



**"Nothing Dearer Than Christ"**

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

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

Let us proceed with the help of the Lord to draw up regulations for the strong kind of monks: those who live in community" (HR 1:13).

A senior chosen for his skill in winning souls should be appointed to look after the novices with careful attention. His concern must be whether the novice truly seeks God... (HR 58:8)

**Can. 303** Associations whose members live in the world but share in the spirit of some religious institute, under the overall direction of the same institute, and who lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, are known as third orders, or are called by some other suitable title.

**Can. 304** All associations of Christ's faithful, whether public or private, by whatever title or name they are called, are to have their own statutes. These are to define the purpose or social objective of the association, its centre, its governance and the condition of membership.

**Can. 677** Institutes which have associations of Christ's faithful joined to them are to have a special care that these associations are imbued with the genuine spirit of their family

*From the Code of Canon Law, Book II: The People of God; Part I: Christ's Faithful; & Part III: Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.*

## Monastic Voices

St. Benedict did not mean to found an order. In this he is unlike many later saints - such as St. Francis or St. Ignatius; nor did he intend to write the Rule for any save his own monks at Monte Cassino. These facts, to me at any rate, say something important about the Benedictines. We do not see ourselves as having any particular mission or function in the Church. We do not set out to change the course of history. We are just there - almost by accident from a human point of view. And, happily, we go on "just being there".

Since St. Benedict did not intend his Rule to have application beyond his own monastery, why has that Rule been such a success? Why has so much been achieved through it and because of it? I think one of the Benedictine secrets is that monks are, on the whole, quite ordinary people. We are not spiritually star performers. But the Rule of St. Benedict makes it possible for ordinary folk to live lives of quite extraordinary value. The weak have a place to do their best. In fact one of the great guiding principles of the Rule is the importance of the weak and the ordinary. How important it is not to treat people equally nor to attempt to mould them into one set pattern. The Rule demands that monks be seen as individuals, each precious in the sight of God, and the Rule is full of compassion.

Wise, moderate, compassionate; these are the characteristics of the Rule of St. Benedict, and I believe its success is partly due to the presence of these characteristics and their exercise in favour of the weak and the ordinary. When we come to consider why the Rule has made possible so many achievements, it is harder to make objective judgements. One thought attracts me. If you ask anyone who is knowledgeable about Church

matters, to name two or three Benedictines who are world famous, he would not be able to get further than mentioning a name or two from some Benedictine community known to him. On the whole, monks do not become famous - and that is a good thing - but monasteries do - and that is an excellent thing. In other words, it is the community that matters. It is as a member of a community that the individual monk does his particular job. It is within the monastic family that he grows and learns, develops his talents and is supported....

We still have to answer the question, what is the secret of the success of a monastery? There are two interrelated causes. First, there is the central part which prayer does, and must, play in the life of the monastery and in the life of each monk. The praise of God, day in, day out, all the year round: this is always the main work of the community, the *Opus Dei*. If this ceases to be so, then the effectiveness of the monastery diminishes. Secondly, the dedication to living the Gospel is equally important. The monk comes to the monastery to seek God, and this he does, like any other Christian, by becoming a follower of Christ. We may say that the sole purpose of a monk is to love God above all things and his neighbour as himself. That, after all, is simply the heart of the Christian life; and it must be in the heart of every monk. Then: that love is to be poured out. So the riches of the monastery, whether spiritual or material, are to be shared with others.

*From In Praise of Benedict (1980) by George Basil Cardinal Hume OSB, 1923-1999*

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## Dear oblate,

This abbreviated letter accompanies the Oblate Statutes which Fr. Abbot has now approved for publication. Fr. Ambrose conceived the idea of drawing up a set of statutes for our oblates when he was first appointed Oblate Master in 1995. On his departure for Ghana in 1997, he left me his translation of the statutes produced by the Italian monasteries and approved by the Holy See in 1975, together with a free authorisation for their copying or adaptation. I have followed the basic structure of these Italian statutes, but, in the course of successive redactions, have re-written them almost completely. An oblate canonical expert has assured me that this is perfectly permissible. Individual monasteries approach their oblates in extraordinarily diverse ways. I've tried to outline here the specifically Pluscarden approach, and hope you find this helpful. I owe thanks to not a few people who have helped me in this onerous task, with suggestions, advice, comments and criticism; and to all of you who continually demonstrate how one can be a follower of St. Benedict in the midst of the modern world. My ultimate aim is eventually to produce a Pluscarden Oblate Handbook, which would include the text of these Statutes, together with an oblate ritual, notes on the Rule, and on the history and life of our Abbey and community, various useful prayers etc. This is another idea inherited from Fr. Ambrose. The great obstacle preventing its achievement is sheer lack of time. If I ever do get around to it, there would be a chance for some further fine tuning. So if you feel there is any improvement or change you would like to see in these statutes, do please let me know.