

Monasteries

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In my bilingual schizophrenic mind, the words "monastery" and "monastère" bring forth quite different concepts and images.

"Monastery" at once evokes a ruin, albeit a romantic one, as it does, I suppose, in the minds of most English-speakers. The dissolution of monasteries in Britain was so thorough, that there apparently exists only one monastery in Elgin (Scotland) that is still active in its original Medieval vocation and setting (despite an interruption of 4 centuries). Most of the others that survive were those converted into cathedrals or parish churches; the former having often kept some of the monastic buildings such as the cloister and the chapterhouse now for use for the dean and canons who replaced the abbots and monks of earlier times. And we have generally forgotten their earlier attribution, though the words abbey or minster still survive in some of their names. Cathedral abbeys in Britain include, among others, Bath, Chester, Gloucester, and Peterborough. Many abbey chapels (Christchurch, Dumferline, Milton, Pershore, Romsey, Sherborne, Tewkesbury, Wymondham...) serve as parish churches. Some monasteries, such as Buckfast Abbey, were rebuilt by the monks in the 19th c. following the original model. Others were preserved in part as family seats and usually greatly modified; such are Newstead Abbey (associated with the young Lord Byron), Lacock Abbey, Buckland Abbey (Francis Drake) and Woburn Abbey (Duke of Bedford). My favorite is Cleeve Abbey which was used as a country home and a farm - many of the monastic buildings have survived and it is "*one of the best-preserved medieval Cistercian monastic sites in Britain*". The dormitory was used as a barn and the cloister as a farm-yard; though the church has gone, many of the monks' living quarters are intact. I was particularly interested in the fishponds, the moat and the water/waste distribution system.

Most of the other great abbeys are now spectacular ruins; we all know of Glastonbury, Rievaulx, Whitby, Tintern, and especially Fountains in Yorkshire which was the greatest of them all. And I fondly recall my visits to the ruined Border Abbeys of Scotland, Kelso, Jedburgh, Dryburgh, and Melrose. But I remember best the red sandstone ruins of Sweetheart Abbey south of Dumfries.

There is a special place in my heart for St. Michael's Abbey, Farnborough (Hampshire) founded by the French Empress Eugénie in exile which Françoise and I

visited in 1990 as a politico-historical and liturgical pilgrimage. It was built in 1883-1888 near Farnborough Hill (later a convent school), the Empress' home from 1881-1920. After he fled from France, Emperor Napoleon III retired at Chislehurst from 1870-1873 where he died and his first mausoleum was built there. Their son, the Prince Impérial (b. 1856) was commissioned in the British Army and was killed in 1879 during an expedition against the Zulu. The Abbey was meant to be a mausoleum for the Emperor and the Prince. It was first served by Premonstratensians (Norbertines or white canons) in 1887-1895, then by French Benedictines from Solesmes (1895-1947). The community was reminiscent of a Maurist priory and became known for its great liturgical and historical learning. This was due to its abbot Dom Fernand Michel Cabrol (+1937) and Dom Henri Leclercq (+1945). Both were great scholars of tireless industry and we owe to them the *Monumenta Ecclesiae liturgica* (6 vols) and the stupendous *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (30 vols) and many other studies. In 1947, the community was augmented by English monks from Prinknash Abbey and still continues. There is another interesting Bonapartist mausoleum (beyond the chapel of the Invalides in Paris) in the church at Ruel-Malmaison to the memory of Empress Josephine, her daughter Queen Hortense and son Eugène (de Beauharnais) - a must after having visited Josephine's delightful Château de Malmaison.

The modern British abbeys date from the 19th c. revival of monastic and indeed Catholic life, though a number of monks had been quietly serving in parishes. The better known, such as Ampleforth in Yorkshire, Downside in Somerset, Worth in West Sussex, and St. Benedict's in East London, run prestigious "public" schools. Ampleforth still has about 70 monks and Downside 30, but many others are struggling for survival amid declining recruitment and aging communities. The English Benedictine Congregation (of 13 communities in England and the USA) has declined from 506 monks and 136 nuns in 1973 to about 279/35 last year. There are only 7 novices, 6 of them male. Like so many religious schools, they have been rocked by scandals of sexual abuse, and no longer have the necessary monks to staff them, and some (Belmont, Douai, Buckfast, Fort Augustus) have closed and others have hired lay teachers and indeed headmasters. Monasteries are therefore reexamining their traditional "monastic and apostolic" vocation and looking to their future. Monastic life as it is traditionally lived requires a larger congregation, so some rethinking is necessary. Vocations no longer come through the schools, but through the website, with an emphasis on visits and discernment. There is also a growing emphasis on the contemplative rather than the active (school and parish) life as representing the true Benedictine charisma. Prayer, community and hospitality are the new order of the day

for monasteries who strive to become “*spiritual centres for their local churches*”. All this being a return to basics.

The French word "**Monastère**" recalls the still active great abbeys of France, many of them inhabited anew by monastic communities or lovingly preserved as museums or national monuments. There is one great exception, however, which is the destruction and loss of the great abbey complex of Cluny. This was at one time one of the largest churches in Christendom and one of its more powerful abbeys - with some 1500 monastic houses under its control and influence.

This is not to say that the French Revolution did not try to do as thorough a job as the English Dissolution. Indeed, the monasteries were dissolved at the Revolution and their monks went into apostasy, hiding and/or exile. The great buildings were put to secular use (barracks, warehouses, hospitals, prisons...) and were thus partially preserved, but most of them were turned over to municipal authorities and used as sources of building material and were thus lost forever. During the nineteenth century, a fair number of the surviving abbey complexes were taken over by the returning monks and new congregations, often with the help of rich Catholic families who bought back the buildings and lands for the monks; the movement was much fostered by the Catholic Revival of the mid-century which produced a large number of monastic vocations.

However, at the turn of the twentieth century, after thirty years of generally anticlerical republican governments following the fall of the Second Empire, a concerted effort was made to finish the job left undone by the French Revolution. All the monasteries were closed and the monks thrown out often with the intervention of the troops. Some communities went into exile, others remained in the area but with the monks living individual lives as priests or lay-folk in the surrounding villages.

In a book on French monasteries written at the time (1909) - "*Romance of the French Abbeys*" (Elizabeth W. Champney - GP Putman's Sons) - one finds the typical English vision of “ruins” and the Preface begins, "*Scattered throughout the length and breadth of France, almost forgotten in their out-of-the-way nooks, the abbeys, though forsaken and ruinous, still afford fascinating shrines of pilgrimage to the thoughtful tourist.*" Her perspective was not encouraging - "*The empty hives are themselves fast passing from the scene. The massive walls of masonry, which neither the desintegrating forces of nature nor the fierce hatred of religious wars has been utterly to demolish, are being turned to secular uses. The suppression of the religious orders, decreed at the time of the French Revolution, has at last been thoroughly effected. (...) only a few are protected by the government as historical monuments or are lovingly cherished by private owners.*" The reader is warned - "*He who would see even the ruins of abbeys must act quickly*". The author acknowledges that the monastic system

"in its beginning at least was sublime", but that the "good fruit ripened and rotted" ... and ends with the (strange but so very contemporary) conclusion "that the mistake of monasticism was celibacy".

It is only after the Great War in which the monks showed great patriotism and courage mainly as chaplains and stretcher-bearers that they were gradually allowed to reintegrate their houses and that the great monasteries we know today began their second renewal.

Kloster Maulbronn

Some years ago, when we were living in Hesse (Germany), we went to visit friends in Freudenstadt in the Schwarzwald (Black Forest, no longer very black since Medieval peasants and later occupants cut all the hardwood trees, and Napoleon and others replanted it with conifers) in the highlands of Baden-Württemberg. The area is rich in springs, and many name-places bear the suffix "-bronn", from Brunne, a fountain. On the way, we visited Maulbronn Monastery, south-west of Heilbronn.

Like many monastic religious houses, it is situated in a magnificent landscape at the foot of a narrow wooden valley. Just upstream from the abbey a dam encloses a lake which provides water for the kitchen, the laundry and the lavatories - in olden days it probably also fed fish tanks... in a still extant complex network of reservoirs and channels. The lake is called Tiefer See (the deep lake), no doubt a reference to the Offertory of the Mass for the Dead ("*de profundo lacu*").

This Cistercian monastery was founded in 1138-1147 (under the protection of Pope Eugenius III and Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, and the generosity of Günther, bishop of Speyer) and buildings were added for the next 200 years. At the Reformation, it was seized by Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg, repeatedly pillaged, retaken shortly by the Cisterians, and finally ceded by the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) to Duke Christoph who turned it into a Protestant Seminary. It was secularised in Napoleonic times but still operates as a seminary jointly with the seminary in Blaubeuren. Its most famous alumni over the centuries were astronomer Joannes Kepler, poet Friedrich Hölderlin, novelist Herman Hesse (it figures in his "Beneath the Wheel"), and indeed according to legend, Doctor Faustus himself.

The monastic complex was paradoxically doubly saved by the Reformation which affected it in 1536: first, its early transformation into a functional Protestant institution in 1546 prevented its destruction and ensured its survival in its near entirety: it is therefore the most complete complex north of the Alps. Secondly, as a Protestant institution, it escaped the wave of Baroque redecoration that at the Counter-Reformation improved/defaced so many of the other surviving Catholic monasteries in Central Europe. It follows the plan of the "ideal monastery" in the West represented by the now disappeared (in the 18th c.) Swiss Abbey of St. Gall and normative up to this day.

What is most remarkable is that it still contains its associated dependencies, not only the cloister (untypically on the north side, rather than on the usual and warmer

south) and its remarkable lavatorium (fountain house), but also infirmary, monks' and lay brothers' refectories, cellar, inn, forge, mill, barn, wine-press... as well as most of the enclosing fortifications. It represents a full miniature Medieval city. Umberto Eco's "Name of the Rose" was in part filmed there.

The cloister was the centre of monastic life – it is square space open to the sky enclosed by arched covered galleries. Square because it is the easiest to expand from architecturally, but also because God, as St. Bernard wrote, is "*quadruple... length, breadth, height, and depth*". It is also an "enclosed garden – hortus conclusus" – with a fountain in its centre, a fit image of paradise. It is set along the wall of the nave of the church – the church wall often with a long bench was used for the collatio (evening readings of the Collationes of John Cassian, who introduced monasticism in the West in c. 425) ; during Lent a light snack was then given, hence our word "collation" for it. The East section in continuation with the transept of the church was reserved on the main floor for noble activities, such as the sacristy, the chapter (for monastic business and organisation), and the scriptorium (for intellectual work of copying and study – often the only heated room in winter). The upper floor was the common dormitory – the monks slept fully dressed on their cots and at the near end, a night-time staircase led directly to the crossing of the church, and latrines at the far end connected to the lower cloister by the day-time staircase. The far side of the cloister, away from the church, was used for the care of the body, a large water basin was used for washing just at the door of the refectory (in larger houses, there was a second refectory for lay brothers, and the kitchens and a warm room (near the stoves) for warming the hands, thawing the ink and attending to health (medicines, bloodletting...). The West side related to material needs, the domain of the lay brothers and the storing of food and wares – an external gallery or alley led from there to the outer buildings where the brothers worked (barns, workshops...) and to the West end of the nave where they prayed.

The abbey church has a well defined sanctuary separated out by a large transept. The rest of the church is partitioned off, the first three bays with elaborate carved wooden stalls – all well preserved – and lecterns for the choir monks for the singing of the office, the fourth bay for sick and invalid monks and separated by a large screen six more bays for the large group of lay brothers needed for the functioning of the monastery. There is a small bell-tower over the crossing – Cistercian monasteries never have steeples, because the bell was for internal use not for calling surrounding populations to worship

"Ora et labora", pray and work the motto of the Benedictines is thus well exemplified architecturally with special spaces to the East dedicated to the intellectual work and sophisticated prayer of the choir monks and westwards the manual labour and the simple prayer life of the lay brothers. Hosts and visitors were lodged at the extreme West end in residences and inns and were admitted through the chapel to a view of monastic life as it were from the wings and, for men, to a limited sharing, for instance of some meals. Yet, the isolation of the monks from outside life was generally carefully maintained.

(Les Cahiers Science & Vie 78, 2003. Xe-XIIIe siècle; La révolution des monastères. Les cisterciens changent la France.)

Notre Dame de Fontgombault

Last year (2013) I had decided to spend part of my Lenten pilgrimage in a monastery. My choice had fallen on Fontgombault in France (Indre) and I was expected there in late February. God, however, chose a different kind of pilgrimage for me – I spent three weeks of January in hospital and many months recuperating at home. It was a spiritual experience of a different kind, but no less useful and enriching for all that. A four-day coma brought me very close to death's door (with the consolation of the last rites administered on me by our rector – I was told, since I have no recollection of it, except of vaguely seeing his face as he bent over me). During my extended absence of consciousness, my mixed-up brain had me experience a virtual trip (pilgrimage?) of a kind to Haiti with the Sisters of Providence (where did it get such ideas, since I never was in Haiti and never even met a Sister of Providence until this year).

A year later, this spring, my condition had stabilized to the extent that I could obtain travel health insurance, so I renewed my plan for Fontgombault. Why Fontgombault, do you ask?

I had been to **Ligugé Abbey** (near Poitiers) in 2006 and was delighted with the experience, though the place was somewhat too modern for my taste. I had been attracted to the site, because it was a very old foundation, dating from 361 by St. Martin of Tours and because of its contemporary association with the artistic world – particularly with the decadent/convert novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans who had been an oblate there and the writer Paul Claudel, both of whose work I much appreciate. To this day they have an enamel workshop that produces pieces based on patterns given them by Rouault, Chagall, Braque and others.

This time I wanted a larger monastery – the Benedictine rule works better in larger houses. A self-sufficient community capable of supporting itself and producing most of its needs in the Medieval fashion. More importantly, I wanted to experience the traditional Latin ritual as it was lived in church before the Council. I was not to be disappointed.

I did, however, hesitate and thought of the **Abbey of Solesmes** (Sarthe), the mother church of Benedictine revival in France under Dom Prosper Guéranger, the great champion of Gregorian chant. I finally chose to visit there for a day and was much impressed, but did not regret my choice of Fontgombault. The church at Solesmes is very long (because a new sanctuary and monks' choir was added to the existing church – the original choir is now used for the guests and retreatants). The nave extends from the old crossing (with beautiful 16th c. statuary complex in the transept, on the North the burial of (a peaceful) Christ surrounded by his grieving mother and all the other actors of Calvary, with the inscription "*Factus est in pace locus eius – his place is now in peace*"). An even more remarkable set on the South transept

depicts the rapture, death and triumph of Our Lady – according to legend (Gerson), Mary is given communion by her Son during an apparition, after which she faints, dies and is carried to heaven – the "dead" Virgin has a very beautiful face and is therefore known as "Notre-Dame la Belle". But the nave is very narrow, being even more constrained by large pillars supporting the bell tower which is curiously set in its middle of it. One therefore participates in the liturgy only from afar. The offices were in Latin, but in the modern (ordinary) ritual. The mass, for instance, was a concelebration by all priested monks wearing identical vestments in their stalls and gathering around the altar for the consecration. The chant was remarkable, though the typical ethereal voices are now not so appreciated than the more virile rendering by some Austrian abbey choirs.

Fontgombault Abbey was founded in 1091 by Pierre de l'Étoile (Petrus a Stella) who is buried at the crossing of the church. The area along the Creuze River had been supporting a small community of hermits living in caves across from where the monastery now stands. The present church was dedicated in 1141 and is in pure Romanesque style. The sanctuary is very spacious and surrounded by an ambulatory with 5 radiating chapels; there is a short transept. The monks' choir occupies the first two bays of the nave. The six others are for the lay congregation. From 1360 to 1372, the abbey was occupied by English troops who transformed the Western bays of the nave into a fortified retreat; it was again affected by war starting in 1412. The community had dwindled to a dozen or so monks. Beginning in the 1460s, the monks began fish farming in the local ponds which restored some prosperity to the region. The abbey then fell into the regime of non-resident commendatory abbots who reaped the revenues while neglecting the religious life. At the Reformation, the abbey was pillaged by Calvinist troops in 1569 and partly burned, destroying its archives. The abbey was invested by troops from the Ligue in 1589. There were even at a time "confidantary" abbots standing in for a lay beneficiary, sometimes a Protestant local lord. The abbey was then run by a prior, with varying results – a revival under Dom Andrieu occurred in 1673. In 1741, the community was dissolved and the space used by the Lazarists, then the Sulpicians who ran a seminary. The building was slated for demolition in 1786 and sold at the Revolution in 1798. The abbatial benefice continued regardless and local priories depending on the abbey continued but were persecuted and their priors exiled and/or guillotined. Restoration of the abbey was undertaken by local priests who persuaded Trappists from Bellefontaine to settle there; they remained till 1903 when they were expelled by the anticlerical decrees of the French government (many monks went to the US). The buildings were bought in 1905 and used as a button-factory; later in 1919 a minor seminary was established for the diocese of Bourges. After WWII, in 1949, the Abbey of Solesmes re-established monastic life and the church was rededicated in 1954. The community prospered remarkably and made a number of foundations in Randol (1971), Gricigliano (1977), Triors (1984), Gausson (1984), and Clear Creek, USA (1999); the monks are presently taking over the old Abbey of St-Pierre de Wisques which has dwindled to 13 aged monks.

Fontgombault is known for its fine Gregorian chant (after all it is a daughter of Solesmes), for its strict monastic discipline, and its love of the old ways – the office and the mass are celebrated in Latin according to the traditional rites and books. What the visitor first notices is the age composition of the community with all age classes well represented with a fine balance between young and older monks – a rare occurrence these days, when monastic age pyramids seem to always be top-heavy. It is thus a traditionalist monastery (it has been said to skirt integrism, but has remained in communion with Rome, shying away from the schismatic SSPX of Archbishop Lefebvre). Monastic life is pursued as it has for more than a thousand years without concessions to modern think – for instance, the two dozen or so lay brothers remain distinct and have not been integrated with the two dozen choir monks. Perhaps this conservatism is part of the explanation of its remarkable success.

Fontgombault is not a scholarly abbey, though it does edit and print various religious publications. The present abbot, Dom Jean Pateau, likes to apply to his monks the phrase used by Pope Saint Gregory the Great to describe Saint Benedict after his studies - "*Scienter nescius et sapienter indoctus*" - *knowingly unknowing and wisely untaught*".

The Monastic Day

It is well known that life at the monastery starts early. How early depends on the feast of the day. On ordinary days, Matins begin at 5h15 am, but on feast days they may start as early as 4h40 am, because they are longer. Matins are the first of the eight canonical hours of the daily office and they are immediately followed by Lauds. In the daily schedule, Lauds must be finished by 7h00 am for the early masses. Matins have retained their ancient name and there is no pretence there of calling them Vigils or Office of Readings. The day is marked by incessant bell ringing. The tower clock rings the hours and the quarters and the church bell calls for every office twice (ten minutes before and at the beginning). And there are the Angelus bells (after Lauds, Sext and Compline). Silence is strictly enforced - during my stay I spoke to no one except the abbot, the hostellers, the porter, and two guests (one sentence each).

The monastic Office the daily singing of which represents the main occupation of the choir monks follows the traditional *Breviarium monasticum*, which differs somewhat from the *Breviarium Romanum* which used to be sung in cathedral chapters and recited by secular priests. Though for most hours, the differences are slight, monastic Matins are much more elaborate and complex. During my seminary years, I had learned the difference between one-nocturn matins on ordinary days and three-nocturn matins on feast-days. But I had never fathomed how elaborate these offices can become in the traditional monastic rite. I was particularly blessed during my stay because I experienced the simple Lenten services of ordinary days, but also the liturgies

of two feast days of increasing solemnity, those of St. Joseph and of St. Benedict. The combination of a large contingent of monks as ministers, servers and singers and of a very spacious liturgical space (large open sanctuary and transept - the monks' choir occupies the first bays of the nave) allows for very elaborate and sumptuous liturgies.

Matins

On my first morning, after a short night shivering in my bed with all my clothes on, I descended into the dark church and sat in a chair in the front row of the empty nave - the only other occupant was a visiting monk (of some indeterminate age and order) sitting at the back in the last row. The temperature was about 4° C. I wore three sweaters, a scarf, gloves and kept my tuque close at hand. It was 5h15 am and the church was in the dark - a monk lit a bleak light bulb on the column next to my seat. The monks who had been spread out in the church at their various devotions started to assemble in the choir stalls - only the choir monks come to Matins, the converse brothers recite a shortened version by themselves in their quarters. The choir was also in the dark, till a few dim strategically-placed lamps gave just enough light to read, while still preserving the gloomy atmosphere.

Given the cold temperature, the monks were wearing great woolen cowls and the stalls were fitted with additional wooden flooring over the stone. They kept their hoods on during psalms and also the doxologies, though they stood as usual. The psalms were recited recto tono, the rest of the office on simple tones. Knowing that I intended to be at Matins, the father hosteler had prepared a pile of bilingual (Latin-French) books for me, with a sheet giving the order of service and the page numbers. Following through proved difficult nonetheless. The psalms were particularly tricky, because there was a pause at the break, but none between the verses - so it was difficult to find one's place once it was lost. When they realized that I could read Latin fluently, I was given a Latin monastic breviary and the problem was solved.

This first service was that appointed for Lent. Matins began with the standard versicles "*Deus in ajutorium... Domine labia...*" followed by Ps 3 (as "psaume d'attente") before the Invitatorium with the usual psalm 94, the Venite (all knelt at *Procidamus ... Let us all fall down...*). Then came the Lenten hymn, "*Ex more docti mystico, servemus hoc jejunium... The fast, as taught by holy lore, we keep in solemn course once more...*" (as in the Roman Breviary). The first nocturn contained nine psalms in three groups of three, each group with its antiphon, from the monastic psalter 45-9, 51. The three readings were from the Venerable Bede on the Gospel of the day (Jesus' entry into the temple and the chasing of the sellers). The lessons were sung from the eagle lectern in the middle of the choir on the tonus simplex - all stood uncovered for the excerpt from the

Gospel, then sat and pulled up their hoods. The lessons were in sequence, with responsories after each. The psalms for the second nocturn were 52-55, plus the infamous psalm 57 (containing the verse "*Deus conteret dentes... God will break their teeth in their mouths*" - removed from our BCP as offensive), again three groups of three with three antiphons. The service ended with the collect of the day.

On St. Joseph's Day, Matins began earlier at 4h50. The monks sang a festive invitatorium and Ps 94. The hymn was accompanied by the organ. There were three nocturns, the first two each with four psalms and four lessons. The psalms were recited recto tono and hooded. The lessons were sung on the ordinary tone. The third nocturn had three canticles (Ecclesiasticus 1-3 and Jeremiah) instead of psalms and a Gospel lesson. The Te Deum was sung accompanied by the organ. The service ended by the stoled abbot reading the Gospel of the day..

On the Feast of St. Benedict, the solemnity was even greater and the service more elaborate, starting this time at 4h40. After the sung versicles and Ps 3, there was an elaborate Venite by the choir leaders and a Gregorian hymn. The antiphons and psalms were sung to plainchant accompanied by organ music: first nocturn (5 psalms and 4 lessons), second nocturn (6 psalms and 4 lessons, the last of the Gospel) and third nocturn (1 psalm and 4 lessons, the last of the feria). After the psalms of each nocturn, two choristers came to the lectern in the middle of the choir and sang the versicle, Pater, Absolutio and then sat on stools in front of the lectern. Each lesson had a different appointed reader who asked for a blessing then sang to the solemn tone (which I had last heard at Christmas Matins in 1960!). Then followed the solemn Te Deum.

Lauds

By the end of Matins, the lay brothers started assembling in the south aisle near the choir gate - they moved into the lower stalls for Lauds, though some went first to prepare the lateral altars for the later masses. Although it was a feria in Lent, lauds were sung in a solemn tone with Gregorian antiphons. The monks remained uncovered with their hoods down. The psalms were 50, 42, 56, and the canticle of Ezechiel, each with its antiphon, then without antiphon nor doxology (except for the last) psalms 148-150, the three last of the psalter, each beginning with Laudate - these give the name Lauds to the office hour. There was a short chapter, versicle, litany. Antiphon to Benedictus (sitting) and Benedictus. Angelus in silence while the tower bell was rung from a cable hanging at the transept.

On St. Joseph's Day, Lauds were accompanied by the organ and sung to the elaborate Gregorian tunes. An obvious problem arose - the use of complex Gregorian tunes resulted in the monks, especially the younger ones, making many more mistakes.

And since choir etiquette requires one who has sung wrongly to rise and kneel for a moment before resuming his seat, there was a constant movement of young monks in the front stalls.

On the Feast of St. Benedict, by the end of Matins, after the Te Deum, the lay brothers entered from the lower end. A number of monks left for the sacristy. They returned in procession: 2 acolytes with torches, thurifer, MC, 4 coped choir leaders, coped Abbot with mitre and staff, 2 coped assistants, 2 wimpas and 1 book. The abbot went to a throne with three steps on the north wall of the sanctuary - the coped assistants sat on stools on each side of the throne and the servers on the steps, while the MC stood to the side. The four coped choir leaders, one with a staff, went to the eagle set before the south choir stalls. The abbot sang the gospel of the day. Followed a short doxology (of Oriental origin) "*Te decet laus, te decet hymnus, tibi gloria, Deo Patri et Filio cum Spiritu Sancto in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*" Collect, *Benedicamus Domino*. *Fidelium animae*, and so ended Matins. Lauds began forthwith. These were seven-cope pontifical lauds, a new experience for me. The service followed the usual sequence of 5 psalms with antiphons, short chapter, respond, hymn, Benedictus with antiphon, versicle, Kyrie, Pater, and collect, but all were sung to full Gregorian tunes with organ accompaniment. What I had never witnessed was the practice of pre-intoning - before each psalm antiphon, the choir leader with his staff accompanied by the MC went to one side of the choir - all rose - he signaled to the monk that was to intone and pre-intoned the melody to him, which he repeated - thus, pre-intoning ensures that the piece begins on the right note and the appropriate tune, A different monk was chosen for each psalm, and the abbot for the Benedictus. The altar was censured during the Benedictus and then abbot, but not the monks and congregation. After the collect, the Suffrage to All the saints ended the service. A silent Angelus followed while the bells tolled - three strokes on each of three different bells and a peal by all four bells.

Private Masses

The night office finished, generally by 7 am, the brothers prepare the side altars (uncover, light candles, and bring the elements) and the priests go to the sacristy to vest for their private low masses. Contrary to most monasteries which have the priests concelebrate together at high mass, Fontgombault has continued the age-old practice of individual private masses. Small identical altars are spread through the church in the radiating chapels, the deambulatory and next to the pillars of the nave. All priests wear identical vestments and each goes to one of the altars carrying his chalice, accompanied by a brother in black cowl who brings the missal and serves the mass. These masses are

said in a very low voice according to the Tridentine rite, each at its own rhythm and last about 25 minutes. The brothers receive communion with the priest and lay-folk can associate with any of these masses in the nave. The two dozen or so priests saying mass simultaneously in candlelight in the still darkened church is a very moving spectacle which I will never forget. I was told that Pope Benedict was much impressed by the sight when he visited the abbey as a cardinal.

Prime

After a period for thanksgiving and a short break, the choir monks (but not the lay brothers) return at 8h15 for Prime, the first of the little hours. The structure is familiar - a hymn, three psalms under one antiphon, a short chapter, versicle, Kyrie, Pater, Collect. Monks then leave for the chapterhouse for the last part of the office - confession, reading of the Martyrology for the morrow, a chapter of the Rule, the remembrance of the departed and Psalm 129 (De profundis). I was interested to note the collect "*Almighty God who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day*" retained in our Morning Prayer is said after the Confession.

Breakfast

Meanwhile the guests go to their dining room for breakfast. After chapter, the choir monks eat separately in their refectory. All eat in silence (no reading) as is the custom on fasting days. The meal is simple, bread, butter, fruit preserves, coffee, sugar, and hot milk.

Terce & Highmass

Terce is sung immediately before high mass at 10h. On ordinary days, the choir monks take their place directly in their stalls. Four candles on the altar. The celebrant, deacon and servers in albs (and appropriate stoles) process in, reverence the altar, bow to the abbot and sit on the lower southern stalls - they sit throughout with their hood up. Terce has the usual little hour structure: hymn, three psalms, short chapter...

The altar party then returns to the sacristy, the celebrant to put on maniple and chasuble and the deacon maniple. While six monks in the middle of the chancel sing the introit, the procession returns for the high mass, the altar is censed and the service is then led from the sedilla. Simple Kyrie. Collect. Epistle sung by a monk from the chancel. Gradual by select choir. Gospel sung by deacon (no incense). Offertory by select choir, while priest continues at low voice. Altar, celebrant, abbot, monks and people are censed. Preface and Sanctus sung. Canon entirely in silence while a pot of incense burns near the altar. An extra small candle is added on the altar at the Consecration. Church bell rung at elevation. Lord's Prayer sung by all. Peace given to

monks by deacon. Monks do not take communion since they have done so earlier as celebrants or servers. Priest accompanied by deacon (paten) and a server (torch) brings communion to the faithful in the nave while select choir sing the communion from their stalls. Post-communion and collect over the people (it is Lent - *Humiliate capita vestra Deo*). Last Gospel.

On **St. Joseph's Day**, there was a solemn high mass celebrated by one of the monks. The community processed in, starting with the two abbots (there is a retired emeritus abbot), the monks both choir and converse; the sanctuary party consisted of 2 acolytes, 2 servers (later torchbearers), thurifer and MC (in surplice others in albs); 2 precentors (leader with staff) in copes; celebrant in cope, deacon and subdeacon in dalmatic/tunic. The ministers sat on lower south stalls during Terce. The coped precentors went to eagle and were joined by two other monks. There was a hymn and Terce was sung. The ministers then went to the altar, acolytes to take their torches, subdeacon the processional cross. There was a procession around the cloister. Incense, cross, and acolytes led. Monks and laymen from the congregation (no women; the choir gate was locked after the last man entered), precentors, ministers, abbots. There was a station at the shrine of Our Lady. All returned except the ministers who remained in the sacristy with the servers.

There was then the entrance procession for the mass (no cross) while the Introit was sung - nice to hear the introit "*Justus ut palma florebit*" after so many years... Altar censed (incense blessed by abbot). Ministers went to sedilla. Kyrie, Gloria (all sat throughout). Collect(s). Epistle sung by subdeacon, who was blessed by abbot afterwards. Gradual, Tract. Incense blessed by abbot. SD gave book to D who placed it on altar. Procession formed (no cross) D recited *Munda Cor*, took book, joined procession, all went to abbot for blessing. Returned to sanctuary for the singing of Gospel by D. SD brought book to kiss by abbot. Creed sung (all sat). SD brought chalice with ciborium on top - with humeral veil. SD received paten and remained in his place till the Pater (he did not go up to the altar - deacon changed side repeatedly - with genuflections at leaving and arrival - to deal with the book on one side and the chalice on the other). MC did not go up to altar. Torchbearers and acolytes in front of altar (4 candles). Torchbearers went to the side at Lord's Prayer. Peace given to D, to SD, to abbots, precentors, head monks and brothers, then to MC, and servers, among themselves. Communion: 2 tables of 3, one each side in the nave. Priest +D at one, stoled monk + SD at the other. 2 torches led, 2 followed. After communion, the 4 torches and the stoled monk left by north aisle with the two ciboria. Ablutions, finals... blessing by abbot. Coped precentors left with ministers.

On the **Feast of St. Benedict** there was a Pontifical High Mass after Terce. Terce was led from the throne. 2 acolytes, 2 torch bearers, thurifer, MC, 4 coped choir leaders including rod, Subdeacon, Deacon, coped Assistant priest, coped abbot (alb with decoration), 2 wimpas, book. Choir party remained seated and covered during psalms, rose for rest. Incense blessed. Procession to cloister, monks starting from bottom stalls, then sanctuary party, led by Thurifer, SD with cross and torches. Men of congregation invited to join after sanctuary party. Station at statue of Our Lady. On return, sanctuary party stopped at sacristy to vest - chasuble, maniples. Altar censed - abbot censed at altar. All went to throne - wimpas & book sitting on step, assistant priest on stool to the west, deacon and subdeacon on each side of abbot. All sat and covered (mitre or hood) for Introit and Kyrie. Stood shortly to intone Gloria - sat again. Uncovered and rose for Collect. Subdeacon sang Epistle on solemn tone and received blessing after. Deacon deposited book on altar, returned to throne for blessing of incense; return to altar to fetch book, recited Munda cor at altar and received blessing at throne. Gospel sung on festive tone, book brought to abbot for kissing, abbot censed by deacon. Abbot preached from his throne, sitting and covered. Creed. After Oremus at throne abbot went to altar (mitre & staff). Mitre wimpa stood to south side. Staff wimpa remained in middle at foot of altar throughout. Subdeacon donned humeral veil and fetched chalice. Altar censed; abbot (mitre but not staff) was censed and washed hands. Old abbot censed and altar ministers - no others. Assistant priest looked after the book, deacon after chalice. Small bell before and after each elevation - not during. Four torches at foot of altar from Sanctus to communion. Communion party - 2 torches, MC, abbot with deacon; other priest coming from side with subdeacon and two other torches. Assistant priest, choir leaders remain behind. After communion, other priest took ciborium away from abbot and was preceded- followed by torches through the deambulatory to the tabernacle in the far chapel. Post-communion from altar.

Sext & Lunch

Sext as usual for a minor hour at 12h50 ends with the silent Angelus with bells. The monks file into the refectory through the transept. Guests are invited to gather in the cloister. At his first meal, each guest is greeted at the door of the refectory by the abbot who washes his hands. The refectory is an old but well-lit vaulted rectangular room of Romanesque architecture. At the far end, the head table where the two abbots eat together under a large crucifix. Along the long walls, tables where the monks eat at their appointed place, their backs to the wall; though they face the room and each other, they observe a strict discipline of the eyes, and never lift them up from their plates.

Occasionally a monk has a flower set before his place - apparently his birthday (into the world or the monastery) or a special anniversary. In the middle of the room two length-wise tables, the one near the head table for guests and the lower one for the younger monks - all face each other. The long monastic prayers for the blessing of the meal are sung, then all sit. The reader is in a niche overlooking the mid-length of the room. The reader appointed for the week had an unpleasant voice and was difficult to understand (but I am deaf) despite the microphone. He first reads a chapter of Scripture or the Rule, after which all get on with their meal and unfold their great napkins which they fix around their necks. The tables are set with pewter dishes for the monks, pottery for the abbots, and china for the guests. There is wine and water on the table, but few drink wine or else cut it with water. The reader then begins the reading for the day which is variable; the ongoing book was about the life of crusader king Saint Louis of France; but papal and current church documents of various kinds (papal interviews, Osservatore romano) are also read. All the reading is made in monotone with a high-pitched voice in the traditional manner - This is meant to insure that the reader is heard over and above the hustle and bustle of the meal. It works, but the microphone (which allows transmission to the guest dining room and the kitchen) renders it rather unpleasant.

Lunch (prandium) is the principal meal of the day. Service is by 4-5 monks in long white aprons. It begins with a good but generally unidentifiable thick vegetable soup, of a different hue every day. The usual greyish bread is offered in abundance - it is very tasty. The main dish is substantial, fish, pasta, cheese or eggs, with a salad and vegetables; fruit for dessert, but pie or cake on feast days. Monks drink tea afterwards, guests are offered coffee. Monks clean their utensils and tumbler with small cloth and roll them in their large napkin and put them on a shelf under the table. The meal over, the reader reads again a appointed text for instance from the Imitation of Christ or the Martyrology (begun at Prime in Chapter). Long sung traditional thanksgiving.

At one lunch, several monks, mainly younger ones, came to kneel before the high table for varying lengths of time until released by a sign from the abbot - these penances were related to faults against the rule confessed the evening before during the culpa at chapter.

None

The usual structure of a little hour. At 2h35 or 3h pm on feast days. Sung recto tono or on Gregorian tunes according to solemnity. On festivals, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for adoration till Vespers. On the Feast of St. Benedict, there was a veneration of his relic: the abbot wearing a stole held the relic before the high altar

assisted by a deacon and acolytes with torches held the relic as monks and others filed up, knelt - the relic was put on their forehead and they kissed the reliquary.

Vespers

Vespers are the other of two major office hours and they proceed very much as Lauds. There were Solemn First Vespers on the Feast of St. Joseph. The sanctuary was lit and six candles on altar. The abbots wore black skullcaps and fancy pectoral crosses - with green cords and tassels in the back. They processed in followed by the choir monks; the brothers sneaked in by the lower side of the stalls and stood at the lower tier. The organ was playing (not used during Lent for de tempore services). Followed two acolytes, thurifer, all in albs, MC in surplice, coped precentor carrying brazen rod and assistant also coped, three coped ministers. They lined up at the altar, revered, saluted the abbot; the minister went to lower stalls at east end and the precentor and assistant to eagle set on south side before middle stalls where they were joined by two monks in black. After the Deus, ministers remained seated for the psalms with their hoods on. The precentor took up his rod every time he intoned an antiphon and a psalm; four psalms with antiphons, all in solemn tones. The acolytes put candles at corners of altar steps, then took them up to the celebrant as he sang the short chapter. The hymn was intoned by the precentor and he chanted the versicle. The antiphon of the Magnificat was repeated between each verse. Meanwhile the thurifer and MC went to abbot to get the incense blessed - ministers went to altar and censed. The celebrant was censed by the deacon who then went to cense both abbots; he handed the censer to the thurifer who censed deacon, subdeacon, precentor and assistants, choir monks, brothers and congregation. Kyrie, Pater... Acolytes returned with their torches to the celebrant for the collect - solemn *Benedicamus Domino* by precentor, episcopal blessing by abbot. *Fidelium*. All exited by front (some brothers have already skipped away to the kitchen) . Supper later at 7h40,

The Second Vespers were before the exposed Sacrament. As for first vespers except: no reverence to abbot; reverence on both knees to the Sacrament; ministers did not put up their hoods. Censing at Magnificat - sacrament kneeling, then celebrant on pavement next to altar, others as usual. *Tantum ergo* - moment of silence - Benediction with Sacrament - Hymn - deacon came to retrieve Sacrament.

On the Feast of Saint Benedict, there were Seven-cope Pontifical Vespers. The great transept organ was used and there were great peals of bells. The monks filed in following the old abbot. The sanctuary party consisted of 2 servers with torches, MC, thurifer, 4 coped cantors including the precentor with his rod, Abbot in cope, mitre and staff with two coped & albed assistants, 2 wimpas, 1 book bearer. All lined up at the

altar for reverence and a moment of silence - all hoods off, (mitre and staff received kneeling with kisses) - mitre and staff back. Ministers and servers went to the throne, cantors to the eagle in mid-chancel. Deus... all sat (abbot and assistants remain seated and covered throughout psalms) - wimpas and book bearer sat on step before throne. For each of the four antiphons, the rod led by MC went to one side (all stood) bowed to monk chosen to intone - pre-intoned - repeated at louder voice by intoner. Abbot rose and uncovered for short chapter and responsory. Servers came with torches. Rod came with MC and preintoned hymn - abbot intoned hymn... A long and strange poem all about France, relics and miracles... Versicles. Abbot intoned (after preintoning) antiphon to Magnificat- sat covered - rose for Magnificat, received staff, went to high altar followed by retinue. Gave staff (kisses, kneeling) - censed altar (incense blessed before leaving). Regained staff and mitre, returned to throne to be censed by assistant priest who then went to cense the old abbot. The thurifer censed assistants, choir leaders, servers, monks, and congregation. Abbot remained standing with staff during Magnificat. Gave staff and sat covered for Antiphon. Torches returned for the collect; there was a short hymn and another; pontifical blessing, exit.

Supper

Depending on the length of vespers, supper occurs sometime between 7h25 and 7h40. Guest eat in silence in their dining room - the food is simpler than at lunch, generally soup, vegetables, pasta, bread, with fruit, pudding or cake. The readings from the monks' refectory are transmitted through intercom.

Compline

Compline is at 8h35 or 8h40 in a greatly darkened church. Monks file in in disorder in the dark. Strangely, they appear to sing the same service every night (the Sunday's), which they know by heart; the monks keep their hoods during psalms even as they stand for the doxologies. The leader is lit by a candle, and a dim light is turned on (kind of) during the hymn, which is sung to a richer tone on feast days. There is no *Nunc dimittis*. The service ends with a hymn to the Virgin - *Ave Regina coelorum* as for in Lent. After which, while the abbot sprinkles each monk individually with holy water, the monks recite the *Miserere*. The *Veni Creator* is sometimes sung. The silent Angelus and the toll of the bell follows. Many monks then spread through the nave for private devotions, many before the statues of Our Lady. On the Feast of St. Benedict, they sang a long and strange prayer to their founder which began in the singular then shifted to plural. Very wordy and sentimental - no doubt a "modern" composition. And so to bed....

Monasticism Light

I experienced monasticism of a different kind when in the year 1960-1961 I was testing my vocation in the Noviciate of the Fathers of the Holy Ghost (Spiritans) away in the Matapedia Valley. The Spiritans are a missionary/teaching order and like many such institutions they subject their applicants to a year-long retreat as novices before allowing them to make their first temporary vows and return to a more active life to complete their studies in philosophy and theology. It is strange that an active order would subject its aspirant members to a kind of contemplative (not to say inactive) life as an initiation process.

I must stress that the objective of this whole exercise was to strengthen our spiritual lives and that the focus was essentially on the French School of Spirituality of Cardinal de Bérulle, Saint Francis of Sales, Monsieur Olier... The method was primarily that of the Ignatian exercises - in three ten-day periods of absolute silence, the retreats of conversion, of orison, and of profession, spread over the year. These retreats encompassed the four objectives and steps of the Exercises according to the well-known Latin formula:

- **Deformata reformare**, reform what is distorted by sin
- **Reformata conformare**: conform life to Christ's
- **Conformata confirmare**: confirm adhesion to Christ
- **Confirmata transformare**: transform into total abandonment

Jesuits and the Sulpicians had much influence in the training of seminarians and young religious following the Council of Trent, especially in France and by ricochet in Québec.

In a religious community such as the Spiritans, the official prayer life was structured around a typical daily schedule developed in 17th c. seminaries, such as the Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Paris where the founders of the order, Claude Poullard des Places (1679-1709) and François Liberman (1802-1852) had been trained:

- 6h30: traditional French morning prayer
- 6h45-7h25: mental prayer
- 7h30: mass
- 11h45: particular exam
- 5h45: litany of BVM and/or Benediction of Blessed Sacrament
- 7h30: traditional French evening prayer (and reading of the necrology)

This six-fold structure was to be maintained throughout life by the professed religious in any of the houses of the community. To which were to be added private devotions of spiritual and scriptural reading, rosary and stations of the Cross... and for

those in holy orders the daily Breviary. After the Council, there was a move to replace the morning and evening prayers by a communal recital of Lauds and Vespers from the Breviary, but that was variously received.

What was peculiar to the noviciate was the addition of two elements borrowed from the monastic life and superimposed onto this basic schedule:

- The daily communal offices of Matins and Lauds (9 am), Prime and Terce (11:15 am), Sext and None (2 pm), and Vespers and Compline (5 pm). These were taken from the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary - more or less the office for a feast day of the BVM with shortened one nocturn Matins. It was generally a fixed form office, but with some seasonal variations for Lent, Advent, Christmas, and Easter tides. This was meant to be a training exercise for the full Breviary later on. Yet the offering was too limited and meagre for it to become a basis for a spirituality; that would come with the full breviary, and in retrospect it seems like a missed opportunity. In the age-old controversy of the Benedictines and the Jesuits over the relative merits of the liturgy and personal meditative prayer in the spiritual life, the Spiritans were clearly on the Jesuit camp.

- The monastic discipline of extended silence, of fragmented schedule (the bell imposing a continuous change of occupation), and of specific practices (sign language, strict enclosure, choir etiquette, table prayers, readings at meals, weekly chapter with culpa, great night silence, appointed times for spiritual exercises, confession...). Short recreations were provided after lunch and supper, the only times we were allowed to speak to one another, but always in groups of three or more never two alone in fear of "particular friendships". Two periods of manual tasks (cleaning, KP duty...) were assigned every day as well as two half days a week (washing floors, farm work, gardening...). As in monasteries, Thursdays were promenade days when offices were said in private or in groups during long walks in the surrounding areas during which we were not allowed to speak to any strangers beyond saying hello. The Master reigned on us and every slight breach to the rule had to be reported to him and led to some kind of punishment such as kneeling next to the Master's stall for late arrival at chapel, kneeling before the head table during meals for tardiness, improper table manners or any other minor fault. During the whole year, we had no radio, television, newspapers, telephone. Our mail was censored and there was none during Advent, Lent and retreat times. No secular reading was allowed and no intellectual pursuits. And no communication with any visiting member of the congregation except the Master and his assistant. A confrere who was a chaplain in a neighbouring convent used to come every Thursday to hear our confessions, but we were not allowed to talk to him outside the confessional.

This "monastic" regimen disappeared when the newly professed scholastic (or seminarian) left the novitiate after a year to join the other members of the community and resume his studies and ministry.

Being thus familiar with the language and the trappings of monastic life imposed on us during that first year of religious life, I tend to feel quite at home in a monastery. I survived my year as a novice without much difficulty, but I was only 18 years old. I probably could not do it now, given my ingrained habits, my inflexibility, and the vagaries of old age. I could no longer survive there, and besides, they would never take me in. But I do sometimes dream of being a liturgical MC in a large monastery...