



"Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

DBH Series No 31, July 2005

"Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God" (HR 43:3).

"What, dear brothers, is more delightful than the voice of the Lord calling to us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life. Clothed therefore with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on his way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us into his Kingdom (1 Thess 2:12)." (Holy Rule Prologue:19-21) "It is the Abbot's responsibility to have great concern and to act with all speed, discernment and diligence in order not to lose any of the sheep entrusted to him.... He is to imitate the example of the Good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the mountains and went in search of the one sheep that had strayed. So great was his compassion for its weakness that he mercifully placed it on his sacred shoulders and so carried it back to the flock (Lk 15:5)."

(Holy Rule Chapter 27:5,8-9)

Dear oblates and friends,

I write, very much later than I had hoped to, to make sure that everyone on this mailing list knows the news about Dom Maurus. Although most will have heard long since, whether from the Abbey or from the news media, some I am sure will be still quite unaware that anything is amiss. The summer issue of our magazine, Pluscarden Benedictines, has already gone out, but quite a few of our oblates still do not subscribe to it. (£5 to The Editor at this address will fix that!) So here I am, offering you my own perspective, as I wanted to anyway, on the whole bewildering tale.

The facts can be stated very simply. On Thursday 12th May Dom Maurus went for a walk, as he always did when the sun shone. He was wearing his white habit, as always, without any coat. He was seen going out, and seen on the road a few hundred yards beyond the gates of the monastery. He has not been seen since.

Dom Maurus was 93. The great personality he had been was largely hidden, now, with the exception of rare little flashes, behind the veil of his dementia. Physically he was astonishingly fit, and quite capable of walking several miles. His hearing was however very impaired, and encroaching cataracts were beginning to render him half blind.

Fr. Abbot was away preaching the retreat at Ryde on that day. Our Prior Fr. Giles, holding the fort, was not unduly worried when Dom Maurus did not appear at lunch. He had wandered off several times before, always staying on the road, always seen and reported by various passers-by. It had always been a question of simply sending a car to pick him up. But this time there had been no sightings. Drivers patrolling the usual routes saw nothing. The sun went in, the temperature dropped, and it began to rain. With monks out in all directions finding nothing, Fr. Prior phoned the Police.

Their reaction was beyond praise: immediate, whole-hearted, massive. With the Police came the RAF search and rescue team, with its Sea King helicopter, its sniffer dogs, and its special sub aqua squad to check out the ponds and water ways round about. Some 60 professionals were soon involved, working through the evening, the night, and all the following day. The various media also took up the story, giving it a prominent place in

both local and national news. Lots of people from round about came to join the search unofficially , testing out every theory as to where he might have gone.

That first night and the day that followed were the worst, as we all helplessly imagined Dom Maurus lying somewhere, lost and confused, possibly injured, cold, hungry and wet... As time dragged on, hope of finding him alive gradually receded, then at last vanished. But the Police did not give up. On the contrary. Again and again the search teams went out, trying different strategies, using differently trained dogs, covering different areas: not excluding, of course, every room in the monastery, and every nook and cranny of our grounds. Still, as I write, they have not given up. The detectives are exhaustively interviewing everyone who was in the vicinity on the day, in hopes of somehow gaining some clue. When winter comes and the green growth dies back, the search teams will be out again. But everyone is baffled. Surely he should have been found by now? Where is he? What happened to him? A sinister theory of course presents itself. Someone came fast around a blind corner, and straight into this old monk meandering about in the middle of the narrow road. The driver for some reason was anxious to avoid involvement with the authorities. Was he drunk? Anyway: he decided quietly to remove the evidence. But the theory seems frankly far fetched, and the police think, statistically most improbable...

It goes without saying that it has been a most distressing time for all of us: surely especially so for Fr. Abbot and Fr. Prior, who have had to carry the burden of responsibility. That would of course have applied in the case of any missing monk: but Dom Maurus was really a very special case. He was the last of the original Pluscarden Pioneers; oblate master for some 40 years; former Prior, Cellarer and novice master. For countless people, also, he was a spiritual father and guide: an outstandingly wise man of God; a man to whom many turned, because of his experience in the ways of prayer, and of the human heart.

It is certain that Dom Maurus was ready for death: that his whole mind and heart was turned longingly towards it. If almost everything incidental in his life had been stripped away, the eternal truths by which he lived endured with rock-like strength. The day before his disappearance he was seen to spend a long time in the cemetery, standing quite still, as so frequently, at the foot of his brother's grave. How dreadful it is that, at least so far, we have been unable to lay him to rest at the side of his brother, and of his monastic brethren, in the manner that is fitting. But now the decision has been taken: assuming his death, and saving any unexpected developments, we will celebrate a requiem Mass three months after his disappearance, on **Friday 12th August, at 11.00 a.m.** All are invited to that, and to the refreshments that will follow.

A wonderfully evocative recent picture of Dom Maurus out walking appears on the back page of our current magazine. Fr. Abbot will certainly be providing a full obituary in due course. My own reflections on Dom Maurus were the subject of my Oblate letter number 2, September 1997, commemorating his Golden Jubilee of profession. I would have little to add to that now, apart perhaps from two little positive points. The first is that it was very merciful of the Lord to have spared him any period dependent on care. He would not have coped well with that. Secondly: his strange passing has been the occasion for a great new wave of concern, prayer, solidarity, expressed gratitude and love, from all quarters, including some quite unexpected. Not a few people, convinced of his place in heaven, have already ascribed favours received to his intercession.

I offer here, for the body of this oblate letter, simply an old oblate letter of Dom Maurus. I have chosen as fairly representative and typical one issued the month before I entered here. I have taken the liberty of adding some footnotes of my own to his text.

MONASTIC VOICES

I write this for the Marian Feast of August on the 15th & with the thought that August as a month is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I take for text the word of Christ's last will and testament... Behold thy Mother. It was His last stripping. He had not given us all He had till He had given His own incomparable Mother.

We accept as true that He was giving His Mother to the whole Church, and to every cell in the Body of the Church. We make no protest. It is a pleasant sort of truth. But do we BELIEVE it? If a man who carries a watch keeps stopping people to ask for the time, then we presume he does not believe in his own watch.

What does Faith in this text mean? It was spoken to John. "Be her son." Surely that means John was to act towards Mary exactly as Jesus. John was to be for her "another Christ". The new translations say "He took her home with him²." The previous one indicated that He made Mary his own³. It makes a neat summary of the difference between Devotion to Mary and TRUE devotion to Mary⁴. The former takes Mary in as a lodger. She pays her rent by becoming the housekeeper for those who are "devoted". If you want something, see the Housekeeper...and give her a tip occasionally; God help her, she has no home of her own. "I took her in. I mean to say, one has to do the decent thing. Her Son was a friend of mine." John took her home... I should think the Son of Thunder will have some thunderous things to say to our traducing translators!

How does one obtain a TRUE devotion to Mary? By asking surely? One does not come to love by hard thought. And who will give us TRUE love? And why do we have to keep on saying TRUE all the time? Would I could stop at this point and wait for you to think for yourself, even if you think in vain. "The trouble with our time is that nobody ponders." That is a quote 3000 years old! We are born lazy and we are born liars... and those truths also come from inspired infallible doctrine... and one does not need to be inspired or infallible to discover how true is the doctrine... about other people. Not you of course. Because we presume we are honest, and not silly, we object to this insistent qualifying word TRUE. I must therefore keep using it. Where will you go for a TRUE devotion even to God? To the one who said "I AM the Truth". Only one is true, only one is good... and that one is not man merely. God is True... Jesus was claiming to be God in claiming to be "Truth".

TRUE Devotion to God must be sought from Christ... and not e.g. from Confucius. "No man comes to the Father except through Me". However many puzzles come from Christ's precepts, no true answer comes from changing the precept. Similarly, if we want the true devotion to Mary enjoined on the Apostle John, then we must seek it from Jesus. He alone was the Son of Mary. He was the perfectly devoted Son. Did He not die for her? Greater love no man can have for Mary than Jesus had. We cannot have that fullness, except in one respect. Jesus was TOTALLY devoted. Our present Pope offended our Euro-USA "intellectuals" in opening his revolution by declaring he was TOTALLY Mary's property. This is precisely what Christ did when He set His Divine Person in her soul that He might draw our flesh from her womb. Mary's will was free. She had the same freedom as any woman who destroys an unwanted child as if it were a piece of her own property. Jesus was as dependent on Mary as that. There you have the distinction between "ordinary" or "pop" devotion to Mary and TRUE devotion.

True love is hard to find on earth because few people can totally subject themselves to another. The very notion of subjection is offensive. The first sin rose from Lucifer's refusal to be totally subject to his Creator's will⁵. The second sin, the sin of man, followed the same pattern. Every sin, large or small, is due to lack of love. Only two persons have lived on earth whose love was such that, while they never lost their freedom of choice, never failed to know and to do, whatever the cost, the will of the Father. The one was Jesus, who was a Divine Person; the other was the girl of Nazareth, who at the age of fifteen, agreed to become the Mother of Jesus, cost what it might. She alone was the Immaculate lover, the immaculately obedient daughter of the disobedient Adam & Eve... and she was that by the grace of her Son.

Now that grace is offered to us⁶. We must of course distinguish the holiness of one conceived full of grace and the holiness of the rest of us. But if we consider two such figures as John the Baptist and Mary Magdalen, then we are seeing what the power of grace can achieve. We in the end, have no other choice than to be as Immaculate as Magdalen became... and Peter became... or as graceless as Judas. The doctrine of Purgatory rests on this "either/or" that comes when the soul leaves the body and stands before its Creator... and Lover. Recall that if there is a Judgment to be dreaded, it is none the less a judgment by the One who loved that soul, ...your soul, ..."unto death". To see the Majesty of Divine Love, is also to see how perfected or defective is our own love. Grace can be called simply Love given. We are free to accept or reject... but we have no power to create love apart from the Creator who is named "Love". He only is the fount and origin of love. Sin is separation from Love. The soul sees as in a mirror, and for the first time, its true self. If in perfected love, then it leaps like any lover to the one perfectly loved. If it sees its own lack, then, like any lover it cries "I am not worthy... make me worthy" and leaps to be purified into some place of Purgation. That place is full of Joy because all in it are realising the purpose of the suffering. (I think of some hospital for cancer patients which is guaranteed to cure). If the soul, looking on Love without the veil of flesh, sees itself as hating Love, then it too leaps, but away as from a fire... into a fire of hate. Newman says such souls would suffer more from being forced into Heaven where only Love remains. I think of the "Concentration Camp" torture teams. At the Nuremberg trials they showed no sign of repentance. Why should we think that death automatically changes hate to love? It is only the flesh that dies, not the person; and that person has shaped his own personality. It cannot be too often repeated that a lover must have freedom. Not even God can compel love.

"Mother behold..." We can be attracted to love. A good mother breeds love in the family, not by force but by example⁷. Faber said "Jesus is obscured..." The people on this small island, with its millions of frightened Christians, are losing even the name of Christ as surely as if they were in an anti-God country. Recently someone asked in a jeweller's shop for a cross. The attendant said "Do you want it plain or with a little man hanging on it?" Thousands of "Christ-ians" all round, hundreds of priests and preachers in that city, a Bishop mad busy writing and lecturing, but no Bishop and no priests to shout to the people "Get out into the highways and byways... stop the hungry on the streets and TELL them... You can eat His Flesh and Live.. drink His Blood and Love His Father... He sent Him to you... and ordained me to seek you out, to search for those who have not heard..." When the wolf ravages the flock, do you blame the wolf? The answer of course is Yes we do. We are all condemning the wolves ... too busy and too frightened to go round doors saying "Do you know who the little man is who hung on a cross for you?"⁸ Evangelisation is a fine word so long as it does not mean me. The Bishop writes a letter for the Parish compounds and the priests lay paper at the back of the empty church; and the poor are not filled and Christ's compassion for the multitude has to wait for a Pope... who, being only a Pole without benefit of our good sense, need not be imitated; for he is TOTALLY Mary's and so has the mind of Christ on people. He learned to love them as Mary does. And so this Pope attracts to love. And when he goes, the people have to trek to Rome; for his "spirit of Mary" is not accepted. It is too demanding. Thus "Jesus is obscured because Mary, HIS Mary, is kept in the background".

In His Service... Fr Maurus OSB

1. "The word "PAX" in the original appears twice. Part of the charm, certainly of the character of Dom Maurus' oblate letters was their messy appearance. The paper was cheap foolscap, rather poorly copied from a duplicating machine skin, on which Dom Maurus typed, with plenty of errors, amid constant interruptions: long before the monastery acquired any sort of word processor or electronic copier. Not that Dom Maurus would have had any truck with such things anyway. He would type on until he got to the end of the paper: often then finishing off at right angles up the margin.
2. cf. John 19:27. The Jerusalem Bible has: From that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.
3. Douay/Rheims: And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own. Knox: And from that hour the disciple took her into his own keeping
4. Dom Maurus refers of course to the treatise by St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716): True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin. This work lay behind the spirituality of his beloved Legion of Mary. Dom Maurus' ardent commitment to its teaching pervaded his every thought and breath, unquestionably enduring to the end.
5. Dom Maurus loved to quote the words of Jeremiah 2:20, "Non serviam" - "I will not serve", as summing up the devil's whole programme. cf. also Isaiah 14:12-21, applied by tradition to the fall of Lucifer the devil.
6. Just to make the obvious point: this is a fundamental theme of St. Benedict's Rule. It is stated succinctly in the first paragraph of the Prologue, and recurs constantly throughout. The purpose of the monastery is first of all to help us turn from the disobedience of Adam, through which we became slaves of sin, and take on instead the obedience of Christ, through which we attain to the glorious freedom of the children of God.
7. Dom Maurus' love for his own mother was another determining factor in his spiritual life. One of the endearing idées fixes of his latter years was that Pope John Paul II had canonised her. His father died when Dom Maurus was a small child, so she single-handedly brought up her three sons, enduring the hardships of real poverty, during the years of depression in pre-welfare state Liverpool. She had the joy of seeing all three sons ordained priest.
8. Door-to-door evangelisation is/was one of the features of the Legion of Mary Apostolate: together with practical reaching out to society's rejects - the alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes... Passionately committed to these activities, more or less outside the bounds of possibility for an enclosed monk, Dom Maurus always hoped that the oblates would engage in them, as it were on behalf of the monastery. Anyone who knew him had experience of the torrents of indignant rhetoric to which the thought of complacent and passive Christians always stirred him! Sadly, in the years of his confusion and withdrawal these torrents ever increasingly dried up. The devotion to Mary, though, never diminished.