

Douai Oblate

May 2007 No 28

International Network

First International Meeting of Benedictine Oblates, Lay Cistercians and Cistercian Oblates at the Cistercian Monastery, Stiepel, Germany, March 29 - April 2, 2007

Following the first Oblates Congress in Rome, an international meeting of delegates has been held. Zina Neagle was one of the three UK representatives.

This 5-day international meeting of delegates, initiated by Gabriele Franziska Heitfeld-Panther, who was co-ordinator of the German-speaking delegates at the First World Congress of Benedictine Oblates in Rome in 2005, has begun the work of building an international network amongst Benedictine Oblates, Cistercian Oblates and Lay Cistercians from five European countries. Delegates from Spain, Italy, Great Britain and Ireland, Belgium and Germany met in the Cistercian Monastery of Stiepel, near Bochum in Germany, for a five day conference over Palm Sunday weekend. The theme of the conference was: Benedictine Oblates, Lay Cistercians and Cistercian Oblates – ways to live out the Christian faith and our mission in the world.

The idea for this conference had arisen from the ambiguous situation in which Cistercian Oblates find themselves. Lacking their own structures, they are associated partly with organisations of Benedictine Oblates (the Working Party of Benedictine Oblates in Germany, for instance, and International Benedictine Oblates) and partly with those of the Lay Cistercians (International Lay Cistercians, who receive support and recognition so far only from

Cistercians of the Strict Observance, the Trappists). Contacts with both Benedictines and Trappists had taken place at international level and demonstrated that there was much common ground and not only that an exchange of ideas could be fruitful but also that the international aspect was very important.

Amongst the participants in the international conference were two members of the co-ordination team for the Benedictine World Congresses in Rome in 2005 and 2009, Pater Luigi Bertocchi OSB and Georgio Marte, from Italy, as well as a representative of the Commission for International Lay Cistercians, Tina Parayre, from Spain.

A full programme of reports, talks, discussions and outings led to an intensive exchange of ideas. At the heart of the conference, lending it its meaning, was the Eucharist. The days were structured around the celebration of the Liturgy, sharing in the Divine Office and daily celebration of the Eucharist.

Reports from individual countries made it clear that there are differences in the ways in which Oblates connect with each other. In the UK, Oblates have, since the World Congress in Rome, a national forum which will enable Oblates to meet on a regional and national level. Delegates from Great Britain and Ireland showed great interest in the possibility of further international co-operation. Preparation for Oblation in UK monasteries and ongoing

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Oblate formation are clearly considered very important. In Germany, on the other hand, the whole idea of an Oblate 'novitiate' and the formation of Oblate 'communities' is still under discussion. In all countries the number of Oblates, and particularly slightly younger Oblates, has increased.

Papers, delivered in English, emphasised the essential elements of the Oblate way of life. Mgr Richard Moth Obl OSB (Pluscarden) spoke about oblation as a vocation, whatever one's state in life: the call to prefer nothing to the love of Christ, in whatever concrete circumstances one finds oneself. Oblates are monastics, whether Benedictine or Cistercian. Becoming an Oblate does not alter our status in the Church, but it does affect the way in which we live out our role in life. Tina Paraye ILC gave a paper in which she spoke of the profound unity between contemplation and action in the life of a person who lives in the world contemplatively, nourished by prayer, lectio divina and the Eucharist. Pater Luigi OSB spoke of the place in which lectio divina must ultimately take root – namely the heart. He illustrated 'Listening with one's whole heart' (or indeed with fourteen hearts!), and '*conversatio morum*', the life-long process of turning one's life towards God, with memorable Japanese symbols. Gabriele Heitfeld-Panther Obl O.Cist. spoke about the mission of Oblates in the Church and in today's world. Those who share their path with Christ become in themselves a sign, an invitation to those seeking God. Other topics discussed were our response as Oblates to the specific needs of our times, the question of Oblate 'identity' and 'role', both within the Church and in relation to the Orders, and the lack of Oblate structures in some countries.

The most important thing initially was to recognise our common roots and aims. Future meetings would usefully, participants, agreed, focus on ways to bear witness to these. What is it about our lives which makes clear the source from which we are nourished and by which we live? To live in accordance with our vocation means to express in our lives the joy of 'preferring nothing to the love of Christ'. To spread the message of this joy requires the use of modern media to enable communication both with one another and with the 'outside world', as well as work at Parish level and the

production of good Benedictine literature.

The conference proceedings are to be drawn together by Mgr Richard Moth in a booklet. A common statement composed by delegates at the conclusion of the meeting has already been sent to the Abbot Primate OSB and the two Abbots General OCSO and OCist.

In these few days participants were enabled to grow into a real community by participation in the Eucharist, as well as through discussion and listening. Thus it was felt that the foundations had been laid for an active network between the participating countries, hopefully in the future including others as well. Delegates saw possibilities not only for fruitful exchange within Europe, but on a wider international level, particularly in contact with those countries where Oblates lack structures for communication.

The general impression was that participants felt strengthened by these shared days, both in the joy of Christ and in their personal vocation as Oblates of their own monasteries. They returned home having experienced a common movement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict, but also with a sense of the need for prayer and patience, particularly for those whose attempt to live in the world, yet as Christians with a vocation to monastic spirituality, still meets with a certain lack of understanding. We pray for a fruitful dialogue between Orders and Oblates in the vineyard of the Lord, for the Church and the world of tomorrow.

The way in which we follow our vocation to live a life of monastic spirituality and express this in our life in the world is our chance to bear witness and thus affect society. We look forward to the next two important meetings – in 2008 the 4th International Conference of Lay Cistercians, in Huerta, Spain, with the theme: Maria – Rabbuni, and in 2009 the Second World Congress of Benedictine Oblates, in Rome. The theme of this Congress will be: The religious demands of our times – the Benedictine answer.

By Gabriele Franziska Heitfeld-Panther Obl OCIST, translated from the German by Mary Cockroft Obl OSB. ◇

St Hilda of Whitby 614 - 680

Seventh century Britain into which Hilda was born, was a land filled with violence, feuding and intrigue, not unlike the Italy of St Benedict in the previous century. Hilda was of noble blood, and lived her early life at the court of her great uncle, the pagan King Edwin of Northumbria, who married a Christian, Ethelburga, daughter of the king of Kent. Her chaplain was the Roman, Paulinus. After an attempt on his life was foiled, the king, with members of the court, including Hilda, were baptised at Easter 627 in York. Shortly afterwards Edwin was killed and Northumbria was ravaged and relapsed into paganism. Eventually Oswald became king and sent to Iona for a bishop, Aidan, who established his see at Lindisfarne.

Hilda now learned the practices of Celtic Christianity from Aidan, having previously experienced Roman ways from Paulinus.

Hilda's sister, Hereswith, went to Gaul to enter a monastery at Chelles, there being no monasteries for women at that time in Britain. Hilda planned to follow her and got as far as East Anglia where she tallied a year. Bishop Aidan recalled her to Northumbria and gave her a plot of land on the bank of the river Wear to establish a monastery with a few companions. Aidan made her abbess the following year in Hartlepool and she ruled that little monastery from 647 until 655, under his influence.

During these years the country was far from peaceful, King Oswald had been killed in battle in 642, his successor Oswin was murdered by his brother Oswy, which led to St Aidan's death. In 655 Oswy was heavily outnumbered in battle near Leeds, but promised to establishing twelve monasteries and send his daughter, aged one, to become a nun if, against all the odds, he succeeded. He did, and true to his promise he entrusted the one year old, Eanfleda to Hilda, and gave her land to establish a monastery on high cliffs near Whitby, an unusual site for a monastery. Dame Ethelreda Hession writes "The choice of this site in preference to a fold in the moors by a running stream would seem to indicate that Hilda was a woman of freedom and breadth of spirit who looked for no shelter from the storms of life, but opened herself to the power of God."¹

Whitby was a double monastery, containing monks and nuns. The remains of two churches, one for monks and one for nuns, have been found at the site.

Hilda became renowned for her teaching and her organisational powers. It is unlikely that she knew the Rule of St Benedict, probably following the rule and customs of Iona which she had learned from St Aidan. Five of her monks became bishops. She encouraged Caedmon, to become a monk and to use his talents to turn scripture into song, as a practical and effective method of evangelisation of the illiterate multitudes.

There were two liturgical and ecclesiastical traditions in Britain at this time, that of Rome, in Kent and Southern Ireland, and the Celtic tradition in northern Ireland and Scotland and Northern England, although in Northumbria both traditions were known, St Aidan having tolerated diversity. Matters came to a head after King Oswy who followed the Celtic tradition had married Queen Eanfleda who followed the Roman tradition. He was celebrating Easter while she was still engaged in her Lenten fast..

King Oswy summoned a synod in 663 to meet at the seven year old monastery at Whitby which was sufficiently large to host two kings, several bishops and an abbot, Wilfrid, who was the chief proponent of the Roman position; Bishop Colman of Lindisfarne being chief speaker for the Celtic position. King Oswy decided for the Roman position, which must have been a painful decision for Hilda.

In 670 King Oswy died an unusual death for those days, from sickness rather than by violence. His widow, Eanfleda joined her daughter under Hilda at Whitby; later they became joint abbesses.

During her last six years, Hilda was frequently sick, but she continued to teach her community in her two roomed cell. She died on November 17, 680, after receiving viaticum and summoning all her nuns, encouraging them to keep living in peace.

In her day, Hilda's influence was immense, many came to hear her teaching and seek her advice. Her cult must have started soon after her death since she is included in a ninth century calendar of St Willibrod.

Whitby was destroyed by the Danes c860, but Hilda's remains were translated to Glastonbury. Her cult remained strong in the north especially after the restoration of Whitby in the eleventh century.◊

¹ In *Benedict's Disciples* ed David Farmer, Leominster 1980 p 77

Notes and News

Oblation

On December 9 at Conventual Mass Patricia Ferguson made oblation, taking the name of St Joan of Arc.

Oblate Novices

The following have become oblate novices: Evelyn Nicholson from our parish at Kemerton on December 13; David Rees on April 21; Inge O'Toole and Beverley Olsen on May 15.

Please pray for

Tesse Maurus Vaughan who is in hospital; Paul Bartlett who is seriously from cancer and June, his wife who has had a stroke and is frail; Joy Nye's unborn twin grand children who are carrying the 'Junctional Herlitz' fatal strain of EB, from which baby Mia died. ◇

New Buildings

The old guesthouse and conference rooms have been called the Bl Hugh Faringdon building, the new building is called St Alban Roe, and the old monastery the St Benet Biscop building.

Some of the oblates have experienced the new guest rooms at recent retreats, and at the May retreat we used the new conference room in the St Alban Row building. In five or six weeks time the first stage of the refurbishment of the former monks rooms will be completed and these will be available for visitors so hopefully we shall not have to limit numbers of oblates attending retreats.

There is a consensus that the new building has been finished to a very high standard. The lift which gives access to the rooms in both Alban Roe and, soon, Benet Biscop buildings has been found a particular boon for those who are not as young as they once were. ◇

Future Retreats

Fri 22 - Sun 24 June 2007
Tues 10 - Thurs 12 July 2007
Fri 28 - Sun 30 September 2007
Mon 22 - Wed 24 October 2007
Mon 3 - Wed 5 December 2007
Fri 14 - Sun 16 December 2007.

Next Year

Mon 3 - Wed 5 March 2008
Fri 18 - Sun 20 April 2008
Mon 16 - Wed 18 June 2008
Fri 11 - Sun 13 July 2008
Fri 26 - Sun 28 September 2008
Mon 27 - Wed 29 October 2008
Mon 1 - Wed 3 December 2008
Fri 12 - Sun 14 December 2008

The Benedictine Way

The nuns of Turvey asked us to include information about *The Benedictine Way*. It is a weekend, 19 - 21 October 2007 designed for Benedictine Oblates at Turvey Abbey, Beds.

It provides the opportunity to discover wholeness and balance through the riches of Benedictine spirituality and prayer. It will seek ways of integrating the insights and practices of Benedictine spirituality into daily life through exploring the wisdom of the Rule.

The cost will be £85, including £25 non-returnable deposit, payable at the time of booking. To book, or for more information please contact:

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