature that the sisters had managed to obtain from Western Christians, for

instance *Kirche in Not, Ostpriesterhilfe*. Often the sisters were examined and ill-treated to extort information about priests from them.

In 1989 when the Ukrainian Catholic Church could again appear and work in public, a new phase of life began for the sisters. They can now openly show their membership of the Church and of the order and are respected and loved by many people. They work in parishes, teach religion, do charitable work and nurse the sick.

At the moment 60 sisters belong to the order; 35 are older than 70. They need help and care. So far they live in small flats; two or three or four sisters living together in and around the towns of Lvov and Ternopil. Their living quarters are intolerably small and dilapidated.

Some of them were able to move into the old monastery of Polish Roman Catholic Benedictines who had to leave the country in 1946. A few rooms of this building were given to the sisters, but the building is in very bad repair. Since 1989 several young women entered the order though the sisters had no room for them and the candidates had to go to their parents for the night. All the sisters who are now younger than 68 had no chance to live in a regular convent. Therefore six sisters came to the Abbey of Frauenchiemsee to experience community life and get a novitiate. A priest of the Ukrainian Catholic Church who lives in Munich comes almost every Sunday to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with these sisters, and Studite monks from Rome come for retreats and lectures about their Liturgy.

BOOK REVIEWS

Gregory the Great, *The Life of St Benedict*. Commentary by Adalbert de Vogüé OSB. Translated by Hilary Costello and Eoin de Bhaldraithe. (St Bede's Publications, Petersham, MA 1993) pp 186.

For evidence about St Benedict we are dependent on two

short documents; his Rule and Book II of the Dialogues of St Gregory the Great. This book is a translation into English of the latter with a commentary by Adalbert de Vogue, monk of La Pierre-qui-Vire, who is well known for his monumental commentary on the Rule and for other works on early monasticism. Not the least of these is his critical edition of the Dialogues in the series “Sources Chrétiennes” and it is on the basis of his long study of the text that he has written this work. It first appeared as magazine articles, then came a French version in book form and now St Bede’s are to be congratulated on this well-produced volume.

In reading this book one progresses through Gregory’s hagiographical study of Benedict section by section under the guidance of a master who is both monk and savant. To understand the text it is made clear that we must escape the prison of modern thought, a ‘childish positivism which seeks “historical truth”, and learn to seek the meaning of these stories. This does not mean that the question of historicity is ignored, it is merely put in its proper place. Gregory is said to “lead us into another world”, the world of the Bible and the Fathers, and it is acting as the midwife of this process that de Vogüé’s commentary performs its greatest service. This work thus not only elucidates the meaning of the *Life of St Benedict* but it is a practical guide for one beginning to read the Fathers. As such it is an important text for those in monastic formation, oblates and all who wish to enrich their Christian life by serious spiritual reading.

A de Vogüé states that “the comparison of texts is our simple exegetical method”, and above all it is the Scriptures which are the key for interpretation. He also compares parallel passages in other parts of the Dialogues and draws on a wide range of earlier literature. These may not be the exact sources used by Gregory but, as with the sources cited in the RB80 edition of the Rule, they enable us to enter the thought-world of the author. Together with comparison, the explanation of structure is important for a deeper understanding of the text. We follow Benedict after his flight from Rome as he fights temptation in the

three parts of the soul: the Rational in fleeing fame at Affile, the Concupiscible in extinguishing sexual desire among the thorns at Subiaco, and the Irascible in his response to hatred both at Vicovaro and from the priest Florentinus. Thus cleansed of vices he makes his ascent to the lampstand of Monte Cassino where, triumphing over Satan, his sanctity shines out in two atemporal cycles of twelve miracles. The second ends with his sister, Scholastica, causing the miracle. As previous miracles indicated observance, here its champion is defeated by the nun's love – “illa plus potuit, quae amplius amavit”. This leads on to a series of three visions centred on Benedict's great mystical experience. After this summit of his earthly life, the Saint makes his final ascent, this time to heavenly glory. The comparison of Benedict's experiences with that of Monica and Augustine at Ostia and with the dream of Scipio are particularly interesting. In uncovering the structure and the literary parallels, de Vogüé draws out from the text Gregory's theology of the monastic life. He also, on a more personal level, develops the theme of the relationship between its cenobitic and eremitical forms.

One cannot leave this book without noting the excellence of the translation by two Cistercian scholars of Gregory's text. The first lines are somewhat terse but overall it is successful both in remaining close to the Latin and in being good modern English.

This book should therefore be bought and carefully studied. Fr Aidan Cusack OCSO who dismissed it as giving us “the pious thoughts of de Vogue rather than an elucidation of Gregory's text” (Cistercian Studies XXIV pp336-7) is rightly refuted in the postscript of this edition (p xii): “Gregory did not write the Dialogues to supply scholars with subject matter for...elaborate source criticism but to foster piety and morals ... in the people of God.” *The Life of St Benedict* is one of those rare books where accessible but sound scholarship is successfully combined with these aims of the great Pope.

D A H

Word & Spirit is a monastic review published once a year by our

nuns at Petersham. Each issue focuses on a single theological theme. The present number is entitled *The Spiritual Journey*. Ten people; monks, nuns and laypeople have contributed, mostly from America but from Europe there are the well known names of Jean Leclercq OSB, Adalbert de Vogüé OSB and Esther de Waal.

Fr Adalbert's journey led him to the Abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire and then to the hermitage; Jean Leclercq has entitled his account "Journeys and Jumps". He is a much travelled monk in constant demand to give conferences in all parts of the world though his heart is still in the Abbey of Clervaux in Luxembourg. Esther de Waal discovered St Benedict's Rule while living in the Deanery House at Canterbury Cathedral. *Word & Spirit* maintains the high standards of previous issues. It can be ordered through Pluscarden.

HOMILY FOR 900TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST MARGARET

**Given by Fr Abbot at the Diocesan Pilgrimage
in honour of St Margaret, 27 June 1993: Part II**

St Margaret had felt the goodness of the Lord, and gave it out to everyone. She found time for the poor, and orphaned children, and pilgrims – Queensferry is her monument here. She was tormented by the thought of so many English captured in raids south of the Border and now slaves in Scottish households. She sent out spies to trace them, and then paid their ransom. She made a special study of Scots law, to ensure its justice and fulfilment presumably. She raised the royal court, both at Edinburgh and Dunfermline, to the standards she'd known in Hungary and England. She had the knack of domestic economy. She imported wines from the south, and the palace halls were hung with silk tapestries. She brought in more colourful cloth and better jewellery – this through Scotland as a whole. Ladies' fashions were never the same after Margaret. Clearly, though she would shed tears in confession, she wasn't a Manichee. But she loved the beauty of the house of God above all. St Margaret's chapel is the oldest building in Edinburgh, and no

mean symbol of her. She restored the church and monastic community at Iona. She built the abbey church at Dunfermline, having it dedicated to the Holy Trinity – the Mystery of Faith *par excellence*. She made sure that the sacred vessels and vestments were of the best. She even ran a kind of embroidery school. And she must have sensed Scotland's isolation. She knew that the Continent of Europe was a place where monasteries were enjoying new life, and she appealed to Lanfranc, monk of Bec and Archbishop of Canterbury, to send her some Benedictines for Dunfermline. It was a small request, in a sense, but it opened Scotland to a wealth of prayer and worship and pastoral care. And someone had to do the opening. It was Margaret's great-great grandson, Alexander II, who founded this monastery, for example, but trace the inspiration back, and you come to her.

And so with so many of the medieval monastic foundations: Jedburgh, Holyrood, Kelso, Melrose, Newbattle, Kinloss, Dryburgh etc; Benedictines, Tironians, Cistercians, Valliscaulians. Trace the inspiration back, and you come to her. "A few highly endowed [people] will rescue the world for centuries to come", even if they are only "smoke", a "breath". She was not the implacable opponent of Celtic Christianity she has been said to be by some. But she did her best to bring what, now, we would call the local Church into harmony with the Church as a whole. She was preoccupied with Easter, it would seem, and with the little Easter, the weekly Easter, that is Sunday. She was a liturgical person, just as she was a biblical one. She found the people working on Sunday, and stopped it. "Let us venerate the Lord's day," she said, "because on it our Saviour rose." She found a Lent that had less than forty days, and lengthened it. She found people never going to Communion at Easter. She persuaded them to go to confession first, and then receive. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you." She had a passion for the dignified celebration of the Mass, and devoted her energies to ensuring this. And those energies were considerable, and, combined with tact, irresistible. She was famous for her own attachment to the great feasts of the Church's year,

and to the Mass, and she died with one of the prayers of the Mass on her lips.

And so we come to her death. Violence had shaped the beginning of her life: she was a child of exile. Violence marked its middle: when she and Malcolm met at in Wearmouth his soldiers were throwing English babies in the air and catching them on their spears – not a nice introduction to a husband-to-be. And violence accompanied her end. She had warned Malcolm against a fifth campaign into Northumbria, but he ignored her and was killed. So was one of their sons. It was the last news that reached her. And immediately she was dead, Edinburgh Castle was besieged by a claimant to the throne. Her body had to be smuggled out in secret, lowered down the steep rock on the western side under cover – appropriately enough – of a mist: Yet she died superbly. If there was one thing the medievals knew how to do, it was die. She died in prayer; looking at the Crucifix. She died grateful. She died asking for the freedom – *libera me* – that in essence she already had. “What is our life? For we are a mist (a breath) that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” But “a few highly endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come”. Family life, social life, economic life, cultural and religious life: Margaret had touched on every area, and left nothing quite the same for her touching. And all this in an alien land, and in little more than twenty years. It isn’t misguided to venerate her, or to think of her as one of those “highly endowed”, by nature and by grace, who have in a real way “rescued the world” beyond their own ‘vanishing’ from it.

Can she rescue us now, we wonder? Her biographer said a beautiful thing: “Being Christ’s she is all the more ours now that she has left us.” It was to St Margaret that Pius IX attributed the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy to Scotland in 1878. But can she rescue us now? In 1993? Certainly, she has a message; she can teach us. She can teach us the value of family life. She can teach us the difference between patriotism, which is a virtue, and nationalism, which is a vice. She can teach us that there is no area of human life, from table wines to the building of monasteries, that

the grace of Christ is not supposed to sanctify. She can teach us concern for the suffering: what would we have felt towards her had we been Saxon slaves and freed by her? We'd have had a cult of Margaret, surely. She can teach us to accept the unexpected and unwanted providences of our lives: the north wind that was, in fact, the breath of the Spirit and gave her her mission. She can teach us that the local Church is always to be a Church in communion with the Church as a whole, and eager to be enriched and revived by contact with that Catholic whole. She can remind us that monasteries, too, and the contemplative life, are part of the fullness of the Church. She can show us that Scripture and the Liturgy are given us for nourishment and energy, are springs of life. Her Gospel-book and Chapel are fine memorials to have left behind. And then, at Dunfermline, there is her cave, the place of solitary prayer, the symbol of the heart, where we pray to our Father who is in secret, and sees in secret. She can teach us that it is prayer, above all, that changes us, rescues us, and rescues the world – because, then, we allow the Father to see us.

“What is our life? For we are a mist, a breath...” And this, I think, is Margaret's last and most lasting message to us. The Collect speaks of her as an “image of Your goodness”. We are made in the image and likeness of God. And, in the beginning, we are told, God “breathed into [our] nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being”. What frail things we are: “a breath that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” Yet that breath is breathed into us by God. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Christ, rising from the dead, breathes back into us. Queen Margaret was a frail human being – “what is our life?” – but she allowed the Lord to breathe the Spirit into her, and so, unknown to herself, rescued her part of the world for centuries to come. She became a Saint. And so it can be with us. We are “a mist that vanishes”; we're of no significance whatever. But the Breath of the Spirit is within us, and great love is possible to us. We can be images of God's goodness by the power of the Spirit, and allow the Lord to rescue the world. The anniversary of St

Margaret's death is a call to holiness. May she help us to accept that call.

Amen.

CALDEY'S OLDEST RETREATANT?

Earlier this year I met the man who must surely be the oldest living Caldey Retreatant, Geoffrey Dearmer, (son of Percy Dearmer, the liturgist and hymnologist), at his home near Ramsgate. He is a hale and hearty 100, and has his wits very much about him – he beat me in a game of Scrabble – and has received quite a lot of publicity on reaching his century, not least on account of his beating all the odds, and surviving Gallipoli and the Western Front as a subaltern in the trenches. He did more than survive, he recorded his experiences in verse, then and later, and his century was marked by the re-publication of a selection of his verse, “A Pilgrim's Song”, published by John Murray, of which he was kind enough to present an inscribed copy to us.

He visited Caldey in his teens, with his brother – they knew Abbot Aelred through his visits to their father, then a Canon of St Paul's – and he recalled the enduring memory of hearing from his bed the joyful sound of the chant of the monks, who had risen at midnight to praise God. He also recalled with pleasure the bathing-parties they had had on the Island.

It was a great pleasure and privilege to jump the years back to our Anglican days in the century's first decade, and meet a Patriarch of our Community's early days.

DGC

THE WEST WING

As mentioned earlier in these pages, we had the pleasure of a visit from HRH Princess Margaret, in her train were Sir Iain Tennant, the Lord Lieutenant and an Honorary Member of our Appeal, and

Mrs Clodagh Farquharson, a member of the Appeal Committee. Her Royal Highness inspected and was impressed by the West Wing, and generously made a contribution.

Work is still progressing, and the shape of the building is now clear to all. The roof is complete, save minor details, and the stonework is partly pointed, with some parts still to be built. Frosty weather has held things up a little. Inside, the shape of things to come is also clearer, the work of decoration has started, and the joiners and plumbers are nearly at the stage of fitting the place out. It still looks as though it may be in use for Lent, though we are not having the official opening until later in April.

The Royal Engineers have kindly surveyed the site, and are going to advise us on landscaping and laying out the site, in terms of roads, radii, gradients and other technical matters, while a very kind friend has offered to take care of the more verdant aspect of the work. All this will have to wait until the contractors are clear of the site, and we have transplanted the bookbinder to other premises, after which we will clear away the green but we call the Studio. It will require a certain amount of careful juggling to reconcile the potentially conflicting requirements of access, parking and privacy, both for guests and monks, no doubt involving evolution, as well as planning.

We have decided to close the Appeal in the autumn of 1994, but hope to garner more funds before that date. It will be pleasant thereafter to return to the Abbey's wonted peace, and devote a bit more energy to the spiritual than to the material. Fr Abbot has exciting ideas for the building's use, which will ensure its benefitting many.

MONASTERIES OF THE SUBIACO CONGREGATION NO 62

The English Province No 11:

Monastery of St John the Baptist, Alton, Staffordshire

Towards the end of September 1993 the community of monks which came to Oulton, Staffordshire, from Farnborough almost three years ago moved to Alton about 15 miles away and close to

the Derbyshire border. Alton lies in the area known as the Staffordshire Moorlands and includes some of the most beautiful countryside in Britain. This part of the country with its steep thickly wooded hills and rocky outcrops and the river Churnet running in between has often been compared to southern Germany. The centre of the village of Alton is built of stone houses clustered around one of the highest points with a group of interesting buildings crowning the summit – a castle – or rather two castles, monastery, parish church and school; on the other side of the valley can be seen above the trees the principal tower of Alton Towers – the whole once forming the demesne of the Earls of Shrewsbury.

The castle which dominates the landscape and is in a way reminiscent of Ludwig II of Bavaria's Neuschwanstein dates from the 1840s and was designed by Pugin for John Talbot, 16th Earl, perhaps for his nephew and heir, Bertram, and after his succession, as a dower house (on a grand scale!) for the Earl's widow. It stands alongside the massive ruins of Bertram de Verdun's castle of 1175 which survived intact until the Civil War.

Earl John was a prominent figure in English Catholicism's "Second Spring", and was noted for his liberal benefactions to the building of churches. He was Pugin's principal patron and close friend, which undoubtedly explains why Pevsner can say of the founder of the Gothic Revival that: "Nowhere can one study and understand Pugin better than in Staffordshire." Hence a mere four miles from Alton is the magnificent church of St Giles in the modest little town of Cheadle; here thanks to Earl John the architect was given free rein to excel as only he knew how. Again at Alton Towers itself (now the famous leisure centre), Pugin's alterations and developments resulted in more of a palace than a stately home. However, it was in Alton itself with its medieval-style "Hospital of St John the Baptist" – a romantic idea of John Talbot's, that gave Pugin his greatest satisfaction. Begun in 1840 and before the castle, the Hospital was intended to house a priest warden, confrater, and six chaplains, twelve poor bedesmen, a schoolmaster and poor scholars. The building was therefore

furnished with lodgings for the respective groups, cloisters, common hall, library and a chapel of church-like proportions. In fact, with the exception of the “poor scholars”, the other inmates never materialised and the complex became the base for the Catholic mission in Alton and the surrounding countryside. The priest in charge, who had been the Earl’s domestic chaplain, invited the Irish Sisters of Mercy to come from Cheadle in 1855 and occupy the vacant buildings. They were later succeeded by Sisters from Maryvale who taught in the schools for boys and girls. A further development took place when French refugee Sisters of the Assumption came to the castle in 1904 and opened a boarding school for girls. When they returned to France after the First World War the Sisters of Mercy extended their educational work in Alton by buying the castle and opening a preparatory school for boys. With a general change in the policy of the Institute in more recent years it was decided to close this once successful school and after 140 years or so the Sisters of Mercy finally left Alton to disperse to other houses. Fortunately the freehold of what had been known as St John’s Convent, together with the church and surrounding land (excluding the castle) had been bought many years before by the efforts of the parishoners and of one benefactor in particular, and was presented to the Archdiocese of Birmingham. It is through the great generosity of the present Archbishop, Maurice Couve de Murville, that the monks were presented with a very beautiful and historic home in this diocesan property. Here they hope to live their Benedictine life and to extend hospitality to guests and retreatants.

DDH