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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pluscarden Benedictines</b><br/><b>No. 114 News and Notes for our Friends September 1997</b></p> |
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**FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

Summer has reached us, but not before a local drama. At the beginning of July, 4.75 inches of rain fell in 24 hours. The Black Burn rose over 7 feet, flooding our main potato crop and washing away 7 beehives with their inhabitants. The water came within a foot of the Priory Lodge. Fortunately, after a severe flood over 30 years ago, the Burn had been very thoroughly cleared and our bridge widened and strengthened. But for this we would have suffered more severely – as many in Moray and Elgin did. The railway line was cut, roads became impassable, many buildings were awash with water and worse. Some local firms have suffered greatly, not to speak of many householders and elderly folk. And the “return to normal” is less complete than may seem. A Moray Flood Relief Fund (PO Box 5768, Elgin IV30 1YT) has been set up and would still welcome contributions.

On 22 June, we were happy to receive the diocesan pilgrimage led by Bishop Mario. This year it was kept in honour of St Columba and was further enhanced by the presence of Cardinal Winning, who preached. The church and marquee were full to overflowing.

Summer has also seen a further increase in our growing circle of oblates, and there has been the usual welcome procession of guests. Fr John Maguire, MHM, the retiring National Director of the Apostleship of the Sea, also spent some time with us and spoke about his work. The late Peter Anson, who had much involvement in the history of our communities from Caldey onwards, was one of the founders of this admirable ministry to the

often forgotten world of sea-farers. On 14 June, Musick Fyne gave a much-appreciated performance of a six-part Mass ascribed to Robert Carver set in a framework of plainchant. Four weeks later, we heard a versatile and spirited rendering of a selection of American sacred music by the Community Choir of the First Presbyterian Church, Royal Oak, Michigan. Throughout the Sundays of August, BBC Radio 3 has been broadcasting some of our own schola's singing of chants in honour of St Columba. A group of young people from the Bethlehem Community, Minto, North Dakota, passed two nights with us on their way to the Pope's World Youth Day in Paris. This Community formerly belonged to the Baptist Church, but is now Catholic. It specialises in publishing. A group of German students from the Würzburg Studienseminar Kilianeum, with their Rector Fr Bernhard Stühler, managed to range far and wide, even to Iona, during their stay with us. Other guests, too, from further east in Europe have made their way to us – one of the happy results of 1989.

On the inside, our life continues its peaceful round. It was a relief to hear that Fr Ambrose has made a good recovery from a bad bout of malaria while in the north of Ghana. Also heartening is the sight of 4 young men in grey habits in choir: 2 “observing” from within for a month, 2 as full postulants. On Monday 6th October, we will be celebrating the golden jubilee of Dom Maurus' monastic profession. He is our last surviving “pioneer”, one of the 5 who came here from Prinknash in 1948. Pluscarden's debt to him is beyond words. The Mass will be at 11 am, and a buffet lunch will follow. All are welcome, though we would be grateful for advance notice from those intending to stay for lunch. This jubilee will point us forward to the golden jubilee of the monastery itself – its refoundation – which falls next year. Of that, more anon.

Yours in Christ,

+ Fr Hugh, Abbot

## **A (BRIEF) JOURNEY TO THE WESTERN ISLES**

This year the E.B.C. General Chapter was held at Fort Augustus, and as part of the celebrations, there was a pilgrimage of the Capitulars to Iona, coinciding with the 1400th anniversary of St Columba's death. Very fortunately (from my point of view) there were a couple of spare seats on their 20-seater coach, and I was offered one, which I accepted with pleasure.

Even from Fort Augustus, it is a fair step to Iona, and so Br Paul, my chauffeur and companion, and I left Pluscarden straight after Vespers on St Benedict, and set off for the Fort in a beautiful evening, going by the back road so as to enjoy the scenery and relative peace. Our route in part followed that of the great Doctor, though with greater celerity, fewer noteworthy observations and less prolixity.

We arrived at the Fort just after seven, but as it was a buffet supper, this did not matter, and although locked out, local knowledge solved the problem. It was a very slap-up affair, suitable to the occasion.

Afterwards all (except Br Paul, who was intent on doing justice to the supper) adjourned to the Calefactory, for recreation. A prominent element in this was the consumption of "Stag's Breath", a sacrilege involving two thirds Drambuie and one third malt, poured with a generous, if unsteady, hand. In all these observances the distaff side of the EBC bore their part with heroic fortitude. Compline followed.

Next day we started early: the bus left at five, off along the Great Glen towards Fort William. A "comfort stop" was scheduled after an hour, at Corran Ferry. Needless to say, when we got there the place was locked and barred, and anyone in discomfort was left to pious reflection on the role of discomfort on a pilgrimage... Lauds was said on the bus (it had originally been hoped to say Office at the Carmel in Oban). The roads were very quiet, the

weather good, and the scenery of mountains, castles, lochs, islands and sea, all that could be desired.

We boarded the “Isle of Mull” at Oban just after seven, together with, a choir from Nova Scotia and many others obviously Iona-bound. We were scheduled to breakfast on board; allegedly, Fr Stephen had organised this in the hope that the weather would be bad, no one would face breakfast, and he would save a large sum! In the event the sea was like a millpond, and we got to Craignure in record time, and set off across Mull. The road spends most of its time in sight of the sea, but where it does not, climbs and swoops quite spectacularly, as Mull rises to over 3,000 feet (Ben More). It is single track all across the island, with passing places for 30-odd miles, and not all the tourists have mastered the technique. It takes between an hour and an hour and a quarter to get across.

At Fionnport there is a smaller ferry, the “Loch Buie”, which although vehicular seems mainly to be used for pedestrians only – presumably to preserve Iona from a press of wheeled traffic. It is a short trip between the islands, the water is beautifully clear, and the horizon is dotted with hills and islands and basaltic cliffs on the Staffa model. I was able to watch gannets fishing close by, they flew along parallel with the surface, then tipped over on one wing and went from a side-slip into a vertical dive, entering the water very smoothly. I do not know the size of their prey, nor their success-rate, as no fish was visible upon their re-emergence.

They did not quite get their ramp properly on to the slipway on Iona, and so some passengers got caught by the waves (the Abbot of St Louis was skilfully propelled in his wheelchair, and got through dry-tyred, though his propeller’s feet got damp). They tried again, and we went ashore.

Iona is essentially a dumbbell consisting of two rocky ends, with a flatter arable central plain and the human habitations and more arable ground facing Mull. At its maximum it is about 31/2 miles long and 11/2 wide. We were told that 90 people live on the island, which belongs to the National Trust for Scotland. It is an

interesting comparison with Caldey, though the latter is smaller (about 11/2 miles by 1), and very much closer to civilisation of a sort. An equally strict control is exercised over property and personnel on both islands.

First we went to the newly-opened Catholic House of Prayer, where they have a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament, four rooms for retreatants and common-room, all facing the sea; kitchen and “usual offices” face inland. There is a resident warden. If you are the first-corner priest, you can stay free, if you will say Mass for them; otherwise it is the standard £30 per day. There was no resident priest when we visited! The House of Prayer is on an elevated site looking across the sea to Mull, maybe a couple of hundred yards from the ferry and perhaps twice that to the Abbey. We said our prayers and had a cup of tea, then a select party went off to cross the island, a pleasant walk across the machair. Corncrakes could be heard in the long grass; they sound a bit like clockwork motors being wound up. We reached the Atlantic, and photos were taken with Newfoundland in the (distant!) background, we ritually dipped our hands in the Western Ocean. Meanwhile, on an eminence, a figure clad in a long robe could be descried. I maintained it was certainly a monk, the others doubted, on the basis of distance and difficulty of access. Later inquiry revealed that this was Br Paul.

We set off to return to the township, I had left our linen at the house of prayer, so as to lighten my burden. However, when I got there, the place was locked, with no one at home, and I was due at the Abbey...after a few minutes the Warden returned from shopping, let me in and I set off at speed.

I reached the Abbey shortly afterwards, and made my way to the St Michael Chapel, to find myself excluded in the outer darkness (it was in fact a very fine day). I eventually gained admittance, covered in sweat and confusion. Rev. Norman Shanks was addressing the party on the history, purpose and method of the Iona Community.

After that we celebrated Mass in the little barrel-vaulted

chapel. Its acoustic was curious: we sang one of the Inchcolm Antiphoner chants for St Columba, “Contemplator”, led by Abbot Alan Rees, and it sounded woolly, even allowing for unfamiliarity; from the sanctuary end, it was much sharper. Abbot President Francis Rossiter presided, and Abbot Mark Dilworth preached. He answered Dr Johnson’s query about the siting of Duart Castle, even if not in so many words, by pointing out that although today Iona is isolated and difficult of access, in St Columba’s day the sea was the principal and most reliable avenue of communication, and so proximity to the sea was all.

This was followed by a simple lunch in the community’s refectory and a quick visit to the church (which was very busy with tourists) and the cloister. The church has a nave; I would guess its chancel is lower and shorter than ours, but about the same width. The transepts are vestigial in comparison. The cloister is open, with an arcade of low double columns, smaller in all respects than ours. It suffered a good deal from being overrun with people. I suspect a visit at a quiet time of year is a very different experience.

Our return journey across Mull took an hour and ten minutes, the weather was a good deal clearer. We got to Craignure early, there was time for postcards, ice-cream and relaxation before the ferry came. The sea was again kind.

At Oban we climbed aboard the bus again, and said Vespers as we set off though the Pass of Brander, by Ben Cruachan and Loch Awe to Dalmally, then off across the Orchy, as clear as glass and looking most inviting (I can understand why my great-uncle John was so fond of fishing round there) to the Family House of Prayer at Craig Lodge. This is a former shooting-lodge, which the family, much under the influence of Medjugorje, have turned into a retreat house, complete with a band of young helpers who give a year to serve there. It is well-reputed, and seems to produce vocations, besides being very welcoming. We had supper there (salmon *again*, washed down with a very pleasant white), and after singing the “Salve” in their chapel at the request of the

young people, climbed aboard again and went off to Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy, before crossing Rannoch Moor and then descending Glencoe, which in the gloaming was suitably atmospheric and fulfilled every expectation of the visitors from the south and the States.

We got back to Fort Augustus about 10 past 11, where someone (puppeteers, it later transpired) was staging a firework display in front of the old cricket pavilion, a thing of bangs and flashes. Next morning one monk asked me if I had heard the thunderstorm, very noisy and with very bright flashes; another, more down-to-earth, had been moved after ten minutes to consider calling the police! After about five minutes, the rain came heavily down and brought it all to a close. I went to bed, and did not rise till 8.45 and Conventual Mass.

Afterwards we had coffee and came home alongside the loch and through Inverness, getting back in time for the main course at lunch. Like the great Doctor, we had experienced the scenery and hospitality of the Highlands. If our journey was briefer, it was also more comfortable, and if less well memorialised, at least memorable.

DGC

## **UNDERWATER BEEKEEPING**

The disastrous flooding in the North of Scotland at the beginning of July this year was widely reported in the National and even International Press. The rainfall was the heaviest it had been for 40 years. Reports stated that the wettest area in the country was between Elgin and Forres in Moray. Pluscarden Abbey lies mid-way between Elgin and Forres.

Apart from the main apiary by the North enclosure wall, we have a smaller one on low ground, with 7 or 8 hives. During the severe flooding of September 1995, water lapped over one's

feet in the apiary area. However, all the hives are set on concrete stands at least two feet high, so there was little real problem then, and it seemed reasonable not to get worried this time: after all, wasn't it mid-summer?

But it kept on raining, in relentless downpour, and by July 1st the normally gentle burn had become a thundering torrent. It soon overflowed its banks, and the land all along its length became one enormous lake.

The water in the apiary this time rose to chest or even shoulder height. That is, its surface was higher than the tops of the hives. Nor did it just lie peaceably: it flowed with a strong current, so that all the hives were swept off their stands, and carried some 10 or 15 yards downstream, where luckily their progress was arrested by tall undergrowth. Most of the colonies were very strong: some had supers filled with set rape honey still on them.

On July 2nd the water had receded to somewhat below waist level, allowing us to wade in and survey the damage. The sun was shining warmly. The first thing we noticed, apart from the empty stands and no sign of the hives, was the area of water where the external feeder had been. A dozen or so bees were flying hopefully in circles above it. We sloshed on, and spotted the pitiful sight of the scattered hives, bobbing about in the lake. And immediately we noticed another remarkable thing: bees buzzing around in the air over their drowned homes. Clearly, and surprisingly, casualties had not been quite 100 per cent.

Most of the hives were upside down, having lost supers, lids and often floors too: not only largely submerged below, but wide open to the rain above. These were the ones with the flying bees. A couple of hives had remained as a unit and the right way up, so that any living bees were trapped inside. All obviously had some buoyancy: the weaker and less well-stored the colony, the higher in the water it floated. We fished them all out and put them back, any-old-how, onto the stands.

Astonishingly, ALL had some live bees still in them. They also all had plenty of other live things in them too. There were



slugs, snails and various unidentifiable creatures on board. All of these however were far outnumbered by the great quantities of earth worms. There were worms (alive) all over the combs! Moral: earth worms must like floating brood combs. In the circumstances, it seemed reasonable to hope for a fish or two, but no such luck.

The two strongest colonies had suffered the worst. Whether or not this is of significance is not for me to say, but the fact remains that these were the only colonies not to have been blessed this year. We always bless our bees after Easter, and these two had been away at the rape when the rest were done. For them, the flood proved fatal. It was heart-breaking to see: great slabs of sealed brood – all cold, dead and starting to rot. Bee corpses, heaped up in thick piles. Among them were not a few crawling wet bees showing some signs of life. I thought if I left them they might sort themselves out and clean the place up, but no: they all died, and within a couple of days the whole apiary area started to stink. Many dead bees in the warm sun are not pleasantly scented – I wished I'd thought to bury them. The still surviving colonies also had their share of dead bees and brood, of course, which had to be removed. Bees won't clean out dead brood, so I had the depressing task of burning dozens of excellent and extremely valuable combs.

Well, I thought: at least our insurance premium is all paid up. This will be a certain case for good financial compensation. Let's just check the small print... "This policy does not cover damage by flood..." But all was not so depressing. As I shook water from the brood combs of some colonies, I noticed emerging young bees, and the Queen placidly going about her business! Reduced to nucleus strength, right enough, but still viable. And some of the honey sealed in the supers was from sycamore or hawthorn – I carefully cut it out and served it up for community consumption. Delicious! Apparently not at all the worse for its 24 hours at the bottom of a muddy lake. I daresay there is some EC regulation against selling lake-matured honey, but some brethren felt the process had improved the flavour!

Over the next few days the weather was very humid and

warm, with some thunder: perfect honey conditions. We had planted a field of Phacelia as a trial for the sake of the bees. I have never known such a heavy nectar flow. A couple of strong swarms were caught and united into colonies which had survived the flood but were very weak. We got several pounds of surplus honey from these within a week. Phacelia honey is as good as clover to taste, in my opinion, and is gathered with enthusiasm even by bees which have recently spent 24 hours underwater. Eight days after the deluge I was going through one of the unassisted surviving colonies, and found every brood comb full of liquid. Funny, I thought, didn't I shake all these out last week? I started to shake the combs over the ground, but soon stopped: they were crammed full from top to bottom with fresh nectar.

My opinion of the resilience of bees, and their capacity to survive very adverse conditions, has naturally soared. After apparent catastrophe, 5 out of 7 colonies survive, of which 4 are in sufficient strength to get a heather surplus, given the right conditions. We've decided not to move the apiary. In every other respect the site is a good one. We just hope it will be another 40 years before we ever see a flood like that again.

DBH

## BOOK REVIEWS

*How far to Follow? The Martyrs of Atlas* Bernardo Olivera O. C S.O. (131 pages, St Bede's Publications, Petersham, Mass, USA; available in UK from Fowler Wright Books 01568 616 835).

The Church is still suffering in Algeria today. Men and women continue to give their lives for the faith as the Church is threatened with collapse under the persecution of Islamic Fundamentalism. A timely publication from St Bede's, this poignant volume by

Bernardo Olivera, the Abbot General of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, comes a year after the martyrdom of the seven Cistercian monks in that country. They were kidnapped from the monastery of Our Lady of Atlas, Tibhirine, in the Atlas mountains of Algeria on 27 March 1996 by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and were executed by having their throats slit on 21 May 1996. Seven monks died, all French, four priests, three brothers, ranging in age from 46 to 82. This book tells the story of the events leading to their death and assesses the impact of their martyrdom on the universal Church.

What is so striking about these contemporary martyrs as a group is that they are so like any other group of religious, in fact making one think it could have been us: "These are our seven brothers. They formed a group like many others we can meet in our monasteries or parishes, or on the streets of our cities. Some were withdrawn, others communicative. Some were placid, others highly emotional. Some were more inclined to intellectual work, others to manual work. What united them was their search for God in community..." (p 9/10).

This account of modern day martyrdom brings to all of us a challenge to live out more fully the faith we profess. Fr Christian de Cherge was Prior of the monastery and his "Testimony", which he wrote at Christmas-tide 1993, three years before the kidnapping, his "A-Dieu", is included as part of the final chapter. It has been widely read and publicised since the martyrdom, is strikingly prophetic and is imbued with forgiveness and love: "...remember that my life was GIVEN to God and to this country..." Three years later he gave his life as his ultimate sacrifice. He was deeply involved in inter-religious dialogue and was the inspiring spirit of the Islamic-Christian dialogue group Ribat es Salem (Bond of Peace).

On Christmas Eve 1993 six members of the GIA invaded the monastery threatening them with destruction. After community discussion they refused "collaboration" with the terrorists, determining to remain as a witness to the other Christians of the

area who faced the same trials. “This Christmas has not been like any other. It is still charged with meaning. Like Mary, we ponder these things that have happened to us. We continue the inner conversation she began in her heart. The piercing pierces us like a sword. The Word takes on this community of body and blood to speak here today, Himself” (Fr Christopher p 57).

Apart from the final chapter “Messages Received”, the book consists of four letters written by Abbot Olivera to his fellow Cistercians in the twelve months following the deaths.

The first (May 27, 1996) gives his immediate reactions to the tragedy and chapter two “Chronicle of a Celebration” (June 1996) consists of the journal he wrote while in Algeria for the funerals of the monks. The full story and background to the situation are movingly told in chapter three. This letter was written in October 1996: “...There is no denying that a powerful current of witnessing to the gospel has passed through the order (we could add, the Church) during recent months; a living stream that gives life, encourages, wakes us up, stimulates us and carries us back to our first love” (p 49).

Chapter four, “Keeping the Memory Alive”, was written to mark the first anniversary of the martyrdom and is a beautiful meditative reassessment of its significance and its meaning to all of us in the Church.

This book should be read and pondered. These monks lived and died for the same faith that we profess, serving the one Lord whom we follow, giving their lives for love of their brethren. This is a powerful book. The witness of the martyrs is powerful. The monks knew what they were doing. They knew and understood the risks. Their complete acceptance of the gospel in their lives calls out to us all.

“The life and death of the seven monks of Atlas is a testimony not to be forgotten. May neither diplomacy, nor politics, nor a view of these events limited to this world, ever deprive us of the voice of our martyrs or silence the clamour of their cry of living faith. From the martyrdom of their spiritual combat to the

martyrdom of their own blood, it is the same cry calling for forgiveness and the love of one's enemies. Life is stronger than death. Love has the last word" (p 25).

DGP

*Carthusian Miscellany The Mystical Tradition and the Carthusians* (AC 130 vv5-11) continues this series, based on papers given at the Congress of the same name in 1995. It is, like *Analecta Cartusiana* as a whole, a rather heterogeneous collection with vv6-8 being a facsimile of *De Bonitate Divina*, printed in 1538, by the Cologne Carthusian Peter Blomevenna (1466-1536) and v5 including an article on reincarnation which is rather out of place. Other articles deal with medieval spirituality, for example Martin Glasscoe's "Evidence of Orality in Julian's short text", Brigittine saints and mystical writers and Carthusian mystics and monasteries.

One theme uniting some of the articles is the relationship between the Carthusians, those most secluded of monks, and the world. Joseph Gribbin, oblate of Pluscarden, offers a well researched study of the influence of lay piety on the liturgy and furnishings of the London Charterhouse, which led to conflict with the central government of the Order. This deviation from Carthusian traditions, at times women were allowed in choir and cloister, did not diminish the monks' fervour, though, as is shown by the witness of the Carthusian martyrs. Moving north of the border the cover has a picture of the door from East Cloister to Nave at the Premonstratensian Abbey of Dryburgh, which is very similar to ours here at Pluscarden. There are three articles on Adam Scott, the twelfth century Abbot of Dryburgh who became a Carthusian but continued his literary output. The one closest to our theme is, "Adam Scott: the tension in the psyche of the man of prayer between active and contemplative life" by David (Alun Idris) Jones, which has already appeared under the same title but in a less developed form in v3 of this series. Jones himself is an example of this tension and has moved from his Premonstratensian

Abbey in Ireland to live as a hermit.

Adam, the other Carthusian writers, and the example of the Charterhouses such as London and Cologne show that while the hidden life of prayer is of the essence of the Carthusian vocation, it is also part of their tradition to pass on to others the fruit of their contemplation. Recently DLT have published collections of Conferences prepared by a monk of the English Charterhouse at Parkminster and v9 of our series gives a fascinating study of another twentieth century Carthusian with a literary apostolate, Dom Benoit Lambres (1898-1974). It lists 278 published works and 23 in manuscript covering such diverse areas as: Archbishop Ramsey, Hinduism, the English Mystics, children's stories, Abbess Laurentia McLachlan of Stanbrook, J. K. Huysmans and "With a Carthusian, through the Beatles, to God". He also worked hard for the restoration of the Carthusian chant but this labour caused him much frustration. Dom Benoît was a Dutchman who lived his monastic life in Switzerland, England and Italy, and was involved in an abortive plan for a Dutch Charterhouse. As a young Dominican he thought of entering our community on Caldey but settled for the Carthusians at Valsainte. He later wrote for the Prinknash magazine *Pax* but his article in 1936 arguing that "the Carthusians were originally hermits" caused trouble with his superiors and he did not write for *Pax* again for three years. He was not the only Carthusian writing for the magazine, D. D. Edmund Gurdon, Sebastian Maccabe and Andrew Gray also contributed articles.

Two more volumes (AC 100:23) of the Chartae of the Carthusian General Chapter (1526-32) edited by John Clark have also been received as well as the second volume of his introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing* (AC 119:5) which contains scholarly notes to the text including indication of possible sources. There is also a study of Denys the Carthusian by Dirk Wassermann, "Dionysius der Kartaüser: Einführung in Werk und Gedankenwelt" (AC 133). Denys (1402/3-1471) was another literary monk whose works fill 42 volumes and who wrote on church reform and a

crusade against the Turks as well as spiritual and theological topics. Peter Blomevenna, mentioned above, edited some of these volumes. Finally, in reorganising his papers on his retirement, Dr Hogg has found the liturgical study “Sources et Genese du Missel Cartusien” (AC 99:34) which concludes Dom Emmanuel Cluzet’s series on the Carthusian liturgy (AC 99:26-31)

DAH

## **PROGRESS ON THE NEW ORGAN**

By early September, the final details of the organ should be settled and the first elements of construction work about to begin. We now have a design for the pipe shades, i.e. the areas of carved wood which cover the region between the tops of the front pipes and the top of the case, which will be a pattern incorporating symbolism of Our Lady and St John the Baptist.

The organ will first be made and set up in the workshop of Tickell and Co. and on completion will be dismantled and transported here. Tickell’s make the entire organ themselves, except for the metal pipes and certain elements of the mechanical key action. The wooden pipes are made by Tickell’s: the Stopped Diapason and Clarabella (which has taken the place of the Chimney Flute) are of cedar, and the pedal Subbass of poplar. The installation here, which we hope will be next summer, should take only two or three weeks: most of this period is spent “voicing” the instrument, i.e. regulating the volume of the individual pipes to suit our needs and the acoustics of the church.

We have received in donations nearly £10,000 to date and can further reclaim tax of about £2000, which is most encouraging and for which we are very grateful. The estimated cost of the organ at today’s process is about £45,000. Donations of any amount are all very welcome; but it is worth remembering that, for donations of £250 or over made as a “gift aid”, we can recover the tax paid at

no cost to the donor.

**MONASTERIES OF THE EASTERN  
CATHOLIC CHURCHES NO 4  
The Monastery of Emmanuel,  
Bethlehem Benedictines of the Greek Melkite Rite**

The monastery of Emmanuel at Bethlehem, affiliated to the Jerusalem Patriarchate of the Greek Melkite Church, is an independent eastern monastery of the Confederation of Benedictine Nuns of the Queen of Apostles.

We strive for perfection following the rules and writings of our holy Father Basil the Great, Benedict, Sabbas, Dorotheus of Gaza and Theodore of Studium, in accordance with what was asked of us at the time of our monastic consecration. (cf. Rite of the Microschema)

The first impulse for our foundation came from the 1954 visit of Archbishop Georges Hakim (who at that time was Archbishop of Galilee) to our monastery in Algeria. He spoke to us about Christians in the Holy Land and his desire to found a Byzantine Rite monastery integrated into the Arab Christian population.

In 1961, three of us set out, while preparatory discussions for Vatican II were highlighting the important part that would be played in the Council by the Greek-Catholic Melkite Church, by bringing into the heart of Latin tradition the Eastern thought of the Fathers and the tradition of the undivided Church.

On the 23rd December 1963, the first Liturgy was celebrated in our first little chapel by the Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem (who at that time was Mgr Gabriel Abou Saada), who had joyfully opened his heart and his Eparchy to us. Some days later, during Paul VI's historic pilgrimage, we had the grace of receiving a special blessing for the foundation from his Holiness



and of explaining its objectives to him.

The kiss of peace which was then exchanged by their Holinesses the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, set Jerusalem a-quiver with the great hope of seeing fulfilled the greatly desired unity of the sister Churches.

On 10th March 1965 His Beatitude Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh canonically erected the monastery and confirmed its incorporation into the Greek Catholic Church and the Arab Christian people of Jerusalem. On 29th December of the same year, Mgr Claudios, the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Bethlehem was accompanied by our new Bishop, Mgr Hilarion Cappucci, who together blessed the monastery, and then on 25th January, blessed our bell, “Marie-Paschale”, who thereafter added her childish tinkle to the magnificent peals of the Basilica of the Nativity and the churches of the various rites.

In November 1984 the Typikon was approved for a trial period of seven years, making possible the first Eastern monastic consecrations.

On 28th May 1986 – the feast of Corpus Christi – the Lord ratified the offering of her life made by Emmanuel’s first Microschema. The grain was sown in the earth, and one day the harvest will spring up.

By cutting this flower and transplanting it to Paradise the Lord ratified and confirmed the Community in its vocation and its mission of collaborating in working for the Unity of the Churches through the holiness of a life generously lived in the humble gift of self.

Today we give thanks to God for the tremendous spiritual riches to which he has given us access:

- the grace of living in places made holy by the presence of Christ the Saviour;
- a better understanding of the geographical and cultural context of the Gospel;
- a clearer intuition of God’s mysterious plans for his people;

- a greater appreciation for the ancient liturgies, long ago described by early liturgical books and the first pilgrims to the Holy Places and the chance to savour the theological and spiritual riches of the texts of the Byzantine liturgy;
- the opportunity to discover the life of the monasteries of the Judaeen desert, especially St Sabbas, where they have preserved intact the observance of our fathers (which we also find in St Benedict's Rule) in its primaeval purity.

We are constantly becoming more closely bound to the Church into which Providence has grafted us, thanks to the constant encouragement and support shown us at the urging of his Beatitude Patriarch Maximos V Hakim by Mgr Lutfi Laham, who is always there to share in the high points of our liturgical and community life.

With and for the Church we pray, hope, suffer, and work to the end that despite the inevitable shadows and setbacks, the Lord's wish may one day be realised, and we may all be one.