

The Revival of Benedictinism within the Anglican Communion: its origins and development within three monastic communities.

By Philip John Bewley, 2009

Introduction

Lord Carey of Clifton, former Archbishop of Canterbury, once described the existence of monastic and other religious communities as “the best kept secret in the Church of England”.¹ Even among the majority of Anglicans today, all monks and nuns are presumed to be Roman Catholic, and many Anglicans would be very surprised to learn otherwise. However, since Marian Hughes made her profession in 1841, male and female religious have existed in the Anglican Communion. More importantly, male religious following the Rule of Benedict emerged on Caldey Island in 1896 and female religious at Baltonsborough in 1906, later moving to West Malling in 1916. With the birth of these two religious communities, Benedictinism and monastic life was finally restored to Anglicanism.

In this paper I will present an overview of the restoration of Benedictine monasticism within the Anglican Communion, detailing the various strands which brought this revival into existence. Thereafter three particular Anglican communities will be studied, namely the Benedictines of Caldey Island; the monastic community which has lived at Pershore, Nashdom and Elmore respectively; and the female community which resides at Malling Abbey. This overview will look at their respective beginnings and ongoing development, and will offer a critique of the Benedictine movement as it has stood within Anglicanism. It is my premise that the movement at various points in its development has moved towards an overtly Anglo-Papalist agenda, and only by embracing its Anglican identity, which by its very nature is steeped in Benedictinism, has it been embraced by mainstream Anglicanism.

The various strands which led to the revival of Benedictine Monasticism within Anglicanism

In 1536 there were in the vicinity of 800 monasteries and convents in England, with around 10,000 monks, nuns, canons and friars.² However, through the Dissolution of the Monasteries enacted by Henry VIII, by 1840 there were none. First brought to the British Isles by St Augustine in 597, Benedictinism had been erased from the British landscape. A Caroline divine, Herbert Thorndike, once wrote: “It is certainly a blot on the Reformation when we profess that we are without monastic life”.³ However, this was not altogether true. As Sr Seonaid OSB so poetically puts it: ‘As a stream, when it finds its course obstructed, discovers other channels or disappears from sight underground only to reappear at a later stage, so with the Religious Life after the Dissolution.’⁴

The stream we are concerned with found an “underground” course for over 300 years in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The first edition came into being in 1549 and found its final form in 1662, the latter still considered throughout the Anglican Communion a universal standard for doctrine and worship. *The Book of Common Prayer* continued in the vernacular the basic pattern of the Eucharist and the

¹ Nicolas Stebbing, ed., *Anglican Religious Life*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications), p.7.

² Sr Seonaid OSB, *A Second Spring: The Revival of the Religious Life in the Church of England*, in Sr Mary David OSB, ed., *Living Stones: The Story of Malling Abbey*, (West Malling, UK: Malling Abbey, 2005), p.44.

³ John-Bede Pauley, “The Monastic Quality of Anglicanism” in *Anglican Embers* Vol. I, Issue 5, Lent 2005, pp.109-115.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Divine Office as the principal forms of worship of the Church of England. In Cathedrals, University College Chapels, and in Parish Churches throughout the land, Matins and Evensong from the Prayer Book were sung or recited as Monastic choirs once had. Even within some households, families with their maids and servants would recite the Daily Offices. Cranmer, through *The Book of Common Prayer*, retrieved the “monastic” quality of the hours. As John-Bede Pauley has stated: ‘Cranmer and the Caroline divines expected the people to be “monastic” in their liturgical outlook. And, for the most part, it “took”.’⁵ Anglicans had become a people of the monastic office.

Undoubtedly, the Services of *The Book of Common Prayer* preserved a Benedictine ethos within Anglicanism. With the so-called “Catholic Revival” in the Church of England, historically marked by John Keble’s sermon in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, in 1833, the underground stream which was Benedictinism was beginning to find its way to the surface in the Church of England once again.

Various strands nationally, internationally and ecclesially contributed to the revival of the Benedictine Order within the Anglican Communion. One of these strands was the French Revolution. French Monastics fled the Continent and sought safety in England. By this stage anti-Papalism had begun to soften, and British society was becoming more tolerant of other religious traditions. These monastics were in fact “refugees in distress” seeking asylum from Britain’s bitter enemy; a condition which may have led to their general acceptance in British society. England, therefore, became used to seeing habited monastic figures in its cities and towns once more.

Another strand can be explained by the effect of the Industrial Revolution upon the cities and larger towns of the British Isles. Long working hours in the new factories springing up around the country, together with sub-standard housing for the factory workers, and a government which seemed unwilling or unable to do anything about it, made life for the new working classes difficult and intolerable. The Established Church, which, in pre-Reformation times would once have had the resources through its Religious Orders to assist the poor and needy, now no longer had the structures to do so. The Church simply did not have the wherewithal to meet the social needs of the day. This led the Poet Laureate Robert Southey to ask: ‘Why, then, have you no Beguines, no Sisters of Charity?... Have you not yet followed the example of the French and the Netherlander?... Piety has not found its way into your prisons, your hospitals are imploring in vain; nothing is wanting in them but religious charity, and oh what a want is that!’⁶

Anglican “Sisterhoods” therefore began to spring up in British inner-city areas, working with the poor and needy. The first to achieve a settled existence was the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross in London, founded in 1845 and modelled on the French *Soeurs de Charité*.⁷ Another was the Society of the Holy Trinity at Devonport in 1849.⁸ The mid 1850’s to the beginning of the First World War witnessed a phenomenal growth in Anglican Religious Communities. Many of these were active orders but quasi-monastic in nature, and brought about a certain respectability to the restoration of Religious Life in the Church of England. As Petà Dunstan has noted: ‘Despite the initial hostility, communities gradually began to be tolerated and then gain a measure of approval from both Church authorities and wider society.’⁹

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶ R. Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society, Vol. II*, (London, 1829)

⁷ J.W.C. Wand, *Anglicanism in History and Today*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p.187.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Petà Dunstan, ‘Evolving Identity in Anglican Religious Life’, in Nicolas Stebbing, ed., *Anglican Religious Life*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2003), p.13.

At the same time, the flourishing of Romanticism greatly affected Western civilization of the early nineteenth century. English Church historians have long recognized the influence of the Romantic Movement on the life of the Church of England. This cultural movement rejected the rationalism of the eighteenth century and looked back with admiration to a pre-Reformation era. Gothic architecture became fashionable once again, a fashion inspired by the romantic ruins of monastic houses dotted across the British Isles, and so too did the medieval imagery that went with it. Monks and nuns became part of this imagery, and monastics themselves were caught up in the new romanticism. As Petà Dunstan says: 'Although the favour shown to the externals of religious life as a consequence was not particularly deep or comprehending of its purposes, it nevertheless helped to make the revival of real communities less threatening. The concept of monastic life may have remained eccentric to many, but it was no longer alien.'¹⁰

The final strand which led to the Revival of Religious Life in the Anglican Communion is explained by a group of enthusiastic theologians and scholars in Oxford University. Edward Pusey, John Henry Newman, John Keble, and Richard Hurrell Froude are considered responsible for the renewal of catholic thought and practice in the Established Church. This Religious Revival is commonly referred to as the Oxford Movement and its followers "Tractarians", a name taken from the "Tracts for the Times" published by these men. Their purpose was to recall the Church of England to its catholic roots, enshrined in *The Book of Common Prayer* and in its historic threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

In 1842, Edward Pusey, in a letter to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke of the need of reviving religious communities in the Church of England. He called monastic institutions: 'a refuge from the weariness and vanities of the world, and a means of higher perfection to individuals, which many sigh after, and which might be revived in a primitive form, but which as yet we have not.'¹¹ The Oxford Fathers, by calling the Church of England to examine its catholic roots, saw in the Religious Life and in monasticism in particular, something valuable to the church's spiritual life which had been lost at the Reformation.

Thus, several contributing factors: the Benedictine influence upon Anglican Liturgical Services, the effects of the French and Industrial Revolutions, and the rise of the Romantic and Oxford Movements, brought about a renewed interest in the Religious Life. *The Book of Common Prayer* had preserved a Benedictine Spirituality within its covers accessible to all; the French Revolution brought Continental Monastics to British shores and made them a visible presence in British Society once more; the Industrial Revolution highlighted the need for Religious Orders within the Church of England to work with the poor and needy; romanticism brought about a revival of interest in monastic architecture and the life that was led within a monastic cloister; and finally, the effects of the Oxford Movement had brought about a revival of interest in monasticism, an aspect of English Church life sadly lost at the Reformation.

The Monks of Caldey Island

One of the first attempts to found a male Benedictine Monastic Community within Anglicanism can be attributed to a man named Benjamin Fearnley Carlyle. A 19-year-old London medical student, he was clothed as a Benedictine Oblate in 1893; along with other Oblates they were under the direction of the Reverend Arthur Dale, a rather eccentric priest who worked as a chaplain to a Benedictine Community of Nuns in Twickenham (these nuns were later to move to Mallory Abbey). Several

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹¹ Letter of Pusey to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1842, p.10 cited in W.J. Sparrow Simpson, *The History of the Anglo-Catholic Revival from 1845*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p.231,

months after he made his oblation, Carlyle drew up some Constitutions for the “Oblate Brothers of the Holy Order of St Benedict”. As Peter Anson has pointed out: ‘this document is an amazing production for a nineteen-year-old youth whose knowledge of monastic life was derived solely from books. It is redolent of the dynamic energy, vivid imagination, and irrepressible optimism which characterized his subsequent career.’¹² Carlyle later wrote that these Oblates of St Benedict were: ‘a body of young men – a sort of Third Order – living in the world with the intention of later on adopting a monastic mode of life, and it was hoped eventually to form a community if it became clear that they had vocations. There were already six members of this group... We met Fr Dale each month either at Twickenham, or at some London church for a conference and chapter and we soon had about twenty oblates in the London centre. As soon as the nuns moved from Twickenham to West Malling Abbey, later on in the same year 1893, we were frequently at the Abbey for feasts and great functions...’¹³

The Oblates soon rented a room above a fish shop in Ealing where they would meet to recite together the Daily Offices. Then as time passed they rented a small house where they lived: ‘a quasi-common life for a year or so, as far as their respective occupations allowed. Most of the young men helped in the parochial activities of their favourite Anglican churches; but on occasion Mass was said at the Oxford Road chapel by one of the clergy from St Cuthbert’s, Pilbeach Gardens.’¹⁴

This experimental community lasted only two years, and was disbanded in 1895 when none of those living in this community felt able to follow in the footsteps of Carlyle, who was now determined to found a full-blown, regular monastic community. The house at Ealing was given up and Carlyle went back to live with his family for a time.

Peter Anson reports that Carlyle had held a fascination with monasticism since the age of 13.¹⁵ During his teenage years he would frequent Roman Catholic churches and became familiar with the Latin Mass and Benediction. When first made an Oblate, he would visit Buckfast Abbey in Devon. Abbot Anscar Vonier later recalled how Carlyle was given every opportunity to observe the monastic life at close quarters.¹⁶ By 1895 Carlyle was ready to be received into the Roman Catholic Church, but the death of the priest, an Oratorian Father to whom he was receiving instruction, led him to believe that God was calling him to a vocation within the Church of England.

Thus, from an early age Carlyle had become an Anglo-Papalist. A peculiarly Anglican phenomenon, Anglo-Papalists made it their mission and calling to make the Anglican Church appear as much like the Roman Catholic Church as was humanly possible. Reunion with the Roman Catholic Church was their ultimate goal, and emulating all things Roman Catholic was believed the best way to achieve this. The Rev’d Victor Roberts, writing in a journal called *Reunion* in 1949 offers this helpful definition of the Anglo-Papalists, and will help in our understanding of Carlyle’s mindset: ‘There is a not inconsiderable minority of people... who believe ex animo the teaching of the Holy See concerning faith and morals, not on any selective principles, but upon the authority of the Holy See itself, and yet they are not in visible communion with Rome. They are designated as Anglican, although they repudiate Anglicanism. They are not Anglo-Catholics; they accept the validity of Anglican orders, but do not claim that the possession of valid orders, or their continuity, justifies the Church of England. We who belong to this minority admit that we are in schism, though not by our own fault, and we desire nothing more ardently than to be in visible communion with the Holy

¹² Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*, (London: SPCK, 1964), p.164.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.165.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

See.¹⁷ Robert's comments highlight the incongruous mindset of Anglo-Papalists, a mindset incomprehensible to most Anglicans.

During an Oblate meeting at Malling Abbey on the Feast of Pentecost, 1895, Carlyle appealed to his fellow Oblates in which he described the Church of England as: Catholic in Constitution – with activities so numerous and well arranged; and yet without one single monastery of the Benedictine Rule remaining – nothing left but desolate and empty ruins – the voice of praise silent in the moss-grown choirs – no home for weary souls and loving hearts – no men to be found for the work of prayer and no room for such... And that as the Catholic Church in all ages has possessed her Religious Communities, so now, after her long sleep, the Church in England, roused at last to the realisation of her Catholic heritage, would awake to the fact that she alone in Catholic Christendom possessed few Religious houses for men, and none dedicated solely to the Life of Prayer.¹⁸

Having spent a time living back with his family, in 1896 Carlyle join a friend in a rented house on the Isle of Dogs in London. Before long a group of like-minded men joined them; the rented house was styled a "priory", and they lived under the Rule of Benedict offering pastoral work among the working-class parishioners in the parish of St John. The local vicar encouraged them in this venture. Benjamin Carlyle was clothed as a Benedictine novice at Malling Abbey that same year, and took the name Aelred. His monastic profession was sanctioned by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Benson. By 1898 he had been solemnly professed by the chaplain at Malling Abbey, with the permission of Archbishop Temple.¹⁹

Carlyle's embryonic community moved several times in search of surroundings suited to a contemplative life. The community was finally offered a Victorian cottage which adjoined the medieval priory on Caldey Island in South Wales. Shaky beginnings led Lord Halifax, an advocate of all things Anglo-Catholic, to suggest they should move to Painsthorpe Hall in Yorkshire, and the brothers left Caldey Island in March 1902 for the north of England. Carlyle was made Abbot in 1903 by a visiting Episcopalian Bishop, and was ordained deacon and priest by the same Bishop in the autumn of 1904, sailing to Wisconsin to achieve this.²⁰

At Painsthorpe Hall a chapel had been erected and the Divine Office was said or sung in Latin according to the *Breviarium Monasticum*. Now that the Abbot could celebrate mass, no longer having to rely on neighbouring clergy using *The Book of Common Prayer*, the *Missale Monasticum* was introduced.²¹ All Anglican Liturgical forms and practices were discontinued. Not surprisingly, an attack in a Roman Catholic newspaper stated that "the well-meant effort of Mr Carlyle and his young brethren is nothing more than a somewhat unpleasant species of masquerade."²² Although comments like this were not uncommon at that time, it does highlight just how "Romanized" their monastic practices had become.

In 1906, on the Feast of St Luke, the community returned to Caldey Island, greatly encouraged once again by Lord Halifax. The return of the monks to Caldey Island was seen by Lord Halifax as the "final triumph of the catholic revival."²³

¹⁷ *Reunion*, Vol. 5, No. 41 (1949).

¹⁸ Peter Anson, *The Benedictines of Caldey*, (Gloucester: Prinknash Abbey, 1944), pp.18-19.

¹⁹ Peter F. Anson, *The Call.*, p.166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.167-168.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.168.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.169.

The Community remained autonomous and outside the usual structures of the Church of England. Peter Anson writes that: 'it would be true to say that it was only on Sundays when the *Church Times* was read aloud in the refectory that the majority of the Brethren had need to recall that they were in communion with Canterbury.'²⁴ Anson also notes: 'they could have regarded themselves more as an elusive and isolated unit of the Western Church, not yet, through no fault of its own, in full communion with the Holy See of Roman.'²⁵

With Roman usage in all things liturgical becoming the norm on Caldey, the ceremonial used at the celebration of the mass was carried out according to such authors as Baldeschi, De Herdt and Le Vavas seur. This led some, such as the Rector of the Church of the Advent, Boston, Massachusetts, to observe that: 'the effect of the Latin Office and Liturgy was alien and artificial... a sort of *tour de force*, a phonograph performance, disedifying and exotic.'²⁶

Undoubtedly, Abbot Carlyle's Community was unique and eccentric, nothing like any other religious community in the Anglican Communion. Monsignor Ronald Knox was later to reflect that: 'Abbot Aelred, though he only became conscious of it gradually, was attempting the impossible – even if you take a very broad view about the limits of Anglican toleration. It was not so much this or that doctrine, this or that practice, that was in question. It was the whole atmosphere of being 'different', of being an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, that made permanent understanding with the Church of England impossible.'²⁷

Understandably the Abbot and his Community were soon in conflict with Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford over their 'Romish' practices. An obituary of Dom Aelred Carlyle which appeared in *The Times* on 15th October 1955 admirably sums the events which unfolded: 'Within seven years... the bubble burst. It was Dr. Gore, Bishop of Oxford, who convinced the abbot and the majority of his monks that their devotional life and liturgical observances would only be justified on a strictly papal basis of authority. Feeling unable to fall into line with other Anglican religious communities, Abbot Aelred and 22 of his community made their corporate submission to the Holy See on March 5, 1913.'²⁸

H.L. Hubbard has rightly commented that: 'Caldey under Abbot Aelred set out to restore the Benedictine life in the Anglican Church. Obviously it could not put the clock back and take literally the 'primitive observance' as its pattern. A more developed type of Benedictinism suitable to the twentieth century was essential. The community had the Roman example before them and around them. They had neither the patience nor perhaps the ability to work out in theory or practice such lines of development from the primitive Benedictinism as might be legitimate within the Church of England.'²⁹ As a consequence, *The Times* reported: 'We prefer to review the situation as a welcome proof that the Church of England has a mind of its own, which is not to be trifled with for the sake of the most dangerously interesting experiment – in this case to naturalize in the Church of England a largely alien element.'³⁰

By adopting an Anglo-Papalist position, the Caldey Island monks became a disdained minority within the Anglican Church. Like most Anglo-Papalists, they were derided for their disloyalty to the Anglican tradition and were viewed with suspicion; their theological and liturgical stance left them at odds with the wider Anglican Church.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.172-173.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.174.

²⁸ *The Times*, 15th October 1955.

²⁹ H. L. Hubbard, review of "The Benedictines of Caldey" in *Theology*, May 1940.

³⁰ *The Times*, 17th March 1913.

Anglo-Papalism has always been a difficult position to hold because of the scorn it arouses from others, and it is ridiculed and condemned from two opposite sides. To many Roman Catholics it is contradictory – to say that you believe everything they do, and yet not submit to Papal authority. Many Anglicans saw Anglo-Papalists as ‘fifth columnists’ trying to subvert the integrity of the Church of England from within. They were either seen as a group of people spreading ‘Roman errors’ or a group of misguided dreamers advocating an unreachable vision of reunion with Rome.

Carlyle and his monks, instead of embracing and experimenting with an Anglican form of Benedictinism that they could find within the pages of *The Book of Common Prayer*, instead chose to copy a form which was felt by outsiders to be alien to their own tradition. Anglo-Papalists have always found it hard to maintain boundaries, and the greatest flaw in the movement has been the need for its own strong *raison d’être*. Without such an Anglican ethos, the Caldey Community ended up creating a religious counter-culture within the Established Church. Their position ultimately became untenable, and their conversion to Roman Catholicism inevitable.

New Beginnings for Anglican Benedictinism

Two internal oblates of Caldey, Father Denys Prideaux and Brother Charles Hutson, together with one monk in solemn vows, Dom Anselm Mardon were the three survivors of the Anglican Benedictine Community on Caldey Island. While the rest of the Caldey Island community was received into the Roman Catholic Church, these three took up residence at The Abbey House, Pershore in September 1913.³¹

During the Great War of 1914-18, few young men were available to join the Religious Life, but by 1920 several postulants had arrived. On 18 February 1922 Father Denys made his profession privately and was installed abbot the following morning. On 21st March, the feast of St Benedict, two novices were professed and the canonical minimum of three was established – it could be said that finally, a stable community had emerged.³²

While the original Caldey Island Community had existed in Anglo-Papalist mode, the new Pershore Anglican Benedictine Community, wishing to remain loyal to the Church of England, acceded to several demands from the Bishop of Worcester, Dr Yeatmann-Biggs (made in consultation with the then Archbishop of Canterbury). These included such things as: the community chapel was to be a private chapel, not a public one; retreatants staying at the monastery were to be directed to the parish church for services; the Latin Breviary was for use of the community only and was authorized on the condition that they omitted ‘modern innovations and accretions and all that is distinctively Papal or in any way casts doubt on the Catholicity of the Church of England’; reservation was only allowed provided it was not in a tabernacle on the altar, but elsewhere. There was to be no Benediction or exposition; the Virgin Mary’s prayers could be asked for in the third person but not invoked directly in the second; the Marian feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption were not to be observed; and a Latin translation of *The Book of Common Prayer* should be used at Holy Communion.³³ Compromise was therefore established between Bishop and Community on both sides. As Petà Dunstan has observed: ‘This showed much flexibility on the part of both the Archbishop of Canterbury and of Bishop Yeatman-Briggs. They were prepared to grant to the ‘remnant’ far more than Bishop Gore had been to the Caldey monks. Something had been learned on both sides: the bishops wanted to demonstrate they could be very tolerant in exchange for

³¹ *The Jubilee Book of the Benedictines of Nashdom*, (London: Faith Press, 1964), p.11.

³² *Ibid.*, pp.20-22.

³³ Petà Dunstan, *The Labour of Obedience*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), p.25.

loyalty, the monks wanted to show they were good enough Catholics to respect Episcopal authority if shown understanding.³⁴

Abbot Denys believed that an authentic Anglican Benedictine Community did not mean mimicking Roman Catholic models to the last letter. He believed Carlyle had made this mistake, and this had led inevitably to an inauthentic community within the Anglican tradition. Denys had no wish to take his community in the same direction. As novice master, he taught this view to the novices. Their calling was to restore the Contemplative Life in the Church of England on the basis of the Rule of St Benedict. This was to be achieved not by attempting to model the community on an existing community, but by expecting that the tradition would evolve naturally by living the life in its fullness.³⁵

Once the community had moved to Nashdom in Oxfordshire in 1926, under a more sympathetic bishop, full Roman Usage was established. The community certainly maintained strong Anglo-Papalist leanings, however an accommodation was forged between those impulses and their loyalty to the Church of England. For example, a community sub-committee recommended that the community should follow the Roman Catholic 1917 'Codex of Canon Law'. Abbot Denys was cautious of adopting a constitution from a Roman Catholic source not tempered to an Anglican context. He had learned lessons from the Caldey days and desired to safeguard the community from leaving the Church of England. His approach was to temper an unrestrained Anglo-Papalism which would lead towards conversion to Rome; in this endeavour, he was successful.³⁶

In later years Abbot Morris commented that through the leadership of Abbot Denys, the community had 'as a whole remained much more rooted in Anglicanism than perhaps even its members appreciated'.³⁷ The community identity had been firmly established as Anglican despite the Roman Catholic liturgy, and they saw themselves very much as a "bridge" linking the two communions, if not organically, at least spiritually. For Anglo-Papalists, and for the monks of Nashdom, corporate reunion with Rome was always the ultimate goal.

Abbot Denys loved the Church of England, despite his continual complaints. Although individual members converted to Roman Catholicism from time to time, he built his community on much stabler ground than its Caldey predecessor. He proved it was possible to be an Anglican Benedictine monk, both completely loyal to the Benedictine tradition and also to the Anglican Communion. As Petà Dunstan writes: "It is the clear vision to maintain those two loyalties together that he bequeathed to his community."³⁸

The post Second World War years saw a steady growth in the Nashdom Community, and by 1960 they had fifteen choir monks in solemn profession with five life professed members in the lay brotherhood. There were five in simple profession and two brothers in the novitiate.³⁹

In 1964 the Nashdom monks celebrated their fiftieth year of existence. On 15 July of that year the Archbishop of Canterbury celebrated a mass of thanksgiving at Nashdom and gave a public address on the contribution of St Benedict to the life of the Church and ecumenism.⁴⁰ This occasion marked

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.102.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.147.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.149.

the fact that the community had finally arrived; they could now take their place in the mainstream of the Anglican Church.

But with the advent of the Second Vatican Council, change was on the agenda. The Council's decrees on liturgy and the Religious Life had far-reaching effects, especially with those who followed an Anglo-Papalist agenda. Within the community there was division as to how these changes should be implemented, if they were to be implemented at all. The then abbot, Abbot Augustine, believed that as they were Anglican, they should follow a "middle ground".⁴¹ The liturgical changes wrought by the Roman Catholic Church were, over time, adopted at Nashdom. The Mass was now celebrated in the vernacular according to the New Roman Catholic rites and so too were the Monastic Offices. Interestingly, there was some suggestion that the community change to the new Anglican rites which were being produced, but after a week of experiment with the new Series II liturgy, this change was abandoned. Anglo-Papalism had won the day, but at least discussion on these matters was now on the agenda. The Roman rite and its usage remained the standard of the day at Nashdom.⁴² As Petà Dunstan states about these Post-Conciliar changes: 'The opposition from some was vocal and anguished. From others, it was registered through silence and outward indifference, the pain internalised and brooding... Following Rome and being obedient to Rome, which had been a unifying force in the community for decades, now became the source of aggravation and division.'⁴³

Roman Catholicism, as it seemed to many, was moving towards a more reformed catholicism, and it seemed at least at some level that the two communions, Anglican and Roman Catholic, were beginning to converge in matters liturgical and theological. Nashdom's role as a bridge between the two communions was beginning to wane. For Nashdom, was their Anglo-Papalist stance still tenable? The community was divided; much of what they had fought for and been marginalized over was no longer important. Many years earlier Abbot Denys had held a vision of an "Anglican" Benedictine community. The turmoil which the community experienced in the 1960's and 1970's begs the question: had Abbot Denys's original "vision" had been lost along the way? In many respects one would have to answer in the affirmative.

By the 1980's Benedictine Abbots of the Anglican Communion were routinely invited to attend Roman Catholic Benedictine Conferences. Any notion that Anglican Benedictines were "make-believe" monks had been long abandoned. And what is more important, there was general puzzlement among Roman Catholic Benedictines in England that Anglican Benedictines desired to use the Roman rite for the celebration of the eucharist. From their point of view, it would have been more ecumenically viable if Anglican Benedictines used their own liturgical rites instead of those of another communion. It was thought that ecumenical friendships would be strengthened through such a move. And Roman Catholic Benedictines believed reunion between the two communions was not best served by uniformity.⁴⁴ This must have left the Nashdom community somewhat bewildered at the time.

Then on 10th July 2002, the Abbot of the day, Dom Basil, was ordained priest. Change was in the air once again. The Second Vatican Council had asked Religious Communities to return to the foundations of their charism. For an Anglican monastic it required a fresh look at the Anglican liturgical tradition which, as we have seen, was steeped in Benedictinism. And so, the community took a major step forward. Abbot Basil felt strongly he could only use the authorized liturgies of the Church of England, and as a consequence *Common Worship* services were used for the daily Eucharist. It seems that Abbot Denys's original vision had finally born fruit. It took many decades and

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.154,155.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.176.

several years of change for the community to embrace fully their Anglican tradition, but finally it had happened.

Malling Abbey

Briefly, we will now look at one revival of Benedictine life among women in the Church of England. This overview is helpful for our study because their continued success is undoubtedly due to their identity as “Anglican” Benedictines rather than as any quasi-Roman community.

On 12th September 1906 ten sisters of a small Anglican community founded in 1891 originally for the service of the poor, recommitted themselves to live according to the Rule of St Benedict. Under the inspiration of Abbot Aelred Carlyle, they moved from North London to Baltonsborough, Somerset, following his vision of re-establishing Benedictinism in the Church of England. Within ten years they had moved to Malling Abbey, Kent.

However, although Carlyle was Visitor to the community until his conversion to Rome in 1913, his influence on the community was limited by the appointment of the Rev’d Frederick P. Vasey as chaplain from 1907 until his death in 1931. Vasey was the son of a mixed marriage and while he had followed his father’s Anglican heritage, his sisters were brought up Roman Catholic. Such an upbringing could have brought about a divided loyalty but his was not so. Vasey longed for Christian unity, and had a wide practical knowledge of the Roman Catholic Church, but he retained a strong sense of loyalty and obedience to the Church of England and its bishops. He saw the direction of the Community as a vocation from God, and it was he, not Abbot Carlyle, who laid the foundation of the Community’s Benedictine life. It was Vasey who gave the nuns instructions on the Rule of St Benedict, prayer, the Divine Office and plainchant. Although their outward observance followed the monastic and liturgical practice of their Roman Catholic counterparts, its beginnings, under Vasey’s influence, had a firm Anglican foundation.⁴⁵

Following some years of community fragility, the community underwent a series of changes under the leadership of Mother Osyth (Abbess 1951-1985), most based on a return to the sources of Christian Spirituality. With the guidance of their abbess, the community rediscovered the treasures to be found in the Scriptures, the writings of the Christian Fathers and the 17th century Anglican Caroline divines. It was a move away from ‘devotions’ towards a more biblical, liturgical and Anglican spirituality. By 1964, this community of nuns numbered a healthy 40.⁴⁶ And compared to many Anglican monastic orders today, their numbers remain good.

Undoubtedly, through this awakening led by Mother Osyth, the inner life of the community found a path of renewal that led them into a period of new vitality. The insights of the Second Vatican Council encouraged and challenged the Community to use its freedom as Anglicans to experiment. This time of change seemed less traumatic for them than for their male counterparts. New experimental Anglican liturgies replaced the Roman Rite, and these were embraced with enthusiasm. Gradually too, a simplified English Office replaced Latin and Gregorian chant.

Mother Osyth had the new abbey church built, and it provided the perfect setting with its light, spacious and simple ambience for the new English Office and Eucharistic rite. The new music for the Office and Eucharist was authentically modern and Anglican.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Sr Mary David OSB, ‘Full Circle: Anglican Benedictine Nuns’, in *Living Stones*, (Malling Abbey, 2005), p.71.

⁴⁶ Peter F. Anson, *The Call.*, p.466.

⁴⁷ *Living Stones*, p.84.

In 1973 the abbey legally returned to the Diocese of Rochester. The Diocesan bishop, Bishop David Say, was keen to see the Abbey at the heart of the Diocese. He visited often for clothings, professions and special events. The English Office and Eucharist made them more accessible to guests, to the local clergy and cathedral chapter members who came to preside at the Eucharist on a weekly rota. Hospitality has always been an important part of the Rule of St Benedict and the Abbey was seeing a marked increase in visitors and guests; day groups from local parishes would come for quiet days. Malling Abbey was therefore taking its rightful place within the life of the Church of England.⁴⁸

In a sermon preached by Archbishop Michael Ramsey on 20th June 1966 at the consecration of the new Church at St Mary's Abbey West Malling, he was able to say: 'Today, in our Anglican Communion, we thank God that through a century and more, the religious life has been reviving and growing in the Anglican churches throughout the world, and amidst that revival the Benedictine way has been revived and followed among us... We thank God for the revival of the religious life. We thank God for the Abbey here at West Malling, for its prayers, its worship and its service.'

Unlike the Caldey community from which it grew, Malling Abbey has maintained a true Anglican identity, certainly more Anglican in flavour than its Nashdom counterpart. It is this Anglican identity, one which has not slavishly followed an Anglo-Papalist agenda, to which it must owe much of its success and a living expression of Benedictinism within the Anglican Communion.

Conclusion

In the course of this overview of the revival of Benedictine monasticism within Anglicanism, we have looked at the various strands which have brought about its rebirth. We have seen how, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, *The Book of Common Prayer* provided the vehicle for an Anglican expression of Benedictinism. The French Revolution was responsible for bringing French Monastics to English shores, thus restoring their presence within British Society. The Industrial Revolution, making life difficult for the working classes, called for a restoration of "active" religious to assist with the poor and needy. These "active" communities were often quasi-monastic in nature and brought a certain respectability to the existence of Religious Orders within the Church of England. Romanticism also gripped the Western World and there was a renewed interest in medieval imagery and the monastic life that went with it. And finally, the Oxford Movement recalled the Church of England to its catholic roots. This movement's founding Fathers were supportive of a restoration of the Religious Life within the Anglican Church. These contributing factors brought about a renewed interest in the Benedictine Life; one could almost say it was inevitable that a revival of monasticism would take place within the life of the Church of England.

Then we looked at three communities in particular, the monks of Caldey Island, the monks who lived at Pershore, Nashdom and Elmore respectively, and the nuns of Malling Abbey. Over the years each community had developed its own particular ethos, particular in relation to their place within world wide Benedictinism and in their relation to the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The monks of Caldey, under the leadership of Abbot Carlyle, were particularly prone to an extreme form of Anglo-Papalism, perhaps due to their pioneering efforts within Anglicanism and only having one model to follow, the Benedictine Order as it existed within the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, they failed to see just how much Benedictinism could be found within the pages of *The Book of Common Prayer*, a prayer book they largely scorned. We saw how Anglo-Papalism has always been a marginalized minority with the Anglican Church, its position incongruous with mainstream

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.84.

Anglicanism. Caldey Island's insistence on an Anglo-Papalist agenda led them to leave the Anglican Church for Roman Catholicism.

The three surviving members of the Caldey Island community were the nucleus for a new monastic order within Anglicanism. These monks who first settled at Pershore and later moved to Nashdom and then Elmore, had learnt valuable lessons from the past, and under the leadership of Abbot Denys Prideaux a compromise with the Anglican hierarchy was agreed. He saw his community as being an authentic Anglican Benedictine Community and he did not believe that mimicking all things Roman Catholic was necessary. The monks of Nashdom saw themselves as very much a bridge between the two communions, a bridge which one day would bring about organic union between them. However, with their move to Oxfordshire and the passing of Abbot Denys some of that earlier vision had become clouded. The changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council brought considerable turmoil to the community. Roman Catholicism was changing, they questioned whether they should follow suit. After several years of upheaval, the monks were able to regain something of Abbot Denys' original vision of an authentic Anglican Benedictine Community. Ecumenical links forged with Roman Catholic Benedictines in the 1980's, it seems, helped in the understanding of their self-identity as Anglicans. In 2002 the Anglican Liturgical Services of the Church of England were adopted for community use. It seems that finally they were able to embrace their Anglican heritage.

The nuns of Mallory Abbey were much more firmly rooted in the Anglican tradition from the very beginning. The Rev'd Frederick P. Vasey, their chaplain from 1907 to 1931, was largely responsible for this, laying the foundations of a truly Anglican Benedictine Community. Mother Osyth in later years steered the community through the changes of the Second Vatican Council. Encouraged by the deliberations of the Council they felt free as an Anglican Religious community to experiment. As a consequence, they have been able to remain very much within the Anglican mainstream, not slavishly following an Anglo-Papalist agenda, and perhaps this is the main reason why they remain the largest Anglican Benedictine Community within the Anglican Communion.

For much of its history, the Anglican Benedictine movement has been heavily affected by an Anglo-Papalist agenda. Only through embracing its Anglican heritage, one as it turns out entrenched in a Benedictine Spirituality, has it been able to enter into mainstream Anglicanism and take its stand as an authentic expression of Anglican Spirituality in its own right.

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