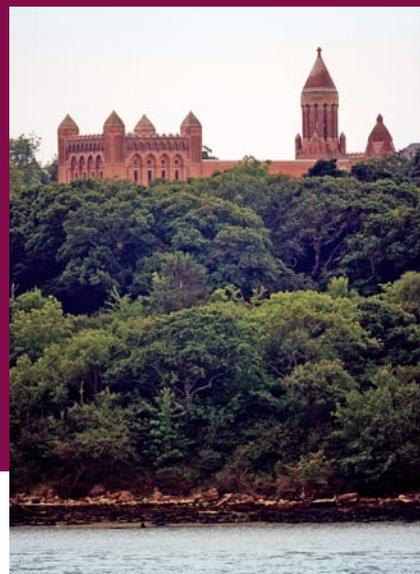


# Quarr Abbey

NEWSLETTER

Issue 21  
Summer 2018



## The Strength of Silent Love

Silence is rightly associated with monasteries. These are generally situated in quiet surroundings and their rather impressive buildings and churches suggest a secluded world to which the noises of the world have no access.

A few weeks ago, a group of Christians from different denominations gathered together at the Abbey for a silent retreat. Every day, visitors enter the Abbey Church or the Pilgrim Chapel simply to enjoy a time of silence.

We often learn silence from nature. As soon as the noises of the city cease, our ears become aware of the multiple sounds of natural life. The words stop at the door of our lips, and even our minds are disencumbered of thoughts, worries, imaginations, and preoccupations. We can begin to listen properly.

Silence is about listening, because it is about communication and communion. "Listen" famously is the first word of the *Rule* of St Benedict. We seek silence not in order to enclose ourselves in some sort of ivory tower, but so as to relate on a deeper level with ourselves, with others, with all creatures, and with God. Silence frees us for listening to the Word which people, circumstances and God address us. Through silent listening, we become able to reply or better to respond, to show ourselves responsive, to act responsibly. St Benedict describes the porter of the monastery as "a sensible old man who knows how to take a message and deliver a reply" (RB 66). Such a man is obviously a silent listener.

The perfection of silence is not reached by the one who never speaks at all, but by the one who utters the right words, kindly and at the appropriate time. The silent one is a good communicator. He or she knows when to speak and when to abstain from speaking. He or she also knows the strength of silence. Silence can be so powerful, so loud! The deepest feelings, the strongest emotions often call for silence. So does love. Silent love is probably the most powerful reality in the world. Stronger than the silences of hatred, violence and death, silent love has a unique power which holds all things together, even the most disrupted, and bring them into peace.

The silence most of our visitors or retreat makers are looking for is not the outcome of any process of auto-suggestion. They find in this place, by listening in their heart, the quiet sound of silent love. They experience its strength: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid*" (Jn 14:27). In our troubled and noisy world, there is a source of permanent peace and silence. It is to be found in Christ, the interior Guest of silent love.

+Abbot Xavier

## Friends of Quarr

It is now 5 years since the launch of the Friends and we are fundraising for our Accessible Paths Project; essentially making the paths leading to the church wheelchair friendly. I am pleased to report that an Island company, Groundsell Contracting Limited, will be supporting us on this project.

The chairman has sponsored calendars of Quarr (2019) in aid of this project. The photographs for the calendar have been donated by Marie-Line Burguiere and will be on sale by the end of July and will be available from the Abbey Teashop and Monastery Shop at £10 each or £12 by post, to include post and packaging. All the proceeds including the cost of postage will be donated to The Accessible Paths Project.

The Retreat on the 28th April was a success with over 20 people attending, a further day of Reflection organised by the Friends will be held towards the end of the year. The date will be published on the Quarr Abbey website events page, nearer the time.

The Friends and the Community of Quarr welcomed the Island's High Sheriff, Mrs Gioia Minghella-Giddens, and her husband Richard to St Benedict's Day Mass which was followed by a talk given by Br Duncan Smith, "Visions of the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation and Western Painters".

Leaflets for joining the Friends are available at the back of the church, but if there are none please telephone 01983 882420 ext 209 and leave a message or email, Dr. Rebecca Ashton, chair.friends@quarr.org

# Quarr Abbey Chronicle

## Recent Events in the life of the Abbey

**MARCH 9th** The Chronicler was away from the Abbey at the time, staying with a priest friend in North Norfolk and giving a series of talks on the Liturgy in his parish. He was called to the presbytery phone from the breakfast table and Fr. Abbot told of the death that past night of Br. Francis.

Br. Francis was ninety-six and had been weakening for some time, but death is always a shock even when not a surprise. And with the passing of Br. Francis the community lost a precious link with its own past. Requiescat in pace.

**MARCH 13th** The Chronicler returned to the Abbey on Friday afternoon to find Br. Francis in his coffin lying in the middle of the Chapter House. It became the common practice over the next four days for members of the Community to look in and recite sections of the Psalter whenever they could find time in the course of each day. By the time the funeral Mass had come we were all growing accustomed to our brother's new presence among us.

Br. Francis had few family members to come to his funeral Mass, but this was more than made up for by the large number of friends he had acquired over many years in Offices such as Cellarer, Porter and Guestmaster. It was with the traditional Chants and prayers that our Brother Francis was accompanied to the grave, but there was nothing merely usual or commonplace about the affection which returned him to God. May he rest in Peace.

**MAY 25th – 26th** It was not so long ago that Fr. Becket Soule gave the Community our retreat, late last year. But the American Dominican paid us a second visit, this time to give two days of public talks on a variety of mediaeval matters of interest. A small, but eager group of students, both monastic and lay, gathered

in the Archway Meeting Room for the sessions.

Fr. Becket's first talk, on the Friday morning, led us through the early life of St. Augustine as recounted in the "Confessions". He drew attention to the role of reading in coming to know the Truth, and argued that the concluding more philosophical books of the "Confessions", which seem to break with the narrative flow of the rest of the work, simply provide a "christian" reading of the world and its history, to replace the fragmentary pagan "readings" which St Augustine has worked through and transcended in the earlier books.

Fr. Becket is preparing an edition and translation of Peter Lombard's Commentary on the Psalms, and on the Friday afternoon he shared with us some of his work in progress. And he shared with the Lombard, the latter's concern with the letter of his text, a disinclination to follow the example of the more speculative monastic authors who used the language of the psalms to clothe their own often quite alien ideas.

After Vespers the Conference changed its location for the evening session. A number of cars took the participants to St. Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde where we joined the Community of Nuns for Fr. Becket's illustrated talk on Mediaeval English manuscripts, or, more particularly, on their colophons, those last words added by the Scribe once the main body of

the work had been completed. Most of these are mere matter of fact, a name or a date, but a significant number give an interesting sidelight on the trials of the copyist, on his hopes for his labours, and even, at times, an outlet for his humour.

On the next day, Fr. Becket concentrated on topics closest to his usual professional orbit, that of Canon Law. In the morning talk he took us through the lives of Peter Lombard, the theologian and Gratian, the lawyer, the two pre-eminent authorities of the mediaeval church, trying to disentangle historical truth from legendary material. This proved much easier in the case of Peter Lombard; Gratian, it seems, must always remain a very shadowy figure indeed.

The conference ended in the afternoon with an amusing look at the, at times, fraught relations between theologians and canon lawyers in the late middle ages. Fr. Becket was, of course, quite unbiased but there is no doubt that the lawyers, then as now, had better prospects, more influence and more money.

**MAY 29th – 31st** Fr. Henry Wansborough, the monk and Scripture Scholar of Ampleforth Abbey, is well known for his inexhaustible energy. True to form he arrived at Quarr in mid-morning and at mid-day was giving the first talk to the Community of his three day series of conferences on the book of Revelation.



*Peter Lombard: the scholar at work*

The Book of Revelation has an understandable reputation for being one of the more obscure books of the Bible, but Fr. Henry was able to provide the biblical and historical context to make a surprising number of things clear. He traced the rise of apocalyptic writings from their origins in the prophetic warning concerning the coming Day of the Lord and the descriptions of prophetic visions of salvation in times of persecution. He then showed the underlying structure of the Book through its repeated use of the phrase “In Spirit” to introduce each new stage in the visionary journey; a phrase chosen because it is only in the Spirit of God that such mysteries as are described can be grasped at all. Finally he drew attention to the contemporary myths, both political and religious which would have aided understanding for the Book’s original readers.

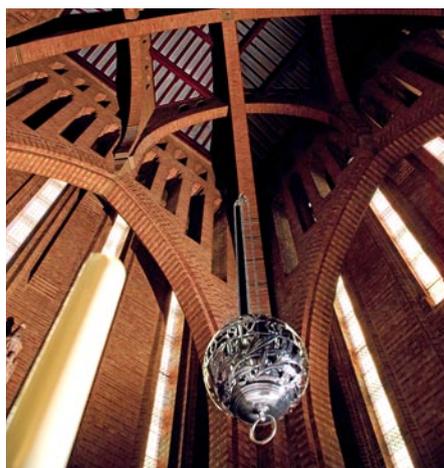
All too soon Fr. Henry was returning to Ampleforth, but not before we extracted the promise of his return.

**JUNE 2nd** This Saturday was chosen by the Island Council of Clergy for the Island Eucharistic Day and Procession

of the Blessed Sacrament; Quarr Abbey was chosen for the location. And the Holy Spirit inspired a devout and joyful celebration.

The Mass was a mixture of old and new, of Parish and Monastic Liturgy. The hymns were well-known Catholic favourites while the Alleluia was taken from the Roman Gradual and sung by the Monastic Schola. Fr. Abbot preached a homily on the Eucharist, and Fr. Jonathan, the Ordinatee priest on the Island led the people in procession reciting the Holy Rosary. The weather

*Hanging pyx at Quarr Abbey*



was more than kind. We knelt before the altar of repose on the terrace lawn under a baking sun. It was good to be there.

**JUNE 5th** Twenty five years ago Fr. Luke was ordained to the priesthood. Today saw his silver jubilee celebration of the event. He was principal celebrant at the Mass and twelve priests from the Island and from the mainland, religious and secular concelebrated with him.

In his homily Fr. Luke accentuated the giftedness of the priesthood; everything a priest is and does is not so much something he himself is and does, as something Christ is and does through him. And this is a cause for thanksgiving. We could all be thankful for the day; for the peaceful Mass, the good meal and the joyful communion of friends at the end.

Quarr Abbey is a Catholic community of Benedictine monks of the Solesmes Congregation. If you wish to contact us please write to [guestmaster@quarr.org](mailto:guestmaster@quarr.org) or Quarr Abbey, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 4ES. Our website address is [www.quarrabbey.org](http://www.quarrabbey.org)

## Book Review

# Love’s Many Names

*Poems by Sam Davidson (Angelico Press)*

When I first met Sam, during a visit to Quarr in 2014, I could see from the start that he had poetry in his very bones. Conversation often gravitated back toward that subject: poems we both loved, poems to be shared, poems he was writing. On my last day, as he walked me to the ferry, he recited a wonderful villanelle he had written about his time at Quarr.

One hearing or reading is never enough for any poem by Sam. There is always another layer to be found. This springs from his open and embracing attitude to the world around him, to people and things and events and situations, which infuses his work with depth and with the sense of mystery that goes beyond implication or symbolism. It is as if in every poem he touches something universally understood, but which has never had sufficient words to tell it. We call it Love.

In “Doe”, a solitary confrontation with a wild creature brings a sudden awareness:



*I felt the force that bound us both,  
Electric-crackling whiff of storm  
The animal conceit of love  
The wordless meanings of a dream*

Again, in the Kurdish poems, there is the strength of the love he feels for the refugee men and women of the camp:

*I like them best like this, at war with life  
As they have been, at home, at war with death...  
Their sturdy feet well poised in filthy boots*

And ultimately, running like an underground stream, breaking out here and there into the light, always present by implication on every page, is that Love which holds us all:

*whose white contained innumerable shades  
the black void giving birth to stars...*

The reader is left with the strong sense of the interrelation of all these different sorts of Love. In a world that divides and separates one love from another too often, here we are made aware once again that

*...everything is love, and always was  
thank you for reminding me of that*

Reading these poems as if they were lectio divina, i.e. with slow care and contemplation, one is filled with vivid insights and images of a sort that can’t easily be described, but are immensely nourishing spiritually. Sam is truly a poet of great wisdom, perhaps not always conscious but certainly valid wisdom. In Love’s Many Names, he presents us with a body of mature work, rich with symbol and understanding, opening the eye and heart to life and love in a new, courageous and enabling vision.

*Julia Trahair (Oblate of Quarr Abbey)*



## Homily at the Requiem Mass for Br Francis Verry

Quarr Abbey Tuesday 13th March 2018

“From Shanklin to Quarr Abbey is not very far, but it took me nearly forty years”. These words are typical of Br Francis’ dry sense of humour. They speak of the man he was and of the journey of his life – a journey which reached its term last Friday early in the morning. Br Francis journeyed a lot. We could mention his crossing of the Atlantic on a vessel of the Royal Navy, his travel from Boston to Vancouver, and his journey back from Vancouver to the UK via the Panama Canal, all this during the war. But he had also visited France and Italy, and many other places, before joining first the Anglican Benedictine community of Alton Abbey in 1946, then our community in 1960, a few months after he was received into the Catholic Church by Fr Dean. This was the end of another journey of his: moving from the Methodist background of his family, through a High Church Parish of the Church of England where he discovered the beauty, meaning and importance of liturgy, to the Roman Church, and finally to Quarr.

However, monastic life at Quarr did not prove so easy because of the circumstances. He was received as a lay-brother, but soon afterwards, during the years after the Second Council of the

Vatican, the place of the lay-brothers was totally reconsidered. He had thought he would have a life of humble manual work – as he did for a while first with the chickens, then in the kitchen – but he ended up with important financial responsibilities as the bursar, and then involved in the pastoral dimension of hospitality in the guest-house. On one side, this shows the range of his abilities, his great capacity to adapt and take charge. On the other hand, it required a great suppleness. He had, to some extent, to get rid of his initial vision of monastic life in order to follow the way God was showing to him through the circumstances of life. God never dwells in our ideals – however beautiful and lofty they might seem – but He is to be found in the realistic and generous embracing of what we are given to live. Br Francis knew well how to do this. He certainly went through disappointments and frustrations, but he had both the human maturity and the spiritual humility which helped him say Yes to what was offered to him.

Here we reach another level, a deeper one. In a sense, Br Francis was very much himself from the start. His first impressions of God, of faith and religion, come from his childhood. They were

confirmed by his liturgical experiences as a Mass Server, then as a lay associate of Alton Abbey, finally as a monk at Alton and here. He had a profound understanding of liturgy. He spent many years of his life gathering translations and making booklets so that our guests and visitors might follow as well as possible the sometimes intricate patterns of our offices. His last community work was the Sunday Mass sheet and he handed it over only a couple of years ago. All this speaks a lot of the general orientation of his soul. He was a monk in order to serve God by his work and by his participation in the service of praise to His glory which is the liturgy. This he did as a brother, happy to serve others and to help them take their part in the liturgical action.

This deeper level is the level of faith. Br Francis was a man of unshaken, deep and simple faith. Faith is like a journey of our soul to God. God is not far from us. Indeed when we meet Him we discover He has always been present. St Augustine wrote pages and pages of immortal beauty on the journey of the soul which is finally able to rest in God. Br Francis did not write pages of spiritual confessions. In a very British way, he spoke of the long and short way which goes from Shanklin to Quarr – a symbol, obviously, of our journey to God.

In the light of the faith he was faithful to, Br Francis has just made his last journey through death into life. With Job he hoped: “I shall see God”. With Paul, he confessed: “we have another house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”. With Jesus, he entrusted the grain of wheat to the earth, sure of the mystery of life involved, not doubting the resurrection. He passed away very peacefully, as fitted the man he was: a man of faith and confidence; a servant of God and the brethren; a lover of monastic life in the spirit of Solesmes; and an Islander, happy that his body be entrusted to the good earth of the Island, there to rest till the resurrection as a great sign of hope and comfort for his brethren.

As we give thanks for all that Br Francis was among us, we pray, together with his family and his numerous friends, that his soul may reach the final destination and join in the eternal liturgy of intercession and praise. There no Mass sheet is needed any more. The Father Himself honours His servants: He is Himself their reward and their life.

I was born in Shanklin in 1921, not on a farm, but farm land was within walking distance. At that time I wanted to be a farmer when I grew up, until I was told that farmers had to get up at five o'clock in the morning; this put me off farming. However I ended up here (at Quarr ) getting up at five in the morning.

When I was starting school one of our neighbours suggested the Catholic school. But she went on to say they would get me in the end, so I was not allowed to go there in case they got me!

My father moved to one of the newer suburbs, Bitterne Park (in Southampton)... we attended a new church, only a few hundred yards away from where we were then living; in some ways it was quite advanced and had a shortened form of Mattins followed by a sermon and then a shortened form of the Eucharist. In some ways this may have been reminiscent of the early church, but it was more likely done to satisfy the low church and the high church element in the parish.

One Palm Sunday (although I did not know this at the time) my uncle was staying with us and we went to St Michael's Church in the centre of Southampton. I was only about twelve at the time. The church was full; the sanctuary was not visible through the chancel arch; at one point we all queued up; I could see nothing but heard the clanking of chains and clouds of smoke and feared the worst. It was of course the blessing and distribution of the palms.

I suppose it is a sign of old age... but I often think how I first began to get interested in the Religious Life. It was not in fact Fr. Andrew who first attracted me but a Kelham Father, who used to preach at St. Michael's in Southampton every Michaelmas. He was one of the gentlemen religious and was a great favourite with the congregation. My parents and I met him at the vicarage for tea one Sunday. I told the vicar of my interest in the religious life, although I must admit I had very little idea of what it was all about and probably thought it ... a continual High Mass.



## The Genesis of a Vocation

*Br Francis in his own words*

Eric Pitt then came on the scene as he was organizing an afternoon trip to Alton (Abbey) to Vespers. At the end of Vespers Brother George came in in cope and made some of the group associates; Fr. Molyneux gave me a push and I found myself with the AOSP cross round my neck and soon afterwards Brother George said "That will be 3/6 and what name will you take?" I hadn't a clue but it was the first Vespers of St. Francis, or at least there was a commemoration of St. Francis and that is how I have been Brother Francis for (so many) years.

Within two or three years of starting work I was more and more becoming attracted to some form of the Religious Life. It was during this period between about 1938 and 1940 that three or four of us young men started what might have developed into a Lay Community, although we did not know of the existence of such a thing. Most days we met to say either Vespers or Compline together and at one time two of us were able to meet at lunch time to say Sext... One Holy Week three of us undertook to "watch" on Maundy Thursday from mid-night until 8am, taking turns during the night. We were

rather loosely attached to the Franciscans at Cerne Abbas.

Some years before this I had started to go to the Abbey for weekends and became more interested in the Religious Life and Dedication to God. However the possibilities of war were getting closer so it did not seem the right time to enter the cloister. On the other hand the war would have ended just the same way if I had not been in the Navy. However I did learn OBEDIENCE and to get on with a variety of other men...As soon as I was demobbed I applied to enter Alton where I joined two and later a third ex-service man.

In the late 1950's plans were afoot to unite the Methodist and the Church of England in South India...There was much opposition in Anglican Communities, but in the end little was done...It was for this reason that I severed my connection with the Church of England. If there were any doubts, I could put my mind at peace by entering into full communion with the

Catholic Church.

Thanks to Fr. Dean I was allowed to stay at Quarr (Abbey) and be instructed by him. I was received into the Church after Vespers on the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist and Confirmed the following Sunday on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul at Ryde Parish Church by Archbishop King.

The Novice Master Fr. Joseph Warrilow then told me to go away for a year before applying to enter the novitiate. I had three months in France (supposing to learn French), two weeks in Rome (Assisi had to wait), and a holiday with my parents which involved a little romance, just to decide if I really did want a celibate life. So it is probably not surprising that at Christmas Fr. Joseph said he would accept me at the end of January.

The result was that I entered the novitiate at Quarr at the end of January 1960. However I do not consider that the thirteen years spent at Alton were wasted; they had given me some experience and given me something of a thirst for knowledge about things liturgical and monastic without which I doubt if I would have lasted the first year.



## Memories of Br Francis

*by some of his Brethren*

When I joined the Quarr Community Br. Francis was in his prime. He was Procurator, in charge of the money, a man to keep on good terms with.

He was always present where the community gathered, though he was a man of few words. Yet his silence was companionable, peaceful, accepting of others, even if he did, occasionally, roll his eyes in hopeless exasperation. He was essentially quite simple and straightforward, and all was lightened by his very dry sense of humour.

He was also industrious. In his later years I remember expressing a wish that we might do away with the countless leaflets and sheets of paper on which liturgical texts were printed. The next day he said he would prepare and print booklets for use in choir containing all the necessary words and music. And so, I provided him with all the texts and he produced twelve new booklets, one for each month of the year, and each one was ready on time, just as the new month was about to begin.

It was hard for Br. Francis when he had to slow down, when he could do ever less and less, and finally when he could do very little at all. But he was a strong man, and therefore a patient man. He wholly accepted the situation in which his Lord had placed him, and therefore he died in peace.

I first met Brother Francis in 1980 when I met him at the celebrations for the Birth of St. Benedict but I had heard about him before. At the time I was a monk of Alton where he had been from 1946 till about 1958. I was told he was a man who could turn his hand to anything.

I came to Quarr four years later and found this to be so true. At the time he was Procurator but did so many other things from cooking the first breakfast of Sunday on Saturday night to mending watches. He was a man of great kindness who would help anyone but he was not one to suffer fools gladly. Later as Guestmaster he made so many friends by his kindness and great wisdom.

Above all he had a very keen and dry sense of humour. On the night he died as I was watching with him he gave me a great wink which makes me feel he has entered Heaven with a smile on his face.

When I was a guest at Quarr in the nineteen-eighties, Brother Francis would sit on the cross bench in the church by the wall and turn the light on and off for the offices. He was a constant presence. As a monk here in the twenty-first century I discovered he was the go-to person for batteries. It can sometimes be complicated and difficult to get hold of things in a monastery, but batteries

were never a problem: you just had to ask Brother Francis. He was always good with practical things, and this extended to his assessment of people who wanted to stay here as guests. His judgement was good. His practical help to us extended way beyond the age at which most people retire from doing things. And then, in the last years, he was just here. His good humour remained constant throughout. He continued to attend community recreation long after he could no longer walk, and his witty remarks would show he was fully engaged. Then, in the last sting of winter, he was confined to his death bed. The night before his final one I was in the chapel across from his room and was aware of a strong spiritual presence: it seemed clear that he was being welcomed into the Beyond. Brother Francis leaves a memory of a person who was always present but never in the way. You never had to work around him. And now I have his cactus on my window sill.

The first events in the community after my arrival were the tonsuring of Br Bede and the Solemn Profession of Br Francis on the Dedication Day of the Church, 12th October 1964, three days after Br Cuthbert and I received the habit. This was the first Solemn Profession of a brother at Quarr, perhaps the first in the Congregation. Previously brothers not destined to the choir had made perpetual simple vows.

My first memory of Br Francis is of him in the area of the teaching apiary, where the hens were. The novitiate were passing on their walk at recreation when a hen escaped. Br Francis caught it, amid much squawking, and carried off under his arm.

Soon after that he succeeded Frere Placide Marie as cook. He was wonderfully competent, and the quality of our diet improved. At the time Fr Aldhelm Dean was both tailor and caterer, responsible for both clothing and feeding the brethren. Once Br Francis was established in the kitchen he was appointed caterer. Out went the old 'Esse'.



# Theological Conferences

presented by Fr Becket Soule OP



*Illumination from Gratian's "Decretum"*

This year's Theological Conferences were delivered by the American Dominican and medieval scholar Fr Becket Soule. Specializing in history and canon law, he is an expert both in the writings of Peter Lombard and the rather obscure author of the *Decretum* (*Concordia Discordantium Canonum*), Gratian. Hailing from North Carolina, with degrees from Harvard and various other American universities, Fr Becket treated us with five conferences on

a variety of topics which rather loosely he described as all coming down to 'reading', and in particular the interpretation of Scripture. He distinguished himself with his vast knowledge of an impressive number of medieval writers.

Our first master explored was St Augustine (354 – 430), with a talk entitled "Reading the Word of God: Scriptural Interpretation in Augustine's

Confessions". A central question addressed was the significance of the last 3 books (11- 13) in relation to the rest of the content of this spiritual classic. The key to understanding these latter books is in Augustine's explanation of the spiritual dimension of time and how this is bound up with his interpretation of Scripture. The language of the Bible is much richer than the less flexible and less persuasive language of philosophy. It has an Omniscient Author, who is God, and a multitude of levels of meaning – the literal, the level of analogy, philosophical level, doctrinal levels, moral levels, spiritual level – and all of these are intended by God. The last 3 books are concerned with what makes the Scriptures different from any other writing. What does it mean when we say God is the Author of the Scriptures? It effectively means that it can have a plurality of meanings which are not contradictory and it can intervene in the lives of people now. Scripture can move readers because the Author can directly intervene in their lives. This is a unique rhetorical power. There is a right word for everyone and God intervenes at exactly the right moment in history – He is never early and is never late. The timeless ontological structure of the universe issues forth from the story of creation. There is no difference between the highest truths and what happens in a person's life and the deeds that are done by God. This is what binds the *Confessions* together.

Next we jumped ahead several centuries to Peter Lombard (c. 1096 – 1160). The main text discussed here was his commentary on the psalms. Lombard comes at that point in history when universities are being established throughout Europe and so there is a corresponding development in medieval scholarship being more centred at the universities rather than the monasteries. Hence the title of this conference bears the prefix: "From Cloister to Classroom", indicating this change from the monastic to the scholastic way of writing commentaries and of reading and interpreting the Scriptures. Lombard does of course use many monastic sources in his commentary along with St Augustine, St Jerome and Cassiodorus. The monastic approach was signified by a more homiletic exhortation to move the reader's heart. Thus Letbert of Lille wrote a commentary on the psalms for his monks encouraging them to be attentive to the

voice of God in the text and directing them to turn away from the evils of the world. Similarly Gerhoh of Reichersburg (1093 – 1169) in his commentary sought to enrich the prayer life of his community of monks. The scholastic approach is clearly evident in Lombard’s commentary beginning with an introduction structured on 3 sections: 1) Who was the author; 2) What is the subject matter; 3) What is the methodology. For Lombard the psalms comprise of 1 book and their author in each case is David. They are concerned about Christ but he goes further than simply drawing out their Christological dimension in using analogies drawn from several New Testament texts. The scholastic method is also distinguished by engagement with the sources in a dialogue in order to understand which are correct and which not. Lombard’s achievement here is the major reason why for the remainder of the Middle Ages his commentary remains the gloss on the Book of Psalms.

By way of an interlude, we travelled to St Cecilia’s Abbey where Fr Becket gave an insightful illustrated lecture on the use of the colophon in medieval manuscripts. The colophon, the ‘last word’ so to speak, was a statement by the scribe at the end of the work. Its use was widespread and can be traced back to the beginning of book production. It was a formal scribal note, sometimes amusing, which purports to

bear in some way on the scribe himself, telling about who he is or about his work. “The art of the scribe is the most difficult of the arts”, wrote one scribe at Echternach around 1000ad. Unfortunately the scholarly resources for studying these are very inadequate. But the colophons do lay bare what the primary assumptions and functions of early medieval book production were: it was a spiritual task using spiritual tools for potentially immediate and eternal spiritual benefits.

The biographical sources on the life of Peter Lombard are scarce indeed and his writings contain virtually no autobiographical references. This is even more the case for Gratian, author of the book on Canon Law which dominated for more than 700 years. In a talk entitled “The Twins: Gratian and Peter Lombard in text and legend”, Fr Becket both expertly and amusingly separated out for us both what is known (very little in the case of Gratian) and what is at best hearsay, and often falsehood, concerning their lives, including the notion that they were twins which of course is an impossibility, they having being born about a half-century apart. But there is no doubting their dominating influences in the Middle Ages, in theology for the case of Lombard and in canon law for the case of Gratian.

The divergences between theologians and canonists was the topic for the final talk

with title prefix: “Why Can’t We Just Get Along?” When teaching at the universities in the thirteenth century began to divide into faculties – Liberal Arts, Theology, Law and Medicine – rigid boundaries began to be manifested between them leading to “turf battles” as the faculties competed for students. Theologians didn’t fare as well as lawyers with regards to student numbers, law being seen to open up more lucrative opportunities. At about the time of the *Decretum*, theology and canon law began to separate. St Albert the Great advised his students to be wary of canonists because they are unversed in the Scriptures. St Thomas Aquinas warned professors of theology against citing legal glosses as authorities. Unsurprisingly the canonists fought back. Hostiensis around the middle of the thirteenth century in his lecture on the *Liber Extra* (*the Decretals of Gregory IX*) compared the relationships between the disciplines to parts of the human body: theology to the head, civil law to the feet, canon law to the hands. He argued that theologians produce just ideas, civilians support the body, but canonists do the work that actually unites the two and gets things done. Therefore canon law is the noblest of all fields of learning because Jesus is true God and true man and he unites in his person the human and the divine. He is therefore the first canon lawyer!

by Fr Brian Gerard Kelly

Inscription from the Quarr Abbey statue of St Benedict by Ian Thompson: with our eyes open to the divine light

