

# Douai Oblate

January 2008 No 29

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## *Editorial*

First, a very happy New Year to all our oblates. It is a long time since our last Newsletter appeared last May, for which I apologise. Pressure of work during the autumn term prevented it from appearing. A lot has happened during these last few months. Sadly, Tess Maurus Vaughan died in August, and we publish her obituary in this issue. She was a devoted oblate and member of the Wulfstan chapter.

Several oblates have been unwell at different times during the past few months, and we have tried to keep you abreast with requests for prayers. This is a sure way in which oblates can support one another. As many as on email receive the news by that medium, and for those who do not have this facility, we are grateful to Ali Godric Wrigley for mailing you.

## *Oblates Congress*

The second international Oblates Congress will take place in Rome in September next year. A lot of preparatory work is going on both internationally and here in Britain. There is a committee which, at the request of the Abbot Primate's secretariat, had been gathering data from each monastery. So, for the first time, we are beginning to learn how many oblates there are in the country. This informa-

tion is necessary so that each monastery may be allotted an appropriate number of places. Similar work is happening in other countries. The central committee in Rome will apportion the number of places available to each nation, then the national committee will know how many places each monastery may have.

As soon as we know how many are allotted to Douai, we will be inviting applications, and, if necessary, a ballot will be held, as last time.

## *Retreat*

In June a meeting of Oblate Directors was held at Douai. One of the outcomes of that meeting was a proposal to hold a retreat which will be open to oblates of all the houses. We decided to hold that retreat at Douai and to run it twice, at midweek and weekend in December. The retreat will be given by Mgr Richard Moth, who is an oblate of Pluscarden, Scotland. Full information and a booking form are available on the back page. Please apply if you would like to take part. If there are more applicants than places available we may select in order to ensure that each monastery is represented, and in our own case, that each chapter is represented. This retreat will replace our normal December retreat.

*Continued at the foot of the next page*

## New Benedictine Books

**T**he stream of Benedictine books shows no sign of slowing up, neither those concerned with putting the principles of Benedictine spirituality into practice in today's world, both by monastics and by oblates, nor those dealing with monasticism from the point of view of an historian. I have recently finished reading *Monastic Hospitality – The Benedictines in England c1070 – v 1250*<sup>1</sup> an account of the organisation and buildings required for the reception of monastic guests at Abingdon, Bury St Edmunds, Christ Church, Canterbury, and St Albans. The subject of this highly interesting book is very limited geographically and time-wise, which only goes to show the amount of interest there is in the details of monastic living both in the past as well as the present. Is this a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit? God works in mysterious ways.

As the number of oblates grows among Christians of all persuasions there are probably as many books written by non-Catholics as by Catholics. Dennis Okham, an ordained Presbyterian minister coming from a Pentecostal and Baptist background is just the latest in a long line of non-Catholic authors, writing from personal lived experience of using the Rule of St Benedict as their way of life.

Although his book is addressed directly to Protestants, *'onk Habits for Everyday people –*

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*Editorial continued*

### *Oblates Handbook*

You will remember that we have talked about this in the past and some of you have contributed articles. At last it is gathering momentum and it should be published this autumn.

### *Douai Oblates Directory*

A new edition should reach you with this Newsletter.

### *Email address*

We have a new address set up exclusively for the use of oblates.

[douaioblate@aol.com](mailto:douaioblate@aol.com) ◇

*Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants.*<sup>ii</sup> I highly recommend it for Catholics too. This is just one more illustration of the fact that St Benedict preceded all the major splits in Christendom, his rule is pure basic Christianity, and can appeal to any baptised person. As Okham writes "In the end the goal of the Protestant and the Benedictine is the same: to seek God. To the question 'Do you seek God?' an affirmative answer is the only *essential* requirement for becoming a Benedictine novice."

Okholm writes from experience of many years living by the Rule; he is an oblate of Blue Cloud Abbey, South Dakota. The approach is simple and direct and illustrated with examples from experience. Here is an example from the chapter on stability: "Modern-day gyrovagues believe the grass is greener 'over there'. The grass is greener in another marriage, another church, another house, another job. The trouble is, once we wander over to the other pasture we usually find out the hue is about the same. But it's not just the hue that remains the same; *we* remain the same. Conversion and growth in character happen when we remain, not when we run."

For Lent reading I suggest *Pilgrim Road, A Benedictine Journey Through Lent* by Albert Holtz OSB.<sup>iii</sup> The book is the fruit of a yearlong sabbatical that Holtz spent travelling. He devotes a short chapter for each day of Lent situated on his experience in a particular place. For example, the reflection for the Thursday after Ash Wednesday is inspired by a journey he made on Eurostar from Paris to London on a winter's day. The train was stopped by a signal in the suburbs of South London, from the window Albert Holtz espied an old man digging his garden, and this leads him to reflect on the contrast between gardening and the high speed train, and what it can teach us about patience, as well as how we should tend our life like a garden.

Albert has a great gift of description and enabling the readers to experience the scene he is describing, and the lesson he draws from

it.

Another example: the Saturday of the first week in Lent has a description of a chamber concert in the church of Saint Julien le Pauvre in Paris. We share with him the performance in this Gothic church, now used by the Greek Melkite church, so that a brightly painted iconostasis has been installed across the sanctuary. We have a description of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* and of the musicians playing. The author muses about the musicians, and shows us the difference between a live performance and an artificial one on CD – minor imperfections in the playing, this becomes a lesson for us to get away from perfectionism and accept our humanity.

The author uses the great variety of scenes he sees to bring out ‘new things and old’ for our edification, like the mediæval statue of Our Lady bathing her baby – you will have to read the book to find out where this is.

This is a gentle book offering a gentle approach to Lent, reflecting on real life situations. It would be a good companion for the days of Lent and it can be dipped into other days as well.

*St Benedict's Toolbox, the Nuts and Bolts of everyday Benedictine Living*<sup>iv</sup> is another useful book. It is by an Episcopal priest, Jane Tomain. She wrote it as part of a doctoral requirement when she organised a ‘Benedictine Season’ for her parish. “We were convinced that the Rule had something important to say, especially to those of us who led frantic, fast-paced lives.”

The chapters of the book cover the main themes of the Rule, Lectio, Obedience, Stability, Conversion of Life, Praying the Office, Hospitality. At the end of each chapter you find the tool box, containing the tools that can be used to apply the particular topic, so for instance the tools for hospitality are (i) becoming an instrument of God's peace, (ii) putting hospitality into practice to those who are near (iii) to those who are far, (iv) to the earth, (v) hospitality in the family, (vi) practicing forgiveness. Instructions are provided how to use the tools and make

them work.

This is a novel approach to using the Rule of St Benedict and one which will be useful to every oblate.

A worthwhile book for those whom it concerns is *Beginning Again, Benedictine Wisdom for Living with Illness*<sup>v</sup>. Mary Earle suffered from chronic illness and she uses her own life experience to suggest how illness can be turned into something positive. With or after a serious illness one has to ‘begin again’, one cannot continue living as before. A rule of life is essential, and the Rule of Benedict can be an excellent guide for setting it up. Listening for the voice of God is essential, one has to be ever mindful of the presence of God and see the hand of Christ in everything. Especially in the words of St Benedict one has to keep death constantly before one's eyes. The disciple of St Benedict can have no place for the contemporary secular idea of ‘sweeping death under the carpet’.

This is a simple book, it does not make great demands on the reader. Each chapter concludes by suggesting some ideas for discussion and a prayer. Highly recommended for anyone who has a serious or long term illness and for their carers. ◇

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<sup>i</sup> *Monastic Hospitality. The Benedictines in England c1070 – c 1250. Julie Kerr. Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge 2007. ISBN 1-84383-326-0*

<sup>ii</sup> *Monk Habits for Everyday People – Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants. Dennis Okham. Brazos Press Grand Rapids MI 2007 ISBN 1-58743-185-8*

<sup>iii</sup> *Pilgrim Road, A Benedictine Journey Through Lent' by Albert Holtz OSB. Morehouse Publishing. Harrisburg PA, London 2006 ISBN 0-8192-2251-0*

<sup>iv</sup> *St Benedict's Toolbox. The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living. Jane Tomain. Morehouse. Harrisburg PA, London 2005 ISBN 0-8192-2152-X*

<sup>v</sup> *Beginning Again. Benedictine Wisdom for Living with Illness. Mary C Earle. Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg PA, London 2004 ISBN 0-8192-1965-7 ◇*

## NEW AGE OBLATES

by Simon Bryden-Brook Obl OSB

I was struck recently by some words written by that popular writer and speaker, the missionary priest Adrian Smith:

The phrase 'Kingdom of God' as an expression of the vision of Jesus, has lost its appeal to us of the western world in the twenty-first century. The word 'kingdom' conjures up images of knights and castles and implies a masculine God. Since Jesus was not speaking of a geographical location, a happier expression might be the 'Reign of God,' or had he been employing today's language he might have spoken instead of the Christ Age, or the Age of Universality, or the New Civilisation of Love, all of which are more meaningful expressions where there are few kingdoms remaining.<sup>1</sup>

Our own Joan Chittister has written of the Rule of Benedict:

Benedictine spirituality is the spirituality of the twenty-first century because it deals with the issues facing us now – stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, prayer, and spiritual and psychological development.<sup>2</sup>

Oblates know that the way we deal with these daily issues is first by *listening*. Joan Chittister tells an amusing ancient story from another ancient tradition:

'Where shall I look for enlightenment?'  
'Here.' The Holy One said.  
'When will it happen?'  
'It's happening right now,' the Holy One said.  
'Then why don't I experience it?'  
'Because you do not look,' the Holy One said.  
'What should I look for?'  
'Nothing,' the Holy one said. 'Just look.'  
'At what?'  
'Anything your eyes alight upon,' the Holy One said.

'Must I look in a special kind of way?'  
'No,' the Holy One said. 'The ordinary way will do.'  
'But don't I always look the ordinary way?'  
'No,' said the Holy One. 'You don't.'  
'Why ever not?' the disciple demanded.  
'Because to look you must be here,' the Holy One said. 'You're mostly somewhere else.'<sup>3</sup>

Coming to the monastery on an oblate retreat or for a visit, we are able for a moment to share that contemplative mental attitude of the monastic and just look and listen. Then we may begin to understand more what the Vision of Jesus was and is and what it means for us today; Benedict speaks of his 'little Rule' as a means of bringing the faithful disciple back to God. 'Listen!' he says, but only 'if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience do battle for Jesus, the Christ.'<sup>4</sup>

We could do worse by looking and listening once more to that central prayer of the Christian, the model prayer composed by Jesus himself for his followers.<sup>5</sup> To help us look at this most familiar of prayers anew, let us use a modern translation.<sup>6</sup>

Loving God, here and everywhere,  
help us to proclaim your values  
and bring in your New World.

Just as Adrian Smith suggests that the word 'kingdom' carries a lot of baggage for us today, so the word 'heaven' needs examining ('who art in heaven' or 'here and everywhere'). Jesus was keen that God's Rule should be proclaimed now and on earth, indeed he insisted that the Rule of God has both been inaugurated and is to come. So we have his prayer, our prayer, that we bring about this Rule of God, this heaven on earth. This is the obedience to God's will which Jesus calls for; 'Thy will be done – thy kingdom come!'

Saturday Vespers reminds us of this with the very first psalm antiphon, taken from the first psalm that evening:

Your rule is a rule for all the ages.<sup>7</sup>

The Grail version translates this verse from the psalm as:

Yours is an everlasting kingdom;  
Your rule lasts from age to age.

The whole of psalm 144<sup>8</sup> is a reflection on the Rule of God, to which Jesus gave so much priority. A careful study of the text indicates the characteristics of this Rule – kindness, compassion, unstinting love, faithfulness, justice and peace. These are words that occur throughout the psalms to indicate what sort of relationships we are expected to have – with God and with our neighbours.

It has been pointed out<sup>9</sup> that Ps 144 [145] contains many of the elements of the Our Father: the sanctification of God's name (Heb 145: 1, 2, 21), the coming of the Kingdom (11, 13), the giving of daily bread (15-16) and help against temptation (14). Like the psalms, this prayer of Jesus' 'expresses two particular cries of the human heart: the one a prayer of praise ("hallowed by thy name"); the other, a cry for help, a supplication.<sup>10</sup> So the rest of the Our Father looks at our needs and asks:

Supply us our day-to-day needs.  
Forgive us for wounding you, while we  
forgive those who wound us.  
Give us courage to meet life's trials and  
deal with evil's power.

Here too the first psalm at Saturday vespers shows us how God supplies the needs of those who look to him:

The Lord supports all who fall  
and raises all who are bowed down.  
The eyes of all creatures look to you  
and you give them their food in due  
time.  
You open wide your hand  
and grant the desires of all who live.

The psalmist's cry is taken up in the next psalm at Saturday vespers<sup>11</sup>:

It is he who keeps faith for ever,  
who is just to those who are oppressed.  
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,  
the Lord, who sets prisoners free,

the Lord who gives sight to the blind,  
who raises up those who are bowed  
down,  
the Lord, who protects the stranger  
and upholds the widow and orphan.

The following two psalms<sup>12</sup> continue the theme of a God who is faithful to his people and who maintains the world. They are very rich and bear deep and careful study.

The Our Father, however, does proceed beyond the Jewish tradition in two ways.<sup>13</sup> First, God is addressed as 'Father' and this is to become standard in Christian prayer. Second, it is an innovation for Jesus to insist on the explicit requirement that we forgive those who have hurt us. The psalms often speak of the forgiveness we hope for from God but never the forgiveness we are to show others. Nevertheless, this demand of Jesus' is in the tradition of those calls upon us to 'be holy as God is holy'<sup>14</sup> – to 'be compassionate as God is compassionate'<sup>15</sup> and ultimately to 'be perfect as God is perfect'.<sup>16</sup>

Does it seem odd that these profoundly Jewish prayers, sung now for three thousand years from the tenth century before the coming of Jesus the Christ are still seen as valid in the third millennium, the New Age? They were the prayers of Jesus, as we see from our brief examination of the Our Father, and so they must be our prayers too.

We see also how their themes were ecstatically taken up by Mary, Mother of Jesus, in the gospel canticle which is sung every night towards the end of Vespers. Let us again use a modern translation to enable us to look at it afresh:

I sense the greatness of God  
who makes my joy complete;  
God smiled at me and asked my help,  
and everyone will dance with glee  
at the wonderful thing happening to me.  
What a God!  
In every age God aids the good,  
upsetting the plans of the arrogant:  
see how the powerful fall off their  
perches!  
Honour for the modest, a banquet for

the hungry;  
The rich get nothing and slink away!  
God keeps promises to friends and companions –

Abraham, Sarah, and their like today.<sup>17</sup>

Any translation of the Magnificat must fail to convey the riches of this great Christian canticle, composed in the tradition of the psalms. Several scholars maintain that behind the Greek text found in the Gospel of Luke there lies a Hebrew original. This text has been reconstructed<sup>18</sup> and shows a remarkable unity and many of the skilful artifices used by the composers of the traditional psalms. There are interesting links, for example, between the Hebrew words for 'lowly handmaid' (Lk 2; 48) and 'his servant' Israel (54) which make Jesus the incarnation of Israel and links the mystery of the Incarnation with that of the mystery of the People of God. Throughout the Magnificat too, in its reconstructed Hebrew form, there are many references and typically Hebrew verbal allusions to God's 'power', peaking in verse 51:

He has shown the power of his arm.  
He has routed the proud of heart.

This vision of the Rule of God is the great tradition of the Jewish religion which Jesus has passed on to us. He developed two great insights. First, God is an inclusive God and welcomes the nations, as indeed at various stages in the history of Israel the prophets and psalmists foresaw; God can no longer be understood as the jealous tribal God of the Jews alone.

Second, Jesus calls his followers to be proactive in proclaiming the Rule of God, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, sheltering the refugee, visiting the sick and those in prison and providing clothing for the poor.<sup>19</sup> Faithful to the development of Christian thought that followed Jesus' death and resurrection, we must go further; we are both to recognise the Divine in the Humanity of others (the Incarnation) and to reveal the Divine in our own Humanity (the Resurrection, the Mystical Body of Christ).

This surely then is our calling as oblates in this wonderful New Age proclaimed by Jesus, sharing in his priestly work of succouring the

world and manifesting the unbounded love of God for all his creatures. The world after the Resurrection of Jesus is dominated by the Risen Christ, into whom we are incorporated by baptism and whose presence as the Body of Christ we are called to be. Let us do his work!

Yours is an everlasting kingdom  
Your rule lasts from age to age. ◇

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- 1 Adrian B Smith, *Tomorrow's Christian*, (Winchester & NY: O Books, 2005) p 6
  - 2 Joan Chittister OSB, *The Rule of Benedict – Insights for the Ages*, (NY: Crossroad, 1992) p 15
  - 3 Chittister op cit p 178 (RB 72, Good Zeal)
  - 4 RB Prologue
  - 5 Matthew 6; 9-13 and Luke 11; 2-4. Even the sceptical Jewish scripture scholar Professor Geza Vermes has no doubt that this prayer were composed by Jesus himself, unlike much else piously put into his mouth by the evangelists. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*, (London Penguin, 2003) pp 222 ff. Emeritus Professor of Jewish Studies at Oxford, Vermes is a noted scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a former Catholic priest.
  - 6 John Henson, *Good as New: a Radical Retelling of the Scriptures* [Alresford & NY: O Books, 2004] p 132
  - 7 'Regnum tuum, Domine, regnum omnium saeculorum'.
  - 8 145 in the Hebrew, the first half being the last psalm on Friday vespers and the second half the first psalm on Saturdays.
  - 9 Jean-Pierre Prévost, *A Short Dictionary of the Psalms* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997) p 47 f
  - 10 Prévost p 48
  - 11 145, 146 in the Hebrew.
  - 12 146 and 147 [both together forming 147 in the Hebrew version]
  - 13 Prévost loc cit
  - 14 Leviticus 19; 2 and elsewhere
  - 15 Or be 'merciful' Luke 6; 36
  - 16 Matthew 5; 48
  - 17 Henson op cit p 182
  - 18 Samuel Terrien, *The Magnificat- musicians as biblical interpreters* (NY/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1995) pp 6-10.
  - 19 Matthew 25: 31-46 and Psalm 145 [146] above. ◇

## Maurus Tess Vaughan “Tess”

*An Appreciation of her life as a Benedictine Oblate*

**T**ESS was enrolled as a novice in 1999 at St Gregory’s Church, Stratford on Avon and made final Oblation there on the March 21, 2000, the Feast of the Passing of St Benedict. She followed in the steps of David Crockett, one of the first Douai Oblates who had made final Oblation there in 1979.

The close link between the parish and St Gregory’s School, where Tess had taught, was her introduction to the Benedictine family. A past pupil of hers of 30 years ago, Henrietta Crockett, described Tess as warm, gentle and comforting with her soft Trinidadian voice, who made her classes fascinating and interesting. She made school days happy and unforgettable.

By the time that we met her, Tess was virtually housebound, and depended greatly on help from parishioners and faithful friends who were retired teachers like herself. Each day, Tess made a painful but purposeful struggle on crutches from her flat (linked to the Church) to the sanctuary where a special place was reserved for her. Her life was one of prayer and study and she greatly treasured her ongoing contact with Fr. Romuald and the “sacred space” material that he sent her.

In June 2003, when an oblate chapter was established in Alcester, Tess was delighted at the prospect of meeting other oblates. On September 11, 2003 in Stratford, the first meeting of our new chapter took place and we adopted Saint Wulfstan as our Benedictine patron. Of the meetings that followed over the next few years there are two that were highlights for Tess. In September 2004, Fr Gervase and Fr Francis came to lead us in a study of the psalms. Everyone was present including David’s wife Patti and we were received by Tess with true Benedictine hospitality and shared tea with her afterwards. The second

was in the following year when Tess needed help to reorganize her flat. A fall in July had led to a lengthy period of convalescence, so a working Chapter was called! Dick was computer technician; Peter, the furniture remover; Anna and Pam tea ladies; David, conductor together with Tess who had a quiet but firm way of directing an organizing other people! Her lovely sense of fun and humour kept us all going.

Over the last two years, Tess became increasingly unable to manage at home, even with help, and had long periods in Warwick and Stratford Hospitals before finally entering Alveston Leys Nursing home near Stratford. When Anna and I saw her in August she was very much at peace. In retrospect, she was ready to go when the time came. Her flat had been cleared and only a few treasured possessions remained with her. Meanwhile, Tess relished the idea of having the next meeting at Alveston and welcoming Fr.Gervase. This was never to be. Tess was admitted to Warwick Hospital after a stroke, waiting just long enough to see the priest before losing consciousness. She died on August 17, 2007, at the age of 83. Her funeral took place at Saint Gregory’s Church Stratford. Father Romuald was celebrant, Peter Griffiths was Deacon and all members of our Chapter were present. Tess who had organized her own funeral, had also indirectly organized that next meeting of the Wulfstan Chapter after all. May she now rest in peace.

*David Crockett Peter Griffiths Dick Donnison Anna Charles Pam Young* ◇

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## "The Oblate Vocation—Response to a Call

This retreat, guided by Mgr Richard Moth, oblate of Pluscarden Abbey is open to oblates from any Benedictine or Cistercian Monastery in the British Isles and will provide an opportunity for participants to explore the nature of the Oblate Vocation, including the place of Obedience, Stability and *Conversatio Morum* in the life of the Oblate

Monday December 1 - Wednesday 3  
or Friday December 12 to Sunday 14,

The recommended cost for the waged residential retreatants is £70. It is also possible to take part in the retreat by coming in each day, for which the recommended cost is £30.

### BOOKING FORM

Name .....

Address .....

..... Postcode .....

Phone ..... Email .....

I would like to take part Dec 1 - 3 residential  commuter

I would like to take part Dec 12 - 14 residential  commuter

If there are insufficient places remaining on my preferred dates I would like to take part on the alternative date

Special dietary requirements .....

Please send this information to Fr Gervase at Douai by September 1. by post or by email to [douaiabbey@aol.com](mailto:douaiabbey@aol.com)