

# Douai Oblate

May 2005 No 24

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## From the Oblate Director

**M**y apologies for the lateness of this issue; it should have appeared during February, but as Easter was very early I was busy getting *The Douai Magazine* and *Douai Abbey Newsletter* out in time, and I was also working on a course on *Prophets & Prophecy* for the University of Reading as well as one on the *Psalms* for our novices together with those of Farnborough Abbey and the Salesian novices.

### *Oblates Handbook*

Since the last issue, there have been a couple of meetings of the Oblate Directors steering committee for the Oblates Handbook. This is being co-published by Canterbury Press in England and the Liturgical Press in the United States. Thank you to those who have suggested topics for articles. At present the book looks set to appear by June 2007.

### *Rome Congress*

The international Oblates Congress is due to take place in September. In the end more places were made available for Britain than was at first proposed, and so three of our oblates will now be going, Zina Neagle, Ali Wrigley and Sylvia Parkes. We look forward to hearing their accounts when they return and hope they will contribute a report for the *Douai Oblate*. We are grateful to Simon Bryden Brook who has kindly acted as national

coordinator on behalf of all the oblates and oblates directors of the country. Because of the independent nature of Benedictine monasteries it is very difficult for members of different communities who normally do not meet each other to organise together, so this has been no easy task.

### *Douai Oblates Day*

You will have received information separately about this event on July 9. I would encourage as many as possible to come, and express the thanks of all us to the organising committee: Jim O'Mara, Simon Bryden-Brook, Mary Macauley & Zina Neagle.

### *'Time'*

Some recent correspondence on the Oblates Forum has raised issues that may interest some of our oblates; the whole question of 'time'. It began with a lady lamenting that she didn't have enough time to be an oblate.

"I am a single parent to a toddler, I almost burst into tears because I thought oblation would be something for me, but I see I can't make the commitment. I get up every morning at 5am just so I can have a sit down breakfast with my son before I drive one hour to drop him off & head to work. At the end of the day we get home at 6.30,

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*Benedictine Saint*

# St Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm was born in 1033 at Aosta, an Alpine town in Burgundy. His mother, Ermenberga, to whom he was very close died while he was a young man. He did not get on with his father, Gundulph, a spendthrift, undisciplined nobleman from Lombardy, who wanted him to join him in business, whereas his leanings were towards scholarship, so he went to live with his mother's family near Vienne and then on to Normandy to study with Lanfranc.

## *Lanfranc & Bec*

Lanfranc, a native of Pavia, was well known as a teacher of law, grammar and logic, first in his own city and then in Normandy. While there he became a monk at Bec. Bec had been founded in 1034 by Herluin, a knight who abandoned his career at the court of Brionne after twenty years in order to serve God. Finding that every community he visited had low standards, he, with a group of followers set up a new monastery, under the Rule of St Benedict, which after a few years settled at *Le Bec*. It was the austerity and poverty of this small community that attracted Lanfranc.

Paradoxically in order to help alleviate the poverty of the monastery Abbot Herluin asked Lanfranc, whom he made prior, to take pupils; thus it soon became a centre of learning as well as holiness. It was here, after a period as a student, that Anselm, inspired by Lanfranc's life as a monk became a novice about 1060.

Wondering whether to stay, join Cluny or become a hermit, Lanfranc took him to consult Maurilus, archbishop of Rouen, who advised him to stay at Bec.

In 1063 Lanfranc was sent to be abbot of a new community, established by Duke William of Normandy, St Stephen's at Caen. Anselm was made prior and on the death of Herluin in 1078 was elected abbot. He was a good father to his monks, and kept in touch with his old teacher and guide, Lanfranc, who in 1070 had become Archbishop of Canterbury, Duke William having conquered England. He visited Lanfranc and stayed some time at Canterbury in 1079, whilst inspecting Bec's lands in England. Lanfranc died in 1089 and the see of Canterbury remained vacant for four years, William II seizing the revenues.

## *Canterbury*

In 1093, while Anselm was in England making a foundation of Bec at Chester, the king fell dangerously ill and asked Anselm to be archbishop, something the clergy had wanted on Lanfranc's death, and something Anselm was very reluctant to do. He said, "You are yoking an untamed bull and a weak old sheep to the same plough".

The root of the conflict was whether the king should control the church. Trouble soon broke out between the two; Anselm refused to accept the pallium, from the king and the king refused to allow him to go to Rome to receive it from the pope. Compromise was reached and Anselm took it himself from the altar in Canterbury Cathedral after it had been brought to England by a papal envoy. As abbot of Bec, Anselm had recognised Urban II as pope, but the king recognised anti-pope Wibert, this quarrel led to Anselm's first exile in 1097. William had refused Anselm's demands for a reform of the English church, nor would he let him go to Rome to discuss the matter with the pope. Anselm set off anyway and stayed in exile. It was only after William II's death while hunting in 1100, that Henry I called him back. However a new quarrel soon arose over investiture and another exile followed in 1103 which only ended in 1107 when a compromise was reached after Pope Paschal II urged Anselm to modify his stance. The result was that the church was allowed the right to investiture with the symbols of office while the king kept control of the choice of bishops.

Anselm remained in England for the rest of his life. He tried to impose a stricter celibacy on the clergy, he set up a new see in Ely, and he gained acceptance of the supremacy of Canterbury in Wales, Ireland and parts of Scotland, but not in York.

## *Writings*

It is by his writings that Anselm is best known today. Many of his works are still available in Pelican paperbacks. Anselm was an original thinker, and worked in a logical sequence. His first work was the treatise *De Grammatico* which was an introduction to logic. Then came

*Monologion*, a monologue written at the request of his monks at Bec. He wrote, "Certain brothers have insisted in urging me to write out for them, in the form of a meditation, a number of things which I had discussed in non-technical terms with them regarding meditating on the Divine Being and related topics." They wanted the work to contain clear logical arguments for the existence of God not supported by quotations from the bible or the fathers, the very reason for which Lanfranc criticised it when he was asked to comment. This was really a new approach to theology, moving away from the traditional way based on the scriptures and using a purely logical argument. His next book was *Proslogion* which was in the form of an address to God. His first title for it had been *Fides quaerens intellectum* (faith in search of understanding), a phrase for which he is still well known today. The argument is that God is that greater than which nothing can be thought, so he must exist or he would not be greater than that which nothing can be thought. The work is couched in the language of prayer.

Besides these major works, there are extant over four hundred letters addressed to all kinds of people, kings, abbots, bishops, nobles male and female about their problems and responsibilities. Anselm had also written prayers, of which nineteen exist, expressive of the new spirituality being developed, meditating more on the humanity of Christ and on Our Lady. These prayers became increasingly popular and were influential and much copied during the Middle Ages.

After he became archbishop, Anselm of course, had less time for writing, although the periods of exile did provide opportunity. One of his later works, *Cur Deus Homo* (why God became Man) was completed during his first exile at the abbey of San Salvatore near Benevento in Italy. It takes the form of a dialogue with Boso, a monk of Bec who was spending some time at Canterbury. His theory of atonement is expressed in mediæval feudal terms which seem unpalatable today, but it is based on obedience, man's disobedience and Christ's perfect obedience. Before his death he was planning another book on the origin of the soul, which

did not come to fruition.

### *Monastic Leader*

As Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm also fulfilled the role of abbot to the community of Christchurch, the monastery attached to Canterbury Cathedral, which had been restored by Lanfranc after the disastrous fire of 1067. Lanfranc had found very few monks, but by bringing over some from Bec and elsewhere in Normandy and encouraging new recruits, had left a community of about a hundred. Besides rebuilding Canterbury in the latest Norman style and enclosing the monastery with a wall, a novelty in England, Lanfranc had also developed the library, with help from Anselm while still at Bec, so that when the latter came to Canterbury there was a strong flourishing monastic life.

Our information about this period comes largely from the writings of the Saxon historian monk of Canterbury, Eadmer who was also to become Anselm's biographer.

Anselm was always happiest when he was with his community at Christchurch. "Just as an owl is glad when she is in her hole with her chicks, so it is with me, for when I am with you, all is well with me, and this is the joy and consolation of my life." It was through his conversations that Eadmer learned the story of Anselm's early life. At first Anselm encouraged Eadmer's writing the biography, but later changed his mind and told Eadmer to destroy the parchment. Eadmer obeyed, but not until he had made another copy of his work, as he did not want "to loose altogether a work which I had put together with much labour".

Anselm died at the age of seventy-six at dawn on the Wednesday of Holy Week, April 21, 1109. It was Thomas Becket who first asked the pope to canonise Anselm in 1163. The pope referred the matter to a provincial council no record of which survives, but the feast was first recorded in a Canterbury calendar of 1165. A papal bull sent to Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1494 ratified the canonisation. He was made a doctor of the church in 1720. The cult was celebrated throughout Europe and Dante portrays Anselm in *Paradiso* as a minister of God's gift of reason. △

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and I make dinner, then he gets a bath. I am doing good only because I insist we don't watch TV in the evening after bath, we read and say our prayers at night ... at which point I fall asleep exhausted beside him at 9pm. I rarely have a quiet moment when I can read the bible. I squeeze in the rosary on my way to work & then from there my time runs out. I pray through the day, little prayers like God give me strength, or a couple of Hail Marys here & there. I feel defeated & it only confirms my doubts about not having called the director of oblation at the local abbey here." (Kat)

This brought some sensible replies: "If your life permits only minimal time for formal prayer ... then that is what you life permits. Don't forget that work is also prayer. I know first-hand how difficult single parenthood is, but God blesses that work as much, (perhaps more) than formal prayer. God is present in the laundry room as well as the chapel; God hears all the unarticulated prayers of a mother as well as the sung prayers of a nun. If you are mindful of the presence of God, it doesn't matter what you are doing, it's prayer. If you are seeking God and find that the Benedictine way can help you in that search, then your commitment will not be an empty one." (Cheryl)

"Let what you are doing become your prayer. What is prayer but a realization of God's presence in your life, that He is there, you are in his Presence!. Do everything knowing He is close to you, loving you!" (Joe)

"Could you take one minute in the morning and one in the evening to pray a psalm? That, in my opinion, while minimalist, is still in the realm of praying the office, as the office is at its core the praying of the psalter. Keep a small discipline such as this faithfully, and you will eventually find ways of expanding this ... perhaps another key would be memorization: find a prayer form

that includes a psalm and that you can learn by heart. That way, you can pray it as you do other things and needn't be holding a book. ... Whatever you do will be part of the universal chorus of praise to God, and when you cannot join in, the chorus of praying Church will carry you until you can." (Scott)

"I pray Morning Prayer while I wait for the iron to heat up and Evening Prayer before I leave the office. If I don't fall asleep on the couch with my daughter, I pray Night Prayer. In my life, my house is the monastery and I am the abbess. When I answer the phone at work, I'm the Porter. I practice Benedictine hospitality when I meet with 'challenging people' .. and so on. ... Most important to me, I'm discovering that I love the Rule of Benedict as the path I walk everyday. And finally, I understand what true obedience is. It's all about listening for the Voice of God, and then moving forward.

The most valuable thing my Oblate Director told me was simply, 'Do what you can.'" (Holly)

I hope we can all learn from the wisdom in these extracts.

#### *Prayers*

Please pray for these who are sick:

June Bartlett, Peter Lattey, Dan & Helen O'Connor, Fr Maurice Twomey, Michael Blackburn, Elizabeth Martin & Mia, granddaughter of Joy Nye.

#### *Dates of Future Retreats*

This year: Fr 8 - Su 10 July, Fr 30 Sept - Su 2 Oct, Tu 25 - Th 27 Oct, Fr 9 - Su 11 Dec, Mo 12 - We 14 Dec.

& next year, 2006: Fr - Su 7 - 9 Apr, Mo - We 17 - 19 May (alteration), Fr - Su 7 - 9 July, Fr 29 Sept - Su 1 Oct, Tu - Th 24 - 26 Oct, Fr - Su 8 - 10 Dec. ◊

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