



## "Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

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

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## Monastic Voices:- ( This quarter–Dominican Voices!)

“PROVIDENCE” by Père Garrigou-Lagrange O.P: “As for the divine governance, though the expression is generally used as synonymous with providence, it is, strictly speaking, the execution of the providential plan. St. Thomas( also) points out that providence in God corresponds to the virtue of prudence in us, which regulates the means with a view to the attainment of some end, which exercises foresight in anticipation of the future. We have, besides a purely personal prudence, that higher prudence which a father must exercise to provide for his family's needs, and higher still, the prudence demanded in the head of the state that should be found in our lawmakers and other government officials for the promotion of the common interests of the nation. Likewise in God there is a providence directing all things to the good of the universe, the manifestation of the divine goodness in every order, from the inanimate creation even to the angels and saints in heaven. And so by a comparison with the virtue of prudence is formed the analogical notion of providence, a notion accessible to commonsense reason and abundantly confirmed by revelation. A prudent person will first desire the end and then, having decided on the means to be employed, will begin using them; thus the end, which held first place in his desire, is the last in actual attainment. So we look upon God as intending from all eternity first the end and purpose of the universe and then the means necessary for the realization or attainment of that end. This commonsense view is expressed by the philosophers when they say that the end is first in the order of intention but last in order of execution.

THE NOTION OF PROVIDENCE: This point is of paramount importance when we are considering the end and purpose of the universe of material and spiritual beings. From this general notion of providence we deduce its characteristics. We will briefly indicate them here before looking for a more vivid and detailed account of them in Scripture.

The absolute universality of providence is deduced from the absolute universality of divine causality, which in this case is the causality of an intellectual agent. "The causality of God," says St. Thomas, "extends to all beings, not only as to the constituent principles of species, but also as to the individualizing principles ( for these also belong to the realm of being) ; it extends not only to things incorruptible but also to those corruptible. Hence all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God toward some end" (Ia, q.22, a. 2). This is demanded by the principle of finality, which states that every agent acts for some end and the supreme agent for the supreme end known to Him, to which He subordinates all else. That end, as we saw when speaking of the love of God, is the manifestation of His goodness, His infinite perfection, and His various attributes.

As we shall see, it is constantly asserted in the Old and New Testaments that the plan of providence has been fixed immediately by God Himself down to the last detail. His practical knowledge would be imperfect, were it not as far- reaching as His causality, and without that causality nothing comes into existence. Obviously, therefore, as was stated above, any reality or goodness in creatures and their actions is caused by God. This means that with the exception of evil (that privation and disorder in which sin consists), all things have God as their first if not exclusive cause. As for physical evil and suffering, God wills them only in an accidental way, in view of a higher good. From the absolute universality of providence we deduce a second characteristic.

This universal and immediate sway exerted by providence, does not destroy, but safeguards the freedom of our actions. Not only does it safeguard liberty, but actuates it, for the precise reason that providence extends even to

the free mode of our actions, which it produces in us with our co-operation; for this free mode in our choice, this indifference dominating our desire, is still within the realm of being, and nothing exists unless it be from God. The slightest idiosyncrasy of temperament and character, the consequences of heredity, the influence exerted on our actions by the emotions -all are known to providence; it penetrates into the inner- most recesses of conscience, and has at its disposal every sort of grace to enlighten, attract, and strengthen us. There is thus a gentleness in its control that yields nothing to strength. *Suaviter et fortiter* it produces and preserves the divine seed in the heart and watches over its development ( St Thomas Summa Ia, q. 22, a. 4).

Although providence, as the divine ordinance, extends immediately to all reality and goodness, to the last and least fibre of every being, nevertheless in the execution of the plan of providence, God governs the lower creation through the higher, to which He thus communicates the dignity of causality (Ia, q.22, a.3). These various characteristics of providence we will now consider as they are presented to us in the Old and New Testaments. No better way can be found to make our knowledge of them not merely abstract and theoretical, but living and spiritually fruitful.....” ..... And so the scriptures as God’s Providence..... spirituality as God’s Providence ... our lives & History as God’s Providence.... & all that is as God’s Providence.

The life and work of Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., (1877-1964) : famous Neo-Thomist and scholar of mystical theology, holding the first chair of Ascetical and Mystical Theology at the Angelicum at Rome, teaching there from 1909 to 1960. Writing hundreds of articles and dozens of books, including the classic "The Three Ages of the Interior Life: The Prelude to Eternal Life," he renewed interest in the early 20th century in the Catholic mystical tradition, especially exhorting all Catholics to the universal call to holiness, which includes a call to advanced prayer of some type, without which the virtues necessary for holiness are impossible( &/or vice versa ). He also wrote many classics expounding the 'philosophia perennis' of Thomas Aquinas and the works of the Doctors John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and other authors like Tauler. He did this in opposition to the influence of Molinos and other “quietist mystics." In place of this he proposed the prayer of the saints. (See Cat.Cat.Church 302-324 & Compendium of Cat. 55-58)

St. Thomas: “Providence is to plan things to an end. After divine goodness itself, which is the end transcending all things, the main good immanent to them is the completeness of the universe they compose, a completeness which would not be achieved unless every shade of reality were found among its components. Hence divine Providence, working to produce every degree of reality, accordingly prepares necessary causes for some effects, so that they eventuate of necessity, and contingent causes for others, so that they eventuate contingently; both types correspond to the condition of their proximate causes. Hence: I. The effect of divine Providence is for a thing to come about not just anyhow but in its own proper style, necessarily or contingently as the case may be. What the plan of Providence has arranged to result necessarily and without fail will come about & what too it has arranged to result contingently will come about also. 2. That all things come about in the way provided for, whether necessarily or contingently, is from the unchangeable and certain order of divine Providence.”(SUMMA 1A 22.4 )

## From The Oblatemaster’s Desk :-

God’s Providence & The Rule----The Rule as Shorthand for God’s Providence!

Last Quarter we had the contention that The Rule of St Benedict has a Sensus Plenior or fuller & extended meaning which indeed extends to the situation of each one of us in or out of the monastery. This Quarter we have the contention that the Rule finds its meaning even farther extended in that it provides an interpretation of God’s Providence both ordinary & extraordinary.

Quotation from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar “There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows & in miseries.” Act iv Scene iv, Brutus. Abstracting from the fact that Brutus has misread or missed the tide already,(!) we are all well aware that there is a propitious moment, a “psychological moment”;there is a moment when one stitch will save nine or the number of possibilities narrows. This purely secular notion of Providence at work is taken up into a higher plane when we consider the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Thirty years ago there was a young theological student who had been sent to broaden his theological base with some practical, pastoral theology. He had been sent together with youngsters from parishes to the Holy Island of Iona. There the group engaged in various activities together, prayerful, liturgical, eating together, recreation & games together, work together & little walks, journeys & pilgrimages together.

On one little pilgrimage together, round the island, several of the pilgrims, including our theological student

clambering down a steep gully to within yards from the sea beating in towards the rocks of the seashore, encountered a sheep which somehow had got wedged between the little almost vertical cliff face of one side of the gully & a large rock four or five feet high. Our soft-hearted "townies", as they all were, soon discovered that no gentle little pulls & tugs could free the animal. "They didn't want to hurt it" & so decided to tell the farmer, if they met him "& indeed he would find it anyway on his travels & then he would know what to do without our interference". So the sheep was left.

The following day some of the group were back to the same spot-& there was the sheep still there in exactly the same place & predicament. Well, nothing for it-they grabbed it by horns & ears & tail & fleece & skin & legs & raised it vertically out of its cleft & then carried it in the same way up the gully to the very top onto a nice grassy spot & there it stood. All was well!

Four or five days later the whole group were again at the grassy land at the top of the gully & to their surprise they found a heap of wool & tail & hooves & bones. That was the sheep they had "rescued".

More pastoral theology was learnt from this episode than from many books, articles & lectures.

The call to compassion has a direct urgency & moment, place & time for appropriate action. Food for a starving man is no good ten days late or sometimes ten minutes late; similarly with the good & kind word, the compassion of sympathy & understanding. It is required when the need is there.

The whole world is God's compassionate Providence of giving everything its "food in due season". We are an essential link. in that.

The Rule of our Holy Father St. Benedict makes this abundantly clear for the monk. Everything has its appropriate time, place, action & even the correct clothes & conditions for its performance. The enclosure of the monastery is the ordinary sphere of performance for all these actions -for the monk. The Church, the refectory, the dormitory, the guesthouse, "on a journey"; each place and time & sphere of action has its appropriate, precise mode that charity & its increase demand. Timing-obedience without hesitation sharpens a correspondence with the movements of the Holy Spirit. Through the following of the Rule in all matters & in all spheres, the monk becomes docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit & as we read RB V 'Of Obedience', "The first degree of humility is obedience without delay. This becomes those who, on account of the holy subjection which they have promised, or of the fear of hell, or the glory of life everlasting, hold nothing dearer than Christ As soon as anything has been commanded by the Superior they permit no delay in the execution, as if the matter had been commanded by God Himself. Of these the Lord says: "At the hearing of th ear he has obeyed Me" (Ps 17[18]:45). And again He says to the teachers: "He that hears you hears Me" (Lk 10:16). Such as these, therefore, instantly quitting their own work and giving up their own will, with hands disengaged, and leaving unfinished what they were doing, follow up, with the ready step of obedience, the word of command with deeds; and thus, as if in the same moment, both matters -- the master's command and the disciple's finished work -- are, in the swiftness of the fear of God, speedily finished together, whereunto the desire of advancing to eternal life urges them." In this the Rule in all its prescriptions is a mirror of Divine Providence & a summary of Scripture & all sound, spiritual books. It is a sure compass of the Divine Will at every moment & every circumstance. The Rule itself is a key to & A Summary of Divine Providence. The Rule gives a guide to the warp & the weft, the grain of experienced life, which is Providence, at least in its ("His") ordinary workings, & it even gives clues to its extraordinary workings!

## Books & Media:-

1) "The Cross and the Third Reich" is a new book by Dr. John Frain from Family Publications which looks at the opposition to Nazism from Catholics and other Christians. The focus of the book is principally on Catholic opposition but he does not ignore the heroic Christians of other Churches who stood up for objective values. There is a rich chapter on individual opposition to Nazism, looking at figures such as Edith Stein and Cardinal Clemens von Galen. (Hardback 336 pages £19.95) - A good complement to Edward Feser's book of last Oblate Letter. One could subtitle this "A practical Guide to refuting New Atheism by living the Truth". 2) "Treatise on Monastic Studies" by Dom Jean Mabillon, translated \* with an introduction by John Paul McDonald £34.95 Paperback 0-7618-2891-5 / 978-0-7618-2891-4 July 2004 362pp published by University Press of America. Read this if you want to know the difference between LECTIO & STUDY ( monastic style ). (Also available, I think, perhaps cheaper, from an Indian printing house ).

## Prayers & News:-

Fr. Abbot especially asks us to pray for vocations. Brother Aelred made his Solemn Profession on the 5th of March 2010 & is now fully professed. We pray for him and also we pray for the noviciate:- Br. Joseph, novice, Br. Richard, postulant & Br. James, monastic pre-postulant. Postulant Oblates including Henry Logan, Philip Hammond & Johan Baillie, Fiona McLeod & Novice Oblates including, Rev. Alsadair Nicoll, Charlie Muir & Grant Farley-Sutton. Newly made their Oblation:- Paul Fergus Costello in December past & Father Stuart Patrick Columba Chalmers in January. Phyllis Bernadette Spalding, firm & confident in her new-born faith recently made her Oblation & now November last, has carried her chart to the altar above! RIP. Also Violet Agnes Haig( née Lettington) in January after a long life of service ( aged 89 ) & a long illness patiently borne. RIP Fr. Kenneth Francis Batchelor, retired priest of Edinburgh Diocese. RIP March..Also March, George Fraser, RIP, jovial bus-driver. Also please pray for the sick, including Canon Duncan Stone ( our oldest Oblate congratulations recently ninety-four & still holding the fort in Fortrose parish when not in hospital!!) Rose Gilfedder 90 recently; congratulations! Norah Napiontek not far behind. John Cairns, , Alan James, Beth Fraser & her husband , also, with several operations & serious illnesses, Margaret Coll; Mary Buist, Peter Aitken, Zina Neagle our Congress organiser recovering from recent surgery, Edmund Young, novice Oblate recovering from a heart attack. Mrs. Irene Coulthard who suffered a brain hemorrhage. Pluscarden Oblates Meeting in Glasgow :- At Peter Aitken's House, 11 Maxwell Grove, Glasgow, G415PH tel:0141 427 2084 2nd Saturday of each month at 2pm. Currently looking at a book on Lent by Gerrard Hughes. Pluscarden Oblates Meeting in Dundee- At Father Aldo's, St Mary's of the Immaculate Conception, Lochee, Dundee tel: 01382 611282 1st Saturday of each month 11.30am. The books used at Dundee meeting are "Preferring Christ" by Norvene Vest and "Work and Prayer" by Cary Elwes, both available on Amazon books. "Saint Margaret's Chapter of Benedictine Oblates"mailto:Dunfermlinesb@live.co.uk (Ecumenical, inter-monastic Oblate meetings in Dunfermline) The first meeting of the Chapter was held on Friday, 29th January, 2010, within Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, East Port, Dunfermline, with Oblates of Douai, Elmore and Pluscarden Abbeys in attendance. The format was kept very simple :- 7:30pm Vespers 8:00pm Supper and discussion 9:00pm Compline and dispersal .Vespers and Compline were taken from 'Benedictine Daily Prayer', a short breviary, and we have produced an extract for those who do not have this prayer book. We are studying "St. Benedict's Toolbox" by Jane Tomaine ( ISBN 978-0-8192-2152-0) Morehouse Publishing. Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month. It is hoped to attract Oblates (of all Benedictine monasteries ), and those interested in Benedictine Spirituality. Dunfermline is easily accessible & the Railway and Bus Stations are only a short walk from the church and motorway access is easy with parking too . Supper is cold table & rota catering. Email: [dunfermlinesb@live.co.uk](mailto:dunfermlinesb@live.co.uk) (Written here in this strange format so as not to attract spam - Rewrite it in the usual format!) (Extract of flyer) Jane our correspondent (with the "Virtual chapters").. tried to log onto one in December but it had technical problems the next one was 21st January. ..forgot to logon live but listened to the recording the next day. The topic was vocations. The session lasted for an hour, which found a bit long. Parts of it were reasonably interesting but the format did not appeal. Think you would need the technology to see and speak live instead of just listening. No new broadcasts since January. There is the facility to type live comments. Want to have a go?!--- then you want:- [www.benedictinenuns.org.uk](http://www.benedictinenuns.org.uk) ....Beth..I think you have the technology?!

## Events:

The 2010 Pluscarden Pentecost Lectures given by the Rev. Dr Peter Gallagher S.J., Head of Philosophy, Heythrop College, London GOD AND GOODNESS: RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND THE DEEPENING OF THE MORAL LIFE 25th - 27th May 2010 at Pluscarden Abbey. 1. Tuesday 25th May at 2.45 pm Grace and Responsibility 2. Wednesday 26th May Morning at 10.15 am Vocation and Divine Commands 3. Afternoon at 2.45 pm .Last Judgement and First Principles 4. Thursday 27th May at 10.15 am.

Holiness and Culture Oblate Weekend:-This Weekend-Friday, July 30th Compline -Monday, 2nd August after Morning Mass. An item planned for each night, morning & afternoon. This planned for yourselves i.e. Oblates, postulant Oblates, Novice Oblates & enquirers of Pluscarden Abbey. No one should feel excluded but this is for Pluscarden Oblates to touch base with the Abbey & one another on this occasion. Already you will be meeting with over 30 of your fellow Pluscarden Oblates & it may yet be more. The guesthouses are full ( spoken for) but many are either commuting from home or staying in other accommodation. I still have a hold of two local hallsbut will relinquish them if no one wants to opt for this. Last chance would be Oblates with children? One for mothers & daughters & one for fathers & sons? Speak now or forever hold your peace! Remember this “

should” be the hottest summer weather!(please God) Please let me know if you plan to come & have not already done so.

MINSTER ABBEY: ( INTER)OBLATE DAY,10TH APRIL 9.00MASS-6.00VESPERS CONTACT SR BENEDICT£5 DONATION. -BY BOOKING ONLY. RETREAT BY RT REV. RICHARD MOTH.(Oblate P) Bishop of the Forces.

Lenten & Easter Blessings to you all from the Abbey & from me,Yours in Christ & SPNB,  
Fr. Martin PAX