

# Quarr Abbey Newsletter

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*The cloister garden in full bloom this Summer*

## **Oasis (Fr. Prior)**

In our rich Western society where everything is available at any time, provided you are ready to pay for it, there seems to be a growing thirst for authenticity. It is at least what comes out from the portion of humanity we monks can observe in our numerous summer visitors. These seem to enjoy direct contact with animals and nature, a peaceful walk through the woodland, resting for a while on a bench in the garden, sitting in silence in the pilgrim chapel or the church and listening quietly to the inner voice, meeting a (hopefully) smiling monk who passes by. Nothing very complicated, really, but it seems to be a luxury to find places where God and man, nature and culture, people of all ages and backgrounds relate harmoniously.

A word kept recurring in a few conversations I had recently with guests or visitors: 'oasis'. As if people had found a spring of water in a desert where to quench a desire or a thirst. The discovery of this source results from a threefold attention.

Attention to nature and care for environment are realities we are getting more and more aware of. The voice of the Catholic Church has been strong in this area for decades, but the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, gives to this concern an unprecedented

importance. Many thanks to our friend Neil May for reflecting on this text in the present newsletter.

Attention to man himself, not with an egoistic preoccupation, but with a new sensitivity for the interior world within, and for others just near us, can be a second step. We easily forget the inner dimension of the human person if we do not have times when we cease jumping from this activity to that. We have a soul. We are a heart. Our true self reveals itself peacefully when we relax and do not feel obliged to play a role nor deliver a performance. Then, we become able to see others in a more considerate and loving perspective. 'Ecology of man' enhances respect for each man and woman as a unique person, created and loved by God, and whose very life is in itself a gift, independent of the benefits it provides or the loving support it requires.

Finally, attention to God emerges unsurprisingly as the heart of any quest for authenticity of life. In a sense we could/should begin with it. It may be a characteristic of our times that our urgent concerns for the preservation of nature lead us to realise the even more urgent need we have to foster the treasure of the human person and to encounter personally and without fear God our Creator.

## Quarr Abbey Chronicle

### Recent events in the life of the abbey

**March 29. The Palm Sunday Mass** this year started with a gathering in the “Spanish Chapel” on the south side of the cloister. The Gospel of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was read among the Moorish arches and warm pink and yellow brickwork. Then the procession moved off, and the sounds of the ancient hymn, “Gloria, Laus et Honor” resounded exultantly along the cloister galleries. But once inside the Church the ambiguous character of this day became apparent in the readings, culminating in the Passion Narrative of St Mark’s Gospel. By the end of Mass, the entire drama of Holy Week from the entry into Jerusalem, through the betrayal and Crucifixion, right up to the wondrous Resurrection from the tomb had been displayed before our astonished eyes.

**April 2. MAUNDY THURSDAY.** The solemn celebration of the Paschal Triduum began with the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper. Our friend, Julian arrived just in time to contribute his fine voice to the monastic “schola cantorum”. It was especially appreciated during the foot-washing ceremony when the lengthy series of antiphons challenges voices which are starting to tire. The Mass flowed seamlessly into watching before the Blessed Sacrament taken for reservation in the crypt chapel. Like all the liturgies of the Three Days, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper has no formal conclusion. The Liturgies like the Mystery they celebrate are one.

**April 3. GOOD FRIDAY.** The monastic Good Friday is a day of empty spaces. It begins with the solemn celebration of Vigils and Lauds, but there is no mid-morning Mass, no Vespers in the afternoon and the Little Hours are short and spartan hours of prayers. Only the afternoon Liturgy of the Passion achieves prominence. It is always well attended; the story of the suffering and death of the Lord moves hearts because we see the God who identifies himself so intimately with our lives; and indeed with all that is most wretched in the human condition. It is a simple, stark Liturgy, even on a bright,

sunny afternoon, and shorn of all accidental elements: a Liturgy of readings, prayers, the veneration of the Cross, and Holy Communion, like the soldier’s lance, it bares the heart of the Saviour for all to see.

**April 4-5 EASTER SUNDAY.** The Easter Vigil is the heart of the Paschal Triduum. It represents the Paschal Mystery in its entirety. In the Light of Christ’s Resurrection shining in the Paschal Candle flame, we listen to the history of God’s plan for the world. We celebrate the world’s creation in the beginning and its recreation in Christ; we recall the offering of Isaac, and its fulfilment in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. We remember the passage of Israel through the Red Sea and their escape from Egypt; and we comprehend the liberation of the entire human race from the power of sin and death. Because Quarr has no parish, we had no baptism at our Vigil, but all present renewed their baptismal promises, renouncing Satan, professing faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and then all together celebrated the Mass of Him, who by dying destroyed our death and by rising restored our life. Alleluia, Alleluia.

**April 13-25 GENERAL CHAPTER.** Benedictine monasteries are largely autonomous but they are gathered into loose groupings called Congregations. All follow, not only the Rule of St. Benedict, but also the Declarations and Constitutions of their Congregation. Once every four years the superiors of our Congregation meet at the Mother House of Solesmes for what is called the General Chapter. This is the primary legislative body of the Congregation. Fr Prior went to represent our community which took place this year for two weeks beginning on the Monday after Easter week. The legislative work is not the only occupation. It is an opportunity for Abbots and Priors to report on the state of their communities and to discuss the challenges of monastic life in their different circumstances, as well as to solicit help when needed. Quarr derives much of its character from belonging to the Solesmes Congregation

which has provided us with much assistance, and not least with our present Superior.



*New life at Quarr in Spring*

**April - May. DUCKS.** During April and May, the monks are well used to the cries of ducks coming from the cloister garden. For a number of years ducks have chosen the garden as their preferred site to lay eggs and hatch young. No foxes have found their way into the cloister – yet! – and no cats. Nevertheless, once the ducklings are hatched and stumbling around the garth, they need human help to make it into the big wide world. They want to leave, but they are nervous of our intervention. Doors have to be opened; benches have to be laid on their side to construct a highway out of the cloister. They all make it outside, even if one or two take a wrong turning and have to be startled out of a temporary refuge under a bookcase. But what happens next? They disappear into the long grass, following Mother on her way to the nearest pond or stream.

**April 22. VISITORS.** We had three visitors for lunch today, who joined the community for coffee in the cloister afterwards. **Mark Carter** used to be our Estate Manager and now runs his own arboriculture business. He was down for the day to inspect our woods and comment on our woodland management plan. For any lover of trees, listening to the experts these days can be rather depressing. One after another, our native species seem to be succumbing to pests or disease. Can one take hope from the past resilience of the natural world? Our other two visitors were monks; Br. Michael from Farnborough Abbey brought an old friend of ours, **Dom Leander Hogg**, with him. This onetime monk of Prinknash now lives at the Monastery of Christ in the Desert,

in New Mexico. Thirteen miles from the nearest road, this monastery of 36 monks is a flourishing community of nations, and in spite of its remoteness in its harsh, and yet beautiful landscape, attracts many visitors seeking after Christ in the desert places of their lives.

**May 5. GANAGOBIE.** Fr. Gregory left this morning for the first stage of his journey to Ganagobie, a monastery of our congregation in the south of France, who are celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation. They were the very first foundation Dom Gueranger made from our Mother house of Solesmes. [DS]

**FRIENDS OF QUARR.** The Friends of Quarr are slowly increasing in numbers and are now fundraising for the Walled garden project. The last fundraiser " Il Pranzo Italiano" at Lisle Combe, in St Lawrence in April raised £2,000 and was very well supported. The next fundraiser will be held at "Ashcliff", The Pitts , Bonchurch, PO 38 1NT, the garden of Mr and Mrs Sidney Lines, as part of the National Garden Scheme on Saturday and Sunday 20th and 21st June, 11am-4 pm. The Friends will be selling refreshments: cream teas, cakes and Quarr Abbey plants in aid of the Walled garden project. We look forward to seeing you there.

A total of £12,000 has already been raised for the project since September 2014.

Art work done by Friend of Quarr, Vanessa Bird, over the last 2 years " Quarr through the Seasons" will be displayed in the Teashop after St Benedict's day on the 11th July. The oil paintings will sell at a special price of £100 each. All the proceeds from the sale of the paintings will be in aid of the Walled Garden project.

My sincere thanks to Friends of Quarr : Mr and Mrs Scoccia for sponsoring "Il Pranzo ", Mr and Mrs Noyes of Lisle Combe, Mr and Mrs Lines of Ashcliff and Ms Bird for their generosity in enabling the Friends to stage these events.

If you would like to join the Friends or contribute in any way please email Dr Rebecca Ashton: chair.friends @quarr.org. I look forward to hearing from you. [RA]

## Fr Brian gives us his account of the Gregorian Chant Forum

From the evening of 13 July to the morning of 17 July Quarr and St Cecilia's Abbey once again jointly hosted the Gregorian Chant Forum. Our international group comprised of monks, nuns, religious and lay people providing for us a rich fusion of academic expertise with the lived-out day to day monastic experience of the Chant. We were delighted to welcome back as our main speaker Dr. Guidrius Gapsys, a Lithuanian musicologist who teaches at the Paris Conservatory. He was supported by presentations from Sr Bernadette of St. Cecilia's and Fr Xavier, Prior of Quarr.

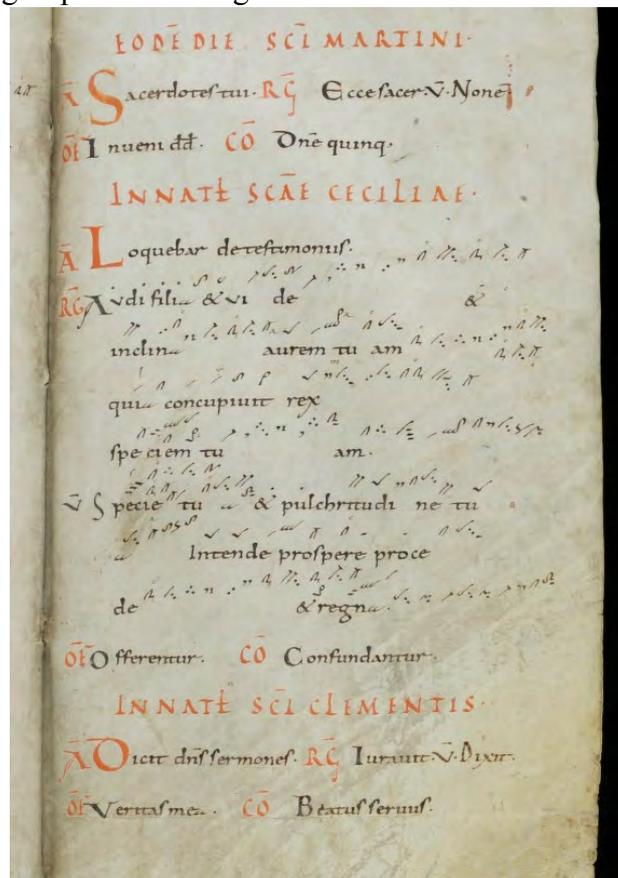
Our Forum this time centred on chants of Our Lady with particular focus on the Assumption. Guidrius demonstrated how Gregorian Chant develops like a "living body". The oldest manuscripts for the Assumption come from Corby Abbey (Picardy, France) about the 9th century. This predates the usage of neumes and so the cantors had to memorize the melodies. In these chant texts there was no explicit mention of the feast, all was simply taken from Psalm 44. The introit "Vultum tuum" which we still sing today on this feast is from this time. Neumes appear with the texts a century later.

The figure opposite shows a page from a manuscript of the St Gall monastery in Switzerland from the early 10th century. This so-called Cantatorium of St Gall is the earliest complete extant musical manuscript with neume notation. It contains the solo chants of the Mass and constitutes one of the main sources for the reconstruction of Gregorian Chant. Neumes were an *aide de memoir* for the cantor indicating the rhythm and identifying the important notes. The page shows the gradual *Audi Filia*. Note that the neume over the first four syllables is a punctum (dot) indicating one note per syllable whereas the next syllable has a torculus (slanted S) indicating three notes for the 'a' of 'filia'. In subsequent centuries composers added new texts explicitly referring to the feast but at times they did so by incorporating them into old melodies. This was

done in a manner which indicates that the composer was mindful of the words of the old text he is replacing and the theological statement which can be understood by comparing the old text with the new.

Another important element in the structure of a Chant piece is its mode. Sr Bernadette noticed a certain persistent presence of the second mode in the Chants of Our Lady. Although the late Middle Ages description of the modes attributed "tristis" (sorrowful) to the second mode, Sr Bernadette argues that this is incorrect. Structured around the minor third re-fa, it is a 'bottom heavy' mode, with a definite pull downwards. It has a small structural *ambitus*. She suggests that 'poverty of spirit' is a better characterization of this mode and thus very suited to Our Lady.

Our week of singing and the mass chants for each day was expertly directed by Fr Xavier who inspired us both by his enthusiasm and his notes on the spirituality of the pieces. He transformed us from a collection of disparate groups to one Gregorian Choir!



Audi Filia: St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 359, p. 137 (<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch>)

## The Procurator's Office

### Another article in the series about 'the Parts of Quarr'

St Benedict's Rule devotes more space to the Cellarer than any other monastic functionary apart from the Abbot. Indeed he sees the two as having much in common. They are both 'sicut pater' –that is like a father with special care for the sick, children, guests, and poor.

What is striking here is that though the word 'cellarer' relates immediately to the cellar (i.e storeroom) which the cellarer controls, Benedict seems principally concerned with delicate human relations within the community. Thus we read: 'he is not to sadden the brothers. If one happens to request unreasonably, he is not to treat him with disdain and thus sadden him, rather he must reasonably and with humility, deny the bad request. He is to keep custody over his own soul'. Similarly 'he is to look upon all the vessels and goods of the monastery as though they were sacred vessels of the altar' [RSB 31]. This is the responsibility of the monks, too, for it is an infringement of the Rule to mistreat anything which they handle

There is no absolute division here, as there had been in some previous monastic rules, between spiritual and temporal orders, for one of Benedict's aims is to bring these two into harmony though he recognises that this will not always be easy.

Benedictines here differ, for better or worse, from Franciscans who are naturally uneasy about the possession of property given Saint Francis's absolute objections to it, or from Jesuits who own such property as is necessary without thinking too much about it. Saint Benedict, as much as Francis, insists on the individual poverty of his monks but is concerned with the comely economy of his communities who live with sobriety in a definite and cultivated place and, like the early Christian communities described in Acts, have all things in common.

There are links here, of course, with the Pope's recent encyclical as Neil May points out in this edition of QAN (see pages 6-7). Benedict wishes his monks to live in reverence for the Creator and for all the created and man-made things which they use.

Quarr uses the word 'procurator' rather than 'cellarer' (in some abbeys he is called 'bursar') but it is still his job to deal with members of the community when they need material things or money. If, for instance, a monk needs money for travelling, he will have to ask for it from the procurator and, on return, he is obliged to provide an account of his expenditure. But the procurator is helped by lay financial advisors and the responsibility for the site development as a whole is managed by a clerk of works. Father Petroc acts in this capacity and also as electrician for the abbey since the community tries to live economically by doing as many things by themselves as possible and by taking advantage of modern ecological methods of saving expenditure and waste as in the solar panels above the workshop shown here.

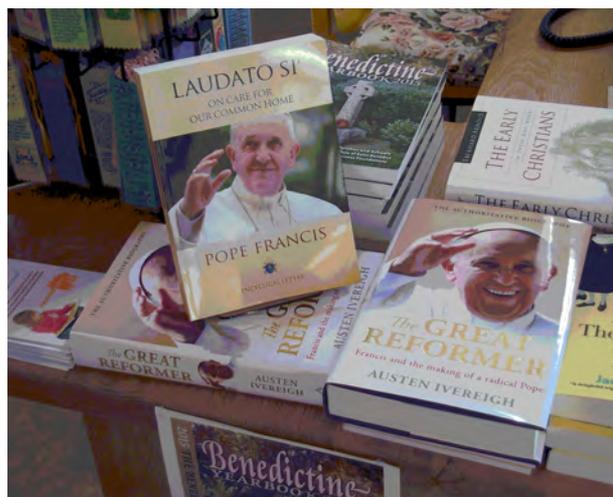


*Solar panels above the workshop*

There is here, as in Benedictine life as a whole, a need for careful balance. Possessions are necessary and not intrinsically evil, but the monk, like every Christian, should not treat them as ends in themselves but care for and cherish what they use whilst at the same time cultivating a sense of detachment. The love between cellarer and monks, so emphasised by Saint Benedict, will last into eternity but the possessions themselves will perish. [BB]

## Neil May (a Friend of Quarr) reviews the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*

The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* was given in Rome at Saint Peter's on 24 May, 2015. It has caused considerable interest amongst Catholics, environmentalists, industry groups, social activists and politicians across the world, bringing both praise and scorn. On the face of it, the Encyclical is about the need for Christians, and indeed all people of the earth, to respond to the environmental crisis because of the threat it poses to all peoples and all species.



However it is much more than this. As the Pope writes in the first section ‘I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.’

The reception of the Encyclical has typically represented the assumptions of those reviewing it. Environmentalists have seen it as a call to act on climate change and biodiversity loss, while left wing groups have seen it as an attack on neo-liberalism and the “deified market” (para 56). However the Encyclical is not primarily about such specifics. It is really a call for a new vision of what it means to be human and of our relationship with creation and God. It is clear from the second paragraph that Francis considers the environmental crisis to be a sign and a cause of what is happening within our societies and selves. ‘The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.’ This is not just a matter of observation however. As he writes later ‘For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion.’

Pope Francis uses the environmental crisis as a way to expose what he considers the dominant paradigm in the western world and as a way to explore a better way of being, knowing and acting both in our personal lives and also in our communities and nations. The paradigm which he identifies (in Chapter 3) as being at the root of the ecological crisis he calls “the technocratic paradigm”. While praising the achievements of technology and science in remedying “countless evils” as well as creating objects of beauty and wonder, he attacks the “undifferentiated and one-dimensional” nature of this paradigm which effects a new relationship between humankind and nature, one of “possession, mastery and transformation” rather than the previous relationship of reciprocity and respect. However, he goes on to write that ‘the methods and aims of science and technology’ have become ‘an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society’ in every way. He links it to what he calls ‘the “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)’. For Pope Francis, modern science, economics, politics and culture are all part of the same reductionist paradigm.

The alternative approach which Pope proposes is one of “integral ecology”, based upon a holistic

understanding of reality. This in turn is based upon the Bible and religious tradition (not only Catholic). It establishes a different relationship between subject and object, between humans and nature where everything is connected and care for each other is natural because we and the whole of nature were “created for love”. To establish this different approach we also need to accept the notion of a Creator God, because without this transcendent reality, we cannot escape what he calls ‘a stifling immanence’.

One of the consequences of this different approach is the need to “redefine our notion of progress”. This affects everything in economics and politics and demands our engagement with them. Another is the requirement to live with “sobriety and humility”, in balance with nature and ourselves, and within natural and moral constraints. ‘Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.’ In many ways the life advocated is very similar to that of the Benedictines, and the Community at Quarr could well use this text in their own lives and mission.

It is noticeable that the Pope does not explicitly call his suggested approach a new paradigm. Indeed he argues that ‘The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic.’ The Encyclical is very realistic in this sense. ‘Yet’, he continues, ‘we can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.’ The Encyclical does not try to provide a new paradigm but a new vision which might lead to a different paradigm in the future.

He is also clear that this is not just a personal activity. He writes that ‘self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today.... Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds.’ He calls for “a civilisation of love” which infuses politics, institutions and communities. Again the model of Benedictine community may be invoked. However without engagement with the wider community, the monastery will be isolated like an individual. The Pope is calling for political and social transformation on a much greater scale.

Much of the Encyclical is given over to practical examples of what can be done at a personal, community and national level. It cannot be accused of being unworldly in this sense, or of ignoring the science or politics of the current world. Some of the suggested actions are pragmatic, such as turning down the heating and wearing a jumper, setting up co-operative enterprises, or reform of the banking system, but they are all set within the need for a new vision of our relationship to other humans and nature (and, by inference, also to God).

The Encyclical is also full of poetry and appeals to the heart as much as to the mind. This is consistent with its rejection of a purely rational and technocratic approach. As such it is not a work of theology or social theory so much as a call to conversion and action. Everyone should read and reflect deeply upon it. As Pope Francis writes:

‘Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.’

**'Rejoice beyond a common joy'. Some reflections on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at Quarr.**



There was a special aptness about the production of *The Tempest* in July in the grounds of Quarr Abbey. Shakespeare's play is all about an enchanted isle and, of course, we live on one. Indeed, the Island hospital has a citation from it written on the wall: "Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,/ Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not." The play also presents spiritual reality. The servant of Prospero (the deposed Duke of Milan and the central character) is Ariel who can only be seen by his master and by the audience although he can produce effects, including song, that are perceptible to all. As if to emphasise the freedom of the spiritual from normal constraints, Ariel in this production was played by two actresses who skilfully co-ordinated their performances to give an impression of omnipresence. Ariel is, as the name suggests, a creature of the air which blows where it will as also of the air which is a musical melody. Clearly, much of Prospero's spiritual power comes from Ariel.

This power is manifest early in the drama in Prospero's putting other characters to sleep which is consonant with the dream-like quality of the whole story. Indeed, those charmed into slumber in this production included the man in the audience sitting next to your theatre critic, though a couple of glasses of wine with an excellent meal at Quarr Abbey teashop may have been a factor.

More significantly, Prospero's magic brings his enemies into his power, first of all in the eponymous tempest. This enables him to direct events towards a reconciliation, which is enfolded in a marriage between his daughter and the supposedly lost son of one of them. "O, rejoice beyond a common joy, and set it down/ With gold on lasting pillars" says in response Gonzalo, who stands out as good among the party of Prospero's enemies and indeed stood out as a good actor in this production.

Yet Shakespeare is not so simplistic as to present the accomplishment of good as flowing from power, even spiritual power. True spiritual good involves renunciation and Prospero gives up his magic art, resolving: "I'll break my staff,/ Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,/ And deeper than did ever plummet sound/ I'll drown my book." This retirement from the exercise of power is done with full knowledge of the cost of such moves: it was precisely because he had retired to a life more focused on study and contemplation of the spiritual that he was deposed as Duke of Milan before the action of the play began.

Prospero is, we might say, an exemplar to the monks at Quarr Abbey in their quest to leave behind worldly concerns. He does, after all, live in a cell and at the end of the play he identifies his only hope as "prayer,/ Which pierces so, that it assaults/ Mercy itself and frees all faults."

So as the vesper bells of the abbey church mingled with the recitation of the Bard's deathless verse we were reminded that just as Shakespeare by his art, at one and the same time, represented both Prospero's story as a conjuror and his story as dramatist of rare power so too he represented also both his and Prospero's renunciation of power in openness to the supreme and divine power and the same renunciation and quest made by every monk—and indeed every follower of Christ.

[*QAN* is the quarterly newsletter of the Benedictine community at Quarr Abbey]