

English Benedictine Congregation

Newsletter

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INSIDE:

- p. 2 Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.
- p. 3 Sixty Years a Priest
- p. 5 Alban Roe House Blessing
- p. 6 EBC Shared Formation
- p. 7 Br. Joseph Benedict Donleavy Story
- p. 9 Abbatial Election Held
- p. 10 Living in a Changing World
- p. 15 Two American Monks Undergo Transitions
- p. 16 400th Anniversary at Stanbrook
- p. 18 Manquehue's New Responsible
- p. 21 Tempus fugit: Obituaries
- p. 22 Abbot President's Diary

FRONT COVER:

EBC Conference 2024
Buckfast Abbey
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Plus ça change,
plus c'est la même chose

By Br. Sixtus Roslevich, O.S.B.
Editor

Plus ça change, *plus c'est la même chose.*

Words of gratitude are due to the members of the Continuing Formation Commission of the EBC for their planning and implementation of the symposium held at Buckfast Abbey on 15-19 July. Fifty abbots, abbesses and other monks and sisters participated in programming that reflected the week's theme: "Is this the road that leads to life? Thinking differently about change." It often takes an outside observer to enter into a community of any kind, to listen, and to see things more clearly. If this were not true, facilitators everywhere would be out of work.

We had two such gifted listeners in our midst. Fr. Martin Daly, S.M., of Ireland, served as our facilitator, while Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia, not only listened but presented two excellent talks. Attendees may have heard a positive refrain echoing in their thoughts: "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" ("The more things change, the more they stay the same," as the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote in 1849.) While founded on the unchanging Rule of Our Holy Father, Benedict, we are however, as the title of one of Fr. Casey's talks made clear, "Living in a Changing World."

We are blessed with two feast days celebrating our founder, one on July 11 and the other on March 21, referred to as the transitus of St. Benedict, the day he entered eternity. A parish handout in August for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary said, "[A]s early as the third century the tradition of Mary's transitus recounted her bodily reception into heaven."* Generally, the Latin word suggests passing from one state to the next. In this issue you will read about others among us who have entered eternity, but also of a clothing, a diaconate ordination, a responsible election, and an abbatial election, all connected closely with the theme of change. I recall signing my high school yearbooks 54 years ago with a paraphrase from Thoreau's Civil Disobedience, also 1849: "All change is for the better, like birth and death, which convulse the body."

*Alice Camille, from Questions Catholics Ask, <https://tinyurl.com/QCA-Assumption>

Sixty Years a Priest – Henry Wansbrough

“To quote the souvenir card of his 1964 ordination: “A royal priesthood to proclaim the great deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His wondrous light.”



At the 70th annual Ampleforth Lourdes Pilgrimage, July 2023

Editor’s Note.

While enjoying a pleasant reunion of friendship on the 70th annual Ampleforth Lourdes Pilgrimage in July 2023, I was struck by the indomitable spirit and indefatigable energy still being exuded by Father Henry Wansbrough, O.S.B., as part of the chaplaincy team. My first contact with him was in August 2006 when he led the monks of Saint Louis Abbey in their annual retreat. With his 90th birthday approaching on October 9, and his 60th anniversary of priestly ordination duly celebrated on July 19, 2024, “we invited him to put to paper some personal recollections as he reflected back over the decades of a life very well-lived.” At the close of the retreat in St. Louis on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady (“...this date special for both of us...”), he inscribed my copy of the New Jerusalem Bible for which he was the General Editor. It has never failed to raise the eyebrows of my nieces, nephews and cousins when I tell them that one of my most prized possessions is a signed copy of the Holy Bible!

My sixty years as a priest have really been dominated by an ordination present, a Hebrew Bible, given to me because I knew that, reading theology at Fribourg (Switzerland), I would need to study some Hebrew.

Already schooled in Greek and Latin at Oxford, I was fascinated by my first sight of the Hebrew script, and set about learning it. An early friend at Fribourg was Othmar Keel, and together we set about biblical studies, later moving together to the French Ecole biblique in Jerusalem, and together touring some 4,000 miles of the Near East on a Vespa motor-scooter each. Our professor at Fribourg said, ‘You can’t understand the Bible till you have smelt camel-dung’; I would add, ‘... and been lost in a desert sandstorm’, and perhaps also ‘...tried to wade across the Euphrates’. The accumulated experience led to dozens of annual student trips to the Holy Land. On these we learnt the realistic way, wild-camping under the Roman aqueduct at Caesarea, having our hired minibus torched in Jerusalem, and eventually being mugged by bandits in the Judean desert.

Another unusual ministry was arranging and singing in tours of the students’ Schola Cantorum on both sides of the Atlantic, in several European countries and even behind the Iron Curtain, to full churches to reassure enraptured audiences that the Catholic Church in the free world had not forgotten them. Moments of excitement from the close supervision of the not-so-Secret-Police, or when one of the boys drank too much and decided to escape the consequences by running away to South America – only to sober up enough to remember on arrival at the airport that his passport was in my safekeeping.

Sixty Years a Priest – Henry Wansbrough .. *continued*

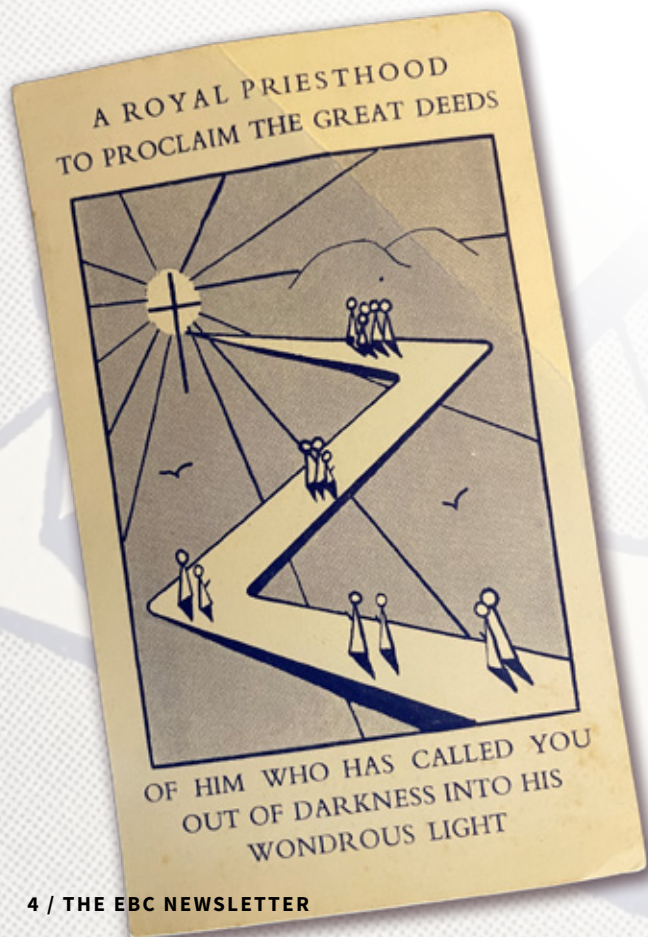
A quarter-century of teaching classical languages in the school and scripture to young monks came to a snappy end with an invitation from the abbot to take over St Benet's Hall in Oxford at 24-hour notice. As the sole Senior Member of this Permanent Private Hall of the University, this combined diverse ministries such as Bursar, Dean, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Admissions, not to mention head-and-only gardener, integrating this with the unrivalled Oxbridge system of public lectures and individual tutorials, including a stint as Chairman of the Theology Faculty. Confronted with the choice of teaching either Old or New Testament, I chose the latter. The ample 'vacations' left plenty of scope for residential scripture weekends or weeks for nuns, monks and others at St Benet's. My mother, of course, saw the sole reason for my appointment to be proximity within 20 miles of her as she slipped gently into death at the age of 98.

Freedom of the university opened up the possibility of important work on international Roman commissions, first the Papal Biblical Commission, an annual meeting of 24 scholars in the Vatican, under the genial presidency and warm friendship of Cardinal Ratzinger for nine years till his election to higher office. Even more rewarding was ten years on the Anglican Roman Catholic Ecumenical Commission, meeting all over the world – from Hong Kong (the only place I have shared a swimming-pool with a bishop-in-a-bikini) to Buenos Aires – as we shared the search for the unity of the Church. The ending of 14 years as Master of the Hall (1990-

2004) freed me to teach for a couple of months each year in Holy Trinity College, in Harare, Zimbabwe, first in residence and (after Covid) on-line until the College closed in 2023 – time enough for one of my former students to become Dean of the Faculty. The new dimension of on-line teaching (mostly in Hebrew) continues, a welcome spin-off from the medical tragedy of the pandemic.

Perhaps the most important ministry has been editing the Bible. Alexander Jones' Jerusalem Bible of 1966 brilliantly encapsulated contemporary scholarship on the Bible, clothed in the first translation into modern English idiom. It is still fascinating to see the genius with which Jones incorporated 20th-century idiom into the text and its vital theological insights. Twenty years later I was asked to revise his JB, but still under the eagle eye of the French director of the Ecole biblique, who checked out every change I made (in seven years of the busy schedule of a monastic schoolmaster) to the original and its theological footnotes. So, it was not until 2019 that I was able, with a free but respectful eye, to transcend the scholarship of the 1950s with the New Revised Jerusalem Bible. One of the most intractable problems was how to reconcile the inherent masculine bias of the English language with current expression of the equality of the sexes. It remains to be seen whether the Holy Spirit can ever guide the bishops of different English-speaking nations to a common view for a shared Lectionary.

The on-line biblical apostolate at every level from primary to university continues to provide new challenges. Rarely does a day pass without an enquiry or challenge. The Word of God is ever new and ever enthralling. That same Hebrew Bible sits on my shelf, enhanced by an armour of sellotape.



Pray for Joseph Henry Wansbrough
Monk of Ampleforth
ordained priest
19. 7. 64.

We humbly beg thee, most loving Father,
Through Jesus Christ thy Son of Lord,
accept these gifts we offer for
thy holy Church

Alban Roe House Ampleforth, Blessing on Feast of St. Joseph

On the Feast of St Joseph, March 19, we welcomed Cardinal Vincent Nichols to bless Alban Roe House. It was a very special day for the monastic and lay community, seeing the culmination of a project that is so important to the Benedictine mission at Ampleforth.



Alban Roe House Visitor Centre offers Retreat facilities to school groups, as well as a Tea Room and Visitor Experience. It is open daily 10.00-17.00 from 22nd March..



EBC Shared Formation, Second Article

Three periods of Shared Formation have taken place in the first half of 2024 in the monasteries of Buckfast, Belmont and Douai respectively, as was 'trailerred' in the last edition of this newsletter. Here now is an 'after the event' update.



These three periods were attended by six novices from English houses (three from Belmont, two from Buckfast and one from Douai) and one postulant (Ealing) and (for the first two periods) three novices from Lurin in Peru. The Congregation invested in some simultaneous translation software, which was key to the participation of those from Lurin.

Talks were given by a number of EBC monks and one nun; the nun being Dame Laurentia Johns of Stanbrook and the monks being Dom James Hood (St Gregory), Dom Anselm Brumwell (St Gregory) Dom John George (St Gregory), Dom Alexander Kenyon (Belmont), Bishop Mark Jabale (Belmont), Dom Dunstan Nelson (Belmont), Dom Luke Beckett (Ampleforth), Abbot Geoffrey Scott (Douai) and Dom Peter Bowe (Douai). Great thanks to all of them! So far as possible, it was thought appropriate to draw on our own EBC teaching expertise, with the sole exception of Fr Paul Lyons of the diocese of Portsmouth UK.

Topics included: celibacy, chant, English Benedictine history, the book *To Prefer Nothing to Christ*, life in community, Church teaching on religious life and last, but not least, letters of St Ignatius of Antioch and their connection with the development of monastic spirituality.

Novice masters also attended: Abbot Martin Shipperlee (Ealing), Dom Leo Maidlow Davis (for Buckfast) Dom Michael Evans (Belmont) and in the last period Dom Andrew Prickett (Buckfast). Their presence was essential, as it was considered important that this initiative not disrupt or seek to replace the key formation relationship between novice and novice master.

All participated in the prayer of the host communities, there were opportunities for recreation, outings and for shared lectio divina. The photographs included in this report indicate some of this range of activity and location.

These three periods have all been experimental. They were evaluated in each instance by participants and this evaluation will be continued by the Shared Formation Commission, looking ahead to the next General Chapter in 2026. The Abbot President attended and led the final evaluation in Douai.

Headlines from these evaluations are that all the periods provided opportunities for sharing in a 'formation community' and for learning, which were much appreciated. There was good reason to be grateful to the communities that welcomed and endured a minor invasion of those from other houses. There are ambitious ideas for ways in which these opportunities could be extended, for example through online resources. It is moreover hoped to have a Shared Formation in the USA in summer 2025. It would also be fair to say that many did look forward to being 'back home' after two weeks in another monastery. Perhaps this too is a plus of the initiative!

Br. Joseph Benedict Donleavy Story

The fifty or so attendees at the Continuing Formation Commission's recent conference held at Buckfast Abbey on July 15-19 included a fair representation of the diversity of the English Benedictine Congregation as it stands near the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. Within the demographic of age alone, the group comprised consecrated religious monks and nuns ranging from their thirties into their nineties. Among them was Brother Joseph Benedict Donleavy, 31, one of the representative monks of Ampleforth Abbey at the conference. Here is a brief excerpt from the introduction and homily for Br. Joseph Benedict's Mass of Solemn Profession on May 5, 2018, delivered by Father Gabriel Everitt:

"[T]he oldest monk of Ampleforth (technically former monk), Fr Timothy Horner, is being buried today in St Louis Abbey in the United States. He went from Ampleforth as one of the founding fathers and the first Headmaster of the school in St Louis. There seems somehow a providential connection between him, a very remarkable and faithful monk and priest, his funeral and our ceremony today, which across an ocean is nonetheless taking place in the monastery of his final profession. I think he is praying for us and for you, Br Joseph Benedict."

The determined perseverance of Joseph Benedict has paid off and the path of his initial studies has now taken him to the Eternal City. While living at Sant' Anselmo in Rome atop the lovely Aventine Hill, he pursues his work at The Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (The Angelicum). In the context of the CFC conference which was branded with the title, "Is this the road that leads to life? Thinking differently about change," the EBC Newsletter staff posed six questions to Br. Joseph Benedict and his responses have been slightly edited for length.

1. First of all, thank you for being so willing to share your thoughts which will surely be of special interest to all the members of our Congregation throughout the world, and hopefully serve as an inspiration to young men and women discerning a vocation to the life of a consecrated religious. How would you respond to the question put forth by the CFC: "Is this the road that leads to life?"

Well, my instinctive response to this question is a phrase that St Benedict takes from the Psalms, and which he uses in the prologue: "who is he who longs for life, and long days to enjoy his prosperity?" I think it is a healthy question to ask oneself – do I still want to live, to put in the work necessary to enjoy the life I have been given, and hand something on to those who come after me? That question of desire is fundamental to answering the question of what the road to take is, and I would definitely answer in the affirmative. I do want to live, even if I have moments of discouragement from time to time. St Benedict follows his question up with a command which comes later in the

same Psalm: "then keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit." Keep to what is good, and live honestly, authentically. This is the road which leads to life, which increases my desire, in fact. The more I live a good and honest life, the happier I am, and the more I want. The monastic life is centred on the Psalter, to which we constantly return in the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the day. It is full of wisdom, and expresses every emotion. Having this basis is vital for me, and has certainly led to my maturing through life, and wanting to share it with others – the natural desire that we have when we find something good.

2. On the final day of the meetings, Fr. Martin Daly, S.M., the facilitator, called upon the youngest members in the room at Buckfast to voice their wrap-up ideas. Many of the participants remarked that you expressed not only your thoughts but your feelings and emotions quite eloquently. Please summarize how you responded.

We are at a cross-roads as a Congregation, and every direction is different to that which we have travelled until this point. I responded with my conviction that we really need to face it together, as a whole. One participant shared that they "think better with other people", and that is certainly true of myself. I need other people to think better. We are Cenobites, which means that we are monks who live together. I need other people to live better, too. The numbers in our communities have been reduced, and this presents many challenges, but if we live well together and find a way to speak and listen openly to each other's thoughts, anxieties, and hopes, then we will be able to find a life-giving common life together.



Br. Joseph Benedict

Br Joseph .. *continued*

3. Oxford-born Emma Dibdin, in a recent review of the podcast 'Revolutions', wrote that "History is sometimes defined as the study of change." Any thoughts on that, having just come out of a week of discussions on change individually, communitarian, and congregationally?

Well, if we are looking at the history of our Congregation as a study of change, then we can see a lot of clear moments of change: the Reformation, which sent the English monks over to the Continent of Europe; the French Revolution, which forced them to return to England; the growth of our schools, parishes and monasteries until the 1960s, and then their subsequent reduction in size. We have also had other monasteries join our congregation: Washington and Buckfast in the previous century, as well as three new women's communities: Mariavall in Sweden, Kylemore in Ireland, and Jamberoo in Australia. How we deal with change was really what we were reflecting on together at the conference, and that is how history will judge us. On a personal level, I suppose Abraham is a good model for me in dealing with change – being open to where the Lord calls me, and strong in trusting Him, as well as being positive and creative in how I respond to the situations in which I find myself. As communities and as a congregation, my hope is that we will respond courageously and, as we hear about the early community in the Acts of the Apostles, with one heart and mind.

4: How do you perceive the evolving nature of the EBC's involvement in education from which, in many cases, vocations were once drawn? In other words, given your house's charism and mission, what is the reality of having fee-paying schools on our respective campuses with less and less monastic involvement?

In our own case at Ampleforth, the school and abbey trusts are completely separate, and the majority of our work in the school is now chaplaincy. This work is not full-time for any of the monks involved, except for Fr Ambrose, who is the Dean of the college. I have no direct experience of working in the college, so I would be speaking out of ignorance to try and talk about that. However, there is a strong tradition in the Benedictine world of education, and St Benedict says that we should be a school for the Lord's service. The document which came from the Second Vatican Council on religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, asks monasteries to be "seedbeds for the growth of the Christian people". We currently offer retreats for individuals, groups and school groups, and this is one way we try to accomplish what is asked of us. There is always a need to grow, and we will need to go on adapting in order to fulfil the wishes of St Benedict and the Church. It is clear from them both that what is expected of a monastery is to aid people to grow closer to the Lord in their life-long journey to Him.

5. A young diocesan pastor in the U.K. recently posed this question: Why English Benedictine as opposed to Global Benedictine going forward? Doesn't the latter more accurately reflect the reality of the Congregation in the 21st century, from Harare in Africa to Lurin in Peru?

It is true that we are far more global than we have ever been before. I talked of other monasteries earlier, and now you mention the foundations made by Belmont in Peru and by Ampleforth in Zimbabwe. Other people may think about it differently, but "English" describes where we have come from, and what our intention was post-reformation – to evangelise and re-establish monasticism in England. This is I think, especially for me as an English monk, still important to our Congregation. Other congregations are named after reforms which happened in the 19th century in specific monasteries – Beuron, Subiaco-Cassinese, and Solesmes, for example. These congregations stretch much further than their names suggest. However, it could be that our changing circumstances require us to make a reform not only in practice but also in name.

6. Aside from your studies, what other benefits have you found to living in Rome? (Perhaps sharing with our readers your favorite gelato shop?!)

I will start with the gelato, because that is easy – there is a great place just down the hill from Sant' Anselmo on the Via Marmorata, simply called Panna, which means "Cream". They like to put cream on top of ice cream in Italy, and I have not yet discovered why. But more importantly for me, the opportunity to meet monks and nuns from all over the world has been a real blessing and has opened my eyes to see the wisdom of the Rule of St Benedict lived in many different ways. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to speak with very experienced and wise monks and nuns about their own lives, and how they have approached the challenges of living the monastic life with its current challenges in today's world. I have had the opportunity to visit several monasteries in Italy, including Montecassino, Subiaco, Praglia, Santa Giustina, and Novalesa. I stayed with the Bose communities in Assisi and Piedmont, and have visited Vitorchiano and its daughter house Valsarena. These last two are female Trappists, who live a very vibrant monastic life and have made foundations across the globe in recent decades. Six of their nuns now reside alongside the small community of monks at Tre Fontane in the South of Rome, aiming to support and offer some of their spirit to the community there. It is a great collaboration which is bearing fruit, with a novice, Br Pietro, having just made his simple vows on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

Ancora una volta, grazie, molte grazie, Fratello. Thank you for your insight and your willingness to share. God bless you, your community at Ampleforth, and your continuing studies.

Abbatial Election Held

— June at Belmont Abbey

On 4th June, 2024, the monks of Belmont Abbey elected Dom Brendan Thomas as their 12th abbot and a packed church witnessed his blessing the following month, on Friday, 12th July. The Belmont and Lurin communities were joined by 2 bishops, 12 abbots, abbesses and over 60 concelebrating priests, plus monks and nuns from all over the world in this joyous celebration. Belmont Abbey's daughter house is the Monasterio de Santa Maria de la Santísima Trinidad in Lurin, Peru. During his eight-year tenure, the new abbot will oversee a community of just shy of 40 monks. Following the blessing Mass, which was presided over by the Most Rev Mark O'Toole, Archbishop of Cardiff, the capacity crowd enjoyed an al fresco reception on the abbey lawn.

Founded in 1859 as the common novitiate for The English Benedictine Congregation, Belmont was raised to the status of an Abbey in 1920, and is in the Archdiocese of Cardiff, located close to the border of England and Wales.

The community is engaged in various apostolates which involve the care of parishes in the dioceses of Cardiff, Birmingham and Lancaster, as well as leading retreats and providing hospitality.

Abbot Brendan was born in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales in 1964, was educated at Belmont Abbey School, and holds a degree in accountancy. Clothed in 1987, he made Solemn Profession in 1992. He did his theological studies in Rome at the Angelicum and was ordained a priest in 1993. He completed a license at the Monastic Institute of Sant' Anselmo in Rome.

For nearly thirty years, Abbot Brendan organised the monastery's retreat programme. In 2000 he became Novice Master, a responsibility he held for 22 years. After a period as the monastery's Prior, in 2022 he was appointed parish priest of St Francis Xavier's Church in Hereford, where he served until his election as Abbot.

A statement released by Belmont Abbey notes that Abbot Brendan is well known in the monastic world due to his leadership of the Monastic Formators' Programme, which he started alongside Fr Mark Butlin, OSB, of Ampleforth Abbey, in 2002.



Living in a changing World

“This address was delivered at Buckfast Abbey, July 2024, during the Conference of the E.B.C. Continuing Formation Conference. We are grateful to Fr. Casey for his permission to include his remarks in the E.B.C. Newsletter.”

In the early 1970s, while passing through London as a student, I was attracted by a series of brightly coloured postcards, each bearing a cartoon figure and a suitable sentiment. I remember one that pictured a doleful individual plaintively uttering the words, “It was all so different before everything changed.” Another was of a lonely man seated at the end of a park bench saying, “I think I will just sit here, and wait until everything gets easier.”

What these two postcards represent are two uncreative attitudes to change, into which most of us may be tempted to sink sometimes: nostalgia and inertia. Although such attitudes may seem harmless enough and even pitiful, they can be significant impediments both to subjective happiness and to our making some objective contribution to the betterment of humanity’s future.

1. Nostalgia and Inertia

Although it has been recently argued that nostalgia can have a positive role in shaping the future,¹ more often than not it can lead us to undervalue the present by comparing it unfavourably with the way things used to be: as we choose to remember them. As a result, we fail to appreciate the importance and urgency of interacting with the here-and-now. Selective memories lead us to the conclusion that to have lived according to the possibilities that former times afforded was far more life-giving than coping with contemporary issues. And so we attempt either to prolong the past or, if it has already been abandoned, to drag it back to replace the present. There are plenty of examples of this tendency. In the Bible, Qoheleth counsels: “Do not ask why the former days were better than these, for that is not a wise question” (Eccl 7:10). Saint Augustine was of the same mind.

What fresh sort of suffering, my friends, does the human race now endure that our ancestors did not undergo? Or when do we endure the kind of sufferings which we know they endured? Yet you find people complaining about the times in which they live, saying that our parents’ times were good. What if they could be taken back to the times of their parents? Would they still complain? The past times that you think were good are good only because, in the here and now, they are not yours.²

Inertia can result from being overwhelmed by the complicated array of choices that confront us, and by the confusing multiplicity of arguments presented in favour of one or another option. We prefer the comforting embrace of routine to the drama of weighing options and reaching a decision. We want to continue flying by auto-pilot, under the guidance of the Default Mode Network of the brain, rather than to wake up and seize the controls. When we

withdraw from the hurly-burly of active involvement we may manage to sidestep necessary periods of uncertainty and the embarrassment of trial-and-error, but removing ourselves from the process of decision-making increases the likelihood that the eventual outcome will not be to our liking, so that our sense of alienation will become even more profound. Adding our two penn’orth to the discussion is the best means of minimising the possibility of an adverse result.

It seems to me that at least some of our reluctance to deal creatively with the unexpected, is due to our tendency—or, should I say, compulsion—to evaluate everything that crosses our path, according to our personal priorities. It is as though our response to reality is filtered through an innate sense of entitlement that establishes us as the sole arbiters of value. Pre-emptively to dismiss something as negative may mean that we deny ourselves the incentive to look more closely and, perhaps, to discover the possibility of positive outcomes that are hidden from the superficial gaze. Refusing to terminate one phase of our life may deprive us of the blessing of a new beginning.

¹ Tobias Becker, *Yesterday: A New History of Nostalgia* Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2023).

² Saint Augustine, *On the Anguish and Trials of this Time* 2.92; in *Patrologia Latina*, Supplementum 2, 441-442.

2. Responding rather than Evaluating

With reference to change which happens independently of us, it is more important to respond to the change than to evaluate it. It may well be that some changes are good—in our estimation—and others less so, but the fact that we assess a change negatively does not mean that it ceases to be a reality. It makes little difference whether I believe today’s weather to be unseasonably hot or unseasonably cool, the main priority is that my choice of attire is based on reality. Wearing winter clothing because I do not approve of a hot summer’s day is close to madness.

Responding creatively to change demands of us the acceptance of the truth that we live in a changing world. As Cardinal Newman stated: “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”³ Our generation has lived through Vatican II, many technological advances, Brexit, and climate change; we are constantly affected by the demands of new health and safety regulations, and by the restrictions imposed by safeguarding policies. And the list could be prolonged. It is easy to think of the past as free and easy, and to resent the bureaucratic hurdles that seem to intrude on every side.⁴ We need to be very patient and adaptable to survive in contemporary Western society where even our legitimate preferences have little weight beyond our immediate circle of our legitimate preferences have little

weight beyond our immediate circle of influence. Meanwhile the world goes on its merry way and, if we are wise, we allow ourselves to keep pace, and to adapt to changing reality, whether it is to our taste or not.

The fact is that external change, whether it is ecclesial, societal or coming from the local community, has an impact on our inner state of contentment and our ability to find meaning in life. Although the young and those who have been pushed out to the margins may welcome any change, those who are fundamentally content with life will probably be alarmed at any challenge to their settled pattern of living. There is also a cumulative aspect to this. As changes multiply our willingness to engage with them decreases, and we may be in danger of progressively becoming resistant to all change, irrespective of its value, impotently stirring discontent among our cronies and failing to engage with reality.

If we were to accept that change is normal, perhaps we would begin to search for ways that would help us to make the most of the times in which we live. In the first place, this would mean acknowledging that change is occurring not just out-there but also in-here. And that means learning to cope also with subjective change. We ourselves have changed and this has affected our capacity and willingness to respond to what is happening around us. For example, as we age we are forced seriously to consider the advisability of actions that previously we did spontaneously. It is not that hills are becoming steeper, it is just that we are losing the ability to sprint to the summit as once we did. In the same way, some people are so worn down by frequent changes that they dread the prospect of further challenges to their routines. And so they retire to their nests and lament the passing of the good times.

I think it helps to recognise that we have no infallible means of determining in advance whether a particular transition will be a positive development or a decline. This means there is an element of uncertainty—or even risk—in every change of direction. A development is recognised as such only in hindsight. Many contingent elements feed into final outcomes; not all of them are welcome at the time. Development occurs by drawing into its forward march whatever it encounters on the way. For those of us who are human, our journey through life is not governed by the rules of sequential logic. Our onward progress is not a regimented procession towards a pre-ordained destination, it includes distractions, deviations, detours, stoppages, and backtracking, all of which cause our immediate objectives to be constantly redefined. Life is not—for the most part—a series of successes in dealing with anticipated challenges, but a repeated and often wrongfooted coping with circumstances beyond our control and, frequently, beyond our competence. This means that we are obliged

to include in our purview of life, the experience of what seems like significant failure with regard to the realisation of our personal objectives and ideals, and disappointment with regard to the options chosen by the group to which we belong. As we age, however, and somehow acquire the elements of a wisdom that has come about through multiple mistakes, we begin to realise the vacuousness of the orderly outcomes for which we previously had hoped. Even when our dreams come true, more often than not they fail to yield the kind of fruit for which we had hoped. Our naïve prejudgments often proved to be overly optimistic.

³ Development of Christian Doctrine, II, §7.

⁴ Bureaucracy more often than not slows down the process but adds nothing to its outcome. To take a simple example. My own monastery is engaged in ever-ongoing negotiations with the local authorities about the construction of a replacement hay shed within our 1,000-acre property. It needs to be architect-designed, and they want to be assured that the colour will conform with official standards, even though it cannot be seen from the road. And they have queried its dimensions.

3. A Spirituality of Change?

What has not happened since Vatican II—as far as I am aware—is the emergence of a comprehensive spirituality of change. I am not trying to short-circuit the inevitable struggles that mark our progress into mellowness by indulging in facile theology but, perhaps, I may be forgiven for suggesting four lines of reflection that may help us to respond creatively to this challenge. Each in its own way is an invitation to return to ground zero, to move back from the specific irritants of the present situation and to try to regain our balance by the consideration of realities that are more fundamental and more enduring.

a) Mixity

In the first place, as adults, we need to be more conscious of the mixity of all affairs in this world of space and time. ⁵ Nothing is ever totally estranged from its opposite. The evaluation of events is determined by the point from which they are being observed. This mixity is what continues to line the pockets of lawyers in our adversarial legal system; it seems that there is always room to blame a victim in order to exonerate a perpetrator. The lesson of mixity is a deterrent against the childish affirmation of absolutes, and is the grounding principle of all reasonable conversation. The acceptance that we live in a speckled world that was not created to suit our preferences also undermines any tendency to exceptionalism or entitlement. The third chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes is an eloquent reminder that, in the plan of God, there is a season for everything under the sun; most realities in this world are obliged to give way to their opposites. Nothing remains the same for long. Every new beginning comes at the cost of ending what went before and, inevitably, some measure of grief. To the extent that our identity derives from that which has passed, we will be upset when life moves on.

One of Saint Bernard's more original themes was his emphasis on the reality of what he termed "alternation": *alternatio* or *vicissitudo*.⁶ The changeableness of reality means that our response to different realities is not equally effective. Our competence is not without limits. There are areas of challenge in which we struggle to contribute to a creative outcome. Worse still, sometimes we fail completely, and the result of our misguided efforts is negative—harmful to others and to ourselves. Failures can seem devastating, but we usually get over them. Fear of failure is much worse; it paralyses.

Those who are serious about their spiritual life are often upset by an apparent failure to maintain constant progress. Their efforts to come closer to God meet with a sense of having drifted farther away. Bernard insists that this dialectic of presence and absence is not only normal; it is a guarantee of authenticity.

For people who are spiritual or, rather, for those whom the Lord intends to make spiritual, this process of alternation goes on all the time. God visits by morning and subjects to trial. The just one falls seven times and seven times gets up again. What is important is that he falls during the day, so that he sees himself falling, and knows when he has fallen and wants to get up again...⁷

The alternations that are a necessary element in human experience require of us an aptitude for resilience. This is true not only of us as individuals, but also as members of a community. When the unexpected happens, much will depend on our having the mental and emotional resources to step back from the immediate events that trigger anxiety, and to give ourselves time to process what is causing the disturbance. Four skills are involved if we are to survive: we have to be robust enough not to lose heart but to keep going; we have to be resourceful in controlling the damage; we have to try to recover what has been lost; and we have to learn from our mistakes.⁸ A strong social support system will often make the difference between profiting from a crisis and merely surviving it.

The worst that we can do is to ignore or deny the stressful situation—either as individuals or as communities. To bury our heads in the sand. Instead we need to embrace a philosophy of life and a spirituality that recognises that mistakes will occur and that—at least sometimes—they will be due to our ignorance, weakness or malice. Let's leave behind our nineteenth-century perfectionism!

b) Total Context

Secondly, it can help to recognise that many periods of turmoil result simply from our having lost sight of the totality of our journey; where and how it began and towards what goal we once aspired to travel. "Unless a particular time of personal transition is seen in the context of the arc of an individual's lifetime, it is unlikely to have any meaning

larger than 'ending this and starting that.'⁹ Often enough the best tactic, when we are overpowered by a torrent of existential dread, is to step back and consider what it was that set us on our way and has been for us, ever since, a subtle source of guidance. This is one of the persistent themes of Pope Francis' teaching. Return to Galilee; go back to that inaugural encounter with Christ, and draw from that moment the energy and the assurance to move forward. This technique for dealing with threatening change allows us to contextualise the situation more broadly or, in the words of Winston Churchill, "to watch the tides, and not the eddies". World literature is full of stories of those who have triumphed over adversity; there is no reason why we should not be included in that victorious band. We might ask ourselves: "When the three-volume story of my life is published, how many pages will be devoted to this particular problem?" So many outrageous afflictions pale into insignificance with the passage of time. This slight momentary affliction may well be preparing for us an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17).

c) Providence

The third line of reflection invites us towards a growing appreciation of God's providence in the arrangement of human affairs. The fact is that the ordering of events in the universe is way above our pay grade. When we are confronted with the unexpected and unwelcome, we have to choose between seeing our cosmos as chaos—the interplay of random forces—or to take the leap of faith and see it as the outcome of some form of divine direction. Theologically speaking, nothing happens by accident. Our acknowledgment of an active Providence is faith-based; it is not some species of fatalism. John Cassian is one witness to this. Speaking of the phrase "Thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer, he says: "No one can say this sincerely except one who believes that every circumstance, favourable or unfavourable, is designed by God's providence for his good, and that [God] thinks and cares for the good of his people and their salvation more than we do for ourselves."¹⁰

An appreciation of God's active providence is not naïve; it does not involve the immediate cancellation of all uncertainty or distress. For those of us who are human, the prospect of unwelcome change will inevitably pass through different phases before we arrive at a creative resolution—shock and denial, mental wrangling, resistance and rebellion, even half-hearted resignation. It takes time for us to get to the point of interacting calmly with reality and giving priority to our faith over our feelings of panic and resentment.

In addition, it can be remarked that retrospective reflection on our life will often convince us that outcomes rarely match expectations and that "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley"; there is more at play in reality than what comes under our control. Our inclination to influence the course of events is often delusional. There is a power greater than us at play. If eventually we garner some skerrick of wisdom we will often conclude that the mindset that occasioned so much distress was unsound.

d) Paschal Mystery

The fourth line of reflection concerns the ultimate absurdity—by normal standards—embodied in the notion of the paschal mystery: the conviction that a faith-filled death is the beginning and the channel of a more abundant life. It is not unknown that our failures bring about, in a more excellent way, the very thing we were trying to achieve through talent and virtue and endurance. What is a scandal to some and foolishness to others, mysteriously becomes the means by which God's beneficent purposes are realised in an otherwise recalcitrant world. The undeniable truth is that Christian discipleship involves passing through periods of apparent diminishment in which the visibility of growth disappears and chaos seems supreme. Again, it is only through retrospective reflection that the meaning of these outcomes becomes clear. Perhaps we do not invest enough effort in our formation processes in assigning a practical centrality to the death-leads-to-life paradox. The death in question is not usually self-chosen. It precipitates itself into our lives unbidden. And we need to learn how to handle it.

⁵ See M. Casey, "Mixity: How Qoheleth Contextualizes Suffering,"

⁶ See M. Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 251-279.

⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 17,2; SBOp 1, 90. See M. Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 251-279.

⁸ Thus Stephen E. Flynn, "America the Resilient: Defying Terrorism and Mitigating Natural Disasters," *Foreign Affairs* 87.2 (2008) 6-7: "Such resilience results from sustained commitment to four factors. First, there is robustness, the ability to keep operating or to stay standing in the face of disaster. . . . Second is resourcefulness, which involves skilfully managing a disaster once it unfolds. . . . The third element of resilience is rapid recovery, which is the capacity to get things back to normal as quickly as possible after a disaster. . . . Finally, resilience means having the means to absorb the new lessons that can be drawn from a catastrophe."

⁹ William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* (Boston: Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2004), 24.

¹⁰ Conference 9, 20.

4. Towards Resolution

Externally induced change upsets us because it often seems to undermine the sacred marriage of cause and effect. Unanticipated factors intervene to disturb the smooth flow of perceived causality so that our efforts may be, at best, void. Sometimes their effect may be destructive. Good intentions are no substitute for an accurate reading of the ever-changing situation. "It was all so different before everything changed." It is to be anticipated that

our instinctive responses to complex and unexpected situations more often than not miss the mark. This can lead to a despairing sense of global incompetence, which is heightened by our exaggerated conviction that we alone are responsible for shepherding a variety of contributory elements, so that jointly they bring about the effects that we believe to be good. In everything that we do there are many factors in play, most of them outside our zone of influence.

Reviewing our misfortunes in a secure ambience will often lead us to the conclusion that our values and intentions were mostly good, even if we cannot completely absolve ourselves of complicity in the disasters that have befallen us. It was our perception of the situation that was lacking—not because we misperceived it, but because our survey of data was incomplete. We were influenced by limited information. What we did not perceive or take into account, had a proportionally greater impact on the outcome than what was revealed by our worthy but partial analysis of the situation.

I think that this kind of experience happens to us more often than we are inclined to admit and, in everyday situations, we learn to live with it. When it comes to important matters, however, we need to be a little circumspect. The right assessment of possible courses of action (prudence), demands that we are unabashed in pre-emptively owning the relative incompleteness of our range of vision and, so, are prepared for it to be augmented from the complementary standpoints of others. In practice this means accepting our limits and taking steps to compensate for them. We all have different skills; what I find difficult, someone else does easily. What I notice may well be invisible to someone else. This is probably why Saint Benedict quotes the text, "Do all things with counsel and afterwards you will not be sorry" (RB 3.13).

5. Synodality

I am aware that synodality is, as it were, the flavour of the month, but I am wondering whether some of the processes associated with it may be of use not only in plotting the way ahead but also in offering us affective support in challenging times. In a sense, it is a very "monastic" process because it asks us to hold onto our own beliefs and values with a very loose grip, being prepared to expose ourselves to alternative readings of familiar situations, and willing to give priority to the preferences of the many. This is what Thomas Merton referred to as leaving behind self-will to be guided by the common will. It requires considerably more virtue than we might, at first, have believed.

One of the things a wholesome group process can do is to liberate us from the tyranny of our own rhetoric.

An assertion that begins as a suggestion of mere possibility often becomes through serial repetition, a statement of fact. It can happen that the unchallenged recital of our grievances has the effect of reinforcing and amplifying them far beyond the limits of the actual events, so that a minor altercation assumes cosmic proportions feeding on and fuelling strong emotional outbursts.

Alas, sometimes we paint ourselves into a corner by being too pleased with our own eloquent denunciations of projected changes, that we fail to recognise either the value of what we are rejecting, or the grief we are causing others by our intractable obstinacy.

An authentically synodal process is more than a psychological technique for attaining some level of consensus in a group. Pope Francis insists that it operates in the context of prayer and in openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In a sense, it involves backtracking to a point where substantial agreement is possible. A fruitful conversation begins with agreement and not with disagreement. I would tentatively suggest that perhaps the dynamics of such a process are somewhat different in male communities, female communities, and mixed communities. Also, we need to acknowledge that the path to consensus is shaped according to different ethnicities and cultures and that generational preferences may sometimes prevail over rational arguments.

To attain such a foundation, it is necessary to confront the possibility that the willingness to engage in battle sometimes pre-exists the emergence of the issue about which the conflict is supposed to be concerned. Resistance often lacks objective substance. A loveless life often copes badly with unwelcome change. It sometimes happens that a generalised alienation finds a focus for its resentment in a potential area of contention—the more trivial the better—or so it often seems. Not unknown among politicians! Monks and nuns often have long memories, at least when grievances are involved and sometimes complaints are cherished long after their expiry date. Because, in this case, the disagreement is more symbolic than real, making a point and overwhelming the opposition are more important than arriving at consensus. As a result, in such an impasse, resolution of differences is almost impossible.

This seems to indicate that some priming is necessary before any communal discernment begins. Objectively this means the announcement of the central question and the distribution of relevant material in assimilable form, as well as the allowance of sufficient time before and during the discussion. Subjectively, it involves encouraging people to step back from their normal occupations and preoccupations in order to find a space suitable for the encounter with others—and their potentially different viewpoints. It is rare that a community process advances unanimity through a spurious spontaneity; careful groundwork yields better results.

Changes for which we ourselves are primarily responsible rarely result in catastrophic distress, though unfortunate outcomes may engender regret. Changes forced on us by external agencies may trigger a variety of reactions and responses from gloom and grumbling to overt resistance. Potential changes in communal living, impose on us all the responsibility of discernment, both as individuals and as members of a community. This usually demands that we step back from immediate involvement to consider the broader implications of the issue. To do so fruitfully asks of us a certain apatheia—which does not mean apathy! A certain detachment from personal, partisan, or political priorities in favour of a disinterested commitment to finding and implementing what is best and most acceptable for the community. Recognising all the while that when the proposed changes take effect, they will have different impacts on different people. There will need to be some measure of post-operative care!

It probably helps if we learn the lessons of history. Dom Jean Leclercq once remarked to me that monasteries that have lasted centuries never stay at the top of their game, but are subject to painful vicissitudes. A few years of fervour may be followed by a period of mediocrity that eventually degenerates into laxity and disorder. But then a reformer comes along and the process begins again. A study of the statutes of the Cistercian General Chapter from the twelfth century until the French Revolution manifests the same pattern: there are good times and not-so-good times. Such is life.

To my mind, the annual cycling of the seasons is a powerful metaphor for the variations that characterise every journey through life, individual and corporate. We pass through times of initial burgeoning, we flourish and flower and produce fruit, and then we are stripped bare and forced to lie fallow. We have no alternative but to be inactive and to rest. But then, beyond our doleful expectations, new shoots emerge and the process begins again. Whether we like it or not, there is an ineluctable necessity for the seasons of life to follow one another in sequence. Change is inevitable. We have no need to look for a target to blame. We simply respond to reality. Otherwise our flourishing will fail, and our days will be spent in futile resentment. To everything there is a season, and each of the seasons has something to contribute to ultimate happiness. Life is more than a Promethean struggle against impossible odds. So why not swim with the tide?

¹¹ *Recta ratio agibilium*

¹² I remember hearing a talk by Cardinal Heenan in which he told the story of an elderly nun quivering with rage at the latest post-conciliar change to the habit, and thunderously announcing, “If I had known this was going to happen before I entered, I would have said ‘Yes’ to Richard!”

13 M. Casey, “The Three Pillars: Filiation, Visitation, General Chapter,” *Analecta Cisterciensia* 70 (2020), 373-403. [Summary],” *CSQ* 55.4 (2020) 425-431.

Two American monks undergo their own transitions

Two young monks experienced transitions of their own earlier this year, in two of the three American houses of the English Benedictine Congregation.

On February 29, John Castonguay was clothed as a novice of St. Anselm's Abbey in Washington, D.C. In a statement released by Abbot James Wiseman on behalf of the community, he said, "He will spend the next year learning to be a monk while the community sees if he 'truly seeks God and whether he shows eagerness for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials' (RB 58:7). He will be known in religious life as Br. Maximilian after St. Maximilian Kolbe. Please pray for him."

On Friday, May 3, Br. Benedict Maria was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacons at the Abbey of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, and St. Gregory the Great at Portsmouth, Rhode Island. With the entire student body and faculty of the Portsmouth Abbey School in attendance, the Principal Celebrant of the Mass was the Most Reverend Richard G. Henning, Bishop of the Diocese of Providence. Among the concelebrants were Abbot Michael Brunner of Portsmouth and Abbot Gregory Mohrman of St. Louis Abbey, where Br. Benedict received his initial formation. Brother's parents and sister were present from their home in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India, along with a large number of his friends from throughout the U.S. He has returned to the St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Florida to complete his final year of theology studies.

Bishop Henning is embarking on a transition as well, having been selected by the Holy Father as the next Archbishop of Boston, replacing the current Archbishop, Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, O.F.M., upon his retirement on October 31.



Photo by Fr. Samuel Springuel, O.S.B.

Mr. John Castonguay receives a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict from Abbot James Wiseman at St. Anselm's Abbey during his clothing as a novice on February 29. He has taken the religious name of Br. Maximilian. Watching from his choir stall is Fr. Gabriel Myers.



Photo by Andrea Hansen

Br. Benedict Maria receives fraternal congratulations from Bishop Richard G. Henning in the Abbey Church at Portsmouth upon his ordination to the Sacred Order of Deacons on May 3.

400th Anniversary Celebration

— *held for the Founding of Stanbrook Abbey with Monastic Communities and the Local Religious*

Having celebrated with our families, friends, oblates, neighbours and ecumenical friends, we wanted to complete this round of Jubilee festivities with our fellow monastic brothers and sisters and religious. To do so we chose 5 July when we honour Mary under the title of Our Lady of Consolation, the patron of our monastery since its beginning in Cambrai in 1623.

Once again the meteorological forecast for poor weather seemed to have been over-ridden by prayer as the day dawned bright and breezy. The sheep, absent from the monastery fields since Monday, returned last evening, newly shorn and looking younger, as if ready for the celebration themselves.

By 11 am the usually silent cloisters were filled with the sound of joyful encounters as old friends were re-united and new introductions made. The first toll of the bell alerted people to get ready; the Mistress of Ceremonies and Choir Mistress gave instructions to the assembly and, by 11.25, when the second toll sounded, silence reigned as nuns, monks and prelates formed into a long procession and recollected themselves for Mass.

The opening chant, sung in Latin by the nuns, was based on Chapter 13 v. 17 of the Book of Esther and captures the heart of the devotion to Our Lady of Consolation:

Converte luctum nostrum in gaudium
ut viventes laudemus nomen tuum...

(Change our grief into joy so that we might live to praise your name).

Originally put on the lips of the Hebrew people living under oppression and for whom Queen Esther was an advocate, for Christians these words apply to Mary through whom came Jesus who has rescued God's people from the oppression of sin. He is the one who changes our

griefs into joy, having taken upon himself our mortal condition with all its sorrows, and transformed them through his resurrection from the dead into the possibility of new and eternal life.

It was wonderful to see the apse full with almost twenty concelebrants, mostly monks from all corners of the UK and some from the US, while in the body of the church were assembled representatives from the Companions of Jesus of the Bar Convent in York, the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal from Leeds, Sr Kathy Yeeles OSB representing the Grace and Compassion sisters, and several Anglican friends.

Before Mass began Mother Abbess Anna Brennan welcomed everyone and thanked people for attending. She preached to the converted for, as she mentioned, there were several communities in the assembly who had already passed their 400th anniversary milestone. The abbess emphasised that the day was all about giving thanks for God's fidelity to us over the past 400 years. A special word of thanks was addressed to Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, leader of the Benedictine Confederation worldwide, for being willing to join us at, what for him, is a busy time as he prepares to retire in September, 2024, and return to his home at Conception Abbey in Missouri, US.

We were delighted that Cardinal Arthur Roche, formerly Archbishop of Leeds, the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, was unexpectedly able to preside at the celebration.

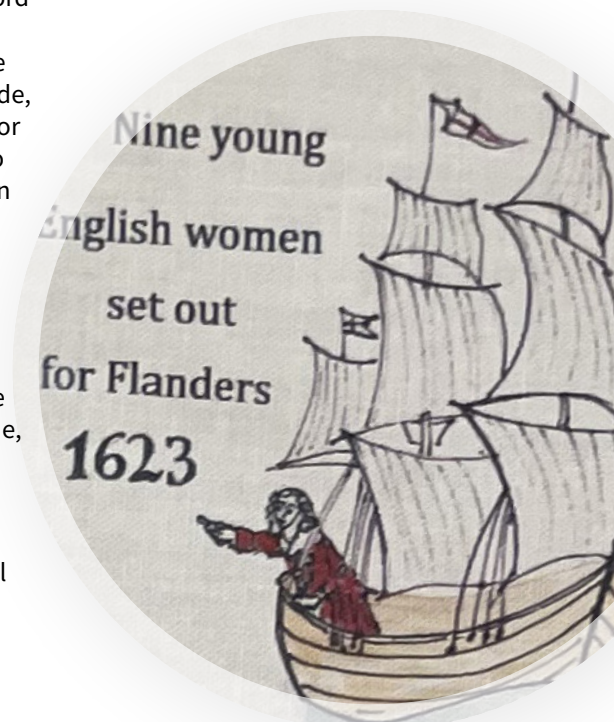
The Mass continued, Mass ordinary VIII, Missa de Angelis, the antiphonal singing between monks and nuns, present in almost equal numbers, being particularly effective.

The Gospel of the marriage feast of Cana (John 2: 1-11), proclaimed by Abbot Christopher Jamison, Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation, took up the theme of transformation of grief into joy set by the entrance chant and central to each Eucharistic celebration.

Abbot Gregory Polan preached eloquently, weaving the story of the Stanbrook community from its birth in 1623 to the present day with the story of the People of Israel where exile, oppression, liberation, desolation, joys and rebuilding are common themes found also in the story of each soul.

The beautiful Offertory Chant, Recordare, Virgo Mater, (Remember Virgin Mother) based in part on the Stabat Mater, and sung by the nuns, addresses Mary as intercessor, begging her to speak up for us to God at our death.

The Offertory gifts were carried by Dame Benedicta and our pre-postulant, Emma Vardon, who hopes to join us later this year.



400th Anniversary Celebration.. *continued*

The final Gregorian chant, sung by the nuns before Holy Communion, Facta es Adjutrix nostra (You have been made our Strong Help) continued the theme of the whole Mass, Mary's role in helping to change sorrow into joy: a most timely message for our troubled world.

Before the final blessing, Cardinal Roche spoke words of gratitude and encouragement to the community, particularly for the hidden ways in which the contemplative life works, under God's grace, to help build up the Church and bring healing to the world.

'Now thank we all our God', sung rousingly by the whole assembly, was a fitting conclusion to this prayerful, simple and moving celebration.

The taking of photographs in the garth followed and, as the winds of change which had been blowing powerfully across the UK over the past few days had subsided [the General Election which yielded a new UK government was on 4 July] people were able to enjoy a sumptuous finger buffet, al fresco, though some preferred the shelter of the monastic refectory lined with the coats of arms of some of our foundresses.

The last word goes to one of these foundresses as it expresses something of the hidden life of prayer which powers the contemplative journey to God.

*...And henceforth let me draw no breath
but to aspire by love
to thee, my God and all my good
by whom I live and move.
No stag in chase so thirsty is
or greedy of sweet spring,
as is my soul to thee, my God,
whilst here I sighing sing.*

Dame Gertrude More (1606-1633) from 'My God to Thee I Dedicate'.
Printed in Poems and Counsels on Prayer and Contemplation,
ed. Jacob Riyeff, pub. Gracewing 2020, p.4.



A new Responsible for the Manquehue Apostolic Movement



The Community of Manquehue Oblates elected Jonathan Perry as their new Responsible on 21st March 2024, Feast of the Transitus of Our Holy Father St Benedict. The role of Responsible is analogous to being abbot or abbess of a monastery. Jonathan is the first successor of José Manuel Eguiguren, Manquehue's Founder and first Responsible.

Jonathan has been a member of the Manquehue Oblates' Community in Chile since 1993. He takes on overall responsibility for the 40 oblates who form the core community at the heart of the wider Manquehue Movement, which runs three large schools in Chile's capital, Santiago, numerous groups for shared lectio divina, a hostel for homeless women, as well as the San José community and retreat centre in the remote South of Chile. He also oversees Manquehue's links and collaboration with the monasteries of the English Benedictine Congregation and their associated schools.

The Manquehue Apostolic Movement

Manquehue is a lay Benedictine community founded in Chile in 1977, one of the many new movements and communities that have arisen within the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. It is comprised of lay people who seek to help one another to live out their Baptism to the full. Lectio divina, the prayerful reading of Holy Scripture, is a fundamental, life-giving experience for its members, particularly in community. By welcoming one another in Christ, they cultivate spiritual friendship, with their motto being "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15: 13). They follow the Rule of St Benedict and draw deep inspiration from the Life of St Benedict by St Gregory the Great.

Lectio Divina Groups are the mainstay of the Manquehue Movement. Its three schools serve over 4,500 students, their families and teachers. The San José Formation Centre

in Chilean Patagonia offers long retreats where people, mainly young, can nurture their faith in a remote and beautiful natural setting. The Hospedería Santa Francisca Romana is a hostel that welcomes homeless women and their children in the centre of Santiago.

Manquehue Oblates

People take part in the life of Manquehue with varying degrees of commitment. The Community of Manquehue Oblates lies at the heart of the Movement and is made up of lay men and women who have made a life-long commitment to live, pray and work together. The Oblates' Community represents a new configuration of the Benedictine charism, complementary to traditional monasticism. Manquehue Oblates can be men or women, cenobitic or married. Cenobites live a celibate life in community houses while married oblates live with their family. All share in a daily life of prayer and work, centred around lectio divina and the Divine Office.

The link with the English Benedictine Congregation and the wider Benedictine world

The connection with the EBC began in 1981 when Manquehue's founder José Manuel Eguiguren visited Ampleforth, in search of advice about how to start Manquehue's first school, Colegio San Benito. A close rapport started up between José Manuel and the monks. The link grew stronger through José Manuel's yearly trips to Ampleforth and a growing number of visits by old boys and monks to Chile. The friendship between Manquehue and Ampleforth grew and broadened out to include other English Benedictine houses and schools such as Downside, Worth and St Louis. In 2009, the General Chapter of the English Benedictine Congregation and the Manquehue Apostolic Movement established a "Consociation", a reciprocal commitment to spiritual communion, mutual support, collaboration, hospitality and prayer.

Manquehue maintains regular contact with Benedictine and Trappist monasteries in Chile and other countries in Latin America, participates in the Latin American Monastic Encounter (EMLA) meetings and has been a member of the International Commission for Benedictine Education since it was established in 2002 by the Abbot Primate.

A new Responsible... *continued*

Towards the election of a new Responsible

José Manuel announced his decision to step down as Responsible in June 2023, after more than four decades of leadership. He believed it was time for each oblate to exercise responsibility for the future by electing another person to lead the community. This immediately prompted many questions such as:

- How was the Community of Oblates to prepare for the election of a new Responsible?
- What were the main issues affecting the Community that needed to be addressed before the election and how were they to be dealt with?
- How was the change of Responsible going to affect the wider Movement, and what needed to be done before a handover?

José Manuel entrusted this process of transition to a team of four members of the community's elected Council, who put together a programme that lasted 9 months. A series of community workshops were held focusing on subjects such as the role of the Abbot or Abbess, Order, Counsel and Participation in a Benedictine community. There were further sessions of reflection on the nature, identity and development of Manquehue's charism as embodied in the Community's Statutes and its rule of life, The Little Rule for Oblates. There was space, too, to reflect together on key issues affecting the community and to offer counsel. In the final stages the whole community subscribed to a shared statement about their vocation and life, which brought the community to the election day united in a common vision.

Two years earlier, the wider Manquehue Movement and its apostolates had embarked on a process of organizational renewal. Care was also taken to sustain this. Interestingly, José Manuel also commissioned an external consultant to carry out a study of the impact of Tutoría on the students and former students at Manquehue's schools and young people in Manquehue in general, in order to unpack and understand their experience. Tutoría is "*a relationship*

of loving welcome in which someone teaches others to encounter Christ in the Scriptures as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and Philip did with the Eunuch" (from the Little Rule for Oblates) and is an essential aspect of Manquehue's life and apostolate. José Manuel's conviction was that the findings of the study, as well as being a legacy, would help clarify, protect and nurture Tutoría in Manquehue in the future.

The election

The election day finally came round, and the oblates gathered at a large country house called El Sauce de Leyda. The three days they spent together were mostly dedicated to lectio divina, the celebration of the Divine Office, personal prayer, together with a spiritual talk by the Founder. The oblates were accompanied, from start to finish, by Abbot Benito Rodríguez OSB, President of the Congregación Benedictina del Cono Sur (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay). The election took place during the afternoon of the second day in the house's private chapel, with Abbot Benito acting as witness. The election was then followed by the promise of the new Responsible, the celebration of the Eucharist and a convivencia in typical Manquehue style.

Jonathan Perry

Jonathan is 58 and was born and brought up in England. The youngest of three children, he was educated at Ampleforth College, in Yorkshire, and before that at Farleigh Preparatory School in Hampshire. After a gap-year spent training with the army and back-packing in India, he read History at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he played cricket for the University. After further travels, he then spent two years with British Petroleum International in London. Despite being sceptical about faith and critical of the Catholic Church, he accepted an invitation to join a Manquehue lectio divina group in London.

A new Responsible... *continued*

This experience opened up a new world, of a living God, prompting him to want to know more about this form of reading Scripture which, he was told, came from Chile. He took the decision to leave BP and go and live with Manquehue. After three years of living with the oblates in Santiago he made a life promise of Obedience, Stability and Conversion of Life as a cenobitic oblate. Both Abbot Patrick Barry and Cardinal Basil Hume were important for Jonathan. They encouraged his search and final decision to commit to Manquehue.

After his arrival in Chile, Jonathan worked for many years as a tutor in Colegio San Benito and eventually became Head of the Tutoría Department there, moving on to take up different roles, such as General Secretary of the Manquehue Apostolic Movement, Director of the Manquehue Youth Area, and Head of the Cenobite Oblates, always working in close collaboration with José Manuel.

Hopes and plans

Asked about hopes and plans for the future Jonathan replies: *“Right now the focus is on getting the ‘basics’ right: a regular life of lectio divina, the Liturgy of Hours,*

community life, working together as a community, charity and friendship among the oblates, personal conversion, growth in prayer, a deep trust in God. We need time to be together in order to focus on our ongoing community renewal. This is the reason behind the decision to bring the resident community of oblates in England back to Chile. We shall, of course, continue our long-standing commitment to the Church’s work of evangelization in the UK, but from Chile. Our mission and outreach in Chile, the UK and elsewhere flows from looking after the ‘basics’. We have lots of plans and hopes, for the community, for our schools and other projects, but all these spring from a life of charity in community and prayer; from a profound awareness of the Father’s love for each of one us, of Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, present and active in the world, and the immense, creative power of the indwelling Spirit. It is of great comfort to know that many people pray for us. We are particularly grateful for the prayers of many monks and nuns of the English Benedictine Congregation.”



The Rt. Rev. Stephen Ortiger

5 February 2024. Abbot of Worth greatly valued in the Benedictine community

The Right Reverend Dom Stephen Ortiger, the former Abbot of Worth, who has died aged 83, was a man of great gifts, both human and intellectual, which made him one of the most influential monks of his generation.

He was Head Master of Worth School, then Abbot of the monastery, and after his retirement as Abbot he expended his considerable energies in a variety of pastoral endeavours, through which he became widely known in Catholic circles, and much loved for his wise good sense, his ability to communicate the things of God, and perhaps not least his sense of humour.

He was born Richard Ortiger on February 21 1940 in Delhi. His father Joseph was an engineer on the Indian railways, and his mother was Eileen, née Owen-Brown.

Richard was sent to the prep school attached to Worth Abbey in Sussex; at 13, he went to Downside as a scholar; and in 1958 he went up to Cambridge, winning an exhibition to read history at Emmanuel.

As an undergraduate he was active in the Catholic chaplaincy at Fisher House, being both secretary and president of the Fisher Society. On finishing university, he entered Worth as a novice, taking the name of Stephen in religion.

After his initial training and his profession as a monk, he was sent to the Catholic University of Fribourg, where he studied Church history for two years and became proficient in German. He was ordained priest on December 16 1967, by Bishop Christopher Butler, a fellow Benedictine.

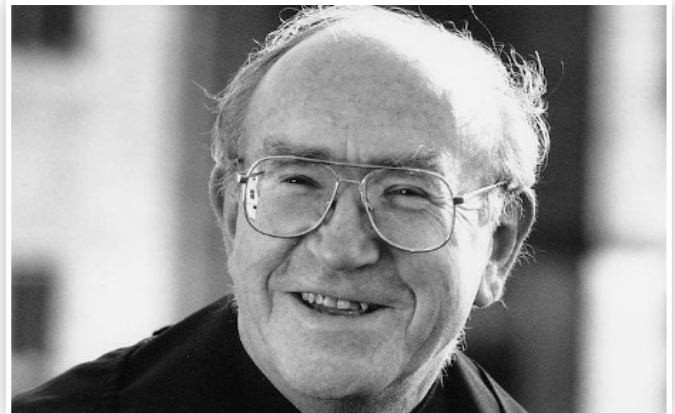
From 1967 Father Stephen taught in the secondary school attached to the Abbey which had opened in 1959, as well as holding various positions in the religious community. He was Novice Master and later Claustal Prior, as well as Housemaster of St Bede's, and finally in September 1983 he became Head Master, a position he held for just over nine years. During his time, the school at Worth flourished.

After his retirement as head, Ortiger had a brief sabbatical during which he learnt to fly in California, gaining a private pilot's licence. Flying remained a lifelong passion, along with photography. Shortly after his return from sabbatical, he was elected Abbot of Worth in July 1993.

His time as leader of the monastic community was a period during which the monks endeavoured to evaluate their contribution to the Church, and, in an era of falling vocations, to try to equip the monastery for the modern age. In this, Abbot Stephen, as he was known, was considered to be courageous and forward-looking, presiding over a series of wide consultations.

His advice and guidance were sought by many Catholic schools and religious communities finding themselves in similar situations. He was a governor of several Catholic schools, and he was constantly in demand as a retreat giver, particularly to Benedictine communities, many of whom were facing uncertain futures.

While every Benedictine monastery is independent, there is an umbrella body that oversees the English Benedictine Congregation, and Abbot Stephen was twice elected as First Assistant to the Abbot President.



As part of his duties, he was Visitor to monastic communities which had fallen into crisis.

Though often called out of the monastery, he was also assiduous in overseeing the welfare of its community and looking after its fabric, engaging in several building projects. The church of Worth Abbey and its attendant buildings, situated near Crawley in the north Downs, is an austere, modern, but very attractive complex, in part thanks to him.

On his retirement as Abbot, in 2002, after another sabbatical, Ortiger was appointed assistant chaplain at Fisher House in Cambridge. He was there for three and half years, in his old university, ministering to undergraduates and dons alike, before returning to the monastery and taking up the position of Episcopal Vicar for Religious Life in the local Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, liaising with all the religious orders working in the diocese.

As a retired headmaster, he was still much in demand speaking to conferences of headteachers, as well as later helping with the training of lay chaplains in Catholic schools in Surrey and Sussex. He was also a fixture on the annual diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes, where he became well known to many; despite his vast acquaintanceship, he never forgot a name or a face.

One of Ortiger's greatest gifts was his natural rapport with people of all ages, especially the young. His friendly and anecdotal style of preaching and instruction was much loved. He was a man of prayer, as befitted a monk; his evident and guileless sincerity won him many friends; and his spiritual guidance was much sought after and appreciated.

In 2019, he was engaged more or less full-time in helping out in the large parish of Bexhill-on-Sea. The next year, despite having passed his 80th birthday, he was made priest in charge at Our Lady Star of the Sea in East Preston, West Sussex, which was to be his last job.

In late 2023, he had a hip replacement; there were complications, and in mid-January terminal cancer was diagnosed.

A week before his death Stephen Ortiger had sent a serene and affectionate message to his friends, ending with the words: "Please keep me in your prayers. I have always believed in and relied on the inexhaustible mercy and love of God, now and always."

By kind permission of The Telegraph

From the Abbot President's Diary...

March 2– 5

Canonical Visitation of St Anselm's Abbey
Washington DC.



March 11– 14

Canonical Visitation at the Abbey of Our Lady,
Queen of Peace, and Pope St. Gregory the Great
in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, U.S.



July 5

Feast of Our Lady of Consolation, patron of
the monastery since 1623) 400th Anniversary
and Mass held for the founding of Stanbrook
Abbey with Monastic Communities and Local
Religious



July 15– 19

Conference of the Continuing Formation
Commission of the EBC held at Buckfast
Abbey, titled "Is This the Road that Leads to
Life? Thinking differently about change."



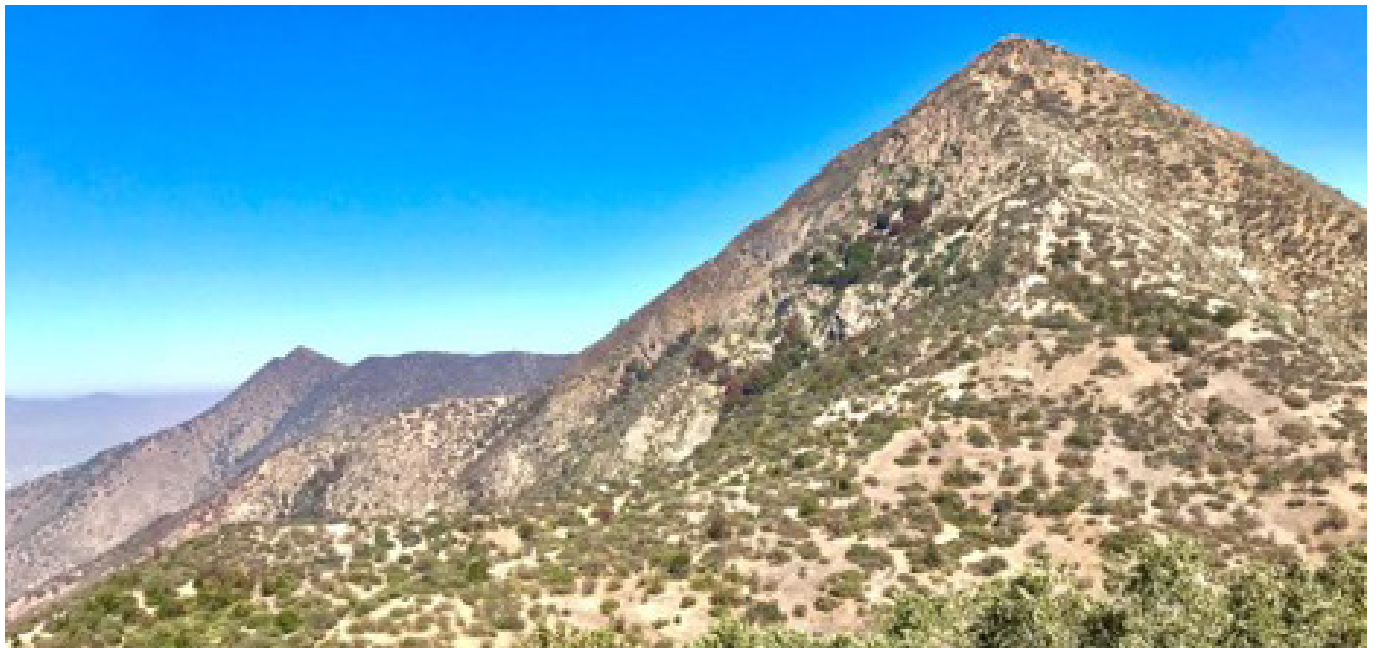
September 6 – 20

Quadrennial Abbots' Congress at Sant'
Anselmo, Rome



Photo St. Benedict's old cell

Please submit photographs of your monastery for inclusion in future issues



Gnomic Verses

by William Blake

This photo and on the previous pages are of Manquehue Mountain in the Chilean Andes near Santiago de Chile, from which the Manquehue Apostolic Movement takes its name.

Great things are done when men and mountains meet;
This is not done by jostling in the street.
They said this mystery shall never cease:
The priest promotes war, and the soldier peace.
He has observed the golden rule
Till he's become the golden fool.
Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair;
But Desire gratified
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.
The sword sang on the barren heath,
The sickle in the fruitful field:
The sword he sang a song of death,
But could not make the sickle yield.
The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said, "Little creature, formed of joy and mirth,
Go, love without the help of anything on earth."



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