

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 90 News and Notes for our Friends June 1991</p>
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FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Our humble periodical attains its ninetieth number with this issue. It is sent to every continent and this now includes Russia. I thank you for your support and for your patience with misprints and mistakes. In the last issue it was said that the only Cistercian nuns in England have now moved to Wales. The Bernardine Cistercians at Hyning have pointed out that they are Cistercians and they have a second house at Slough. Hyning, near Carnforth in Lancashire is a house of prayer and an ideal place of retreat, while the Slough community is engaged in the work of education. The nuns at Whitland are cloistered.

In March, our Abbot President's Council met in Belgium at the Abbey of Keiserberg in Leuven, formerly known as the Abbey of Mont Cesar, Louvain. It was founded from Maredsous and D. Columba Marmion was once its Prior. It played an important part in the Liturgical movement before and during the Vatican Council. It stands on a hill overlooking the city. On the Sunday evening we were taken to see something of the town – the beautiful Beguinage, now occupied by university students, the church of St Jan der Doper (St John the Baptist) and that of St Gertrude, as well as the big Norbertine Abbey. I spent two days at the Abbey of Affligem where Abbot Jan was most kind, taking me to see the other monasteries of our Congregation in Flanders.

It was a new experience to take part in a liturgy in Flemish. Affligem has a long history and has been destroyed several times. Abbot Jan is its fortieth Abbot, and incidentally was born at Hamilton in Scotland. It is in the country and the former farm buildings are now a cultural and liturgical centre and a youth

hostel. There is a large bookshop which also sells Affligem cheese, beer and wine.

A queen of England, Aleydis (or Adelaide) is buried in the cloisters. She married Henry I in 1121 after the death of his first wife. She was the daughter of Godfrey, Count of Louvain and died in 1140. Her brother, Henry, who was a monk of Affligem, is buried with her.

Belgium is a small country, so the monasteries are all very near one another. Abbot Jan took me to Steenbrugge, near Bruges, where we were warmly received by Abbot Anselm Hoste and the retired Abbot, D. Elijus Deckers. The monastery publishes the world-famous critical edition of the writings of the Fathers, *Corpus Christianorum*, and Abbot Anselm has edited the writings of St Aelred. He came with us into Bruges, the Venice of the North. The Beguinage was especially attractive with the little white houses of the sisters, built around a large square filled with trees and grass and daffodils with a large church on one side and on the others a monastery of Benedictine nuns who showed us some of their library: illuminated books in Flemish, paintings and a delightful little garden with water flowing through it. We returned to the Abbey for Midday Office and dinner, and then to the Abbey of St Andre, which belongs to the French-speaking Congregation of the Annunciation. It is a large Abbey with a school and extensive building work was in progress. St Andre was well known for the St Andrew's Missal and its monks have gone to Brazil, India, Africa and elsewhere. We also visited the English Convent in Bruges, founded in 1629 by English nuns who are Augustinian Canonesses. They have a Priory at Sayers Common in Sussex. The Bruges Convent has a school to which English Catholics sent their daughters during the Penal days. To my delight, the nun who received us was a native of our diocese of Aberdeen.

The other Belgian Abbey of our Congregation is that of Dendermonde which we also visited. It is in the town and has a school. We were shown round the fine buildings and valuable library. It has many valuable things which were once at Affligem, including St Bernard's crozier. The Abbey stands on the site of a

Capuchin Friary. It was the home of a Scottish Capuchin, Fr Archangel, John 9th Lord Forbes, who became Guardian of the Friary. He had a reputation for holiness and died ministering to the plague stricken on 4th. August 1606. His name is entered in the Franciscan Martyrology.

After Easter I went out to Mexico for the Visitation of the monastery of La Soledad. Since my last visit, La Soledad has been given a noviciate and there were two novices and a postulant. A field has been brought under cultivation and garlic is being grown as a commercial crop – as well as vines. All this requires constant irrigation. Water is pumped from the river and flows through hundreds of little channels.

The large group of Oblates, who arrive for Mass every Sunday and who animate the singing with various instruments, is very impressive. They also do good work for the village, assisting the two Benedictine Sisters who run a clinic and do catechetical work.

Work has started on the construction of the monastery and 8 cells should be ready for occupation in August. A cell costs £2,000 and we have been able to find benefactors to pay for 5 of these. There will also be a library and conference room and eventually more buildings round the cloister garth. Everything is very simple in Mexican style, built of adobe bricks and all on the ground floor.

From Mexico I went to the Monastery of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico, also for the Visitation. The Community is developing well and there is also a small community of Sisters, Our Lady in the Desert about 30 miles away, in process of formation. Solar lighting has now been installed in the chapel in place of kerosene lamps and there is also a radio telephone.

One day we all went over to the Sisters' house by the Santa Cruz River outside Espaniola. There we sang the Mass and Office together and then all drove through mountains, stopping for a meal at Cuba and a visit to an old Indian pueblo, now in ruins. I also spent some days at our own monastery at Petersham.

I was at Prinknash for the election of the new Abbot, Dom

Mark Hargreaves and look forward to his blessing on 11th July, the feast of St Benedict.

Our Provincial Chapter assembled at Pluscarden on 19th June and we welcomed the superiors and delegates from our twelve houses and from as far away as Mexico, U.S.A. and Ghana, as well as the nuns from Fernham and Petersham. After the three days of discussions and business, we welcomed our Bishop and the Aberdeen pilgrimage on the Sunday. Knights of the Holy Sepulchre took part in the procession and carried the very splendid new Diocesan banner, while Abbot Aldhelm Cameron-Brown, former Abbot of Prinknash, was the special preacher.

The following day, the feast of St John the Baptist, patron of the monastery, was a festive day before our guests departed. Our Bishop was in Choir for all the Offices and our Abbot-President gave the homily at Mass. We were also joined by the Abbot of Nunraw and the Prior and brethren from Fort Augustus. A talking meal followed in the cloisters and in the evening the noviciate organised a gaudy, which was enjoyed by all.

On both occasions the sun shone on us, otherwise it was difficult to realise that it was Midsummer. There has been heavy rain and the gardeners are anxious about our strawberry crop. Our two postulants will begin their noviciate on 8th July – they have been with us for six months. Tony McGrade is from Glasgow, Stephen Holmes is from Kent; he got to know us while at St Andrew's University. We ask your prayers for their perseverance, also for Br Gregory who has begun his noviciate at Petersham.

Death has claimed one of our oldest friends: Mrs Helene Petrie. She was one of the first to welcome our monks when they arrived in 1948 and, with her family has been closely associated with the Community ever since.

Br Patrick of Prinknash died on 17th. May and though he never visited Pluscarden, he was a skilled blacksmith and made the candle brackets for the dedication crosses in our church as well as that of the votive light near Our Lady's shrine. May they rest in peace.

I want to thank all of you who wrote for my Jubilee and for

your gifts and prayers which I value. On these occasions, one is all too conscious of the faults and failings, the wasted opportunities and the years the locusts have devoured, but grateful too for the mercies of God and his blessings and the support and help of so many good friends and especially of one's brethren in the monastery.

Brother helping brother is a strong city.

Yours devotedly,

+ D. Alfred, Abbot.

Postscript. Fr Abbot's final paragraph perhaps suffers from a not uncharacteristic excess of modesty. The Jubilee to which he refers so briefly was that of his 50 years as a priest. We fêted it on two occasions: on 7th June, the anniversary itself, when the community was joined at Mass and dinner by some 70 local guests, clerical and lay, Catholic and non-Catholic; and again on 24th June, at the conclusion of the Provincial Chapter, when we had with us, not only the superiors and delegates of the houses of our Province, but also our Bishop, our Abbot President, Dom Gilbert Jones, three of our brethren from Fort Augustus and Dom Donald McGlynn, the Abbot of Nunraw. These were happy events: opportunities to thank God for Fr Abbot's priesthood and to thank Fr Abbot himself for his fidelity to the gift given him at "the laying on of hands" (cf. 1Tim. 4:14) half a century ago. It is good to guard the secret of a king, but gloriously to reveal the works of God (Tobit 12:7).

A special word of thanks should also go to Canon John Symon of Aberdeen, who preached to us movingly and memorably on 7th. June. He is an old friend.

In the autumn of the year, the Community will also be remembering the 25th anniversary of its independence and of Fr Abbot's headship of it.

Fr Prior

FYNE MUSICK AT PLUSCARDEN

The Catholic Church in Scotland on the eve of the Reformation has traditionally received a very bad press. It certainly suffered from many defects. Its close alliance with the Crown had resulted, for example, in an 11 year old natural son of James IV being consecrated Archbishop of St Andrews: six other of that king's illegitimate sons were also given valuable Bishopricks and Abbacies. Catholicism indeed remained the religion of the State until the Reformation Parliament of 1560; but that deft manoeuvre by a minority faction, albeit one with English support, succeeded, at a stroke, in bringing about its immediate and virtually complete collapse.

The Church, then, has always been depicted as utterly demoralised throughout this period; leaderless, compromised, unable to offer any resistance to pressure, or to inspire that heroic fidelity to the point of martyrdom, which so distinguished its English counterpart.

Thank goodness, the simplistic views of history once fashionable are today being increasingly subjected to revision. The Scottish Church, it appears, was by no means uniformly lukewarm and corrupt. Much of the evidence of what its life was like has been destroyed, but some quite surprising conclusions are being formed in the light of new discoveries. One of the more exciting of these has been the recovery of a set of musical scores, produced for the Inverness sang school in the mid 16th century, and later used as a binding for a wholly uninteresting contemporary book of law.

The director of Musick Fyne, James Ross, using these and other extant sources, has painstakingly reconstructed a complete sung Mass, as it would have been performed in Scotland in about 1546. This was the year of the murder, at St Andrews, of Cardinal Beaton, during the ascendancy of Mary of Guise. The Council of Trent was in session: Aberdeen, incidentally, was the first diocese in the world to enact its reforming decrees the following year. But more importantly, for our purposes, 1546 was the year in which

Robert Carver, an Augustinian Canon from Scone, wrote his 4-part Mass, *Pater Creator Omnium*, for the parish church at Stirling. This was sung in a concert at Pluscarden on 29th June this year, performed in aid of the West-wing appeal by the group Musick Fyne. Their precision and purity of vocal production well achieved the standards of excellence for which they have become known.

Carver's Ordinary of the Mass was supported in their programme by items of chant from the Sarum rite, 2 organ pieces and 4 motets, all of contemporary Scottish provenance. No Mass was offered on this occasion, but its structure was adhered to, without breaks or interval, in order to gain as authentic a reproduction as possible. The audience was treated to a glimpse of a Scotland imbued with the High Renaissance culture of Europe; of a Church capable of rising to a liturgical glory and splendour more indicative of a preoccupation with the things of heaven than of this earth. Listening to this sacred music, based on the rhythm and movement of plainchant, and directed solely to the enhancement of the various parts of the Mass, one had a sense that our inheritance was being reclaimed before us. If such music became unknown in Scottish Catholic worship after the reformation until at least the mid 19th century, its recovery for us now may be valued the more highly.

Refreshments were served after the performance, and a Generous contribution made to the appeal fund.

D.B.H.

AND A JAM SESSION

Regular guests at Pluscarden are aware of the frequency with which jam makes its appearance in the refectory. In order to provide for this, large quantities of it have to be made each year.

By the time this newsletter reaches you the jam-making season will be in full swing and the kitchen-master will be obscured by the steam rising from his jelly-pans, as strawberries,

raspberries and blackcurrants bubble and froth.

Fruit is grown in the garden for sale in the shop, but only unblemished berries go for sale. The others are served in the refectory and, of course, turned into jam. During the season there is a glut of soft fruit and one can only freeze so much. Jamming it means there is less waste and we have the taste of our fruit throughout the year.

As the summer progresses one type of fruit follows another. First there is rhubarb, then come the green gooseberries. Oddly enough, green gooseberries give a red-coloured jam (some cookery books say it is possible to make green-coloured jam with them, but we have never succeeded). Come the high summer, and the flow of fruit begins to quicken as strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants each come to ripeness. Plums and apples too are brought into service from time to time, though not as often as other types of fruit.

Each type of fruit differs in the amount of jam that can be got from it. Blackcurrant and gooseberry are probably the most economical in terms of the amount of jam we get for each pound of fruit. Rhubarb and strawberry give least, though some people believe strawberry is the best jam, while others are firmly in favour of blackcurrant. Gooseberry probably gets the least votes from the consumers.

Of course we have to make our jam in large quantities. Our technique is exactly the same as that used in any domestic kitchen; only we use bigger pans. As much as 96 lbs has been made in a single session with blackcurrants. So now you know how we keep the brethren sweet.

D.M.S.

THE WEST WING

The plans for the West Wing have now been amended to the satisfaction of the Chief Inspector of Historic Monuments, and are now back with our local Planning Department, whose approval we

hope for soon.

We have received a number of generous donations, and now have a shop in Elgin, in Harrow Inn Close, which runs between the High Street and South Street, next to Boots, in the historic centre of old Elgin, to sell gifts, Abbey products and tickets for fund-raising events.

Lord and Lady Cawdor very kindly opened their 'Paradise' garden to the public, in conjunction with a broadcast by the BBC's 'Beechgrove Garden' programme, which raised £2,000 for the Appeal, despite less than perfect weather.

James Ross and his friends of Musick Fyne sang a Carver Mass here, as elsewhere recorded in these pages, and this too helped our funds. We are very grateful for this help and support.

Forthcoming Events

7th August: Richard Baker, 'Music in my Life', at Darnaway Castle, near Forres. 7.30 p.m.

10th August: String Orchestra of Reykjavik College of Music (Aberdeen International Youth Festival). 7.30 p.m. at the Abbey.

25th October: Katherine Durran, Piano, and Veronica Henderson, 'Cello. 7.30 p.m., at the Abbey.

12 December: 'On a Winter's Night'; 7.30 p.m., at the Abbey.

BOOK REVIEWS

A WORD IN SEASON: Monastic Lectionary for the Divine Office, Sanctoral Volume IV. pp. 304, Pbk. £12.95 + P & P; Hbk.

Designed for use at the Office of Vigils or Readings, this latest volume, for Feasts and Solemnities of the General and Benedictine Calendars, supplies readings on the Saint and homilies on the Gospel of the day; it contains from four to six readings for each celebration, plus three responsories.

Seventy-three authors' works are used in this compilation; Newman, Augustine, Bede and 'Unknown' make the biggest contribution. The widely-cast net brings in a varied haul, including about fifteen 20th century authors, from Karl Adam, travelling by way of (among others) Fulton Sheen, Paul VI, Karl Rahner and Edith Stein, to Anscar Vonier. Ancient and mediaeval writers of East and West make up the rest.

More time must pass before all the modern authors can be truly assessed. There is at least something for everyone, material to chew over, to edify and enlighten. This would make varied lectio for one whose time is limited.

D.G.C.

The Celtic Vision. Edited by Ester de Waal; published in U.S.A. by St Bede's Publications, Petersham; in U.K. by Darton, Longman & Todd; 263pp.

Much is written today about green issues and the need to live in tune with the environment. These concerns, like socialism, are a reaction to the evils of our industrial (or perhaps today post-industrial) society. In pre-modern societies there was no need for these reactions and Nature in all her moods was just the arena of life, an arena that was however totally pervaded by the supernatural.

From such a society came the prayers and blessings contained in *The Celtic Vision*. These translations from the Gaelic have been selected by Ester de Waal from the *Carmina Gadelica*, a collection from the oral tradition of the Western Isles of Scotland, the Outer Hebrides, by a remarkable man, Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912). This work was the fruit of his extensive travels, visiting the Island people in their homes, during the latter half of the 19th century, before the double edged benefits of state education corrupted the tradition. Many of the areas he visited were Catholic and had survived the Protestant Reformation, but even in Protestant areas the oral tradition retained its roots in the

old Catholic and Celtic culture.

The Prayers in this selection have been grouped under headings such as farming and fishing, birth and death, night prayers, journey's and Mary. As private prayers they are all connected with the daily and seasonal rhythms of the peoples' lives which were lived in the belief that they were part of an ordered cosmos, presided over by the great God of life, the Father of all the living. This means that their devotion is connected with the ordinary things of life, for example the prayer for smoozing the fire at night:

I will build the hearth
as Mary would build it...

and the milking song:

Come Mary and milk my cow.
Come Columba the divine,
and twine thine arms around my cow.

Their devotion is also heavily Trinitarian, with many prayers being similar to the famous St Patrick's Breastplate, and it is permeated by the realisation of the nearness of the supernatural order. Mary, the angels and saints are seen to be as real as the visible world.

One should not however forget that their life was often hard and that it was the truths of the Catholic religion which interpreted it and made it bearable. One hopes that the leaders of the New Age cults will not ignore this fact and pervert the meaning of these prayers as they have attempted to do with Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen. It is this caveat which indicates the real value of Mrs de Waal and St Bede's Publications producing this selection. Many today are dissatisfied with our liberal consumer society and are seeking alternatives. Monasticism is one witness against the secular world, and by presenting this practical introduction to a similar, but lay, Christian culture, one

can build up the Catholic alternative to the false prophets of a green neo-Paganism.

The Table of the Lord: A Panorama of Change in Liturgy and Church Design by Fr Dominic Scotto T.O.R.; published by St Bede's Publications, Petersham; distributed in U.K. by Fowler, Wright Ltd.; 74pp.

This attractively presented, scholarly work deals with the reasons behind the development of the Catholic altar as it was known prior to the changes effected after the Second Vatican Council. It is a short work, but the footnotes and bibliography are both copious and comprehensive. Fr Scotto concentrates on the developments that occurred in the early Middle Ages and at the start of the High Gothic period. He begins by outlining a brief history of the Christian altar from the days of the Roman house churches to the Roman basilical altars over the tombs of the martyrs. Next he examines the main elements of medieval eucharistic and popular piety, and then proceeds to trace the influence that this eucharistic theology and piety had upon the design and location of the altar in Catholic churches. There is an interesting section in this latter chapter dealing with the reasons for the particular architecture of the great French gothic cathedrals such as, Notre Dame, Chartres, Amiens and Albi. This most readable work should be of interest to the student of liturgy and to anyone with a general interest in Church history.

Journey to Jerusalem by Kenneth R. Overberg S.J.; published by St Bede's Publications; distributed in U.K. by Fowler, Wright Ltd.; 64pp..

Also new from St Bede's Publications and aimed at a general readership, Journey to Jerusalem is a series of thirty short, contemporary meditations on Biblical themes, which were originally given as mini-sermons in the Bellarmine Chapel of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, where Fr Overberg is a

professor of Theology and chairman of the theology department. The book is arranged according to the development of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises and it is intended to be a month long reflection on Christian living. The text is illustrated by modern black and white photographs of scenes from the Holy Land.

D.G.P.