

# **Pluscarden Benedictines**

No. 190 News and Notes for our Friends Pentecost 2020

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Cover: Coronavirus Lockdown at Pluscarden

## FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Obviously, this letter will have to be about the “lockdown”. It will be expected that I say something about our community’s experience of this. Unfortunately, as I shall explain, I’m not in a position to write much about how the community is managing at this time. I can say that the brethren are well and the normal round of monastic life continues, though without guests or visitors. The daily celebration of Mass and the Divine Office continues, with heightened awareness that the holy Sacrifice and the divine praises are offered on behalf of all the faithful, and especially the many who cannot be physically present at the Liturgy. We pray for all our friends and look forward to the time when we shall be able to see them again. We share the general sense of uncertainty regarding the future, become more appreciative of what is really important in our life, and trust in God.

I can’t say more about the community because I am not at home! On 18<sup>th</sup> March I came down to fill in for a few days as chaplain to the Benedictine nuns at Minster in Kent. My return flight, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, was cancelled, and the government’s announcement of the lockdown found me still at Minster, where I remain at the time of writing this. I am waiting for the lockdown in Scotland to be relaxed sufficiently to allow me back.

So, I can speak only of my personal experience of the lockdown. To me it has brought two things: much more solitude than I normally have, and a near-total cessation of my normal work. In these respects, I suppose I have shared the experience of many.

The solitude has taught me that I am not called to be a hermit! I am coming to understand why St Benedict sees separation of a monk from the normal round of community life as a form of punishment. Not, I must say, that my current situation is at all unpleasant. On the contrary. I am in close proximity to a good

monastic community that treats me with great kindness, and I am well cared for. It is a joy to ensure for the nuns the daily celebration of Mass, something many communities of nuns lack. I appreciate the contacts I have with the nuns. And I have noticed something about footsteps. In the chaplain's flat where I am, I am quite separate from where the nuns live, but some noise travels. Occasionally I hear footsteps. I realised that whenever I heard them I became tense. It wasn't that the noise bothered me. The footsteps were always very quiet, hardly audible. The tension was because when I am at home in my office, footsteps are often an advance warning of a knock on my door. It took some weeks here for it to sink in that the footsteps would never be coming in my direction, and I could relax. I am relaxing, and grateful for the opportunity. At the same time, I am coming to appreciate that it is largely through its intrusions on my comfort or concentration that the grace of the common life flows into me.

I am trying, with limited success, to spend my time usefully, and I can find good things to occupy my time. But this is very different from having my time and energy claimed by the immediate needs of others. For the present, given that distance stops me from doing most of what an abbot does, there is very little of what I can do that really needs to be done. Put quite simply, what I do or don't do right now doesn't matter much, except of course in the sight of God, which I suppose is the point! Things seem to carry on quite well without my little contribution. This is humbling.

I am sure I share with many, a feeling that the lockdown is not just a long interruption to normal life. One feels that in the long run it will mark an end to life as it has been, and the beginning of something new, not only because of the effects of the virus, but because a renewal is needed and this is the time.

With all the community at Pluscarden I pray for you and your families, for the eternal rest of your loved ones who have died, for your health and well-being, for the recovery of the sick, and for

God's blessing on you and his protection in the coming weeks and months.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Fr Anselm

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**From the *Book of 'The Lord be with you'*, ch. 19**

“The solitary life is indeed a school of heavenly learning, a training in divine arts. There all that we learn is God; He is the way by which we proceed and through which we come to a knowledge of the highest truth. The hermitage is a paradise of delight where the fragrant scents of the virtues are breathed forth like sweet sap or glowing spice-flowers. There the roses of charity blaze in crimson flame and the lilies of purity shine in snowy beauty, and with them the humble violets whom no winds assault because they are content with lowly places; there the myrrh of perfect Penance perfumes the air and the incense of constant Prayer rises unceasingly.

“But why should I call to mind these in particular? For the lovely buds of all the holy virtues glow there many-coloured and graces flourish in an undying greenness beyond the power of words to describe. O hermitage! delight of holy souls, unfailing in your inner sweetness. You are like the Chaldean furnace in which holy young men check the raging fire by the power of their prayers and put out the thronging, crackling flames by the ardour of their faith; where their bonds are burnt and yet their limbs do not feel the fire; for they are loosed from their sins and their souls are stirred up to sing hymns in God's praise.”

St Peter Damian

## FROM THE ANNALS

**February 26<sup>th</sup>:** Brs Innocent and Benjamin begin their pre-novitiate retreat at Compline. We sing the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

**28<sup>th</sup>:** An oblate weekend begins tonight; talks are given by Fr Abbot in the North Transept Aisle.

**March 4<sup>th</sup>:** Bishop Hugh and the Scottish Bishops have issued guidelines with regard to the coronavirus outbreak. Mass is to continue for now, with restrictions and precautions in place.

We have the clothing ceremony for Brs Innocent and Benjamin. They receive the white tunic and short scapular of a novice. They receive the names Br Patrick and Br Edmund respectively.

**5<sup>th</sup>:** Bishop Hugh joined the community for the celebration of the Solemnity of St Aelred.

**13<sup>th</sup>:** As part of the virus precautions, brethren now occupy alternate stalls in Choir, and sit with some spacing at Chapter and recreation. Our timetable continues on without alteration.

Several mature trees in our grounds, of various species, have come down in recent gales. These days they are cut up and moved.

**17<sup>th</sup>:** Our annual clergy day. About 10 came for Mass and lunch, including 2 deacons. Fr Abbot preached.

**18<sup>th</sup>:** Fr Abbot set out early for St Mildred's Priory, Minster, to act as chaplain for the sisters. He expects to be away for a few days only. Today Bishop Hugh announced that, following on the government instructions, there would be no public Masses after the Solemnity of St Joseph. Churches will remain open for private prayer and for Confessions etc.

**23<sup>rd</sup>:** Fr Abbot was due to return today, but his flight was cancelled. He hoped to get a flight tomorrow; that flight too was cancelled. At present he hopes to get back by a flight on Saturday.

**24<sup>th</sup>:** The national lock-down is announced. Our Church doors are locked. Fr Abbot is stuck at Minster. In the community, we institute an extra Holy Hour each week for the intentions of the crisis. We also sing the *Sub tuum praesidium* daily at the end of

Vespers, and use a special prayer from the Vatican at our daily Chapter meeting.

**25<sup>th</sup>:** The Annunciation. At noon we gather, in union with Pope Francis and all Christians throughout the world, to recite the Lord's Prayer for the pandemic intention.

**April 2<sup>nd</sup>:** New strawberry plants are set up on the poly tunnels. The Vatican issues instructions on the celebration of Holy Week.

**5<sup>th</sup>:** Palm Sunday. Fr Prior presided in place of Fr Abbot. The liturgy was carried out as usual, but without a blessing or procession of Palms, or a congregation.

**7<sup>th</sup>:** We hear of the death of Mary Bradley, our long-term friend and Oblate, RIP.

**9<sup>th</sup>:** **Holy Thursday:** no washing of feet in the liturgy this year, or procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of repose.

**10<sup>th</sup>:** **Good Friday.** The Passion was sung in Latin as usual. The veneration of the Cross was carried out without physical touching.

**11<sup>th</sup>:** This year we began the Paschal Vigil at 9.00 p.m. No Easter fire was allowed, so we took a flame from the old Paschal Candle to light the new one. No readings or chants were omitted, but there was no blessing or sprinkling of holy water.

**12<sup>th</sup>:** **Easter Day.** Fr Prior continued to preside at the liturgy in place of Fr Abbot. Painted Easter eggs and a variety of home-made breads were blessed and consumed as usual.

**21<sup>st</sup>:** There was a festive lunch in honour of Fr Abbot's patron St Anselm, even in his absence.

**May 7<sup>th</sup>:** We hear of the death of Libby Petrie. She was a friend of the community for many years. Her husband Roy Petrie served at the opening Mass in September 1948, and thereafter attended Mass here regularly. Though an Anglican, Libby too often attended Sunday Mass at the Abbey. She also took part in many activities on behalf of the Abbey over many years. She is to be buried in the cemetery with her husband Roy.

**15<sup>th</sup>:** Libby Petrie's funeral and burial here. Fr Prior presided. About 15 close family members came, as allowed by current Government regulations.

## NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

We enjoyed a long three week visit from Fr Abbot in February. While he was here we had a community outing to the Maronite Monks of Adoration. We attended Vespers (Ramsho) which was followed by a friendly meal together. It was fortunate Fr Abbot was able to have a good long visit when he did and return to Britain before the end of February. Otherwise, because of the coronavirus travel restrictions, he might have ended up being stranded in America.

Fr Gregory flew to Milwaukee, his native city, on March 7 to be with his mother before her death. She passed away peacefully on March 20 with her children present. Fr Gregory had planned to stay on for a while longer anyway, but the lockdowns in both Wisconsin and Massachusetts have prevented him from returning to Petersham. At the time of writing he is still there, and we are looking forward to his eventual return.

For the past several years in Lent Fr Dunstan has attended the annual Worcester Diocesan Catholic Men's Conference, as well as the Chrism Mass at Worcester Cathedral. However, this year both events were cancelled due to the coronavirus. But he was still able to give a Lenten retreat to the Maronites here in Petersham, although he was rather busy during the retreat. With Fr Gregory away Fr Dunstan is our only resident priest. Therefore, he had to do some commuting back and forth, returning here to say a daily Mass for us. The retreat went well. This was the second retreat he has given, the other being to the nuns of Lady of the Desert in New Mexico.

Due to the coronavirus we made some modifications to our Holy Week liturgy, but by and large we did much the same as we always do. On Palm Sunday we omitted the procession but still blessed the palms. On Holy Thursday we skipped the foot washing, the procession and the transferring of the Blessed Sacrament. Our Tenebrae service at Vigils during the Triduum was much the same as always except we recited the psalms and

canticles in English, instead of singing them in Latin. On Good Friday we venerated the cross by bowing to it, instead of kissing it, and we included the extra intercession for those suffering from the pandemic. We still celebrated the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening with the full number of seven readings, but we omitted the fire and procession. We still blessed the paschal candle, which was then lit and carried by Fr Dunstan to the candle stand. He paused three times for the “Lumen Christi” while we all knelt in our choir stalls.

On Easter Sunday we would normally have a festive talking meal after Vespers with the sisters of St Scholastica Priory. This year we all thought it would be best if we had separate meals, following the recommended practice of “social distancing.” So instead we brothers had a talking meal on our own in our refectory.

It’s quieter now in Petersham with no guests but monastic life carries on. We’re continuing with our normal liturgical life. And likewise, manual work goes on as well. Br Vincent has been painting the walls of our renovated carriage house. Br Benedict Joseph will be working in the garden this summer. We now have several raised beds which he has been filling with berry bushes, strawberries, and herbs. He started some vegetable seeds indoors in preparation for outdoor planting. He has also been cooking regularly, notably baking a variety of breads and chocolate brownies.

Finally, on Friday May 1, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reconsecrated the country to Mary, under the title of Mary, Mother of the Church. This was done in conjunction with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops who also reconsecrated their nation to the Blessed Virgin at the same time. Parishes and religious communities were invited to take part also. Here at Petersham we had a consecration ceremony after Vespers. The texts we used were provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. At the end we sang the Regina Caeli.

DIC



## THE HOLINESS OF GOD AND THE DIGNITY OF MAN

This article is provoked by the reports that emerged some months ago of sexual abuse within the Church. This time the abuser was not a cleric or a person in authority in the Church, but one who in his lifetime commanded respect and seemed worthy of imitation because of the apparent holiness of his life and the good charitable work that he certainly did. It is not for me to assess the truth of the reports. They have been accepted by those responsible for the legacy of the person in question. Nor can I comment on how it is that in one person's life there can be so much good done with one hand, and such profound harm with the other.

My thoughts are personal, insofar as my perspective is of one who has spent his whole life within the Catholic Church and his whole adult life in institutions of the Church. My personal memories and my evaluation of my life are bound up with my understanding of the Church, the validity of its teaching and discipline, and the validity of the personal example of those whose lives seem to embody the Gospel.

Nobody is canonized before he dies. But the example of our own contemporaries, known directly or by reputation, who exemplify heroic discipleship, is particularly precious and powerful. One thinks of St Teresa of Calcutta, or St John Paul II. Knowledge that one such person was not what he seemed does not, at least for me, unravel the whole fabric of my experience in the Church. But I feel a need to reprocess my memories, incorporating the knowledge I now have. A large part of this comes from a sense that in the recent revelations is a tearing of the veil shielding the holiness of God. It is not just that a reputation for holiness has co-existed with a propensity for evil – this is the human condition – but that the sacred has been an instrument for gaining sinful gratification. Disciples seeking to grow in holiness have had sin presented to them as initiation into the higher realms of Christian mystical experience.

I believe such a revision of memory is a re-reading of the

history of salvation, that can begin with a new reading of Scripture. The reading I have in mind isn't searching Scripture for passages that directly answer the questions we have today about abuse. The result would be disappointing. It is a matter of reading the whole story again in the light of what we know now, in the belief that the story has not really changed, but my understanding of it might now deepen.

One might begin with the general silence of Scripture, particularly the New Testament, on this aspect of human life. We might misinterpret this, especially if we feel that part of our current problem is silence.

We know the congregations of Christians addressed by St Paul included slaves, and we can guess they may have been many, given the proportion of the population in cities of the Greco-Roman world that was enslaved, and the appeal of Christianity to the less fortunate. Slaves being property, their bodies belonged to their owners, and they were viewed as available to their owners for sexual use. In this context it is worth observing that slaves were generally young. Many were born children of slaves. Or, they were children abandoned by their parents at birth, or later abandoned on the streets because their parents could not support them. Slaves could earn money and eventually pay for their freedom, and this was encouraged: masters gained the price of their freedom and could buy newer and younger slaves. It has been reckoned that generally slaves who started young might have attained freedom by the age of thirty. So, we have a large number of vulnerable dependent young people whom the culture viewed as legitimate objects of lust. Abuse must have been part of daily experience for many listening to St Paul.

A great difference between then and now is that none of this was hidden. First of all, the slave population was not racially distinct and was not segregated. Slaves and free mingled. Slaves were often professional people, doctors, teachers, administrators. Paul, in one of the workshops where he made tents, might have worked alongside slaves. And if masters chose to use their slaves

sexually, there would have been no need to hide the fact. The silence of the New Testament is not concealment, there being nothing to hide.

Within Jewish society in Palestine in the time of Jesus, we would expect slaves to have been protected, by Jewish moral standards and by the restrictions that the Law of Moses placed on the practice of slavery. Still Jesus' teaching demonstrates complete familiarity with the condition of slaves and the ever-present likelihood of their suffering physical abuse.

The general point is that our Scriptures are addressed to people very accustomed to abuse. The authors lacked our vocabulary for this, and there was no court, not even a court of public opinion, to which appeal could be made against it. But it is likely that if we listen to Scripture with more awareness of the experience of its first audience, we might discover more is said than we had thought. Below are some examples of how such a reading might go.

There is first the impact of the central Christian message, for which Paul in particular chooses language that would resonate with slaves: that Christ took on the condition of a slave and suffered the death of a slave; that all are free in Christ. Then there are the values that Christianity inherited from Judaism and diffused, values that attacked the roots of slavery: respect for work, chastity, and care for children. In general, the understanding of the Christian community as "the household of God" made this community a real alternative to the household of the master to which a slave belonged.

Probably in Jesus' own teaching we should have a more literal understanding of the Our Father's "forgive us our debts". Debt loomed large in the experience of Jesus' compatriots, and was a common reason for which people went into slavery. To remit a debt meant to give freedom from the slavery which would otherwise result from debt. It is quite literally to set the other free. A word in which everyone prayed the Our Father authentically would be a free world!

In the Acts of the Apostles we see how after Pentecost the Gospel spreads in ever wider circles, starting in Jerusalem, first to Jews, then to Samaritans. Finally, following the conversion of Paul and the revelation to Peter that “what God has cleansed, you must not call common” (Acts 10:15), the Gospel comes to the Gentiles, beginning with the Centurion Cornelius.

Immediately before the stories of the conversions of Paul and Cornelius, we have the Ethiopian Eunuch who, riding in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah, meets Philip on the road. We cannot tell from the account whether he is Jew or Gentile, and perhaps this is deliberate. He is on the margin between the two worlds. Probably he is a “God-fearer”, a Gentile who believes in God but has not converted to Judaism. In fact, even if he had been born Jewish, by the Law of Moses he was excluded from full membership in the Congregation because he was a eunuch. As a pilgrim to Jerusalem, he could have visited but not entered the temple. Although he was an important man, he was what we would regard as a victim of the most appalling sexual and physical abuse. Under the old Law he was forever marginalised because of that. It must be deliberate that in St Luke’s very orderly narrative of the spreading of the Gospel, this marginal person comes into the embrace of the growing Church ahead of the great apostle Paul and the illustrious Cornelius.

Also noteworthy is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: “As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth” (Is 53:7). His question, of whom does this passage speak, must arise from his own experience of humiliating abuse, and this brings him to Christ.

The crucifixion was an act of abuse. That seems to be stating the obvious, but it is worth paying attention to the fact that in the Roman world the purpose of execution was not simply to kill, or even to inflict pain. It was intended to humiliate and degrade, and included the shaming of the person by the exposure of his body. A

story of the most terrible abuse is at the centre of the New Testament.

Coming to the Old Testament, a good place to start is the situation described in the first two chapters of Exodus. The people of Israel, growing and prospering in Egypt, have become an apparent threat that Egypt wishes to neutralise. So, the governing power initiates a process of enslavement, including the gradual elimination of the male population. The experience of fatherhood is being removed. At the same time, the memory of the God of the fathers is being lost. In the experience of the first generations of Abraham's descendants, we heard often of the "God of your father" or the "God of your fathers". These references vanish in the story of the people in Egypt. They do not return until, at the burning bush, God says to Moses "I am the God of your father", signalling the coming redemption.

What is being described here is the reduction of Israel to a state of vulnerability to exploitation, by the removal of the protection of the fathers and the protection of God. Here the biblical narrative gives us a rare glimpse into the inner world of the vulnerable, the women and children, which normally in historical narratives is left hidden. We expect to find helplessness. In fact, we find strength, in the midwives who cleverly evade Pharaoh's orders and allow the male children to live. In this feminine strength God makes his presence felt and his blessing remains operative through the gift of life.

This experience of vulnerability to oppressive power becomes fundamental to Israel's understanding of herself. It is anticipated in the stories surrounding the birth of the first child of God's promise, Isaac. In the slave Hagar, oppressed, abandoned and driven into the wilderness, are anticipated the sufferings of the nation Israel – though she, in subversion of any idea that being oppressed confers a right to oppress, is an Egyptian whose oppressor is Sarah, mother of the nation Israel.

The experience of slavery becomes part of the communal memory, creating a compassionate society. Lev 19:33: "When a

stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” The experience is a key to knowledge of God: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:2).

There are various descriptions of abusive situations in the Old Testament. Consistently the narratives draw us to sympathy for the victims. There is the story of Tamar in Genesis 37, and another Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, the story of Susannah, the story of Joseph in the house of Potiphar, and in the New Testament of course, the story of the woman caught in adultery. Some have happy endings, but some, reflecting reality, end tragically: the second Tamar, and, in the short term, Joseph.

A particularly horrible and multi-layered story of abuse is that told in Genesis 19, concerning Lot, his two guests whom the people of Sodom want to take and abuse, and his two daughters whom he offers to the crowd in place of his guests. Here, a sense of sympathy towards the potential victims seems absent, perhaps drowned in feelings of horror at the sacrilegious nature of the actions attempted: Lot’s guests are really angels.

To develop this theme of the connection between the violation of the dignity of human beings and the violation of the holiness of God, we might explore the story of the sons of God and the daughters of men in Genesis, a tale of the breaking down of the boundaries between heaven and earth associated with sexual transgression, and probably abuse of power. We might also read again the story of Adam and Eve, involving as it does not only disobedience but seduction through the promise of power, bringing us back to the starting point of this reflection: the need to read again the story of our salvation with the knowledge we now sadly have; the conviction that the full story is there in Scripture, waiting for us.

DAA

## MONTROSE AND PLUSCARDINE

Mid-seventeenth century Scotland was in a state of civil and religious turmoil. Protestantism was now the official religion of the nation, though whether with or without Bishops remained hotly, even violently contested. Many people, especially in the North, were not happy with the uneasy religious and political settlement. Two men, both members of the Scots nobility and both competent soldiers, shared this distrust – James Graham, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Montrose and Thomas Mackenzie of Kintail, better known as “Pluscardine” – both Presbyterians. Much more is known about the “Great Montrose” than about Mackenzie. He was granted the dissolved Pluscarden Priory and appointed Lay Prior in 1633. The Mackenzies were a powerful clan in the North and Thomas was a full brother of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Seaforth, who passed the lands to him. Although we cannot now know, surely it’s likely that when he stayed at Pluscarden, Mackenzie would have inhabited the 15<sup>th</sup> century Scottish tower house that was the former Prior’s Lodge.

As a young soldier, Captain Mackenzie had fought first for the French in 1625, then for the Danish-Norwegian forces against the Holy Roman Emperor. He was in the Netherlands in early February 1627 and was wounded at Eckernforde and in Stralsund, both in Germany, in 1628. At some point after this he returned to Scotland, for there is documentation that he served as witness to a charter issued by his brother George at Elgin on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1631. We have virtually no information about what he was doing between acquiring the lands of Pluscarden until becoming involved in the Risings of the late 1640s.

Montrose was a principal member and signatory of the National Covenant in 1638, and as most prominent Scots signed (apart from some in the North), we may assume that Mackenzie followed suit. However, those who signed bound themselves to defend King Charles I with their lives, with the proviso that they would have nothing to do with his “ecclesiastical innovations” until they were approved by Parliament. Charles was forced to

give way on this point, and in November 1638 a General Assembly abolished Episcopacy and restored Presbyterianism. There ensued various skirmishes on both sides of the border.

Montrose was not especially puritanical; his initial support for the Covenanters arose from a desire for a society in which the clergy would confine themselves to their spiritual duties, and the King would uphold law and order. Another factor that influenced his actions is to be found in a personal enmity and distrust between himself and Archibald Campbell, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Argyll, leader of the national party of Presbyterians. In the Scottish Parliament of September 1639, they were firmly on opposing sides. Wishing to use the King's authority to lead Parliament to defeat Argyll, Montrose therefore offered the King the support of a large number of nobles. Charles, however, would still not consent to abandon his bishops. For a time thereafter, Montrose seems to have played a kind of double game. He served in the Scottish Army which went South to resist the King, but was suspected of Royalist sympathies (mainly by Argyll), and on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1641, he was charged with plotting against Argyll, and was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Charles then visited Scotland seeking support, and reluctantly gave his formal assent to the abolition of Episcopacy. Montrose shared in a general amnesty accorded to all Charles's supporters.

In 1643, the Solemn League and Covenant was agreed between the Scottish Covenanters and the leading English Parliamentarians, by now at open war against the King. This agreement was duly accepted by the Kirk and the English Parliament and Westminster Assembly. This was a step too far for many on both sides of the border and Montrose was among their number. The King, appreciative of Montrose's assumed loyalty and his military prowess, in 1644 created him Marquis and Lord Lieutenant of Scotland and the following year, Captain General.

The first indication we have of Pluscardine's involvement in the events of the time came in 1645, when he was sent to negotiate with Montrose in the aftermath of the battle of Inverlochy, which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1645. There Montrose had soundly



defeated Argyll's Covenanters with a force consisting of West Highlanders and Irish soldiers, many of whom were Catholic, with their own Priest Chaplains. (Interestingly, the Campbell laird of Ardchattan, Pluscarden's mediaeval sister house, had given assistance to Montrose's forces before that battle.) It may well be that Mackenzie was impressed both by Montrose's military brilliance and his charismatic personality, although it was to be a few years before he made up his mind which side to back.

On 9<sup>th</sup> May 1645, Lord Seaforth (Pluscardine's brother) was among the large force of Scottish Covenanters which confronted, and was defeated by Montrose and his Royalist forces at the Battle of Auldearn. Montrose thereafter laid siege to Seaforth's Castle Chanonry of Ross and took it from the MacKenzies after four days. It is likely that Pluscardine was on his brother's side, whether or not he took part in the defence. The MacKenzies retook the castle again in 1649.

In April 1646 King Charles, thoroughly defeated in the English Civil War, became a prisoner of the Scots Army, and therefore ultimately of Montrose's enemy Argyll. Charles was forced to order Montrose to cease hostilities, and Argyll made sure he was then driven into exile. On the Continent, Montrose had many tempting offers to serve under various European monarchs. However, he remained loyal to his King. The deciding factor for many, including Montrose (and probably Pluscardine), was the execution of King Charles in January 1649. A King, after all, ruled by Divine Right and the execution of a monarch was considered by many throughout Europe as a crime crying out for vengeance. Montrose indeed swore vengeance and immediately transferred his loyalty to Charles II, proclaimed King of Scots in February. Charles appointed Montrose his Captain General in Scotland and authorised him to seek military help from the European powers. Montrose travelled throughout Germany, Poland and Scandinavia, attempting to raise forces for the King. Another factor which heavily influenced the Scots who had been wavering was what they saw as the unwarranted interference of Cromwell in Scottish

political affairs, cowing even the powerful Argyll. At home, it is apparent that Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine wholly transferred his loyalty to Montrose.

In February 1649, along with Colonel John Munro of Lemlair, Colonel Hugh Fraser and Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, all opposed to the authority of the current Parliament, Pluscardine led a Royalist uprising in the Highlands, gathering a force of clansmen. Surely some of his forces would have been recruited from the crofts in our valley. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> they entered Inverness, where they threw out the Castle garrison and demolished the walls and fortifications. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, they held a council of war during which they formulated edicts by which they took control of the customs and excise of the six northern counties. Shortly afterwards, General David Leslie was sent north to attack them. The Highlanders then retreated into the mountains. Leslie seized the Castle Chanonry of Ross, installing a garrison there, and negotiated a surrender of all of the clans, except for the Mackenzies. As soon as Leslie left for the south, the Mackenzies attacked and retook the Castle Chanonry, having already left a garrison in Inverness Castle.

In mid-April, “Pluscardine’s Rising” was revived and, accompanied by Major-General Middleton, Lord Reay, the new Marquis of Huntly and other Royalist nobles, Pluscardine occupied Balvenie in Banffshire with 1,000 Highlanders. The rising was not successful, however, and petered out without any final resolution.

Montrose landed in Ross-shire in April 1650, expecting support from the Highlanders who had rebelled in 1649. Having given up on help from the cautious Seaforth, he still hoped that Pluscardine would arrive with a strong reinforcement. However, by this time many of the Highlanders had gone over to the other side and fought against him at his final battle at Carbisdale on April 27<sup>th</sup>. Montrose escaped and sought refuge with Neil MacLeod of Assynt at Ardvreck Castle, but was betrayed by him and handed over to Leslie at Tain. He was taken to Edinburgh for trial and execution.

After spending a night at Castle Stewart near Inverness, Montrose was escorted through Moray. It is reported in several accounts that on the way “some loyal gentlemen waited upon his Excellency most avowedly with grieved hearts. Among them was Captain Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscarden. He was overjoyed to see these about him, and they were his guard forward to Forres, where the Marquis was treated, and thence, afternoon, convoyed to Elgin city, where all these loyal gentlemen waited on him, and diverted him all the time with allowance of the General ... Thence they conveyed him all the way to the River Spey, and a crowd of Royalists flocked about him unchallenged”. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, Montrose was sentenced to death by Parliament and next day was hanged, drawn and quartered. He protested to the last that he was in truth a Covenanter and a loyal subject.

Surprisingly, perhaps because he was of less importance than other Royalists, Thomas Mackenzie escaped retribution for his part in the Risings. We know that he went on to fight for Charles II the following year, as a Colonel of Foot for Inverness and Ross, at the Battle of Worcester, where the majority of Royalist troops were Scottish (including General David Leslie who had changed his allegiance). Of the 16,000 Royalists, 3000 were killed and 10,000 captured, including Leslie, who remained in the Tower of London until the Restoration. 8000 Scots prisoners were deported to the Colonies, to serve as indentured labourers. Many of those who escaped later joined the King in Europe and we must assume that Thomas was among them. He had been removed from his position as Prior of Pluscarden after the abortive Rising in 1649 and the lands and title passed to a cousin, George Mackenzie of Tarbat. Thomas died on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1676, leaving no heirs. Where he now lies, we do not know.

Lord, since thou knowest where all these atoms are,  
I'm hopeful thou'lt recover once my dust,  
And confident thou'lt raise me with the just.

James Graham of Montrose, *Written on the eve of his execution*

## SOME EFFECTS OF A 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PANDEMIC

The Black Death swept into Europe towards the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Depending on locality, between one third and two thirds of the population perished as a result. The plague arrived in England in 1348, via a ship landing in a Dorset port. From there it spread very rapidly throughout these Islands. Children seem to have been particularly susceptible. By and large, any children exposed to the disease quickly died from it. Religious who lived together in enclosed spaces were also especially vulnerable; so the monasteries were very hard hit. The death rate among Priests also was disproportionately high, as they attempted to minister to the sick, the dying and the dead. It seems generally that around 80% of adults who caught the disease at that time died from it. The Black Death struck in successive waves, each somewhat less severe than the last, until gradually it fizzled out of its own accord: in Britain from around 1351. Of course, in those days no one knew what caused the disease, or how it spread. There was no available antidote, no National Health Service, no known preventative measures, and no effective treatment.

Death on such a scale could not but have its effect on the religious and spiritual outlook of the age. Concern for the welfare of departed souls acquired a greatly augmented prominence and emphasis. Many people also, in all walks of life, turned with a new intensity towards personal prayer and devotion. This can be seen in the extraordinary growth and popularity of mystical texts in Middle English, either written or popularised in this period, such as the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich. It can also be seen in the new influence and prosperity of the contemplative life, made manifest most notably in the Carthusian Order.

Before the Black Death, Carthusian presence in the British Isles was extremely modest. The first Carthusian house was founded at Witham in Somerset by King Henry II, as part of his penance for the murder of St Thomas Becket (1170). The early

days of the Witham Charterhouse were hardly smooth. The first Prior resigned because of a lack of support from the King and the local community, and the second died in office soon after. The house would only be set on a firm foundation by the appointment of its third Prior, St Hugh of Grenoble, who later became the great and famous Bishop of Lincoln.

Fifty years passed before another Carthusian Monastery was founded in England. In 1222 William Longspee, Earl of Salisbury, undertook this second foundation in Gloucestershire. Monks came, but the location did not suit them, and after the Earl's death in 1226 they petitioned his wife, who granted them manors in Somerset, to which they moved. Longspee was the illegitimate son of Henry II and half-brother to King John. So like the first foundation, this one also was essentially the work of a single royal benefactor.

It took 121 years for the next Charterhouse to be founded in England. In 1343, very shortly before the Plague struck, Nicholas de Cantilupe, under licence from King Edward III, established a house at Beauvale in Nottinghamshire. The foundation charter states that the house would be "*for the glory of God and of the Virgin and of All Saints, for the furtherance of divine worship, and for the good estate of the king, of Archbishop Zouch, his most dear lord and cousin, of the Earl of Derby, of himself and his wife Joan, and William his son and heir, and of their souls when they should die, and also of all his progenitors and heirs.*" This charter was witnessed by the Archbishop of York, the Bishops of Durham, Lincoln and Lichfield, the Earls of Derby, Northampton and Huntingdon, Sir John de Grey, Sir William Deincourt and Sir William de Grey, as well as by Cantilupe's son and grandson. So the foundation of this house was not royal, and not confined to one single benefactor.

The London Charterhouse was the next to be established. Its foundation set a pattern that would be followed by others in the post-plague years. In 1349 a certain Sir Walter Manny bought several acres of land at Smithfield for the digging of a plague pit

and construction of a chapel to pray for those there interred. The site was bought from Manny by the Bishop of London, Michael Northburgh, who intended to found a Charterhouse there. That project was not however realised, until done so by Manny himself under letters patent from the King in 1371.

What makes this, and the other houses established over the next forty years, different from the earlier foundations is the sheer number and variety of benefactors. The experience of the Black Death had meant that the laity of England were, at risk of oversimplifying, no longer willing to allow the clergy to look after their hopes for salvation. People wanted to make sure that Masses and prayers would be offered for them after their death. So in this period chantry chapels proliferated, endowed whether by individuals or by families, or even by communities or guilds. A chantry chapel would be staffed by one or more Priests who would offer Masses there for the intentions of the founders.

For those who could afford it, a dedicated Carthusian Monastery could be even more attractive than a chantry chapel. There the founders could be sure to have a community of holy monks, renowned for personal austerity and sanctity, praying specifically for their intentions. So there sprang up new Charterhouses in London, Hull, Coventry, Mount Grace (in Yorkshire) and Axholme (in Lincolnshire), all more richly appointed than their predecessors. The fact that three of them were founded in towns or cities rather than the usual Carthusian preference for remote locations is significant. Three houses, founded in 1371, 1377 and 1385 respectively, were all built piecemeal as funds were donated by many different benefactors. These would pay for an individual cell, or the refectory, cloister etc. These benefactors were not royal nor, in many cases, were they even aristocratic. Instead they were successful merchants and businessmen. Urban locations were chosen because the founders wished to be close to the object of their generosity. That there were enough novices to fill these houses (all of which were bigger than the earlier monasteries) demonstrates, too, that the effects of the

plague drove others to examine their own spiritual lives in a different, more fundamental way. In the fifty years after the Black Death, the Carthusian population of England, stable for two centuries, proliferated many times over.

At the time of King Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, begun in 1535, there were nine Charterhouses in England, and one in Scotland. The example of St. Thomas More, very much a spiritual son of the London Charterhouse, illustrates the great influence that Carthusian spirituality retained up to that time. That influence explains also why King Henry VIII felt he had to make such a terrible and public example of the Carthusians, when they stubbornly refused to accept his self-appointment as supreme head of the Church.

As for the Perth Charterhouse: that endured until 1559. In that year a mob, inspired by the preaching of John Knox, descended upon it for its destruction. A conflagration followed that succeeded in overturning the whole religious establishment of the country. Then in 1560 the Reformation Parliament of Scotland passed its measures. Thenceforth prayer and Masses for the dead, as well as vowed religious life, and public adherence to the Catholic faith, became illegal in the land.

*The article was inspired by and based on an unfinished doctoral thesis of Daniel McLean.*

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### **On Spiritual Communion**

“The effects of a Sacrament can be received by desire, even though in such a case the Sacrament is not received physically. Just as some are baptized by a Baptism of fire, as they had the desire for Baptism before they were baptized in water...”

St Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologica III, Q.80, a.1, obj.3).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FANCY AND FANTASY FOR CHRISTIANITY

Dr Richard Dawkins, arguably the head of the New Atheism movement, opens his best-seller *The God Delusion* with a quotation from science-fiction writer Douglas Adams (of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame): “Isn’t it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it, too?” Without going into the several false and misleading implications present in this quotation, I find that it can give an insight into much of the wilful obtuseness of modern atheism. For many, religion or any belief in God’s existence is at best akin to a belief in the existence of fairies, and at worst a dangerous delusion. This also points to a complacent lack of curiosity in the post-modern, scientific mindset – an unwillingness to look beyond the questions, “What is it?” and “How does it work?”, to the most important question of all: “Why does it exist? What is it for?”

This scorn for questioning the purpose behind a thing’s existence was brought to the forefront by the French materialistic philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). For Comte, to question the “Why?” of something was infantile; mankind must move beyond its religious, inherently childish phase towards an adult mindset where the questions asked would be “What?” and “How?” Ever since the so-called Enlightenment, religion and the question of God’s existence had been more and more seen as mere mythology, fairy stories told to make the bogeymen of the night disappear, and give some sort of meaning to our sordid lives. Fairy stories are told to children to instil a sense of morality and good vs. evil, and we adults can now put away our Mother Goose religion and get on with our lives. Who cares why a thing exists? What really matters is if one can measure it, analyse it, plumb its statistical depths. One might think of Dickens’s Gradgrind squawking in *Hard Times*: “Facts alone are wanted in life... you can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing



else will ever be of any service to them.” But do fairy stories and myths – in a word, fiction and fantasy – need to be put away, once one crosses the threshold of adulthood, for the world of facts?

Christian authors such as G.K. Chesterton, J.R.R. Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis did not believe so. All three found that fairy stories and myths can lead us into a deeper understanding of who we are as people and as children of God. In fact, they all three enthusiastically embraced fairy stories and mythology in order more fully to embrace their Christian faith. Tolkien even went so far as to invent a whole world, along with its mythology and languages, partly in order to “incarnate” his own Catholic Christian belief system.

Many modern atheists heap scorn upon Christian faith as nothing but a successful species of myth, practically a carbon copy of those which can be found in many classical tales, such as the death and rebirth of pagan gods like Dionysius and Osiris. Our three authors, however, saw these pagan myths rather as precursors pointing toward the Christian mystery, scattered like seed by God in pagan culture to prepare the human mind for the Incarnation. For these authors, God had expressed Himself to paganism in a rather shadowy manner, using imagery that the human imagination could understand and be inspired by. In Christianity, however, God has expressed Himself fully and directly, through the real, historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. As Chesterton states in *The Everlasting Man*, “[The Incarnation] met the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story. That is why the ideal figure [Christ] had to be a historical character as nobody had ever felt Adonis or Pan to be a historical character.” Yes, there are mythological dimensions to the story of Christ, in fact, to the whole history of salvation. But they are what Tolkien and Lewis would refer to as a “True Myth”, in other words, a myth that had actually happened.

It is well known that Tolkien played a large role in the conversion of Lewis from cynical agnostic to practising Christian. One night, during a long walk, Lewis was debating the idea of

Christianity with his friend, and said that while the Christian story is beautiful and perhaps even inspiring, it is, in the end, nothing more than “lies breathed through silver”, in other words, just nicely moralistic tales. Tolkien, however, took up the challenge and spoke to Lewis of his belief that the Christian message, the Good News, is rather a “true myth”: a *story with mythological dimensions that actually happened*. A God *really did* come to Earth, perform miracles, die and rise again. With time, this idea worked itself into Lewis’s heart and soul. He became able to accept the idea of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection not just as pretty tales to tell infants and gullible adults, but as the true story of God’s redeeming love.

Not only do myths have the potential to point to the Christian mystery; fairy stories and fantasy can have the ability to lead us towards Christian truths. Chesterton brilliantly explores this in his chapter “The Ethics of Elfland” in *Orthodoxy*. For him (and for Tolkien afterwards), fairy stories are not just comforting tales told to children to get them to fall asleep at night, but they also teach the basics of Christian morality to those with the ears to hear. To quote Chesterton again: “There is the lesson of ‘Cinderella’, which is the same as that of the Magnificat—EXALTAVIT HUMILES. There is the great lesson of ‘Beauty and the Beast’: that a thing must be loved BEFORE it is loveable. There is the terrible allegory of the ‘Sleeping Beauty’, which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts, yet cursed with death, and how death also may perhaps be softened to a sleep.” A bit further on, Chesterton discusses the crowning ethic of the fairy story and myth, which he calls the Doctrine of Conditional Joy. In these stories, all virtue hinges on an “if”. For instance, Cinderella can dance with Prince Charming *if* she is home by midnight; Orpheus can rescue his beloved Eurydice *if* he promises not to turn back to look at her; Jack can be happy ever after *if* he kills the evil giant, and anyone can have eternal joy *if* they only believe in the Son of God.

Many ancient myths have their basis in the question “Why?” Why is there a blue sky? Where did the Earth come from? Who made us? These are not just the sometimes-annoying questions of a toddler, but humanity’s search for meaning and purpose in a confusing and terrifying universe. It is too easy to park our inquiring minds by the door and enter into the cold world of modern agnosticism or atheism. By closing our minds to fantasy and myth, going the way of post-modernity and insisting upon scientific fact as the only basis for morality and culture, we not only lose a precious part of our common history, we lose a privileged path to important truths about life. No person can live for long on unadulterated fact; fiction, imagination, and fantasy can be means by which God brings us relaxation, reminds us of important moral truths, and can even lead us to *the* Truth, *if* we keep our eyes open, an idea Christianity has almost always enthusiastically welcomed.

And who knows? Maybe there *are* fairies at the bottom of the garden after all!

Brother Benedict-Joseph Miller

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**From the *Book of ‘The Lord be with you’*, ch. 19**

“You, O solitary cell, are the wonderful workshop of spiritual labour, in which the human soul restores to itself the likeness of its Creator and returns to its pristine purity, where the blunted senses regain their keenness and subtlety, and tainted natures are renewed in sincerity by unleavened bread. The gifts you bestow are these: that while the countenance seems pale with fasting the soul is nourished with the fatness of God’s grace; that he who was once so wrapped in darkness that he did not know himself can with a pure heart behold God. You lead man back to his beginnings and recall him from banishment to the heights of his ancient dignity. You make it possible for man to see, from the citadel of his mind, all earthly things flowing away beneath him and himself passing away in the stream of perishable things” (St Peter Damian).

## **FLYING FROGS AT PLUSCARDEN**

### **Some fauna around the Abbey, April - May 2020**

These days have surely been unprecedented not only for CV lockdown, but also for such an unbroken length of lovely Spring sunshine. Here at Pluscarden we have no guests, and almost no visitors either. But the fauna around the Abbey abound. We are fortunate to enjoy the cheerful sight of new calves and lambs in adjoining fields. The local roe deer, who wander freely, and almost fearlessly, through our grounds, have produced their fawns. We see few rabbits these days, but plenty of hares. Our red squirrels are frequently spotted. Recently a badger was seen wandering through our car park, just by the flagpole outside the Church. As for other small furry animals around the Abbey, one at least can be missed by nobody. Baxter the cat continues to dominate the life of the community from his comfortable residence in our East Cloister.

To mention some of our local bird life: the oyster catchers came in from the coast to scout out nest sites in the valley somewhat early this year, well before the end of February. Almost rivalling the racket they make have been the plentiful great spotted woodpeckers, drumming on trees all around us, and at night, the tawny owls. Overhead, in very large numbers, are greylag geese, commuting from coastal roost to inland grazing. Sometimes we see a flock of curlews when they come directly overhead. Normally we have lapwings all about also: not spotted so far this year.

The swallows arrived exactly according to schedule, on St George's day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Our new wood chip sheds furnish them with ideal nesting sites. The warblers, also returning from Africa, made it to our valley before them. Among them all, the black cap in particular fills our estate with his penetrating song. Buzzards abound, after apparently a dip in population in recent years. So do, in particular, gold finches, and grey wagtails. The heron patrols our burn; the sparrow hawk leaves abundant signs of his dining

habits all around; the jackdaws make their usual mess, and din, as they try to cram large twigs into small holes in our mediaeval masonry. We hear of a diminishment of thrushes elsewhere in the country, but we have plenty here, both mistle and song thrushes, and we see more snails than usual about, to supply their needs.

Two puzzling nocturnal creatures, often heard before, have been positively identified this year.

The first of these sounds a bit like an old man wheezing, or even snoring, very loudly. He sits on the Abbey roof; sometimes on the dormer window of a cell, giving its occupant the full benefit of his call, on and off through the night. He is a barn owl. Maybe he is just marking out his Spring territory. Some of us suspect though (without evidence) that he may be placing himself favourably to seize some of the many bats, mainly but not exclusively pipistrelles, who roost all around our buildings and fly especially at night.

The second puzzling creature sounds like a flying frog. This particular frog though lets out not only the usual croak, but follows it with a high pitched squeak. And he flies, though only at dusk and dawn. He is a woodcock, engaged in his territorial display flight, known as “roding”. Our woodcock’s territory takes him right beside the Abbey buildings. Let no rival dare to come in, or there will be trouble.

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**From the *Book of ‘The Lord be with you’*, ch. 19**

“And having won a victory over the demons such a man is made the companion of the angels; an exile from the world, he is the heir of paradise; denying himself, he becomes Christ’s follower. And he who follows in His footsteps now will certainly, when he comes to the end of his journey, be raised to the glory of His fellowship. I say with all confidence that he who remains in the solitary life to the end of his days for the love of God will, when he quits this mortal dwelling, come to that glorious building, the house not made with hands, his eternal home in heaven” (St Peter Damian).

## **BENEDICT (CHARLES) ARBUTHNOT 1737-1820**

### **Abbot of St James' Monastery, Regensburg**

The Scots Monastery at Regensburg was founded originally by Irish monks, but in 1577, when only one monk and one novice remained, a Papal Bull transferred the monastery buildings to the Scots. The first Scottish abbot was Ninian Winzet (a strong critic of John Knox), who had been charged by Mary, Queen of Scots, with the task of providing priests for Scotland. However, it was not until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century that the abbey was able to send missionaries to Scotland. From 1623, this was done in co-operation with the English Benedictines at Douai, France. A century and a half later, in 1776, Benedict Arbuthnot was appointed Abbot.

Charles Arbuthnot was born near Peterhead in 1737. He was baptised at nearby Longside and brought up in the Catholic Faith, and at the age of eleven was sent to Europe to continue his education, perhaps a much broader one than he could ever have received at home. The intention had been to head for Douai, but he ended up accompanying an acquaintance to Regensburg (Ratisbon) in Bavaria instead. Four years later, he wrote to his parents, "I have made a tolerable progress in my studies and besides have learned the French language as [well as] Arithmetikes and Geometry, and that to the satisfaction of my worthy Superiors, who have been very kind to me." He later won for himself a widespread reputation as a mathematician, natural philosopher and chemist. Soon, German became more familiar to him than his native language.

Although not originally intended for the religious life, in 1756/7 he entered the Benedictine Order in the Monastery of St James, known as the Scots College at Regensburg, an institution founded for the purpose of educating young Scotsmen for the priesthood, generally with the idea of them returning to Scotland later on in a missionary capacity. We do not know why Charles suddenly, as it seemed, made the decision to enter the cloister, but,

as any convert, priest or religious is aware, God calls one at any time, in any place, and the call becomes too urgent to ignore. His parents, though no doubt surprised at this decision, nonetheless gladly gave their consent, on receiving which, he wrote:

“I cannot express the pleasure yours of the 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. gave me. Your free and generous consent, in leaving my state of life to my own choice drew tears of joy from my eyes. He, and He only, who has the heart of man at command, could inspire you. I can assure you, before I took the resolution of doing what I have done, I begged the living God most earnestly to assist me mercifully in my choice, not once, but again and again for a considerable time before I entered upon my present situation. And now, I thank the great God, far from repenting, I have all the contentment and satisfaction any poor mortal could wish for, in this side of time.”

Under the name of Benedict, Charles spent the rest of his life at the Regensburg monastery, apart from a brief visit home in 1772, and was ordained priest in 1761. He wrote home at this time, “I am fully convinced, it has been by divine Mercy and providence that I was brought hither, and that he has called me truly to the state of life I at present enjoy. I was in the beginning of this year ordained Priest; and since the dignity of this State requires a greater Purity of soul, I entreat you, Dear Parents, to recommend me earnestly to God in your holy prayers”, promising to remember them and all his family in all his Masses. His father died in 1770 and the monk Benedict declined his share of the estate.

In June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Benedict was elected Abbot of St James. Already known for his scholarly achievements, he became renowned also for his piety, scholarship, wide-ranging intellectual interests and his kindness of heart, and was respected throughout Germany. So much so that, when in 1802 the Eternal Diet of Regensburg determined under pressure from Napoleon to secularise all the church lands of the Holy Roman Empire, a

special exemption was made in favour of the Scots Monastery at Regensburg, although it was not allowed to accept any new novices. "Upon this occasion," his nephew John Moir wrote, "the Abbot addressed so affecting a memorial to the Diet that it drew tears from the eyes of all present." Abbot Benedict had already declared the monastery a Scottish national shrine which was put under the direct authority of Rome.

An indication of the warm respect in which many held Abbot Benedict is to be found in the letters of the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell (one time Rector of Glasgow University, beating Sir Walter Scott to the post), who stayed in the monastery for a time in 1800, although definitely not subscribing to the Royalist views of the monks! He was greatly taken by Abbot Benedict and later wrote: "Not to love him was impossible ... When I knew him, he was the most commanding human figure I ever beheld. His head was then quite white, but his complexion was fresh and his features were regular and handsome. In manners he had a perpetual suavity and benevolence. I think I see him still in the cathedral with the golden cross on his fine chest, and hear him chanting the service with his full, deep voice." He even gave him a mention in his poem *The Ritter Bann*.

Campbell also praised what he saw as Benedict's unusually tolerant views, perhaps on his own account, but the Abbot himself gave personal evidence to this. In many of his letters home, he asked to be remembered to one John Skinner, an Episcopalian clergyman brought up near the Arbuthnots, and later Bishop of Aberdeen and Primus of Scotland, author of the *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*. In one letter, he writes: "Do not forget to remember me to Mr Skinner, whom I esteem very much as an honest man and a good old friend. Why should I be offended at any man for his particular way of thinking? His book stands in our library, and is still interesting for the ancient history of Scotland."

Arbuthnot deserves to be remembered also for his many scientific achievements. He was exceptionally gifted in both mathematics and chemistry and his lectures on these subjects were



always well attended, several of his essays being printed in the Publications of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences, of which he was a member. His nephew, John Moir, wrote of him that he was “a man revered for his piety, eminent for his learning, and accounted one of the best mathematicians in Germany, having repeatedly carried off the first prizes from the German Academies for solving mathematical problems.”

In 1818, on a visit to Regensburg, the Anglican Thomas F. Dibdin described the aging Abbot as “one of the finest and healthiest-looking old gentlemen I ever beheld – in his eighty-second year”, and wrote of the Scots Benedictines: “Of manners the most simple, and apparently of principles the most pure, they seem to be strangers to those wants and wishes which frequently agitate a more numerous and polished establishment; and to move, as it were, from the cradle to the grave: ‘The world forgetting, by the world forgot’ (Alexander Pope).”

In March 1820, Abbot Benedict wrote to his brother Thomas, “We are now both in a pretty advanced age ... My health at present is in a passible good state, although I begin to feel the weight of advanced age, and have suffered this winter much by rheumatical pains; my memory is also much impaired; yet I have reason to thank eternal Providence for my present situation. As the spring and summer are now advancing, I hope they shall be beneficial to my health; the will of God be done!” Three weeks later, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, he died and was buried in the monastic cloister.

A last word from Thomas Campbell on a visit later that year: “The whole of Bavaria, they told me, lamented his death. I scarcely imagined that the news of an old man’s death could have touched me so much; but I could not help weeping heartily when I recalled his benevolent looks and venerable figure, and found myself in the same Hall where I had often sat and conversed with him – admiring what seemed so strange to me, the most liberal and tolerant religious sentiments from a Roman Catholic Abbot.”

Eileen Grant, Obl OSB

## BOOKS RECEIVED

*Marc, l'histoire d'un choc. Traduction et lectio divina de l'évangile selon saint Marc*, by David-Marc d'Hamonville, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2019, pp. 400. ISBN 978 2 204 13393 7. 20 Euros

Abbot David of En Calcat is an established Scripture scholar, and now he has put us all in his debt with a new book on St Mark's Gospel. Reading it is like being on the road to Emmaus; pennies keep dropping, lights come on, bells ring as the Scripture is opened up; it is full of insights and sidelights, a delight to read. It is indeed *lectio divina*. The author has followed Bengel's classic advice, "apply yourself totally to the text, and the text totally to yourself".

Here is no array of authorities, "X says this, and Y says that"; as Fr André Borias said to me once, "Scripture is its own best interpreter," and so for Abbot David, in the beginning is the word, which he chases through the Scriptures, running it to earth and bringing out so many unexpected riches. It is a great pleasure, a joy, to read this book. It derives its riches from the fact that the author has indeed been shocked by Mark, and so takes nothing for granted. His new translation is deliberately meant to leave the rough ways rough, not to smooth them out, disguising their character. "And, and, and...", says St. Mark, and "And, and, and..." says our author, who describes these "ands" as "the heart-beat of the gospel". Pronouns are left in their rough state, no attempt to guess (wrongly?) who the author had in mind, nothing is too insignificant for his attention. He has sat, captivated by the text, open-mouthed and astonished, swallowing it down and chewing it over, open-eyed, dazzled by the light, ears open to listen for harmonies and echoes, and then ruminated in his heart and in his cell, a real monk.

His language is sometimes disconcertingly slangy – deliberately, he wants us to be shocked, too – and you won't find many commentaries which end sentences with a question-mark

and exclamation mark side by side. He digs us in the ribs, sits back and says, “Well, whaddya know?!” with bright-eyed enthusiasm. He looks for pearls, and finds them, he trips over buried treasures and hurries to share them with us. Sometimes the sheer unconventionality of his language could pose an obstacle to full comprehension; I suspect some of it is not to be found in the average dictionary.

The book simply follows Mark’s text, a passage at a time, which he then serves up to us, before going on to the next, in order. There is no index, which is sometimes a pity when one wants to find out again, where it was that he said that, or how did he tie this passage to that, but in a book like this, an index would be a tall order.

DGC

**John W. O’Malley SJ, *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 240 pp., £19.95, ISBN 9780674988415**

This book’s rather forbidding title should not put readers off; it is actually a book which does not make undue demands. It is also shorter than the number of pages suggests, being a small book with a sizeable, reader-friendly typeface. In it Father O’Malley of Georgetown University, USA compares the last three General Councils of the Catholic Church, mainly in terms of their historical and, particularly, cultural background. They were all aware that the unchanging Christian message, proclaiming Christ, takes on different language in different centuries.

As well as the membership of Bishops, by far most numerous at Vatican II, one needs to note Catholic lay influence on the three Councils. At Trent, the different rulers’ representatives were full members of the Council and, as well as the Bishops, signed the Council’s acts. Although no government sent envoys to Vatican I, some well-placed laymen successfully influenced it. At Vatican II

there were twenty-one laymen auditors and fourteen women (seven Sisters and seven laywomen). More widely, Vatican II's *Decree on the Lay Apostolate* was facilitated by submissions from different lay associations during the preparatory phase and a large number of laypeople helped compile its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

The theologians and ecumenical observers also had important parts to play. Although one major aim at Trent was to promote diocesan bishops' authority, the bishops there listened with care to what the theologians had to say. Vatican I had what is now Rome's Gregorian University to serve it intellectually. In principle, the many theologians at Vatican II were much less prominent than at Trent, but, in practice, they considerably helped in the commissions' meetings. The observers' record is more varied. Those at Trent had clear restrictions placed on how they could speak, though they were firm as to what they said. Pius IX's tactless wording of the invitations ensured that Vatican I had no observers. Eventually, Vatican II had "between fifty and a hundred" (p. 162). As at Trent, they were not permitted to address the Council in session, but they helped with its *Decree on Ecumenism*, both by their presence and by informal conversation, and they probably helped bring about that new concentration on social questions as part of moral theology that was such an achievement of Vatican II.

This book has the inevitable small errors and omissions. O'Malley variously states the date at which Pius IX announced Vatican I (actually 1864) as 1858 (p. 22) and 1867 (p. 43). He dates the Code of Canon Law to 1918 (when it took effect), though it was promulgated in 1917, the date usually assigned to it. He omits the reason why John XXIII consecrated the non-Bishop cardinals as Bishops in 1962, namely to make indisputable their right to attend Vatican II. Even so, this book is worth its price.

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