



A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY

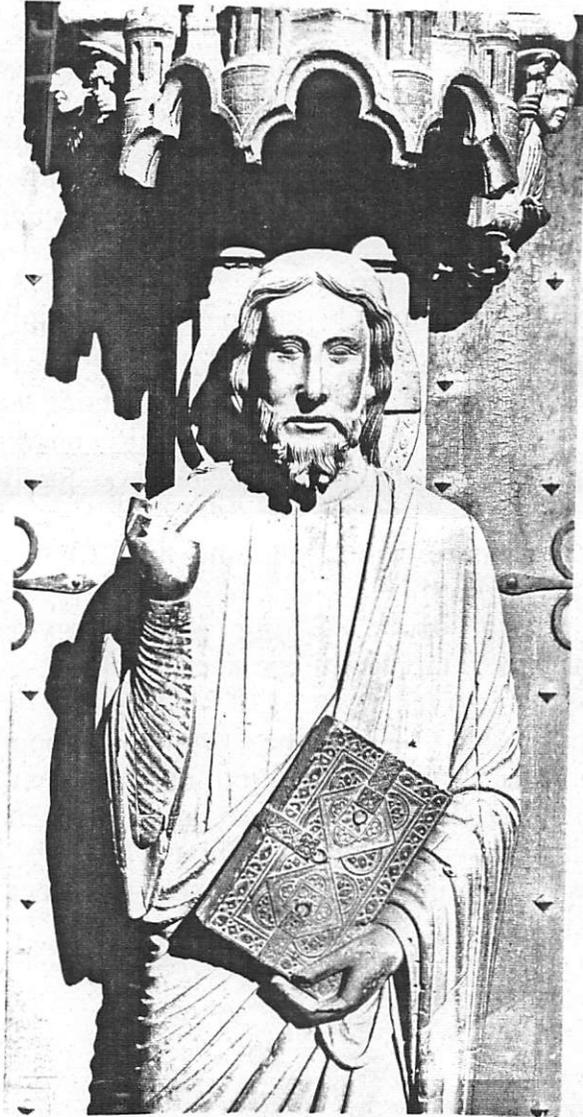
August, 1996

A SCHOOL OF THE LORD'S SERVICE

In the spring of 1996, a group of educators from various Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries from seven European countries gathered in Pannonhalma, Hungary, to discuss the special merits of "Abbey Schools," mainly secondary schools connected with monastic communities of the Benedictine tradition.

Next spring a similar program is planned in the Benedictine Abbey of Morristown, NJ, for such schools in the US and Canada. Behind these events there seems to be a new awareness pointing in two directions. First, there is a new-born realization that education, for a long time a favored field of activity for religious orders, may need to be re-assessed so that it might re-emerge from the neglect that the various renewals of the past decades have brought upon it. Second, it appears that this new interest does not aim at simply returning to the past, but seeks new insights into the rapport between secondary education and monastic life.

Today we see more that education is not simply an added dimension of monastic life, replacing menial work. Rather, the monastery as a whole must be, in the words of St. Benedict's Rule, "a school of the Lord's service" -- , i.e. a life-time training ground in the single all-important matter of serving God. Such a concept has the classical Christian broadness of what "education" means: not just some activities on the side-line, but a way of life making human life grow and expand toward full Christian maturity. Education is supposed to impact not only the intellect but the will and the emotions, personal relationships and social milieu, as well. The monastery is neither to be understood as a place of retreat for recluses, nor as a home base for "spiritual commandos" sent out into the world for apostolic tasks before returning into the solitude of contemplation. Rather, the monastery is itself a school in which the members seek God and his ways and teach their environment to imitate this way of life. With such understanding of monastic life, "The Abbey School" is a natural extension of the monastery in pursuit of its core purpose.



Christ as Teacher
Cathedral of Chartres, France

The challenge of modern-day monastic communities involved in education is to exploit the riches of their own tradition in service of Catholic education. Two features stand out. One is the experience of community built on common prayer and work, essential to the Benedictine tradition. The other is the sense of permanence linked with the monastic vow of stability. Both values stand out today as badly needed in a society in constant flux and in fear of losing its very foundations as the principles of faith and the stability of the of family undergo new and new jolts of cultural unrest. In a school built around a monastic community the rhetoric of "home" and "family" applied to the school must not appear as a quaint effort to veil the harsh realities of dysfunctional families and fragmented lives but must be a reality flowing from the Abbey's steady schedule of prayer and work with the members' steady attention to spiritual life, sacramental practice and personal sanctification. Another natural effect of the monastery's stability is the Abbey's never ceasing connectedness with its alumni who, when returning and visiting, should be able to find the community that has raised them living out the very same spirit in which they have been brought up.

MONASTERY NEWS

School year 1996-97 starts with a Faculty Retreat focusing on the theme summarized above: "A School of the Lord's Service"

By the end of the school year we have finished remodeling projects to establish a permanent Room of Reconciliation adjacent to the entrance of the Abbey Church. Two stained glass windows, anonymous gifts, picturing the gospel stories of the Prodigal Son and of the Merciful Samaritan have been installed. Meanwhile the cry room was relocated into the next room and a diaper changer was installed into the adjacent room.

On July 5, 1996, Fr. Moses Nagy has permanently returned to Hungary. He joins two other monks in their effort to re-establish the Cistercian School in the city of Székesfehérvár (pop. 120,000) where the Cistercians began teaching in 1813 and remained active until the Communist suppression of 1950. The task this little community will face is overwhelming: they need to minister to a student body of 800, take care of a small parish established around the Cistercian church, and regain control of the school. With unprecedented friendliness, the city has already returned the School to Cistercian possession and committed itself to relocating the city museum established in the old residence of the priests.



Mark and Paul on Mt. Pilatus in the Swiss Alps

On June 15, Fr. Mark joined Br. Paul in Rome. After ten days in Rome, the two made an extensive trip through Italy, Austria, Germany and Hungary. They became familiar with the various ways Cistercian live and work in these countries and saw some of the most outstanding cultural relics of the past.

Fr. Roch went to Europe in July with a work assignment. For two weeks he taught a class of Cistercian seminarians an intensive course of theology (ecclesiology).

The Library Project has steadily advanced during the Spring. It became quite clear that streamlining the needs and interviewing faculty members, parents and students takes time and only at the price of prolonged consultation would a "vision" emerge about the new facility and its functions. Meanwhile the Capital Campaign produced tangible results. Among others, the Catholic Foundation gave 35,000 for this project and asked for a mailing list for letting the School community know of their gift.

To the more studious aspects of the summer belonged Fr. Timothy's trip to Dijon, France where he and a group of his students pursued the age old method of learning language and culture "by immersion." For the first time Fr. Timothy preached in French at one of the Sunday masses of the parish.

Fr. James accompanied the Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas to Italy. The choir performed in various Italian churches and cathedrals and listened to lectures on Sacred Music by Frs. Ralph (Germany), Fr. Gilbert (Hungary) and Fr. James. Among their most memorable performance, they sang on the feast of Pentecost in the Cistercian Abbey Church "Santa Croce" in Rome and performed also in the city of Palestrina, the birthplace of the greatest figure of classical polyphony.

DAYS OF MOURNING

Last spring has offered to our community the taste of death on several -- too many -- occasions. First came the tragic accident in which Fr. Placid's nephew lost his wife and two of his children. Then we lost a number of old-time friends and supporters. Finally, we ended up holding two funerals in our church in close succession

The joy of graduation was mixed with grief when, halfway between Baccalaureate Mass and Commencement we held in the Abbey Church the funeral of Dr. George Shrimme. His younger son, Ryan, was this year's valedictorian: his farewell to both his father at the funeral and his farewell to his school and classmates will stand out for a long time in the Abbey's history.

When we thought we had "all this" behind us, another tragedy struck. On June 21, 1996, Dee Walker, member of Class '97, died in an accident. His funeral, held also in the Abbey Church, was a testimony to the deep and blessed reality designated by the expression "Cistercian Family": although an only son was mourned, it was clear that all his classmates surrounded his casket as brothers who, in spite of his "early graduation," will always hold him dear and remain united to him by their faith in everlasting life.

Both of these occasions gave us insights into the importance of the Abbey and School to remaining united as a school of prayer.

CISTERCIAN MARTYRS OF PAST AND PRESENT

On October 1, 1996, Pope John Paul II beatified 45 victims of the French Revolution who suffered death rather than denying their faith. Three of these were Cistercian monks: Fr. Pierre-Paul Charles and Fr. Elias Desgardin from the monastery of Sept-Fonts and Fr. Gervaise from La Trappe. Most remarkable is the story of Fr. Pierre-Paul, prior of his monastery. He kept his community together for several years at the cost of moving to another location. There, he used the remaining assets of the Abbey to help alleviate the growing poverty of the post-revolutionary years. After forcibly disbanding the community, the government sentenced him and the monastery's infirmarian, Fr. Elias, to be deported with many others on a ship to life-time forced

labor in French colonies. The ship of the deportees soon became "hell on earth" as it was carrying sick and desperate inmates into life-time exile. Fr. Perre-Paul ministered to his fellow prisoners by preaching and administering the sacraments, while Fr. Elias took care of the sick. They both succumbed to typhoid fever and were left on an island to die.

A much more recent event was reported by the news media. On May 21, 1996, seven Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists), belonging the monastery of Mt Atlas in Algiers, were executed by Muslim Fundamentalists after being held hostage since March 27. The spiritual testament of their leader, Fr. Christian has been recently disclosed. It shows the clear awareness that the group accepted the hatred to which they were exposed with no rancor in their heart, in fact with a great deal of respect for believing Muslims. Their story manifestly proves the force with which a monastery can contradict, by its own peaceful way of seeking Christ, onslaughts of ideological hatred and fanaticism. We join the Exordium Magnum Cistercii, an 13th-century account of Cistercian origins, in its exclamation: "O quantos et quales fratres habemus in coelis!" - "O how many and how great are our brothers in heaven!"

EVENTS PLANNED FOR THE ABBEY CHURCH

Every First Friday of the school year (beginning on September 6) the Community's Mass at the Abbey will be at 7:30 PM. The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas plans to participate.

October 13, Sunday, 7:30 PM. Annual Mass of the Abbey honoring the Freshmen of the University of Dallas with reception following.

On November 2, All Souls' Day, Solemn Requiem Mass for deceased members, relatives and friends. The Collegium Cantorum will present Fauré's Requiem Mass. We will send you a reminder, asking that you us the names of those deceased persons you especially wish us to remember at this year's celebration.

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Our Lady of Dallas
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*"Come children, hear me,
I will teach you the fear of the Lord."*
St Benedict as Teacher