

**Pluscarden Benedictines**  
**No. 109 News and Notes for our Friends June 1996**

**FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

The chief event to record is the dedication, on 30th May, of the new church of the two Petersham communities, St Scholastica Priory and our own St Mary's Monastery. This was a splendid occasion, presided over by Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston. During it, one could feel a "building" becoming a "church", and one could understand why, among the common offices of the Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours, that of the dedication of a church comes first. The photos hopefully give some idea of this new house of God, which is light and spacious, asking to be filled with prayer. On a later page, Br Gregory of St Mary's describes the memorable ceremony. Up to now the communities have worshipped in a chapel on the ground floor of the men's house. Now the new church is separate, and thus the true relationship of St Mary's and St Scholastica's has found visible expression: two distinct communities, each living its own life, but joining with the other to celebrate the liturgy. I can remember the great change in the whole feel of our monastic life here at Pluscarden when the chancel was re-roofed in the early '80s. So, please pray for our brethren in America that their new church will bring with it growth in their monastic life. Later this summer, too, the men's community will be moving from its present accommodation to the current guest-house, nearer the new church.

On the home front, there is nothing so momentous to report, but still good things to record. The celebration of Easter was a high point. It was a great joy to have Br Michael back with us for this. He has spent the past year at the monastery of Christ in the Desert, New Mexico, a house of our Province recently become

an abbey. Not long after Abbot Alfred made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and regaled us with his impressions on his return.

A monastery is never without guests, says St Benedict, and they cannot all be named here! But it is a pleasure to mention Fr Thomas Stransky, Rector of the Tantur Institute in the Holy Land, who during a Scottish visit kindly visited and spoke to us too; Fr Denis Corrado, Provost of the Brooklyn Oratory, New York, who was with us on Easter Monday; Fr Michael Regan of Scotus College who shared with us his enthusiasm for that great Benedictine liturgist, Dom Odo Casel; and Fr Tom Weinandy, Capuchin, who gave this year's Pluscarden Pentecost Lectures to an appreciative audience. He spoke on the Father's Spirit of Sonship. After the Lectures we hosted the first meeting of a *Communio* study circle to be held in the British Isles.

At the time of writing, we look forward to the great solemnities of the summer: St John the Baptist, St Peter and Paul (June) St Benedict (July) and the Assumption of Mary (August). We look forward too to the diocesan pilgrimage at the end of this month, led by Bishop Mario Conti. He and his fellow Scottish bishops have declared this year a year of youth, and as a small gesture in this direction we are offering a "monastic experience" weekend at the end of August to any interested young Catholic men.

Shortly after the last issue of *Pluscarden Benedictines*, there came the terrible news of the massacre of the innocents and their teacher at Dunblane. Shortly before completing this issue, there has come news of another massacre of another kind of innocent: that of the 7 Cistercian monks in Algeria. We can't help but think of *the* Innocent One whose own life was cut short by violence. Yet God, the Father, raised him from the dead. May we never lose faith in resurrection!

Yours in Christ,

D. Hugh, Abbot

## EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

This number of the Newsletter is a *Petersham* number. Fr Abbot and Br Gregory Phillips have written about the dedication of the church, which as you can see from the photos is a truly beautiful building.

When I first went to Petersham nine years ago the monks were living in the old wooden farm house on the main road and went round by car to the Sisters' chapel for Offices and Mass. The new church is a remarkable achievement in so short a time and could not have been done without the generous help of good benefactors. We are a little envious.

The building of the monastery and church at Prinknash was begun in 1939 but suspended during the war. The plans were simplified and the monastery was built on the foundation of what had been the church. The church has not been built.

At Pluscarden we found the ruins of a 700 year old church when we returned in 1948. We have restored all of it except the nave – 80' by 20' – of which only the ancient foundations remain. Its restoration is a remote dream for future generations.

### *Pleurococcus*

Until recently the walls of the NE corner of the church were quite black. Fr Ninian used to maintain that it was evidence of the Wolf of Badenoch's looting and burning of Pluscarden. I was never convinced by this theory and mentioned it to Dr Archie Wallace who scraped off some of the "soot and blackness" which he submitted to a colleague at Edinburgh City Hospital. He identified it as "an alga – a pleurococcus which was vigorously multiplying. It grows on damp exposed surfaces". So much for the Wolf of Badenoch!

The coping stones and part of the north wall had been removed when the Abbey was still a picturesque ruin and rain water running down the wall was responsible. Now the Moray

Stonecutters are repairing the damage of 300 years and pleurcooccus is no more

### ***News of our Subiaco Congregation***

On 10 February, the feast of St Scholastica, patroness of the Abbey of Subiaco, Dom Mauro Meacci was elected 183rd successor to St Benedict. *Ad multos annos*. Some years ago Dom Mauro visited Pluscarden with Dom Beda. He was Novice Master at Subiaco.

The monastery of Christ in the Desert has been raised to the rank of an Abbey and the election of an Abbot is to take place soon.

Ramsgate. Abbot Bernard having reached the age when Abbots become *emeritus* has resigned and the election of his successor will take place when the Abbot Visitor returns from the USA. So there will be a new group of Abbots from the English Province at the General Chapter at Praglia in September and at the Congress of Abbots in Rome.

On 30 May the Prioress of Fernham, Mother Mary Ignatius, celebrated her Golden Jubilee at which I represented Fr Abbot.

The Principal Concelebrants of the Mass were Abbot Francis of Prinknash, Abbot Celestine from Glenstal who gave the homily and Mgr Michael Connelly. Abbot Alan Rees was at the organ. The Abbot of Downside and many monks and priests were there with a large number of guests. After lunch in a large marquee, the beautifully illuminated vow charts of the community were on display – the oldest were those of 1792 before the community left France at the time of the Revolution. It was a very happy day.

### ***Holy Land Pilgrimage***

From 30 April - 9 May, through the great generosity of one of our readers, I was able to visit the Holy Land with a group of pilgrims

from the south of England under the leadership of Fr Edgar Dunn and with the Commissary for the Holy Land, Fr John Hooper OFM.

For the first four days Tiberias was our centre from which we visited places around the lake. The Mount of the Beatitudes, Nazareth with Mass in the Chapel of the Little Sisters, Cana, the Benedictine Monastery at Tabgah with a wonderful Mass by the lake side and there are also five Benedictine Sisters from Manila helping the monks. We sailed across the water in a temperature of 120° and ate St Peter's fish at a kibbutz. Some of the pilgrim company rode camels at this kibbutz. We saw the fishing boat contemporary with the apostles which was recently lifted from the lake near Kibbutz Ginasar. We saw the impressive archaeological explorations at Zippori – the home of St Joachim and St Anne.

Our coach took us down the Jordan Valley to Jericho, capital of the new Palestinian State – where we had Mass at the Franciscan Church then on to the Dead Sea and Qumram through the desert. We saw the Orthodox monastery of the Temptation and so to the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. Here I stayed at the Benedictine Dormition Abbey on Mount Sion.

*To be continued*

Your Editor,

Dom Alfred

## **NEWS FROM ST MARY'S, PETERSHAM**

Thanks to the generosity of our friends and benefactors, the skill and labour of the builders, the patience, prayer and work of the twin communities, and above all, the grace of God, St Mary's Monastery and St Scholastica's Priory in Petersham now have a new monastic church, dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God. The

church building itself is a blending of Romanesque and modern features, with the floor plan of a basilica, many beautiful rounded arches and splendid carved wooden doors between the foyer and the nave. After a flurry of cleaning, moving and other preparation in the days proceeding, the church was dedicated on 30th May. Bernard Cardinal Law, Archbishop of Boston, presided at the Mass, with our local bishop, Most Rev Daniel Reilly of Worcester, among the concelebrants. Several hundred guests, both lay and religious, came here for the ceremony. The Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in New England and the surrounding area were well represented for the ceremony, including five abbots and one abbess. And we were pleased to welcome Fr Abbot from Pluscarden, Abbot Aldhelm from Prinknash and Abbot Bernard from Ramsgate not merely for the day, but for more extended visits.

The weather, however, did not co-operate, as rain not only cancelled the planned procession from St Scholastica Priory to the new church and the solemn entrance through the bronze outer doors, but also necessitated a last-minute change to the vesting rooms for the Cardinal and the concelebrants from the priory to the statio area of the new church. The rite for the dedication of a church is a most impressive one, and it began, after a simple procession to the sanctuary, with the architect, Ray Renzoni, handing over the plans and the key to the Cardinal, who in turn gave them to Fr Abbot and Mother Mary Clare. Following the sprinkling of the people and the walls with holy water, there was the Liturgy of the Word, with Paul Bleau, vice-president of the Masiello Contrsuction Co, the builders, giving the first reading from Nehemiah and Sr Mary Joseph the second. Cardinal Law's homily focused on the nature of the church. The centre of the rite is the prayer of dedication with rich evocations of the images of the Church bride, fruitful virgin, mother, vineyard, temple, city – and the anointing with sacred chrism of the altar by the Cardinal and of the carved dedication crosses (carved by Sr Monica) on the walls by Bishop Reilly and Fr Abbot. This was followed by the

incensation of the newly-dedicated altar, the people, and the church walls, and by the festive lighting of the altar candles, the candles at the dedication crosses, and then the lights in the church (at which point the sun came out!)

The scholas from the two communities led the chants, which included several antiphons taken from medieval dedication liturgies, and a special polyphonic choir from both communities sang a 15th century English *Ave Maria* after Communion. Following the Mass, the communities and their guests enjoyed a catered meal in the basement of the church (which we eventually hope to make into the library) and relaxed in one another's company after the rigours of the past few days. As the monks and nuns in Petersham begin to worship in this new church dedicated to the Mother of God, we hope that our prayer here will help bring Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church and the true Light, into the hearts of our visitors and guests and into the world at large.

DGP

## MONASTIC CENTURY

1996 is the centenary of the foundation of our monastic community. It was an inauspicious beginning. In March 1896 Benjamin Carlyle, a twenty-two year old Anglican medical student who had taken the name Br Aelred as a Benedictine Oblate, moved into a house on the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London and began social work in the local slums. He originally had one companion but soon others joined him in his work. Today almost a hundred monks in eight communities, two of them Anglican, can trace their origins to this beginning. There are also about fifty nuns in two communities, one Anglican and one Catholic, which were strongly influenced by Abbot Aelred Carlyle.

The early history of the community is well known: within ten years of the foundation they had settled on Caldey Island and were

living a regular monastic life. In 1913 they were received into the Catholic Church with the active support of Pope St Pius X, Abbot Columba Marmion and Dom John Chapman. Growth was prevented by the Great War and the 1920s were years of crisis with severe financial trials, Abbot Aelred's departure to Canada where he became a secular priest, and the closure of the novitiate. By the end of the decade, however, with the move to Prinknash, normality returned. Twenty years later there was no longer enough room at Prinknash for all the new vocations and so foundations were made at Farnborough and Pluscarden. Abbot Aelred eventually returned to the community he had founded and died in the habit in 1955. The community had thus come a very long way in fifty years. Now, another half-century on, one can ask why it survived and flourished after such an uncertain early history.

Monasticism is a charismatic movement and the obvious answer is the action of the Holy Spirit: "if this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38-39). One can, though, ask: what was special about the type of monasticism created by Abbot Aelred? I would suggest that the appeal of Caldey, once one has stripped away the fin-de-siècle romanticism, is that it represented the classical type of Benedictine Monasticism as outlined in the Rule. Dom Denys Rutledge of Fort Augustus in his book *The Complete Monk* (1966) has studied this classical form which he calls 'the normal monastery' and his conclusions closely fit the Caldey example. Part of the wider context of Carlyle's foundation was a movement within the English Benedictine Congregation which desired to change from a polity reflecting the situation of penal times to a more "normal" one based on independent Abbeys. *Benedictine Monachism* (1919) by Dom Cuthbert Butler, who gave great help to the Caldey converts, presents some of the main themes of this reform, which desired a concentration of work in the House rather than on remote Missions. The situation of Aelred Carlyle's Anglican foundation was very different and he obviously did not have to face the heated debates over abandoning a

venerable tradition, but his concern was broadly the same as that of the “Downside movement”: fidelity to the Rule. As he said in 1913, “we want to be Benedictines pure and simple, a real religious family”. He did, like Dom Guéranger of Solesmes, draw heavily on the nineteenth century rediscovery of medieval monasticism, and he himself, with his enthusiasms, gift of healing, interest in the paranormal, and overambitious building schemes was anything but ordinary. Our interest, however, is in the *type* of monastic life he created. For this he drew on various previous monastic reforms, the Cistercians and Camaldolese, the Constitutions of the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance (now the Subiaco Congregation) and the Solesmes liturgical restoration, all of which aimed at a return to the purity of ancient forms. Our white habit shows his desire to identify with the earlier of these movements, his use of the term “Primitive Observance” to describe his Anglican Congregation illustrates his desire to return to the sources. The result was a community life centred on the Abbot as father and lived within the enclosure, giving pride of place to the Divine Office, emphasising silence, manual work and a certain austerity and leaving time for the development of prayer and study. Guests were received, retreats given at the monastery and in 1905 a Confraternity was founded along the lines of our present Oblates. The aim, though, was for the monks just to live the monastic life, with any such works being incidental and subordinate to this. The type of life lived on Caldey and outlined in Abbot Aelred’s *Our Purpose and Method*, bears a close resemblance to Dom David Knowles’ *Project for a Contemplative Foundation: 1933* (in *David Knowles: A Memoir* (1979) by Dom Adrian Morey) although there is no direct influence and Knowles would probably not have appreciated the comparison.

One can thus sum up the essentials of Abbot Aelred’s vision of the monastic life as the purely contemplative life lived according to the “primitive observance” of the Rule of St Benedict in a community with a definite family spirit gathered around an

Abbot. It was this ideal that was tested in the crucible of the 1920s and which has remained the foundation of the communities descended from Caldey. The reason why it has endured is probably because it gave expression to the archetypal model of Benedictine life lived in community which has always been the aim of those reform movements which periodically spring up in the Benedictine family.

DAH

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Suffering of Love – Christ’s Descent into the Hell of Human Hopelessness* by R. Martin; St Bede’s Publications, Petersham MA, 1995; 173pp \$14.95

Many thinkers of this century, rejecting faith in a loving and omnipotent God, have experienced human life as mere absurdity, and death as an ultimate horror which negates all value and every joy. The despairing pessimism of such a view might see Auschwitz as an emblem of our condition. Regis Martin’s book is offered as a response to such typically modern anguish, above all in the light of the Nazi holocaust of the Jewish people. Following the lead, especially, of H. U. von Balthasar, and drawing on a wide range of literature, including poetry, short stories and film scripts, Martin seeks to explore and develop the doctrine of Christ’s descent into hell. His central thesis is that this is an extension of Christ’s passion, or rather its supreme culmination. Christ experienced the hell of separation from God, of total abandonment and desolation, not only up to death but beyond. Through this solidarity with the despairing ones, he reached the uttermost depths of human suffering, and so redeemed it from within. Martin wants to give maximum theological weight to Christ’s cry of dereliction on the cross, without ever quite crossing the boundary of orthodox doctrine into currently popular theories of a

disjunction at that point of the very Trinitarian Persons, and of the divine and human natures. The thesis merits much discussion, which space here prohibits. Many will doubtless find it attractive, but personally I have difficulties with it. I mention here only its notable contrast with the classical theological interpretation, expressed in many icons, whereby Christ descends into hell as a mighty conqueror, carrying the emblems of his victory, to free those bound in death from their prison. There are other features of the book which might be its strength, but which I found distracting, even wearisome. The author has a penchant for heaping up and repeating constantly vocabulary of horror and revulsion. A very considerable proportion of the text consists of quotation, and each chapter is followed by sprawling footnotes, which almost rival it for length.

DBH

*The Catholic Faith – A Dominican’s Vision* by R. Conrad, OP; Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994, 200pp

A coherent theological vision of our Faith, much indebted to St Thomas Aquinas, and explicitly following the teaching of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is here presented with remarkable simplicity and clarity. The author presents the faith as something deeply attractive, reasonable, answering our needs and always for our good. The book would be an excellent introduction for any outside enquirer, but may be strongly recommended also to any Catholic, however learned. It makes no attempt to offer strange or innovative doctrine, yet it has a freshness and originality of approach which makes it a joy to read. My only complaint is with the drawings. Chapman have seen fit to substitute the author’s very funny originals with its own humourless versions. Pity.

DBH

*A Plea for Purity - Sex, Marriage and God* by J. C. Arnold. Plough Publishing, Darvell Bruderhof, Robertsbridge, E Sussex.

1996. 160pp

Johann Christoph Arnold is the grandson of the founder of the Bruderhof movement, now established in the US and England. Bruderhof members seek to practise radical community life, inspired by the Gospel and the tradition of the Hutterite Anabaptist Bretheren. It might be expected that the doctrine coming from such a background would conflict sharply with what the Catholic Church believes and practises. Not so: advance copies have won praise from Mother Teresa, Cardinal Ratzinger, and an impressive list of other well-known Catholic writers. Pope John Paul has expressed his pleasure at the “harmony of moral conviction that springs from our common faith in Christ”. This reviewer found the book inspiring, challenging, helpful and would recommend it to anyone truly seeking Christ, yearning for purity of heart and life, and interested in the crisis afflicting marriage throughout our society. Arnold writes well, and simply, and speaks from long experience as a father, a church leader, and a marriage counsellor. His position is quite uncompromising: he rejects entirely all abortion, pre-marital sex in any form, and any possibility of re-marriage after divorce. His teaching on contraception is the same as that of the Catholic Church. He regards the sexual revolution of our time as an unmitigated evil, which has deeply wounded those caught up in it. Yet this is not a book of moral condemnation. Compassion and humanity breathe from every page. Arnold's aim is to witness to the power of love in a loveless age. For those who fall short of his ideals, this book should be seen not as a threat, but as a beacon of light and hope, proclaiming that purity and faithful love are possible even today. That is, they are possible, if we accept Christ, and his teachings, in all their beauty. But how can we consistently and perseveringly follow Christ? Arnold is in no doubt: we need Christian community. Without the constant support of Christian community, Arnold does not think that the purity for which he pleads will be possible.

DBH

# **MONASTERIES OF THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

## **No 1: Ukrainian**

### **Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration, Monks of Mt Tabor**

When Fr Abbot Boniface had to leave Africa (for health reasons) where he had founded a monastery of the Eastern tradition which still exists, he was asked, in the early '70s, not to waste his valuable and rare experience and to use it for a similar foundation in the USA. Cardinal Dearden of Detroit was the main promoter and protector and the monastery started in the Detroit area in 1972. Due to Fr Abbot's health (Detroit being colder than tropical Africa) they had to look for a more clement climate. This they finally found at their present address in California, three hours north of San Francisco. Bishop Yaroslav Gobro, Hierarch of the Chicago Eparchy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Ordinary of the Western US, accepted us under his omophorion. From the very beginning we received the most effective and sincere collaboration from him and his successors and from Rome, which approved and recommended our *Typicon* (Rule & Constitutions) in 1979.

From the very beginning Rome has supported us in our intention to restore genuine Eastern monasticism, in close continuity with the Gospel and Holy Tradition, so that we are truly like "Orthodox in union with Rome" (as the Pope wants us Greek Catholics to be). So we have done away with all Latinisations. We live a basically "contemplative life" although this (rather Western) term does not fully render the enormous riches of Byzantine monasticism. We have the full Divine Office and daily Divine Liturgy (except during Lent), gentle silence, manual labour, joyful community life with openness to emeritical life, the sacrificial dimension of personal prayer to take upon us the burden of the whole world before the face of God. In short, a true "family of Jesus", rather than a stress on the institutional side. However the venerable monastic observances are honoured since they stem from the Gospel, for example the full monastic fasting, wearing

the habit even outside the monastery, *lectio divina*, the priority of brotherly love, the fatherhood of the Abbot as icon of Christ etc. Although the schedule and chores are important as expressions of God's will, much attention is given to formation into the true Eastern monastic spirit and tradition, as well as the development of the human person and his gifts – artistic, intellectual or mechanical – and other natural skills. This openness is further extended in the form of selected ministries that are an extension of monastic life, such as hospitality, our small but very busy retreat house, spiritual direction, welcoming active participation in our worship, catechetical work for children and converts, conferences, writing, Newsletter etc.

According to visitors familiar with Mt Athos, this kind of life is very similar to the one on the Holy Mountain, and in the same spirit. It is sometimes a vigorous life, but it gives the great joy and reward of being authentic and totally in the spirit of the Gospel and true Eastern monasticism, rather of all religious life in the Church of the East and West.

Mt Tabor is a group of three monasteries. First the “mother”, Holy Transfiguration Monastery; then the Holy Transfiguration Skete located in the Upper Peninsula in Michigan; and finally the Holy Protection Monastery for Nuns, not far from Mt Tabor. The Sunday Services are very well attended by a full congregation, many of whom who stay for a potluck meal (and catechism for children and converts). Among these assistants there has grown up “an extended community” of faithful sharers with our own life, who form a core group; several of them are even closer to the monastery as “aggregate members”. Through them all the monastery reaches out far beyond its own location and becomes like the biblical icon of Moses on the mountain (Exodus 17:11ff) while the armies wage the battle in all the valleys of the world.