

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I	VALYERMO DESERT SCENE
	VALYERMO DESERT MAN
CHAPTER II	ABBOT VAN CALOEN
	ABBOT THEODORE NEVE
	FATHER OF THADDAEUS YANG
CHAPTER III	LLANO COMMUNE
	STONE HOUSE
	ALDOUS AND MARIA HUXLEY AND LLANO
	LEVI AND DOROTHY NOBLE AT VALYERMO
	OSCARINE BRASSEUR AT THE PRIORY
CHAPTER V	FIVE PHOTOGRAPHS
CHAPTER VIII	CHAPEL CRUCIFIX
	REFECTORY WINDOW
CHAPTER IX	VESPER CELEBRATION

PREFACE

In writing of Valyermo, I have deliberately chosen to avoid conventional pious chronicle, and concentrate instead on things, events, procedures and people that seem to me to contribute to the unique flavor Saint Andrew's Priory has among Benedictine houses, especially Benedictine houses in America. That is not to say I am forgetful of the deep spiritual values that must underly all such ventures as Valyermo. I presume them, and I hope the reader will.

Neither have I been at all concerned to conceal skeletons in cupboards. Au contraire. I believe that the frank disclosure of crises, mistakes, miscalculations, wrong turnings, will only tend to highlight the genuine achievements of a quarter of a century. I am not of course writing a history. Valyermo is too young to have a history. One fervently hopes that it will have one. And I offer these pages as a tribute to a community and a place that I love very much indeed. If they induce the Southern California public at large to take note of a rather unique phenomenon in their midst, they will have adequately served their purpose.

THE VALYERMO EXPERIENCE

Since the Fall Festival of 1982 the not terribly original button "I love Valyermo" has been appearing on the lapels of various ingenuous devotees of the Priory. They always wear these when they come about the place (do they at other times?); and it would be churlish indeed to insinuate that their enthusiasm is other than genuine. Nowadays such buttons and bumper stickers of course make their appearance all over Southern California in the frenetic rush by automobile manufacturers, real estate promoters, cereal merchants, dry cleaners, purveyors of lingerie, toiletries, cleaning fluids, what you will, to gain a little corner in the sun.

The sort of people who sport the Valyermo button are not always, true, the sort of people you would borrow money to drink with. At worst they may be ex-convicts ("college graduates" in the irreverent domestic argot) who have found God, and show every indication of staying close to the version of God provided by Valyermo. He gives food and lodging. Or they may be plain cuckoo. Or just colored with the charismatic brush, and always ready for a long spiritual talk. After a while though they tend to become proprietorial, and constantly speak of the place as though they owned it. Maybe indeed they do. The better element among them, it must be admitted, have labored long and lovingly, year in, year out, festival after festival, and it is by such labors that the Priory lives.

In ecclesiastical terms the laity nearest to the Priory (they have the right to get buried in the Priory cemetery) are of course duly professed Benedictine Oblates. Once a curious but not too well-informed

visitor inquired "Tell me what are Oblates" and a waggish priest (not a monk) standing by said tersely "a fan club". His answer had its point.

Nearer still, in some juridical way, will be those we now term "observers". They are young, or not so young, men who feel they have a monk's vocation. They are usually asked to live the life for six months or so before entering the novitiate, and become finally professed as monks. Some just go away after a while. Some are asked to go away. Since I entered the Priory in 1968 we've had some oddish observers, especially in my early years. One I recall was simply hiding out AWOL from the army, and was finally tracked down (to our consternation) by the sheriff. This was during my own novitiate, and I was constantly embarrassed by his pious style in conversation. "This morning when I was making my meditation down by the creek...." That sort of thing. I was once called upon to adjudicate a heated argument between him and a young negro observer - Which of two saints was really the holier. The negro boy didn't last long either; but he didn't leave without dropping a heavy tray of plates on my head during kitchen chores. Inadvertently, of course.

However, we've had many more sensational exits from the Priory than mere observers, and one shouldn't get too deeply into the matter just yet. One a prior, some who embezzled amounts of money, and so on. They will come up for mention in due course.

Whether it be anxious observers, or fans who wear their heart on their sleeve, or just ordinary mortals "hunting for peace", it's undeniable that Valyermo as a place exercises a profound attraction. Set in the high desert, within easy reach of the Los Angeles megalopolis, it astonishes the traveller by merely existing. It is the vivid contrast to

the city which takes one by the throat. Not seventy miles from downtown you are back to nature with a sigh of contentment, or with a thud, depending on your temperament. Desert nature it is true, but nature. Cottonwood trees, tranquil peach and apple orchards, a lake, shade, sheep browsing in a paddock, a few scattered wooden buildings, birds everywhere, wild creatures like squirrels and rabbits and gophers and snakes liable to dart across your path.... Over all the most benign climate imaginable, comparable to that which gave Athens to the world in those good days when the environment didn't have to be protected by law. Nights are cold in winter (a snowfall or two is normal) but the days are almost always serene. Heat in summer, though more intense perhaps than what you get in Los Angeles, is always more tolerable, because there is shade, and there is no smog.

I really think that I was lured to the Priory by, amongst the usual complex set of considerations, the sheer magic of the high desert. On spiritual considerations I choose to exercise the traditional, but nowadays not much observed, virtue of reticence. The magic of the high desert, to my mind, has been best described by Willa Cather (a much underrated American author) in Death Comes for the Archbishop, the only novel, apart from Joyce's Ulysses (if you can call that a novel) that I've read twice. I can still quote the paragraph where she describes the feelings that made Jean Latour, as an old man, return from retirement in his native Puy de Dome in Provence to die where he had labored.

"But in the Old World he found himself homesick for the New. It was a feeling he could not explain; a feeling that old age did not weigh so heavily upon a man in New Mexico as in the Puy de Dome....It was in the early morning that he felt the ache in his breast; it had something to do

with waking in the early morning....In New Mexico he always awoke a young man; not until he rose and began to shave did he realize he was growing older. His first consciousness was a sense of the light dry wind blowing in through the windows, with the fragrance of hot sun and sage brush and sweet clover; a wind that made one's body feel light and one's heart cry 'Today, today' like a child's...

"That air would disappear from the whole earth in time perhaps; but long after his day. He did not know just when it had become so necessary to him, but he had come back to die in exile for the sake of it. Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning...."

That was the desert of New Mexico of course, around Santa Fe; but our desert round Valyermo is similar; high, pellucidly clear, with a virgin quality as in the Genesis dawn of things, palpitating to the subtle and muted color changes of the sages, with the vicissitudes of weather or season. This desert does not have the stark, raw, terrifying quality of, say, Sahara. Or of Sinai, forty years of which so molded Jewish temperament millennia ago. There is hardness, yes. It is well fleshed with sage, with joshua, with juniper and manzanita, and during the season with those glorious Roman candles - the yucca tree in bloom. And of course when the spring flowers (alleged to depend on the quantity of winter rain) make their appearance almost overnight like manna, our desert becomes a veritable paradise. It recalls Saint Jerome's ecstatic letter to Heliodorus: "O desertum Christi floribus vernans..." There is nevertheless a feeling of bone not far beneath the surface. But on the

whole it is no hardship to live here. Thus we at Valyermo, however we may in fervent moments draw the comparison, do not have the same austere experience as the first Egyptian anchorites in the Thebaid. Neither for that matter did Jerome.

The monastery itself has little resemblance to the celebrated Benedictine houses of the old world. Monte Cassino or Montserrat, or Maria Lach or Salsburg or Melk or Niederaltaich, or Ampleforth or Buckfast or Downside. Or indeed Beuron or Maredsous or Saint Andre, though it stems from that lineage. If you were looking for parallels you would probably find them in the first dawn of Celtic monasticism in the sixth century, when the romantic fervor flowing from the east which so captivated people like Jerome and Augustine, was still palpitating. Lindisfarne say, or Iona, or Clonmacnoise, or Devenish, or Nendrum, or Innishmurray - the roster is very long, the age of the "little monasteries". The same nearness to nature, the same simplicity in building, the same ardor of beginning. Or perhaps that is merely the fancy of an Irishman, aging, like Jean Latour, in exile. One incomparable boon is that the Belgian founders, in whose veins the blood of the great Flemish masters must still have been running, tempered with supreme good taste all building and decoration (which goodness knows is modest enough) to blend with the beautiful desert landscape. There is very little to boast of in Valyermo; a converted stable as chapel, a converted cowbyre as cloister; but the simple good taste is so soothing to the nerves.

Honesty, however, compels one to point out that there is an obverse side to the medal. Feelings, I suppose, depend on temperament. I know that my first reaction to Valyermo desert was euphoric and exhilarating. Yet when an intelligent young Dublin priest on a lightning visit to

California came to visit me recently, I was intrigued to hear him ruminate as he gazed at the landscape, "You know, for me this is hostile country..." Precisely the contrary reaction. Yet somehow, I could understand him.

I could understand him because during the twenty odd years that I have been a monk here, I've had plenty of opportunity to sample the loneliness, the utter isolation, the defenselessness, the fear, that can surface in low mood. Belloc tells somewhere of the curious weltschmerz that overcame him after a day-long visit to the deserted Roman town of Timgad in North Africa. He felt the utter absence of people, returned to his lodgings, fell into a depressed sleep, and was not consoled until he awoke "to the homeliest sound in all the world - the sound of water boiling in a kettle".

It is something of that nature that must be set down as the negative Valyermo experience. I have for twenty years walked and cycled the desert, always almost alone, rarely seeing a soul. More I think than any other local resident. It might very well seem that the presence of a community should deal with any onslaughts of loneliness and isolation. Isn't that what a community is for after all? Well - yes and no. While it is true that "no man is an island entire of himself", it is also true that every man is ultimately alone. Religious communities piously describe themselves as families. But of course that is no more than a figure of speech. Such communes are not families, especially when they are large. Valyermo thank goodness is not large. The members are mutually supportive yes, and have contracted obligations to one another. But it would be naive to think that intimacy exists all around. Indeed, ties of blood have their limitations too, I daresay. So that there are

times when every man is an island, is alone. Alone with God, we like to say. Doubtless in dying, if they are fairly conscious, all mortals know that feeling. And all mortals have to die:

"If only gladiators died,
Or heroes, death would be our pride.
But have not little maidens gone,
And Lesbia's sparrow, all alone?"

The aloneness which the desert brings may very well be a rehearsal for that. Who was it said that all life is merely a rehearsal for death? The Platonic Socrates I suppose.

However, at the Priory, negative experience in the long run is more likely to stem from inadequacies in human beings than from raw and empty stretches of sand. In the daily cut and thrust of living not everyone encountered is likely to bring solace or raise the spirits. The society is made up of monks (professed members of the community); prospective members at greater or less remove (they have been already mentioned as observers and novices); workers either paid or voluntary (usually local residents) of both sexes; familiarii (lay people who for one reason or another are allowed to live permanently in the Priory, or who pay to live there); and guests. Because the Rule of Saint Benedict enjoins that "all guests be received as Christ", there is a general policy of welcome. But when you consider the modern society of southern California, it is easy to see that severe strains may be imposed on hospitality.

Thus, you may feel it necessary to enter the refectory at lunch time with some circumspection. It is the meal where the monks mingle with the lay population, and where some degree of communication is unavoidable.

having vowed to take the rough with the smooth, you may be pardoned for feeling that community bores are enough to be going with. Having others superadded, especially on a permanent basis, (familiarii, workers, permanent guests), tries flesh and blood rather much. Valyermo perhaps, because of its unique character as a "little monastery" is on this score, exposed to greater hazard.

Large and long established Benedictine houses have, over centuries, developed a system of dealing with the matter. Guest houses are apart and self-contained, and cloister areas are restricted to monks. In Valyermo, however, in spite of modest "monks only" signs here or there, the only privacy you can count on is your own room. And even that is sometimes precarious. Almost anywhere else, the monks' dining room, their community room, their library, their laundry, their kitchen, you are liable to run into people that cause you to wonder why they're there. Encounter is bad enough, but being to expected to respond to conversational sallies can touch a raw nerve.

In this context, as Valyermo life-style has been currently developing, I trust it will not be held invidious if one airs some pet peeves. Everyone has pet peeves. Mine have to do with good manners really; and good manners are just a by-product of civilized interchange and local convention. I instance the practice of table-hopping at lunch, and the tendency towards indiscriminate hugging. Table-hopping at any time, is probably rather an odious practice. It is the duty maybe of the host, (we possibly have too many self-constituted hosts at Valyermo). In others it is presumptive. It interrupts conversation, and it presumes a welcome. At the Priory you can gauge the progress towards proprietorial

feeling in people by the stage at which they begin to table-hop. Too often these are the wrong 'uns, ready to presume, to become intrusive, often adhesive. The less brash will hesitate to butt in. Both monks and others could, I suppose, do with a little examination of conscience.

Hugging may, indeed, be a swing of the pendulum from the strong taboo against physical touch that used to be prevalent in American society, *especially in the west*. It has probably been popularized recently by younger monks as an extension of the Benedictine kiss of peace. And laity of both sexes have been swift to follow suit. The trouble is, when you hug indiscriminately, repeatedly, needlessly and everywhere, the practice ceases to have much meaning. Afternoons after concelebrated mass are often loud with vociferous and exuberant reunions between people who have seen one another the previous day. This style is normal among Latin peoples of course. But I treasure the wry observation of the poet Pablo Neruda at some communist congress, when a French friend commented on the enthusiasm with which neighboring South American delegates were greeting one another. "Don't kid yourself. The real idea is to frisk the other guy for a concealed weapon". In any case, at Valyermo, the real trouble is that modest souls who cannot bring themselves to simulate such transports may be made to seem downright standoffish or unfriendly.

That too many people, both monks or laity, assume the right, or duty, to welcome everybody could become a major irritant. More irritating, of course, in laity. Some will want to stake a claim that they "belong" in a sense that other mortals do not; and, after an absence, you may find yourself welcomed to your own home by someone you're not quite

sure you've seen before. The gushing phrase "Valyermo is my second home" is frequently heard, a warm and pleasing phrase indeed, but not always from the lips of people with whom one is particularly anxious to share one's home.

Such troubles, however, are ultimately no more than minor and trivial. And so Valyermo, just a little more than twenty five years old (we had the silver jubilee of foundation in October 1981), feels her way towards a formula that will graft the venerable Benedictine tradition on to the raw reality of Southern California. Doubtless, as we move towards the second millennium, there will be ups and downs in that pilgrimage. The prospects, however, look very good, much brighter perhaps than those confronting the fabric of the institutional church itself. Let us then proceed to a candid narration of the ups and downs of the first quarter century, which when set apart against the backcloth of fifteen hundred years of Benedictine history, insofar as they may be reckoned, downs are merely teething troubles.

ANTECEDENTS: BRUGES, SZECHUAN

I

A curious quirk of history, noticed by few, seems to link the origins of Valyermo Priory, young as she is, to the very origins of California itself. The first governor of California was Philip de Neve. A Fleming, he was appointed by the king of Spain, and arrived in California with Junipero Serra (the two tended to be at loggerheads). De Neve died in Mexico. There is a commemorative statue to him near Olivera Street in old Los Angeles, and a street named after him in Palos Verdes.

The first abbot of Saint Andre Abbey in Bruges was Theodore Neve-de-Mervignie. The latter family name was a late addition; and it seems likely that the Neve family in Flanders dated from the sixteenth century when the lowlands were a Spanish possession. There was probably a relationship. I never knew Theodore Neve; but by the accounts of those who did both his bearing and style suggest the Spanish grandee as much as anything else. He will certainly go down in Benedictine history as one of the great abbots of the twentieth century. He had a large vision.

Saint-Andre itself, of which he was abbot, had oddish beginnings. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Gerard van Caloen, a particularly distinguished and talented prior of Maredsous (near Namur), was asked by Pope Leo XIII to undertake the revitalization of the troubled Benedictine congregation of Brazil. He left for Brazil, and some hair-raising adventures there, destined never to return to Maredsous. When, in the early years of the twentieth century, he did return to Europe, it was to found three "procures" (one near his native village of Loppem which was to develop into Saint Andre, one at Aqua Calda near Sienna, and one at Wessobrun in high Bavaria) to recruit for the needs of Brazil.

The Italian and German procures soon disappeared, but the Belgian one prospered. Some monks from Maredsous (probably already discontented with trends there), went to join Van Caloen at Bruges. They included Theodore Neve. When Neve succeeded Van Caloen as leader, Saint Andre, already a monastery, in an astonishingly short time, so grew in influence and numbers as to equal, if not outstrip, the stature of Maredsous itself.

On July 5, 1910, Saint Andre founded the Prefecture of Katanga in the Belgian Congo (present Zaire), in the name of the Benedictine congregation of Brazil. On July 17, 1911, Neve changed stability to Saint Andre which now had ten professed monks. On June 5, 1912, he was named first abbot, and installed July 8th. The enterprises began to multiply and the influence to spread worldwide. Foundations were made or previous foundations revitalized in Poland, in Portugal, in India, in Trinidad, in China; and all the time the considerable demands of the Katanga Prefecture continued to be met.

It is the China foundation which concerns us, where we begin to meet the men who played a part, and in the main still continue to play a part, in the fortunes of Valyermo. The beginnings in China in the 1920's owed something to different sources; to the Belgian missionary Vincent Lebbe who left a legend in the far east; to some monks from the celebrated French abbey of Solesmes; and to Saint Andre. But in 1929, when the first monastery was erected at Si-Shan in Szechuan province by Jehan Joliet of Solesmes, it was in the name of Theodore Neve, abbot of Saint Andre. The Frenchmen Jehan Joliet, Emile Butruil, and Gabriel Roux, were first in the field; and the moving spirit seems to have been Joliet, who was a captain in the French navy before becoming a monk and knew the far east well. By January 1, 1936, the community comprised ten members (all

from Saint Andre, except for two from Solesmes and one from Oosterhout). Joliet was the first prior, and Hildebrand Marga was the first Saint Andre monk to arrive.

In 1935 Neve himself undertook the long journey to China, taking with him two monks, Raphael Vinciarelli, the master of clerics, and Thaddaeus Yang, who was actually Chinese himself and was able to have the abbot visit his family in Java. The two monks stayed. Neve returned to Bruges to send reinforcements. In 1936 Eleutherius Winance, Vincent Martin and Wilfrid Weitz left for China by way of Russia and the trans-Siberian railway. They were followed in 1940 by Alberic de Crombrugge and Werner Papeians de Morchoven; in 1947 by Gaetan Loriers and Francois de Grunne (who stayed briefly only).

This whole Saint Andre enterprise indeed was destined to have a brief enough history. By Christmas of 1949, the Reds had taken over their monastery in Chengtu, put some in gaol, and placed the rest under house arrest. One by one all Belgians were expelled, Gaetan Loriers being the last to leave. Between 1935 and 1949 however, they had managed to radiate a wide influence throughout that vast and even then, deeply troubled country. They were based in Szechuan province in the north, at first in Si-Shan, subsequently in the city of Chengtu. Individuals fanned out to various enterprises. Eleutherius (and for a while, Werner), taught philosophy at the seminary at Si-Shan. Subsequently, after the move to Chengtu, Eleutherius taught philosophy again at West China University, and French at the Provincial School of Arts.

Vincent enlisted in the medical corps of the Chinese army fighting the Japanese, was captured by the Japanese and interned in a concentration camp near Peking. When released, he returned to Europe. Thaddaeus

worked as a journalist for the Chinese Nationalist press. Raphael who succeeded the Frenchman Gabriel Roux as prior in 1936, published books of Christian apologetic in Chinese. Wilfrid tutored Madame Chiang-kai-Chek, wife of the generalissimo, in French. Alberic, after the move to Chengtu, administered a home for old folks in the nearby mountains. Gaetan, who before leaving had taken a degree in Oriental languages at the Sorbonne, went to perfect his Chinese at the Franciscan school of Chinese language in Peking (subsequently in Macao).

Then suddenly, in 1949, the curtain fell. By the time the Reds took over, the group of course had some Chinese recruits; and at the takeover, the situation was thus. Wilfrid (for health reasons), and Vincent had already returned to Bruges. Thaddaeus had come down with tuberculosis and been sent to southern France to recover. Bernard Wang and Felix Tang (two Chinese recruits) had been sent for studies to Collegeville, Minnesota; and Bernard went on to Rome for a doctorate. Vincent was soon to go to Harvard from Belgium for a similar purpose. Of those remaining, two Chinese, Peter Chou and Paul Wu, were arrested, tried and put in a concentration camp. The Belgians Raphael and Eleutherius were also gaoled for a brief period, the others placed under house arrest and finally expelled to Hong Kong.

Gaetan was the last to leave, and by the time he reached Hong Kong, everyone except Raphael had continued to Europe and Saint Andre. Emile Butruil, the only remaining Frenchman, elected to go to Japan. Rumina-ting in Hong Kong about what had happened and what now, Raphael and Gaetan really sowed the seeds of what was to become Valyermo. Gaetan had passed through California enroute to China, and raised with his prior the possibility of the group settling there while awaiting developments in

China. Raphael showed interest. But for the moment, the two had no other course than follow the rest back to Saint Andre. In November 1952, they arrived home.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group had turned to other preoccupations. Vincent was in Harvard, and Eleutherius had gone to Rome to teach philosophy in Sant Anselmo. Werner was in Germany studying metal craft. None of the group indeed showed much enthusiasm for the California suggestion when Raphael and Gaetan conveyed it to them. Obviously, if the notion were to become a reality, that could only be by chapter decision (at that stage highly unlikely), at Saint Andre.

The two originators however, were far from surrendering hope, even when other preoccupations seemed to distance themselves too from the possibility. Raphael was appointed prior at Saint Andre; and Gaetan's services as translator were requisitioned by the new International Committee for the investigation of concentration camps that had been set up at Paris by the United Nations. It was presided over by a Dutchman and by the celebrated French writer David Rousset. And Gaetan was soon to find himself being flown back again to Hong Kong to make French versions on the spot of evidence from Chinese victims. In 1954, Eleutherius, back from Rome, had made two similar trips.

Any hope of a California foundation now depended on the monastic equivalent (there is such a thing) of lobbying. Abbot Neve of course, with his customary largeness of outlook, was open to the idea straight-away and actually in favor. He could not however, answer for the chapter; and some chapter members were known to be thoroughly opposed. In fairness, they had a point. All Saint Andre's famous enterprises had been missionary, and could California be regarded as missionary terri-

tory? Even if the idea were put forward, (as it was) as a purely temporary measure, awaiting the time (Benedictines can afford to take an immensely long view of history), when even the communist regime would have had its day? Secondly, Saint Andre would have to finance the project, having already financed the Chinese venture and lost everything.

But Raphael was prior, and having behind him long centuries of Italian politicking, both ecclesiastical and secular, Raphael was an accomplished lobbyist. Gaetan, less skilled maybe, and certainly less devious, did nevertheless his part. The months went by. A key man to win over was the redoubtable Benoit Thoreau, treasurer and reputed financial wizard. He had himself visited America and was won over. Some persuasion of course also had to be exercised on the other actual members of the China group, but they all eventually came to Valyerme with the exception of Hildebrand Marga, who doubtless considered himself too old. Gradually the Californians gathered momentum and the opposition began to be muted. Finally, at a regular chapter meeting, permission for the California foundation was formally granted, with the proviso that the group would one day return to China. The stage was now set, and the way was open for the investigation of a suitable site. As it happens, such negotiations in themselves, can be extremely complicated; and it was here that Vincent Martin, already in Boston for his studies, was destined to play a major role.

II

The first matter to which Vincent had now to address himself was permission from some bishop to settle in a diocese. Benedictines are actually, exempt religious, and once established, have a large measure of autonomy. This very fact indeed, may not recommend them strongly to particular bishops, who prefer control. For developments however, in the move towards a California foundation, a green light from some bishop was just as essential as the vote of the Saint Andre chapter had been.

In some ways Vincent found himself confronted by something of a Hobson's choice. You had two dioceses in Southern California. Los Angeles, presided over by the great ecclesiastical power figure of the west coast, James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, notoriously not the easiest man to persuade. And you had San Diego, with Bishop Charles Francis Buddy. Of him, perhaps the least said the better. He will certainly not be remembered as a great American bishop, was rather unpredictable and undependable, and in many ways, a maverick figure. Both dioceses however, could provide suitable sites.

San Diego, all told, seemed the easier nut to crack, and duly Vincent had his interview with Buddy. The bishop was interested, yes, in securing the services of several new priests. For a multitude of reasons he was chronically short of priests. But the group would have to separate and work as assistants in parishes for a prolonged period. After that he would see about a foundation. In all, the prospects did not look promising.

So...it would have to be Los Angeles. And preliminary probings indicated that Cardinal McIntyre was totally opposed to any such idea. Though a power figure, and a man of considerable drive (his real skill

was as financier), he had very definite limitations both intellectually and ecclesiastically. What he knew of Benedictines was probably little, and that little he didn't like. To an activist like him, the way of life was well-nigh incomprehensible; and though he did finally yield under pressure and with great reluctance, during his long tenure as archbishop, he never set foot in Valyermo. Seven years later, when I myself, working temporarily in his diocese, was leaving to enter Valyermo, I had a curious and prolonged interview with him. It was during the early sessions of the Second Vatican Council. I made a record of it at the time, just because it was so curious and revealing; and quote it now as the best indication of the sort of man with whom Vincent had to deal. By that time, Vincent himself, working at Valyermo, had obviously become to some extent, persona non grata.

APRIL 27, 1963

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARDINAL MCINTYRE

OBSERVATIONS

As I am ushered in the door from the waiting room by Father Rawden, he is standing behind his desk reading some sort of grubby (torn, not scissored) newspaper cutting. He goes on reading, rather hungrily I thought, while I hover. There is a full-face picture of some cleric visible, not Kung I think. He then looked up, says 'how are you' with that American intonation, and not over cordially. I reply au mode 'pretty good, thank you'. I get his ring to kiss and am motioned over to a chair at the corner of the desk. I place my bag, breviary and hat carefully by me on the floor, and sit. He retires for a moment to the (secretary's) room behind. Almost immediately he returns, says 'why don't you put your hat on the desk, Father', and sits. I notice on the desk some sort of file card, white, "Father John Meehan", with, I think, an MA telephone number. It is 11:25, five minutes before the time arranged.

His first question, in a rather chilly and magisterial tone: 'what is your canonical status?' A bit nonplussed, I said 'how do you mean?'. 'What diocese are you I mean?' I told him, and the business went along smoothly enough, not with any great dispatch or efficiency. He vaguely pressed a button on the telephone, and presently a woman appeared in the doorway on my left. 'Did you want me, Your Eminence?' 'What's thatno, no, I'll see you later'. Sorry, Your Eminence'. All this in a worried and irritable sort of way. 'You are Father John Meehan.' No,

Denis is the first name; there was a Father John Meehan, but he is dead.' 'Oh yes (a bit fussed)...I remember.' A passage or two later, another button and Father Thom appeared. 'Bring me Father John Meehan's folder.' 'Denis' I corrected for Father Thom and he brought it. Much fingering through the file, with frowning concentration, while I watched. Of Valyermo; 'what work are they going to give you up there?' And so on.

I had the impression that all this was merely preliminary. He exuded a gauche sort of defensiveness, which I now read thus: 'this fellow is one of the other way of thinking, a liberal, fairly clever maybe, so let's play it cool.' Every now and then there would be that direct look, eye meeting eye. Generally speaking, I'm not bad at that; but in each case it was I (with some idea of showing dutiful inferiority?) who finally averted gaze. He had delayed in answering my letter (not much, but a definite delay) and doubtless had checked here or there. Is it possible that he related my move to the Kung crisis, seeing it as a sort of snub, withdrawal or disassociation (as indeed in a way it was). It was sort of clear too that he felt ill-at-ease about the Valyermo people, foreign (unAmerican probably), outre, avant-garde, 'different'. "What do they do up there? I know nothing about them....One of them teaches you say (I had mentioned Eleutherius)...What does he teach? Where? What's his last name?...You teach history don't you?..." I was rather glad it was Eleutherius I mentioned. I have a feeling Vincent Martin (Teilhard de Chardin) was in his mind. Maybe I'm wrong.

Business is finished to his satisfaction, emphasis always on the canonical, and a long pause at the end while he laboriously pencilled a note in my folder, he settled himself with deliberation in his chair, said 'now' and launched upon the conversation he had been meaning to

have, I think, all the time. 'Have you been keeping up with this Council?' 'Well yes, in the way one does, in so far as one gets news.' 'That's the whole point. I think the news being published everywhere about it is all wrong....I was there....'

His manner was less uneasy, and he warmed as he gave me a long and rather tiresome description of Council procedure. All the time he doodled (the pad was 'from the desk of Monsignor Hawkes'), drew not very illuminating lines as he explained, and invariably said 'schemata' where he should have said 'schema'. I murmured inanely here and there; but any time I made a vapid remark he seemed almost pathetically anxious to hear what it was. 'What's that?', with his hand to his ear.

The liturgy came first, what was or was not done about it. The way he brought it up "This is heresy to you of course...." was revealing, showing where, for some previous reason, he placed me. From that to Latin. This was the only area where I really did say things and take a stand, and I think I made some impact. Reading Latin, talking Latin, what did I think of Bacci's Latin (I was critical). Pressed, I finally voiced the opinion very firmly that in spite of the papal decree the use of Latin as a medium of instruction was impractical, and indeed impossible as things stood. He said (not hostilely) 'I'm really shocked to hear a man of your experience and learning say that'; but he sort of agreed.

At one juncture something I said, about one world, or the tendency toward one language anyhow (we covered so much), brought a quick reaction. 'That is what Bea thinks...If Bea came here I would not let him speak...I'm worried, worried about the hierarchy....Are we going to throw all the wisdom from the 4th to the 9th century (sic) aside?' 'I'm rather more optimistic than you' I believe I said 'surely we must believe....

otherwise everything is hopeless." 'But you must face it, everything is hopeless, the situation is here".

Then to King at last. Agitated, rather shaken and desperate it seemed to me, clutching at all sorts of straws. 'He had no documents Father. Everyone since Exul Familia must have...and so on. Do you think he had any of these? He had nothing. He came over here attacking the church, disturbing the people. Every crackpot as a result will be off again on the Inquisition, the things in the history of the church (did one detect echoes of recent correspondence in this?), these things for which we have good explanations...I've been forty years in a chancery office...You'd be surprised (I wonder?) at the sort of correspondence that crosses this desk...'

I can't get over the very patent defensiveness of the man. About his teachers at Dunwoodie, McCarthy the Maynooth man, Gigot, the scripture man, some Chaldaean or other. 'He was a great scholar, Father...he never wrote of course...but he was a great scholar. I went back to my notes and found everything there. Forty years ago they knew all about the things people talk about now, but knew about them to refute them. I got a book on scripture by that nun, mother Kathryn Sullivan (you know her, anxiously to me, as if he expected I would be a friend of all the new-fangled folk that trouble him); it was just a rehash of Gigot. I got everything for the Council in my notes..." Where could one begin with such preposterous assertions? Defensiveness about Latin too, being able to read it, understand it (that Time piece must have hurt) I said at some stage 'no one speaks Latin well' and he agreed rather hungrily. 'But would the priests understand any better in English, Father? I can't understand the English I read now, in Time, in Life, (always venom and

defensive contempt for these), high-school English...the words have changed meaning. Resurrection, integrity, the Protestants don't know what they mean by them...' His own use of language was conspicuously bad, often I had to correct him in order to communicate at all. Sometimes he dithered hopelessly, hand to head, until I gave him words. Defensiveness again, but yet vanity, about his learning, 'I don't have time to read or study much, never had, but...'

A kind of frustrated rage (the look was that of an old cornered bull by times), misgiving (which he hesitated to face) that things and styles may be passing him by; anxiety to be reassured and to get some hint of what's really in all this business (liturgy, theology, language) without giving too much away. He seemed anxious to see how I ticked for instance; but it would take years to acquaint him. These were my general impressions.

Different people tried to come in at different stages, Manning, Hawkes, but he went on inexorably, ignoring them. Finally at 12:45, I made a move by picking up my bag, and recalling personal business by mentioning canon 544. Did he feel I was testing his Latin? He fussily read it through (I had the book) rejecting help and insisting on his own (rather dubious) version of it. Then the final gesture! How on earth did Osservatore Romano get into the picture? Was he perhaps bringing to my notice that he could read it? "the language is not like of other Roman papers, it's different (I agreed). Now the Latin you get in that, there's Latin you can read." He presents me with three back numbers. We are both standing, and parting rather cordially. He is back to freedom (Kung?): 'it's not freedom they want but license'. 'The dilemma seems to be balancing freedom and discipline' I murmur. He sort of laughs.

In detachment one can only conclude that this is a man who has really lost touch with current thinking and current style ('they tell us the way to correct sin is to commit it'). That is, if he were ever really intelligent or at all perceptive; I suspect that in the domain of taste, generally he must be one large blind spot. [If he were not a Cardinal, I cannot really see myself willingly giving thirty seconds to an attempt at communication with him on any level. It would always be a matter of beginning in the Garden of Eden].

That he was finally prevailed upon to consent, under very stringent conditions, was due to the fact that some members of his diocesan council (notably Monsignor Jacobs of Oxnard) were (by the same process of lobbying that brought about the Saint Andre decision) induced to support the idea. His senior auxiliary (subsequently his successor), Bishop Manning was favorable enough, but was adamant that the monks must settle in Orange County. In fact, it was only the difficulty of procuring land in Orange County that led to the investigation of other sites. And Manning was reluctant enough to lend his support to the subsequent Valyermo purchase.

While Vincent was grappling with these problems, and frantically combing Orange County for a foothold, members of the group were filtering gradually towards California to resettle. Pending decision, the prior, Raphael, installed himself with the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange in Orange County. He was ever afterwards to maintain close links with Orange. Thaddaeus, now recovered completely from tuberculosis, became chaplain to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph in Brentwood. Eleutherius was teaching philosophy in Collegeville, Minnesota... Soon all were

somewhere in the States, poised for occupation when a place to live was found. It was to be Hidden Springs Ranch, Valyermo, and the momentous day of beginning came in October 1956. Our next chapter moves to the desert.

ANTECEDENTS: VALYERMO

Over the months of waiting, Vincent's efforts were by no means restricted to ecclesiastical negotiation. A great deal of exhaustive (and exhausting) searching went on before he was finally led to the then little heard of desert-mountain oasis in Valyermo. That is not to say that the seemingly remote area was without its colorful prehistory; but nobody knew about it. Recent history that is. West of the Mississippi, though archaeologists now claim to have discovered evidence of organized human habitation in the little Californian town of Calico 200,000 years ago, there is, all told, very little verifiable history. And, while Indians may very well have roamed about Valyermo 200,000 years ago, by the beginning of the twentieth century, there were very few people roaming there.

In the generations immediately before the Priory, without doubt the most interesting local happenings were three: the Llano Socialist Commune; the residence locally for some years of the celebrated British writer Aldous Huxley; and the residence of the Evans-Noble family at Valyermo Ranch (next door to the Priory) for practically half a century. Let's take them in order.

The Llano commune was set up by a socialist resident of Los Angeles called Job Harriman. His move was a reaction to losing the Los Angeles mayoral election in 1911. He had seemed a very probable winner; the sensational confession of the McNamara brothers, steel worker organizers, to a bombing which killed eleven employees of the Los Angeles Times, ruined his chances. With a coterie of followers he moved to Llano. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that he had read Karl Marx. More probably, his ideas stemmed from groups active at the time in New York

and Washington, of whom the best known member was the journalist John Reed, who was born in Oregon. Reed was in Moscow for Lenin's October revolution, and wrote a then celebrated account of it: Ten Days that Shook the World. A film (Reds) has been made of Reed's life.

Whatever the genesis of Harriman's ideas, the commune did operate on the communist principle. It may be regarded as the last and most short-lived in the long line of American Utopian experiments. Members initially purchased entry, and were then expected to contribute labor and skill. Rumor and tradition have it that this led to much internal dissent. A number of the entrants were newly arrived immigrants, and a proportion were work-shy. By 1916, they had begun to disband, Harriman going off to the deep south. The means of support apparently was animal husbandry and fruit orchards. In the twenties some of the individual dwellings were still standing; but today all left for the curious to see are some stone remains (a communal guest house, a silo and a buttery) visible near Crystallaire from Highway 138, and a lime kiln at Bob's Gap. At its peak the settlement probably numbered 2,000 people.

Aldous Huxley and his first wife Maria lived at Llano too, in an unpretentious house (visible also from Highway 138) which has been recently restored, between the years 1938 and 1948. Subsequently he moved to Wrightwood in the mountains, and finally, as his health began to give trouble, to Hollywood once more. He died in Hollywood in . It was in the Llano house that he wrote Doors of Perception (Gates of Hell in USA) after an experiment with mescaline. It caused a minor sensation in Britain and America.

It is to be regretted that he had left for Hollywood before the arrival of the monks, because, remembering Huxley's deep interest in the

evidence for religious experience, I am sure we all would have much in common. However, we at the Priory are fortunate over the twenty-five years to have had his sister-in-law, Rose d'Hautville, as neighbor and close friend. She was the youngest member of that charming and talented Belgian family into which Aldous married. Nowadays she is a mine of information on all matters that concern Huxley, and will invariably bring any relatives that come about to visit us. She still works each day in the ceramics shop.

Recently her New York niece, Claire Nicolas White, published an admirable volume of poems from which I quote one. It gives a choice glimpse of Rose in the evening of life, and of her relationship with Valyermo Priory.

THE MOJAVE

My aunt in the desert looks out at nothing,
which is silver, clean like the moon.
She puts a false log in her stove,
draws a roof over her head
and pops a kumquat in her mouth.
Clouds are advancing with silver linings
across the desert, playing hopscotch
with the telephone poles.

My aunt takes her bicycle to the aqueduct
and rides along it, convinced it is fun.
She is seventy and no Navajo but a Belgian
She has managed to find in the desert little flowers
and other Belgians, monks who were in China,
also wolves in cages, imported from the zoo.
The reverend pere Hilaire drops by at midnight
with a bottle of champagne.

My aunt in the desert turns on her tape recorder
and listens to her grandson who, in Katmandu
is an eight-year old Buddhist monk reciting mantras
by rote. His mouth fills up with spit
and one can hear him suck and swallow.
He has worms as long as his arms," says my aunt,
But his great-uncle, the baron, has promised
to leave him the title.

Her social security check is at the post office.
She is a refugee from the Second World War.
The monks are refugees from Communist China.
Her grandson is a refugee from civilization
and the wolves are refugees from the zoo.
There is somewhere a refuge for all of us
if only we can find it.
Even a cage will do.

A similar bond unites us still to the multitudinous members of the Noble-Evans family who were our much loved next-door neighbors at Valyermo Ranch until they sold it in 1969 and moved to San Marino. We miss them very much, and are overjoyed when any Evans comes back to see us. Fortunately, some papers concerning the history of the family have been deposited with us, and we very much hope we can retain them. From these the following information has been culled, and it forms quite a remarkable American saga.

When Barney Evans' (our contemporary's) grandmother died in California in 1946, she had just been the recipient (for her 94th birthday) of a family chronicle compiled by her children and grandchildren, and privately printed. Her maiden name was Oliver, and she was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1851. In 1872, she married Cadwallader Evans, a medical doctor, and had ten children; Harry, George, David, Berne, Cadwallader, Mary, Marjorie, Dorothy, Deane and Norman. David died young.

Margaret Brown Oliver, as she was, belonged to an Irish family that had emigrated from the Newry area, probably shortly before the famine. Her numerous children, when they lived in Pittsburgh, seem to have been on the very closest terms with the maternal grandparents; and grandmother Oliver in particular left a very vivid memory. She lived until 1900 and always remained a solid pillar of the Church she had elected to join, the

Disciples of Christ. She had been born a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, but showed remarkable independence for the time by abandoning the confession before she left Ireland.

For our purposes, the interesting one among her children (Margaret Oliver that is), was Dorothy, born 1887. In 1910 Dorothy married Levi Noble, a young geologist from Auburn, New York, having herself graduated from Smith College. Subsequently, for virtually all their lives, this couple was destined to live at Valyermo Ranch, witnessing such growth and change as took place. Dorothy's father, Cadwallader, seems to have purchased the Valyermo property on impulse about 1908-9 in partnership with two men called Brubaker and Petchner. When he first came up from Los Angeles to view the place, there was only one house in Palmdale, and the journey to the ranch was made on horseback. Very soon afterwards, he seems to have bought out the two partners. Then when Levi and Dorothy married in 1910, he presented them with a sizable portion of the land, and apparently a house, the particularly charming house we all knew. From that time until Levi died in 1966, they were regularly residents there; and it was Levi who transformed desert wilderness into the rich orchard paradise that is Valyermo Ranch today. Small wonder that by the time the Priory was initiated in 1956, Dorothy Noble had acquired the reputation of arbiter of the valley. She was in fact an extremely able woman. As they had no children, her energies were diverted into many channels. Writing was one of them, and she wrote reasonably well. Very well for a non-professional.

There is no evidence that she published anything; but a typescript survives of a completed novel (Shoot the Moon) in four installments. Possibly she tried unsuccessfully to market it. It is about gold mining

in Death Valley; and probably follows closely the pattern of popular love stories at the time. Of more interest nowadays are the fairly meticulous diaries she kept of various travels. One such document is a lengthy and circumstantial account of a motor trip from Auburn, Connecticut all the way across to Valyermo in . It is a remarkably graphic revelation of the hazards of motoring over very indifferent roads in the early years of the century. Another describes an expedition northwards to Utah that had something to do with Levi's geological interests. Levi's geological map of the Valyermo area, which is plumb on top of the Saint Andreas fault, is of course still standard. But Dorothy's writing always shows considerable descriptive talent, considerable knowledge of flora and fauna all over America, though chiefly in California and desert country, and a woman's lively observation of people and situations. To her must be attributed the very name Valyermo. It is euphonious and seems tantalizing Indian; but it was her adroit coinage. Yerma in (Mexican) Spanish is used to mean desert, so she just combined the two languages. "Desert Valley" I suppose.

Dorothy's word in any case was law throughout the valley; and for some years after the monks arrived she was a familiar figure every morning, cigar in mouth, outside the post office awaiting the arrival of the mail. Despite the cigar, she was not physically large or imposing, yet no one dared disobey her diktats, and she was a valuable friend to the monks. The ranch was then being managed by Dorothy's nephew Barney and his wife Jean (also from Pennsylvania), who with their children became practically members of the Valyermo community. It was an interesting reversal to his great-grandmother Oliver's origins that Barney, for his economics thesis at Yale, chose Ireland as his subject.

By 1956 all the local ranches, including Hidden Springs (the Priory now), were privately owned, probably for a generation or so. Few had the continuity of the Evans-Noble ranch, and tended to change owners. Wealthy Pasadena residents named Newman owned Hidden Springs. They had purchased it from friends called Young at the request of their invalid daughter, and built a charming house there. The original dwelling was what we call the Stone House. Mrs. Newman was in residence and had recently advertised the property for sale. West of her was the Stewart ranch, east Valyermo Ranch which we have described.

The negotiations, conducted by Vincent Martin, which finally led to the purchase of Hidden Springs by Saint Andre, were not indeed as delicate and demanding as the ecclesiastical ones. But they were not without embarrassment. For people of presumably dyed-in-the-wool wasp traditions such as the Valyermo ranchers were, it was not altogether prudent to advertise the fact that the prospective purchasers were (a) Catholics (Benedictine monks to boot) and (b) Belgian nationals. Neighbors might be expected to feel cool towards either species. Without disclosing awful truths, Vincent was able to bring matters to the point of purchase. And when after completion of the sale, he had to confess the full truth to Mrs. Newman in Pasadena, she was more relieved than disappointed. She had heard some rumor that he was acting for the federal government. Things could have been worse.

All along he was advised, aided and abetted by a well-known resident of Newhall, Bushnell. This man was Irish and Catholic. At the turn of the century he had emigrated from the village of Ardcarne (now celebrated as the scene of a highly popular British novel Woodbrook) near Boyle, County Roscommon, had begun at the bottom of the ladder, and was

at this stage one of the most powerful business men and property owners in California. Some years later, he was overjoyed to encounter in the community a fellow Irishman, myself. On that occasion he volunteered a revealing confidence. The only formal education he had ever received was in the Irish elementary school at Ardcarne; and his hero was his teacher, a man not much older than himself.

"When I got to the States it wasn't long before I realized that what Master Conway taught me was well up to the standard of high school here, and some university education...Imagine me nowadays taking ace-graduates from Harvard Business School under my wing to teach them the job..." When he heard that I had actually been through college with two sons of the Conway in question, his cup was overflowing.

Vincent always says that Bushnell, more than any single person, was responsible for bringing the Benedictines to Valyermo. Baird, the Pasadena real estate agent who was acting for Mrs. Newman, was also helpful. He too was thrown for a loop when Vincent, whom he had been encountering for weeks, told him the truth (before he confessed to Mrs. Newman). But he showed no trace of prejudice, and furthermore, reassured Vincent that Mrs. Newman would not either.

So...by such circuitous paths, and after many wanderings, the group which set out from Bruges in the middle thirties, now found themselves in a new and somewhat exciting home.

Gradually, from different areas, and different occupations, the China group converged upon Valyermo. Dates of arrival, as chronicled at the time by Thaddaeus, are as follows:

1955, December 11, Vincent takes possession of the property

1956, March 4, Thaddaeus arrives from Brentwood

1956, June 17, Raphael arrives from Orange
1956, July 18, Werner arrives from Belgium
1956, August 30, Gaetan arrives from Belgium
1956, October 10, Community life begins with vespers at 5:30 pm
1956, October 31, Alberic arrives from Belgium
1956, December 3, Eleutherius arrives at Collegeville, Minnesota
as professor
1957, February 6, Wilfrid arrives from England
Thus, the little monastery was born.

Almost immediately too, from Pomona, came the loyal Lees, a Belgian-American family, who had befriended Vincent while he was working in Claremont parish. Madame Oscarine Brasseur, Lucille Lee's Belgian mother, became a Valyermo personality second only, if second, to Dorothy Noble. She had lived so long in pre-revolution Russia that this rubbed off. Her ample person, quasi-queenly bearing, heavily accented English, rich throaty laugh, made her seem a countess straight out of Chekhov or Tolstoy. Her motherly warmth flowed out over all the latest and lowliest of Valyermo monks. Few will forget her superb cooking (a skill she bequeathed to some brothers), or the mulled wine she would solicitously dispense late on chilly festival nights, year after year, never seeming to need sleep. She was the first Oblate buried in the cemetery.

For some time in those initial years, the Lees rented the house on the opposite side of the road, so that Oscarine could adequately mother her charges, while Jack Lee discharged his job from Pomona and came out weekends to join the family. Ever since, if Valyermo be veritably a 'second-home' for all the Lees, it is no less true that the hospitable Lee house in Pomona remains a second home for all Valyermo monks.

LEAVES FROM THE DIARY OF A MIDDLE-AGED NOVICE

1963-1964

September 1, 1963 9:15 p.m.

In my cell (cella frequentata dulcescit) at Valyermo, after Compline. Not feeling too bad, thank God. There was rather a frantic and not so pleasing morning at Saint Francis de Sales in Sherman Oaks. I got off quasi per ignem about 2 and was here before 4. The intervening time until dinner was spent in chatting with Father Prior (he is most kind), getting books from him, getting things sorted out a bit in my room, having a welcome shower under roughish conditions, or roughish at least by my experience to date in California.

Office (vespers, compline) satisfying somehow. Did not feel the chant a trial to patience as I feared I might. Have just now emptied my wallet (\$36.50) into an envelope for Father Prior in the morning. .
Q'approveche. Think of going out towards the farmyard for a smoke (there's a perfectly wonderful moon) and then getting settled for the night.

10:05 p.m. Back again. It was so golden and serene. For all the world I might be back again under a harvest moon on Kiltycooley Lane. I smoked and drank a great deal of water, missing of course the beer which has become habitual with me. Yet already I feel more settled here than in Sherman Oaks. Something to do I think with keys; no locking and unlocking of doors. What a welcome change.

Sunday, October 6, 5:25 p.m.

Just back from a fairly considerable walk along what I now call my Aran Road - behind the peach orchards towards the neighboring horse-ranch (Palermo?). The first day I walked it I was strongly reminded of the four mile walk from Kilronan to Kilmurvey on Innishmore. The desert is quite colorful just now with some sort of saffron colored sage or broom. Very pure color at a distance, though when one has ideas of plucking some for one's room the near view is not so satisfying. I hadn't mentioned before either I think the near bird-sanctuary character of this place. In the cottonwood trees over by the chapel they are particularly tuneful just now, and with the clear evening sun falling athwart the lawn and the trees, a veritable serenity is distilled.

Monday, October 14, 11 a.m.

Today is a big day for me. I get the habit, a new name, and formally enter the novitiate at 5:30 this evening. It has been rather a fussy morning (cold as usual, early), and looks like being a fussy day. I have to go to Lancaster early p.m. about a car and some other chores. Everything more or less in order I think. Read the Book of Proverbs a bit in the intervals of the morning.

9:45 p.m.

Received the habit and the name Molaise in a colorful ceremony, which included the mandatum, washing of my feet by the Prior. Hardy and beaten though I consider myself to be, I was quite moved at one or two points, especially the singing of that wonderful antiphon Ubi caritas et amor....Prior made a sincere little address to me personally, mentioning the Molaise relationship and so on.

Well...deo gratias, as he said in giving us a free dinner (flowers and a candle). I hope my crusty old forebear of Innishmurray will pray for me.

Monday, October 26, 10:30 a.m.

Another very balmy morning with a touch of cloud, but quite warm. Minor mishaps last night and this morning. While washing dishes last evening a glass slid and was broken, I thought by Bob's motion; but everyone else thought it was me, and I left it so. Not so patient this morning when a tray of plates which Terry (the negro postulant) caused to slide from a high shelf onto my head. I said 'Dear God' and looked murder I'm sure, because I don't feel particularly friendly to him just now. Opportunities I daresay, for exercise of the virtues one is supposed to cultivate. Can't say I making much headway just yet.

Friday, November 1, All Saints, 5 p.m.

Just after a lone tour of the orchard boundary. It was so beautiful, and the same holds for the Lancaster drive, where I went to have the car checked. Autumn coloring on the trees, clear autumnal sunlight, a sort of stillness over the whole landscape 'mingling memory and desire'. I thought of all sorts of things; the day it is, and those who have gone before, , other Autumn landscapes, Belloc's Four Men, and the Sussex tour - "Here am I homeward and my heart is healed..."

Valyermo seems to be bringing me that. The great peace and fulfillment of it all, the sense of real living 'where all's accustomed, ceremonious...'

For some reason I thought a good deal of shooting pheasant in Ireland; the leaves, the land, the color, the quietness of corners in fields, the sense of darkness soon to come and getting indoors. But there was so much depression really associated with that Kildare landscape around Maynooth, was there not? Some obscure sense of strain.

The sight of leaf-strewn avenues between rows of peach trees equals anything I have ever witnessed. Each leaf seems to be at once gold and green, and they seem to fall in such regular patterns. Undisturbed of course by wind. A carpet of that pattern would be splendid. For once, I found myself wishing for a color camera; or, better still, to have it all painted like Van Gogh's cornfield, pointilliste effect...

And now for All Souls Vigils. Beannacht De le Hanamnachaibh na marbh - I must try to keep them all in mind; family, Neil Kevin, Ned Kissane, John Doherty, James Duff, Jackie O'Neill, Pat Casey, Bishop Doorly, Seumas McLoughlin.

Friday, November 22, 12:10 p.m.

Sensation.

Just as my pen ran out on that peaceful note came word (Brother Joseph) that President Kennedy and the Governor of Texas have been shot and seriously wounded in Dallas. Excitement...listening to radios and whatnot. Within half an hour comes news that Kennedy is dead. How tragic and awful. Reports are so garbled that there's no way of knowing what actually happened. There appear to have been more shots than one. Indications that the rifle was of foreign make, and apparent certainty that it was a rifle bullet. Shot clean through the head...

"Oh captain, oh my captain, the fearful trip is done...."

Requiescat.

Monday, November 25, 2:40 p.m.

A very unusual forenoon. The day; bright, serene, a little windy, a little cold. The day of mourning of JFK. We had a sung requiem as conventual mass at 8. Then, immediately after breakfast, everyone went to watch the Washington ceremony on TV. Sombre indeed, muffled drums, an extraordinarily heavy silence over even the announcers. Touched a bit by seeing the Irish guard at the graveside, and remembering Sion, or so many Sions. Vergil's bit about Marcellus was in my mind a good deal, and I have just re-read it now. As good an epitaph as any other. The Potomac one hopes will wash by the eternal flame as gently as the Tiber by the tumulus:

"vel quae, Tiberine, videbis

Funera, quum tumulum praeterlabere recentem

.....

Heu, miserande puer, si qua fata aspera rumpas

Tu Marcellu eris. Manibus date lilia plenis

Purpureos spargam flores, animamque nepotis

His saltem accumulem donis, et fungar inani

Munere...."

No work this morning of course. I go to Palmdale as usual.

New Years Day 1964, Wednesday, 10:20 a.m.

On the lawn, under the absolutely perfect conditions that it has almost become tedious to mention. Warmer, if anything, that it has been for the past week. We arose at six to a memorable morning moonlight. Mass at 7:30 with a few in from outside.

For some reason, Maynooth personalities were woven a good deal into my dreams last night. I was having a meeting somewhere with Kevin McNamara about the Summer School, trying to dodge Joe Hamell (who was suspicious of all this), not succeeding fully, and being about to meet Charlie O'Callahan who had been ages waiting for me. Awoke just as I was about to meet him. Interesting. Also interesting that I was a Benedictine in the dream, and was conscious of some obscure anxiety about being caught in the Maynooth environment again.

So begins, in the name of God, 1964. All in all I feel quite happy as I look out at it. Let's hope 1965, my silver jubilee of ordination, will bring similar serenity, and that whatever years remain may make up a bit for the fallow and turbulent ones. Laus deo on this beautiful morning.

9:30 p.m.

Just in from night wandering. In the literal sense the night is divine. So balmy (there is a light wind moving, set up by the day's heat I suppose), that one would almost wish to sleep outside.

Wednesday, January 8, 10:15 p.m.

Tonight is my late one. Due to meet Eleutherius at 11:47. The night is very cold indeed, freezing hard I should say. We've all just come from watching TV program of Pope Paul in Palestine. Moving...full of all sorts of significant gestures, incidents and remarks. Please goodness it will herald something new for humanity and for religion. The embraces and kisses of peace between him and Athenagoras I thought the highlights; wonder why there was no shot on the papers. Failed to see it I suppose. People of both faiths wept openly we are told, when they recited the Our Father together in Greek and Latin on the Mount of Olives. More and more reactions coming in, and lessons drawn, to judge from today's New York Times. Suggestion that it will be the signal for playing down legalism and excessive Romanism in the Catholic Church. Fine...ut unum sint...

Wednesday, January 22, 5:20 p.m.

Sitting in a heavy dressing-gown, because it is bitterly cold with all the signs of further storm. We had a long and adventurous day yesterday, Basil, Ronnie Long and I. Claremont, Encino, Carroll O'Connor's for drinks, Blessed Sacrament for dinner, UCLA for Chekhov's Seagull. Everything worthwhile, at Carroll's we met Mrs. Field, his mother-in-law, who is a close friend of my friend, Mrs. Clapp, and his little adopted boy, John.

The return was the adventure. I drove, through torrential rain all the way, and precisely at the T-crossing on Fort Tejon road we ran out of gas. It was 12:50 a.m. with ceaseless rain and sleet. Ronnie just folded up in the car. Basil and I walked the two and a half miles, arriving so thoroughly drenched that we had first to change every stitch. Then we got gas and set out to rescue Ronnie. At 2:30 a.m. all was over and I crawled into bed. Up duly though for Lauds.

Sunday, January 26, 5:45 p.m.

Waiting for office with a feeling of fulfillment. After lunch I had to counsel one of the retreatants, gave Benediction at 2:15 and almost immediately set out for a long desert walk. Took a trail new to me and eventually came by the Evans ranch, circling the hill (har qodshi, mount of my holiness). Encountered nothing but birds, the snow-covered mountains on my right, a lovely view of the Mojave on my left. After rain, that storm last week which caught us, a curious russet undertone of color seems to palpitate from the sage. A feeling of cleanness and warmth, quite perceptible....

Wednesday, February 26, 8:15 p.m.

An early entry this morning. I almost made the same mistake as last Wednesday, and was about to say mass when I thought of Palmdale. Instead I had a ruminative walk in the morning sun. Just now having done my room and that dratted corridor, which bugs me a lot ever since I got the job of keeping it clean, the sun begins to light up the lawn outside my open window. The birds sing and it seems like a dream day.

Over yesterday and this morning I've been thinking a good deal of Valyermo and possibilities, difficulties, personal quirks and so on. It does seem a pity in a way that some real plan for the monastery cannot be put in operation right now. It's possible that a let-be and make-do policy might prevail. Prior doesn't seem too good sometimes at distinguishing the important from the trivial. Monkly outlook ought to be perhaps that inefficiency in the long run doesn't matter. One works at anything, or with anything, only because this can bring one to God.

Saturday, February 29, 9:45 a.m.

This day completes six months residence for me in Valyermo. We arose to find a light coating of snow, more hail than snow really. Delightful of course, except that I have qualms about the lettuce seed I put in yesterday afternoon. Must go out immediately.

Wednesday, March 18, 11:05 a.m.

No entry yesterday for obvious reasons. In many ways it was one of the best Saint Patrick's Days I ever had. Alberic and I got off betimes on a glorious morning, gave a ride at Little Rock (to Sepulveda) to a young negro looking for work. Called on the Louis nuns at Louisville for tea and brown bread, then to IHC for a splendid lunch from Mimi and Charlotte (Vera in Ireland of course). Terry O'Brien was waiting for us and drove Alberic to his doctor's appointment, while I went to the dentist. Then to rendezvous with clerical pals (Tommy McGovern, Kieran Marum, Mat Delaney, Terry O'Brien and Frank Reilly) for gala dinner at Corsican restaurant. Expensive, but Alberic (he wore a green shirt that would stop a clock) and I weren't paying. Much chat and gaiety. Back to Terry's for a quick wash, and home to Valyermo at midnight. Too exalte to rest much, but got up for Lauds, as did Alberic. Go Mbeirimid Beo ar an Am seo aris...

Sunday, May 10, 9:30 a.m.

Again, an absolutely balmy morning. Conference due at 9:45 with Eleutherius. Over recent days I've been taken by the cotton flakes that keep snowing from the trees, ever so gently, filling the air, filling little trenches in the ground like feathers. This morning for instance, at conventual mass the whole sunlit and green-flecked air was shot through with them. One is stirred, almost physically, by it all; curious underlying stratum in nature, in the seasonal changes, that seems charged with a faint sweet melancholy. Or is it just the Celt in me? Old incantatory lines of verse begin to float through my head -

Diffugere nives...and the like. I begin to think of the past, of childhood, of family, of people...When I came back after breakfast, the first rose, a red rambler, had opened...Beautiful.

Tuesday, July 21, 9:30 p.m.

Walk, after long interval, on Aran Road again tonight; moonlit, serene. The afternoon was quite warm - I did a very little hoeing and watering. Had I noticed already, by the way, that yesterday I got \$4.95 from New Catholic Encyclopedia in payment for my few hundred words on Macrina. Shortest article in the whole thing, but at least we get to buy it at distributor's rates. Letter also from Jack Dempsey in Dublin to say Maynooth Union is planning to invite me for 1965 Address. Hope they do - I get over free.

Friday, August 14, 9:50 p.m.

A perfectly heavenly night with a half-moon (almost). Just walked on Aran Road. In Lancaster p.m. Suddenly reflected driving back that I'm as happy now as I've been any time in my life, or can hope to be. That true happiness comes, can only come, in embracing the simplicity, abnegation and spirit of this life I've undertaken. All other values are hollow, demonstrably hollow. Why not be joyful about it?

Wednesday, August 26, 10:30 p.m.

Just back from Palmdale. Did a slight detour coming back, stopped and got out to pace the road just as the moon was rising. Thought how naturally in primitive societies worship of the moon would develop. Also on the ease of seeing 'lights' and unexplained brilliances under such magic radiance. Prosaic road signs seemed to glow and glitter like jewels. The Irish fairy stores came about thus, of course. With the encroachment of urbanization, all the magic gradually goes away.

Wednesday, September 2, 10:45 a.m.

Today is cool and fresh. Got up duly for Lauds though tired after yesterday's long journey, and since Gaetan's class at 9:30 have stretched. The new building is going ahead very well, much outside board wall put up yesterday. Thinking all morning about how, in Valyermo life, childhood and school impressions get revived. The look of books somehow in the wilderness is exciting - you open one. Rather like the adventurous world suddenly disclosed long ago in Kiltycooley, when another borrowing from the Carnegie library on the mall was such a revelation. Worthwhile sensations....

Monday, September 7, 10:30 a.m.

Labor Day. Last night after compline I went for a long pow-wow with the Prior, canvassing nearly everything I wanted to clarify. Satisfactory enough except that he is not going to let me teach anywhere this coming year. Exclusively retreat giving, organizing and so on. Well... maybe it's the best idea, though I have many moments of misgiving. My job is to obey...

Sunday, September 13, 10 a.m.

Preached this morning and got some favorable comment. Nothing else looming. Am in quieter mood; I think about lots of things, even this business of being retreat director. Shall take up the cudgels and do the best I can, if that's the Lord's will for me.

Monday, September 21, 9:45 p.m.

A complete day of chores and ill-humor, God forgive me. Washed the windows, out and in, of the novitiate corridor in the morning. Washed and polished the corridor itself in the afternoon, all with a very ill grace. When one is in low humor it seems almost impossible to put a cheerful face on things, for me anyhow. After it all, I mowed the lawn as there seemed no point in giving up physical work for such time as remained. That and a good shower left me in better frame. Took a short walk.

Saturday, September 26, 8:15 a.m.

Fifty years old this day. A much cooler morning, but fresh and invigorating, rather ideal for the festival. Night, as such nights are, disturbed. We had a number of sleepers on the corridor, and I was awakened periodically by someone testing a loudspeaker. Bathroom is going to be in some state after all this...

Tuesday, September 29, 10:15 a.m.

Late morning today, for the first time since I came I think. Probably because of festival. Rising 6:30, not 6. How right I was about that bathroom. This morning I mopped again since no one else seemed likely to do it.

9:45 p.m.

Humor rather evil. But I've just managed to walk off some steam. Spent the whole afternoon trying to get the corridor in shape, polishing that is (with frantic and unavailing searches for implements), and dapping. All the time I looked murder at anyone who came my way, including the Prior, but chiefly Brother X who, I felt, ought to have done the bathroom.

Saturday, October 10, 7:15 a.m.

Dreamt of my profession last night - that it was attended by the Red Army (quelle situation), and that I was frantically making my way through serried ranks of them to say my formula, which the Prior had forgotten to give me...What do analysts make of that sort of thing?

Thursday, October 15, 9:30 a.m.

Well, my monastic dies dierum has arrived, not without vicissitudes. What with one thing and another, meeting Eleuthere in Palmdale, I didn't get to bed till 1 a.m. and was early awake, not having slept much. However, I'm in good health and feel adequate enough. People are the same before their wedding day I guess. The weather looks delightful. All day yesterday I was practicing the Suscipe me Domine...Which I have to sing solo. But I do love the antiphon, it is so plaintive and beautiful.

Prior just now called in to go over details. He is rather elated. Eh bien. Two poor Irish nuns came yesterday from Marycrest, mistaking the day. They're coming again today. I hope Saint Teresa, the great Carmelite, whose day it is, will help and guide me.

DE MORTUIS

"I love that ancient Saxon word

Which calls the burial ground godsacre...."

The erection of the Priory cemetery (I suppose one has to settle for the less attractive Latinism) dates only from . State law is pretty exigent in such matters, and it took us a while to meet regulations. Prior to that, our dead were deposited temporarily in San Fernando. Now at last they rest on the hilltop in native desert soil.

Cemeterium is not a Latin word at all actually, but straight translation from the Greek , where it sounds beautiful; 'sleeping place'. Somehow, in Latin, or in English, it fails to come off. I for one would welcome 'godsacre', or even the more homely 'graveyard'. However, in this country of blatant, garish or sometimes altogether vulgar cemeteries, it leaves nothing to be desired. Simple return to the virgin soil, where on brilliant summer mornings the sun strikes first, or when we have our winter snowfalls, the whiteness lingers last. On all the graves, there are temporary markers. One day we hope to have modest but permanent memorials that will blend with the desert landscape. A section is reserved for oblates and familiarii, and there are already some graves.

The deceased monks are Gabriel Muir, Raphael Vinciarelli, Bernard Ambrose, Alberic de Crombrugge and Thaddaeus Yang. Some we have already met; but this seems to be the place to treat them at adequate length.

GABRIEL MUIR

1946 - 1969

The tragic accident which ended the young life of Brother Gabriel on March 5, 1969 plunged every member of the community into gloom, heightened by the fact that it was some time before his body was discovered. He was born Patrick John Muir in San Francisco on February 23, 1946, belonging to the same family as John Muir of Sierra Club fame. On graduation from Saint Francis' High School, Mountain View, he spent a year at Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, and then decided to enter Valyermo. He made his first profession in August 1967. During his couple of years' membership of the community he made himself a universal favorite by his boyish charm and high spirits; and his family (father, mother and two teenaged sisters) were such frequent visitors as to be almost members of the community too.

His love of shooting (he was a remarkably good shot, providing on at least one memorable occasion a meal of quail for myself) proved ultimately his undoing. While tinkering with his gun in his room, it went off and killed him outright. There is no more to be said. Personally, I shall always remember encounters with him on the desert trails, I walking, he hunting. Invariably smiling and effervescent, he would want to know what game we had in Ireland (which he dreamt of visiting one day), whether I had ever done any shooting (I had), what guns we used...

Philippe ver Haegan as prior probably dreaded the occasions when he was called upon to say something in English publicly. His words over the body of Gabriel, at a mass concelebrated by fourteen priests, were probably his finest effort. I quote them here.

"The tragic death of brother Gabriel is for his family and his community a very heavy trial to bear. Sometimes, death is sweet, serene and a source of consolation. Other times it is sudden, bitter and dramatic. Then our first reactions, our first emotions are crushing. We pass through a kind of agony which overwhelms our whole being very deeply. We feel so poor; we are afraid; we feel guilty or responsible, and we question ourselves; why, how, what happened? Everything seems so tragic and senseless at the same time.

How can we find an answer and face all these anxieties? The answer is before us: on this coffin there is the cross of Jesus. We have only to look at this sign to grasp its mysterious and living message. This cross is above all a sign of victory.

Jesus chose to pass through a tragic and shameful death. He suffered the temptation of despair. An indescribable sadness invaded his soul "My soul is sad unto death". He drained the cup to the dregs, taking upon himself all our miseries, all our infidelities, all our deaths. And by doing that, he conquered death. By rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life. And so, this evening, we celebrate a victory....."

RAPHAEL VINCIARELLI

1897 - 1973

Raphael, the first Valyermo prior, was born Angelo Vinciarelli at the village of Il Crocifisso near Sienna, in Firenze province in 1897. It is a historic village because the church there, according to tradition, was visited by Saint Francis of Assisi. Years afterwards when he was being received into the novitiate at Saint Andre, Abbot Neve asked him "what's your first name?" "Angelo". "Very good, I will make you an archangel..." So he became Raphael.

He was by all seeming a product of the 'procure' set up by Van Caloen at Aqua Calda to recruit for Brazil. Other Italian boys came to Saint Andre too around the same time. But Raphael came at such an early stage that he must very soon have seemed a native French-speaking Belgian. To the end however, (he died in an Orange hospital at a pretty ripe age) he retained the Mediterranean aplomb, the adroitness, the malleability, not to say deviousness, and the allegrezza of his native country. He was often required to roll with the punches. But there is a sense in which the Italians have the oldest wisdom in Europe. Since the days of the Roman Empire, they have seen power figures and tyrants, both lay and clerical, come and go; and they shrug it all off with an expressive "Ma che..." They are survivors, and they are deeply humane. Raphael Vinciarelli was nothing if not a survivor.

From the very beginning at Saint Andre he seemed marked as an intellectual, distinguishing himself in theology at Sant Anselmo in Rome, and returning to become immediately master of clerics. When Neve brought him to China in 1934, he doubtless had him earmarked as the man to lead the whole enterprise. His inclination may have been for the scholar's

life of sitzen und letzen; but destiny and other exigencies decreed differently. In Szechuan of course he did publish some booklets in Chinese, but in California, the growing pains of Valyermo were to absorb him. He endeavored to keep up his interest in theological speculation, and would invariably have read the monographs of conciliar and post-conciliar theologians. I think his views were more conservative than the average run of these. He was, one heard, at the end engaged in compiling some sort of theological treatise himself, with an eye doubtless to the correction of what he would see as zany tendencies. It never saw the light, I don't know why. Probably in the present climate it would seem very dated, because Raphael for all his intelligence and adaptability, remained incorrigibly orthodox in all such matters.

To be honest, not much of his reputed talent seemed to flow over to his preaching or the conferences he regularly gave the formation group. He would appear with a notebook filled with his cramped, spidery handwriting. His style was very Italiano, certain pet phrases like 'going to the Father' being repeated ad nauseam; and his elaborate gestures, and tone going from diminuendo to high crescendo, were disconcerting to some. I should hate to be asked to summarize what he said on any particular occasion, but he would have talked a blue streak. Language or languages, were no trouble to him. I don't know where he learned his English; but, though heavily accented, it was more fluent than that of many natives.

As prior and host, there was only one adjective for him, the Italian one, accogliente. Radiating smiles, geniality and charm he would advance impeccably groomed, hair brushed and gleaming, habit falling in precise and correct folds. Though he was, I understand, as a young man quite a useful soccer player, his gait could appear nunnish and mincing, almost

feline. His whole demeanor suggested that he expected things to be done for him, and they usually were. He would accept services with a kind of royal grace. Purchasing things, personal items, clothes or the like, it would never occur to him to settle for anything less than the best quality; and whether in or out of the priory, he was usually being waited on by somebody, bringing the whole situation off with style. Eyewitnesses still describe a memorable scene. During a snowfall he is moving sedately, under an umbrella, from his room to the chapel. Step by measured step, while the bent and obsequious figure of George Barnes (a then brother) shovels snow from his path. Had there been another brother to hold the umbrella the picture would be complete.

Rarely was he angry, but when he was, the voice would rise in that crescendo that was characteristic of his conferences, becoming almost feminine and hysterical. Everyone soon came to know that no excuse, short of an earthquake, was good enough to disturb his siesta. And during that, doubtless in nightmare, he would sometimes emit the most bloodcurdling shrieks. Shortly afterwards, while you waited in some alarm, he would emerge refreshed, bland and smiling.

Though he looked quite mild and elaborately polite, he had plenty of courage, and, dour encourager les autres, would make a point of being unflappable in crisis. The day the sheriff came to arrest the awol observer, he insisted before handling the matter on finishing his conference to an audience which included that observer. Doubtless at Chengtu 1949 he showed similar mettle, going with dignity to gaol and making the best of it. Not for nothing had his forebears waited out Nero and Domitian and others of that ilk throughout the centuries.

Sometimes very funny things could happen. Though his English was more than adequate, it stopped short at Los Angeles slang, especially indecent slang. Once a serious disagreement occurred between two observers, one an ex-actor, whose views were described by the other as 'a bunch of Hollywood shit'. Outraged, the actor hastened to Raphael, who listened gravely and took the matter under consideration. Now and again, when puzzled, he would discreetly consult his Irish fellow-monk. "Tell me Faathah what ees thees anyhow?....Bunch of Hollywood sheeit...."

It was of course he who received myself into the novitiate one October day in 1963. He asked me, shrewdly, what, during those first weeks of violent change of life-style in middle years, I had missed most. The weather had been unseasonably hot, and I answered honestly "Beer". He said "Good heavens, why didn't you ask for it?" Then, very courteously, though I don't think it was customary at the time, he asked me if I had a preference about name, telling me the tale of his entrance under Neve. I chose Molaise. He had never heard of the saint, despite his great learning, and the name was without precedent in the Benedictine order. But he never flickered, and just asked me if it would go into Latin.

Meanwhile, I had been eyeing a novel of Alberto Moravia's on his shelves. He said "Do you read Italian?" "Yes." "Take it, it's yours." I read it and it was, in fact, a highly risque novel.

BERNARD AMBROSE

1928 - 1975

Bernard's death was far from being as shattering as young Gabriel's; but nevertheless; the fatal disease struck him with such dramatic suddenness, so very soon after he finally entered the community, that it saddened us. In fact, he was a very short time with us before the hospitalization that was to be fatal, and of course, had not yet made his first profession. The chapter, however, received him on his deathbed, so that he might be buried in the habit, and in the cemetery. He took the name Bernard as a tribute to his friend Dr. Bernard Tucker. He was 47.

He was born Benjamin Ambrose in 1928 in . In his early adult years before thoughts of the religious life began to occur to him, he worked as stockbroker with the firm of . It was with a view to making a practical contribution as brother in the Valyermo community that he decided to postpone his entry until he had completed training as a nurse. Oddly, or prophetically, enough, his work as a nurse just before coming here was exclusively with terminal cancer patients. And it was then that he met Bernard and Wanda Tucker, who were so kind to him at the end.

One had very little chance to get to know him personally during his short residence here. He seemed a quiet, undemonstrative man, concerned to begin his work as a nurse straightaway; but no one could fail to be impressed by his calm acceptance of the sentence of terminal cancer which came his way almost at once. When the end became inevitable, Dr. Tucker and his wife Wanda insisted on moving him to their own home and caring for him there until he died. The gesture was quite a remarkable tribute

both to him and to them. Mercifully, he did not I think have very great pain in the early stages, but at the very end he did suffer acutely.

We would visit with him in small groups, and chat and maybe pray together. The prayer was never frenetic or dramatic either on his part or on ours. Just as normal and serene as if we were singing lauds in choir and soon to go to breakfast. I recall being particularly impressed by the courage, cheerfulness and matter-of-factness of the man when I visited him with the prior shortly after his removal to the Tucker residence. Few people can have faced immediate death so undramatically, with such calm awareness and such open-eyed normalcy. When his will was read, the Priory was the principal beneficiary.

ALBERIC DELORING DE CROMBRUGGE

1911 - 1981

It is rather hard to believe that the Alberic we knew at Valyermo had such portentous beginnings when he was born on December 7, 1911. The Municipality of Laarne in East Flanders records:

"In the year nineteen hundred and eleven at Laarne, Belgium, on this seventh day of December is born Alberic Gaston Jean Marie Ghislain, son of Gaston Guillaume Emile Alberic Ghislain Marie, Baron of Crombrugghe de Looringe, and of Germaine Francoise Isidora Marie Anne van Delft."

Not that he lacked aristocratic bearing; he had more than many fellow-barons in Belgium (where that title indeed tended to proliferate a bit). It is used to be said about class-ridden English society that the only levels where you could count on encountering natural human behavior were either the very top (the aristocrats), or the very bottom (the working class). Because there was nowhere to fall from, and nowhere to climb to, Alberic always gave you the impression that he had nowhere to fall from. He possessed, in high degree I think, a virtue that the ancient Cynic philosophers called anaideia (shamelessness) and made their summum bonum. It has sometimes been Englished 'not giving a damn'. Then there was a certain panache and magnificence about the little personal possessions he treasured - his shirts, his hats, his pipes - all striking in size or color. If these be aristocratic symptoms, he certainly had them. Otherwise he would be inclined to greet aristocrats, or aristocratic pretensions, with very rude noises. His friends were always the simple, and the unashamedly proletarian.

In his person he represented the single most powerful argument against dehumanization that I have ever known. He was blessedly proof

against any systems, or any bureaucracies; and I do believe brought immense consolation to thousands in Southern California, who were hapless victims of dehumanization. That such a man could continue to exist, in blithe ignorance of what he was expected to be, proved something. The undefeated, undefeatable, quintessential human being, which indeed Alberic was from the dawn of his first consciousness to the day he died.

I am aware that to some of his Belgian contemporaries he seemed the perfect example of the enfant gate; that he never grew up. I'm not so sure I agree about that. He grew up alright; he was in fact a man of extremely sophisticated culture, knowledge and taste. He just never changed. Nothing that he encountered in grown-up values seemed to him worthy to supersede the values of a child; and he was not about to relinquish these latter for standards he found vulgar and phony. It was significant that in later years he sometimes seemed to give up on human beings. He disliked what he saw happening to them, and tended to turn to animals, seeing them, reading about them, talking to them. I loved his stories of escapades with favorite nieces and nephews, in defiance of grown-up and normal values, of expected deportment. How the children must have loved him.

The quintessential human being, warts and all.... Even his very faults and negative reactions were true to standard. His sulks and tempers, his depressions. He could be frighteningly hostile to those who seemed to transgress his values, and he could hate very cordially. But his normal mood was genial, gentle, giving and generous. He had a beautiful smile, and such an unrestrained laugh that it did you good to hear it. It was sad when he laughed no more, but more frequently cried, but even then he was just responding humanly.

His family may conceivably have all been like that; I very much hope they were. In 1966 in Rome I was privileged to meet and know reasonably well his sister Susie. I found much of him in her. The fact that he looked rather Celtic than anything else, the curious name Crombrugge (there was a pre-Christian Celtic divinity, a rather monstrous one, called Crom Cruach), and his Irish sojourn as a little boy during the 1914-18 war near Cahir, County Tipperary, argues that the family had some Irish connections. He lived with a family called Murdoch (now no longer there), and the name suggests that they were Anglo-Irish rather than Irish, and probably non-Catholic. Murdoch himself was a colonel in the Indian army, and not particularly liked by little Alberic, who showed early his propensities where authority, lay or ecclesiastical, was concerned. But he loved Granny Murdoch, who let him help to make butter patties in the dairy; and he loved the colonel's small daughter. She had the intriguing habit of running round the house outside, without any clothes on, every morning before breakfast. One morning as she re-entered, the colonel, either playfully or in rebuke, slapped her smartly on the buttocks. Next minute he was astonished to find the little Belgian boy coming at him like a tornado, fists flailing and eyes blazing. At the very end, when almost nothing would elicit a response, at the mention of Granny Murdoch, an expression of the utmost tenderness would come over his face.

As it happens, I was the last one to catch him in a moment of some lucidity as he lay dying in Saint John of God Hospital on Christmas Eve, 1981. He reacted as usual to a mention of Granny Murdoch, asked about our mutual friend Gaetan (who was in Belgium) and Gaetan's sister Anne Marie. He just said quietly, "They are the salt of the earth...." Then

I gave him a little present I knew he'd like, a diminutive dog such as ladies wear as bracelet ornaments. He peered at it, smiled and said 'Bobo', his name for the Priory dog. After that he said "I want to die now..." I came away, not sure I could maintain composure any longer.

I do not propose to go on here about his career as a monk, his work in Belgium, in Szechuan, in Belgium again, and finally in California. That has all been soberly recorded elsewhere; and that he was loved everywhere, especially by children, goes without saying. For many years, in the neighboring town of Lancaster, he was practically Mr. Lancaster. People still talk of him, emerging from the rectory in the morning, with his big hat and his big pipe, to begin his rounds of sick on foot. He liked going to the unfortunates, prisons and such places; and was never happier than when asked to supply for the regular chaplain at Camarillo mental hospital. Friends he made in such places would come to visit him afterwards at the Priory, and he would beam with undisguised pleasure.

In the community itself, it is of course as a 'character' that he will live perpetually in memory. Amongst a group of men, many of whom are no mean hands themselves at reducing a room to elaborate disorder, Alberic's capacities in this field reached the standards of the legendary. Give him a room anywhere, and in a month no one could possibly get in except himself. Literally overflowing with what others considered rubbish. But not Alberic....It always remained somewhat of a mystery how and where he slept. This of course could cause minor embarrassment when he was lodged for any length of time in an outside rectory, as frequently he was in Lancaster. Gaetan once visiting him there, and gazing bemusedly at the bed piled to the roof with papers and bric-a-brac, said in

astonishment "But where do you sleep?...." Alberic simply fixed him with a stern look and replied "That's a most indiscreet question...."

It was the absolute contrast that beggared description. Humor elaborately sophisticated; manner of littering his room altogether infantile. Exasperated colleagues often felt that he must be some sort of kleptomaniac, because he couldn't resist annexing whatever he found lying around, especially if it glittered or was colorful. Exactly like a magpie. Brothers would often search his room for missing items when they got him out. Though he had annexed them he would never miss them. Greed or acquisitiveness had nothing to do with the matter. Likewise with food. When you saw him bearing down on the kitchen, it was well to hide *anything you wanted to hold on to. He would be a small boy again getting* his hand into the cookie jar. He had a wonderful story about an elaborate dinner his mother (long-suffering woman) gave for the local bishop and his retinue on the occasion of a confirmation. Little Alberic (cher Bob) was hovering in the wings watching the goings on, and when all the guests left the dining room, rushed around the empty table drinking what remained in all the glasses. He was immediately so exalte that he rushed out to join the crowd, fell in a heap on the lawn and rolled about. The exiting bishop was quite concerned about him, and summoned him over to pat him on the head, while his mother, under no illusions, watched grimly from behind.

In all, it is just maddeningly impossible to recapture on paper the unique flavor of this man's personality and style; and one has to confess defeat. Examples may convey something. First, two incidents. One sunny afternoon after mass, the youngest daughter of Jean MacDonald, one of the Priory's oldest friends, (she was aged possibly five) severely embar-

passed her mother by throwing off all her clothes and cavorting among the crowd. Alberic, standing by with his outsize pipe, beamed with delight and murmured "Eve, avant la pomme..." Doubtless he was transported suddenly to Cahir and the colonel's daughter. Second incident: a severe problem at confession. The children all trooped to him at confession. Small girl has troubles, "Father, I don't know what to do..." "What happened?" "Well, I stole something and I can't make restitution." "Oh....why not?" "Well, I can't make restitution because I ate it".

Finally, a typical Alberic anecdote. Where on earth did he cull them from? Or did he just make them up? They were always so richly sophisticated. A bishop in the south of France is widely known as a wit and brilliant raconteur, and possibly bon vivant. Consequently, he is much in demand as a dinner guest; but sometimes worries that in the gaieties of intercourse his sallies may become borderline, or even cross the border. He accordingly tells the vicaire who travels with him to warn him at borderline moments. After a wonderful dinner, he is taking leave of the particularly charming countess who has entertained. She gushes: "Monseigneur, this has been magnificent; I have rarely enjoyed such an evening. But....do you mind if I say something?" "But of course" said the bishop, inwardly dismayed. "Well...it's about that vicaire of yours. Rather a peculiar man don't you think?" "Oh...why so?" "Precisely at those times when you were being most witty and entertaining, he kept pressing my foot under the table".

THADDAEUS YANG AN-JAN

1905 - 1982

In a world where rapprochement between the Far East and the Western World has become a major, if not the major, issue, as humanity grinds its way toward the third Christian millennium and one world, it will always be a matter of profound regret that full advantage was not taken in Southern California of Thaddaeus Yang's quite unique background. Though he wasn't temperamentally inclined towards scholarship or the academic life, nevertheless for the sake of others, he ought to have been persuaded to teach. At some worthwhile graduate school perhaps, where bright young people would have been exposed to his influence. He was even technically qualified, having a doctorate in Political Science from Louvain. But no one had the enterprise to arrange this, and an irretrievable opportunity was missed.

He was by birth and training altogether unique in this environment, or indeed any American environment. A man perfectly cultivated in both cultures, east and west, perfectly fluent in Chinese, French and English, with considerable artistic talents to boot, in sculpture, painting and calligraphy. Furthermore, in that he came to Christianity from a Buddhist background, in his person he bridged the gap between the two great religions as well. Engagingly modest, his style was so low-keyed and mild as to be altogether deceptive, especially in a Californian culture where assertiveness is the norm. He did of course, for those who were lucky enough to come in contact with him, exercise a prodigious influence in Valyermo itself. But his experience and his wisdom were very much needed in other places too; and California in the present generation might be reaping the benefit.

He was born on May 15, 1905 to Bie Liat Tan and Lien Nio Njoo, a Chinese couple with a large family living on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (present Indonesia). He was given the name of his childless godparent. His father was a Buddhist ascetic, went to retire periodically to a hermit's life on a wooded hill near their home. It was to counteract the possible romantic influence of this on the growing boy that his mother, a Confucianist, contrived to have him sent to England and the European continent to be educated. In ways his experience was almost exactly that of the celebrated Indian philosopher Aurobindo, whose Anglicized father sent him to England to be thoroughly westernized, only to have the whole process boomerang. Thaddaeus as an adolescent went to school near London to learn English. Then he went to Belgium, and while studying French there fell under the influence of Vincent Lebbe, the missionary already mentioned. He was not yet a Christian; but a scholarship to Louvain brought him in touch with Jacques Thoreau, a professor there, whose wife was Lebbe's youngest sister. The Thoreau's were devout Christians, and took the Chinese boy into their home, thus beginning an association with all the Thoreau's which was to last until the day of his burial at Valyermo.

It was the warm Christian example of the Thoreau family, rather than any process of ratiocination, that led him finally, during the Christmas vacation of 1925, to request Christian baptism himself. He was twenty, and he took the name Albert. Very soon, almost as if destiny were calling, he heard the sensational news that a former Chinese prime minister, Lou Tseng-Tsiang, had become a monk at Saint Andre. Like Aurobindo leaving Oxford, his eastern roots were tugging; and he felt he should do the same thing, with an eye on China. He wrote home to Java.

However puzzled or disappointed they may have been, his parents bowed to his decision. His father wrote that he should follow the voice of conscience 'seriously and courageously', adding (he ought to know) that 'one needs courage to be a good monk'. His mother requested that even as monk he not abandon his secular studies. With the cooperation of Theodore Neve, he fulfilled both requests. In 1927 he entered the novitiate at Saint Andre, and was professed on October 7, 1928. After the usual studies in philosophy and theology, he was ordained priest on July 31, 1932, and returned to Louvain to complete his doctorate by 1933. By 1934 he was on his way back to China with Theodore Neve.

We have already indicated his pursuits in China, and his penchant for journalism (he used the name Ta-Teh) rather than scholarship. For a time he was rector of the seminary at Si-Shan. He had in fact little time ever for the minutiae of scholarship, and to the end could be ironical about it all in his gentle Chinese way. His puckish sense of humor too, made him more noted, during university years, as practical joker than as student. Those who knew him throughout, from the late twenties and early thirties, maintain that he passed through a process of re-conversion. Not religious, but from being thoroughly westernized to a re-Sinification in Szechuan. Maybe...that would make the resemblance to Aurobindo's career more striking than ever. When I came to know him in 1963 at Valyermo, he showed an avid interest in Ireland, which he had never visited, taking particularly to Celtic myth and fantasy and forever borrowing my books. Aurobindo too, as a classics student at Oxford before 1914, was avidly reading all the Irish revolutionaries.

At Valyermo Thaddaeus must have seemed to everyone the monk par excellence, in style always, if no longer in belief, a Buddhist. He

would work long hours in his driftwood studio, producing pieces of great beauty. He would feed and care for all domestic animals and birds, and seemed to have a positively uncanny liaison with nature. Two of our most beautiful flowering trees at the moment grew from pips he casually pushed into the earth when passing. Inscrutable like all Chinese, one conjectured about his inner thoughts and feelings. Did he for instance, genuinely like California? I sometimes wondered; judgments, especially negative judgments, were so hard to wrest from him.

He did however, genuinely love Valyermo, and everyone connected with Valyermo. More than any other monk, he never forgot friends, especially old friends of the Priory. He would always know and remind you if they were in hospital or ill; and would enquire with pathetic anxiety whether you had seen or heard of people who hadn't been around for some time. Twice I saw him angry, once when he asked a particularly obnoxious guest very firmly to leave, and once when someone slipped up about proper reception of another guest.

Except for a memorable visit back to his old friends, the Thoreaus in Belgium, and short duty visits to old Priory friends in the neighborhood, he rarely went out or travelled. Maybe to an exhibition by one of his artist friends, because in himself the artist was always uppermost. Of course, his health was never other than frail, the bout with tuberculosis in Szechuan; eye-trouble and Parkinson's disease as he aged, kidney trouble and a broken hip making him a wheelchair case before the end. During the last months he was almost ethereal, eating practically nothing except when his loyal Chinese friends brought some tidbit of Chinese cuisine. But I for one never heard him complain; when I enquired how he was he would simply give a measured and accurate response. He hated

having to go to the hospital; and, mercifully, he died peacefully in his chair with everyone gathered around him.

Sadly, Alberic and himself were somewhat estranged at the end. He was still fairly able when Alberic was failing. I rather think it was the ecclesiastical decorum and caution that had become second nature to Thaddaeus (he had after all been president of a seminary, acting prior and sub-prior, and he never missed the office) which Alberic found exasperating. Personally, there are two treasured mementoes I shall always carry of Thaddaeus. I carry a stick when walking; and once when I found myself without one he insisted on presenting me with the elegant ebony one he received for his golden jubilee. I never now walk without it; and I took care to have another one presented to him carrying the Latin inscription: Molasius Thaddaeo DD

magistro discipulus.

The second is a priceless observation I succeeded in eliciting, when for once his inscrutability was pierced. An observation about Denis Hennessy (during his early tenure), the prior who left us, the Benedictines, and the priesthood at one fell swoop. Thaddaeus squirmed a lot before making it; but it finally came out with an embarrassed half-laugh. "He's rather like a football player". From any angle it was an acute judgement. Nobody could possibly be less like an American football player than Thaddaeus Yang and I rather think he was on principle, agin the type.

And so they sleep far from Sienna, far from Java, far from Laarne on the sandy hilltop, those three Ulysses figures. Differences may have divided them at times throughout their odysseys. Differences did, we know.

"But in the grave, all shall be renewed".

Beside them the two young Americans, for whom, as for all the young who die, we can only quote the beautiful sentiment of the wisdom writer,

"Raptus est ne malitia mutaret intellectum eius.....:

DE VIVIS

Writing about one's deceased brethren is a considerably less hazardous procedure than writing about the living. For obvious reasons. Conceivably, I suppose the dead could come back to haunt one. But I don't think I'd be particularly discomfited by encountering the ghost of any person in the previous chapter. One ghost I should love to encounter - Alberic's.

The living of course actually do haunt one. And you may be pardoned for hesitancy in describing with candor a man with whom you have to live the rest of your life. I find it salutary to recall in this regard a story told of Tim Healy, the brilliant and witty lawyer who became the first Governor General of an independent Ireland. When told that the celebrated writer Liam O'Flaherty was planning to write his life, Healy murmured imperturbably: "Oh that's perfectly alright, I'll just write his"...

I shall try to keep it in mind as I proceed to observations in the present chapter. They will obviously have to be selective, and couched in more cautious terms. Most of the original Belgian members of the community have been mentioned already, and perhaps in part described. Most of them are happily still with us; but for the past fifteen years the gradual and inevitable shift towards American personnel has been much in evidence. I myself am the only surviving Irishman, and enjoy the same ripe years as the Belgians. We may indeed be permitted in low moments to commiserate with one another, or even murmur 'apres nous la deluge!' Soon, as history goes, we shall all be comfortably dead.

Raphael remained prior until Valyermo was declared a conventual priory in . In Benedictine terms this means that the house has now become independent of its founding abbey; but the founding abbot has the right to appoint the first conventual prior. Abbot de Ghesquiere appointed the colorful and impulsive Philippe ver Haegan, who saw the priory through the difficult years . In middle life he had to make a frontal assault on both the English language and the American culture. He did both manfully, but strangely, though he was Frenchified to his finger tips, his English always seemed guttural and German accented. Doubtless he made his mistakes, but we loved him (he is a very lovable man), and regretted very much that Belgium called him again when he finally resigned. One must admit of course that his impulsive driving left something to be desired by California standards. There were minor embarrassments with the highway patrol, and with automobiles. I don't consider myself a backseat driver, and have only once in my life shouted 'Stop the car'. That was when he careened at a breakneck speed off an unfamiliar freeway ramp, while driving myself and a very uneasy Eleutherius. He was disgruntled and went on about fear. "Fathaire, we should not be afraid..." I couldn't agree more, but I stop short at suicide. I firmly took the wheel.

When he resigned, the community failed to elect a successor, and Denis Hennessy of Newark Abbey was sent in by the abbot as prior-administrator. In he left somewhat dramatically, and John Borgerding, a native of Minnesota, was duly elected first American prior. Americanization naturally has gone on apace from that time.

The first American wave was represented by John himself, Augustine Flood, Philip Edwards and David Rochon. Of these David Rochon left,

became secularized, and died as pastor in Oregon diocese. Augustine Flood left also, changed stability to Saint Vincent's Latrobe, and is at the moment president of the college there. Bernard Wang, the Chinese recruited during the Chengtu years, also left and became secularized, as did the Indian Placid Prabhu. He, like Bernardine Solvyns, was a monk of Saint Andre, who joined this community at a later stage after the foundation of Valyermo. Other solemnly professed Americans who left were Emmanuel Steinberg and Benedict Falvo. So that the solemnly professed at the moment comprise six Belgians, one Chinese, one Irish and the rest Americans. The second strong wave of Americans, all practically contemporary, is made up of Fathers John Bosco Stoner, Gregory Elmer, Francis Benedict, Thomas Duscher, Blaise Brockman and Brother Dominic Guillen. They as a group might be looked upon as the hard core of the present community and with them the future rests. They are closely followed by Gabriel Lozano, soon to be ordained priest, Brother Benedict Dull and just recently, Brother Joseph Iarrobino. Two simply professed brothers, Luke Dysinger and Anselm Ferris have been sent to Oxford for studies and Brother Paul Desmarais is in New Hampshire for the same purpose.

The decision to send two young men to Oxford, though it is a heavy drain on present financial resources, may ultimately prove very important. In the transition, which is inevitable and fast happening, from European to exclusively American personnel, there is some risk I suppose, of diminution in intellectual and artistic standards. In so many institutions throughout the, relatively brief, history of USA, this has been the story. The matter may seem delicate (and there is no reason to labor it unduly); but it does have a relevance in Valyermo. It should first of all be clear that when one states that standards tend to drop in

America, that is no reflection whatsoever on American society. Rather the contrary. America deserves the credit for being the only society in history to have made a practical attempt to implement genuine egalitarianism by mass-education. The attempt was gallant; but when you diffuse something very rapidly the quality gets diluted. Spread a heap of sand; you must spread it thinner. Standards tend to get confused, and real excellence may become indistinguishable from ersatz substitutes.

The very freshness of American approach, the determination not to be overawed by eminences (encouraged by John Dewey and such people) has indeed its charm. Everyone who has taught in America is familiar with the student mentality that has been described as 'Plato says but I think...' Nevertheless, it would be silly to ignore the constant danger of real shallowness. In Valyermo the fact that we have no school or university makes the maintenance of intellectual standards and interests (a very honored Benedictine tradition) considerably more difficult. Individuals (Eleutherius comes to mind) have to work in comparative isolation. One hopes that the new American waves will be conscious of all this. America being the practical business society that it is, there has always been, and still is, a pragmatic bias in American education. The Belgian founders, despite their meager resources, have spared no efforts to secure the best intellectual training for their American recruits. It will be the business of the recruits themselves to keep that torch burning, even if this means running counter to fashionable local trends.

In fact, in the history of Saint Andre itself, there is a cautionary lesson. The beginnings there too were practically oriented (the missionary needs of the time). Theodore Neve, for all his great vision, had to

be pushed towards a policy of securing the best Louvain training for his promising clerics. The long subsequent line of distinguished Saint Andre scholars was the reward. The man who did the pushing, as master of clerics, was none other than the first prior of Valyermo, Raphael Vinciarelli.

So much for the intellectual life. For sixteen years I was fortunate enough to be on the staff of Maynooth College, living very closely with a group of remarkable intellects. And if I were asked to name the single greatest personal advantage I derived from such company, I should have to say that the closeness of great minds forced you to keep your standards high. The trouble with such a special community though is that it sort of spoils you for the banalities of normal human intercourse. There, nothing pretentious, or shoddy, or counterfeit had a chance of getting by.

Yet, as it happens, my most treasured memory of a short interchange at Maynooth had nothing to do with intellectual pursuits. It was when a guest at the staff table, who had been boring everyone with pious cliches, suddenly addressed a colleague of mine, quite loudly and portentously, across the table: "Father, do you have a chapter of faults on the staff here?" It was of course, an asinine question that should never have been asked. My friend swallowed hard, and then came out with the measured response (he was good at them): "Well...Father...if you mean by that, machinery for finding out what faults fellows have, we have."

Likewise, if Valyermo no longer practices the medieval chapter of faults, it does not lack machinery. Fellows' faults in fact, became so well known as to be endearing, and the character would perhaps seem incomplete without them. All the Belgians are very much individuals, and

can be counted on to react predictably in given situations. Everyone chuckles for instance at Eleutherius when he goes on the offensive. He will don a mock humility ("Fathaire, may I say something...I am nothink ...") while wielding an axe to secure his ends. The others are all predictable too. The consequential set of Werner's (small-statured, yet Napoleonic) shoulders as he moves about in the morning issuing directives to Lupe or Bill Rhames. Wilfrid, in shorts and blazer, emerging rather like General Montgomery before Alamein, to take command of his beloved Boy Scouts. Vincent's sermons, delivered in a raucous Fernandel accent that could be used for hurling imprecations. Gaetan's (Poppa G) perennial low profile.

But the Americans too are coming to have established roles which you would be disappointed to find unfulfilled. 'Prior John's' loud and assured tones as, spanner in hand, he bears down with his coterie of trainees on some decrepit automobile. Philip's genius for listing all the obstacles you never thought of, when some seemingly simple project is mooted. Dominic cavorting in high mood and looking more than ever like Orson Welles on a spree. Francis' pious and forgiving smile as he embraces all and sundry, dispensing sweetness and light. Blaise never divided from his apron. Gregory's studied style and somewhat plummy preaching. The no-nonsense, Prussian mien of Thomas as he moves, brusquely and efficiently towards his various tasks.

So on...These things make up the warp and woof of daily living, and indeed its main satisfactions. Domestic fun is frequent thank goodness. Sometimes it may sink to the level of the infantile, recalling the atmosphere of convent novitiates fifty years ago on Holy Innocents' Day. But on the whole, it is robust and very masculine. Among the young

probably far more practical jokes get played than we elders ever hear about, and far more caustic things get said about us than it is good for us to hear about. But even among the senile, or semi-senile, fun is not unknown. The precise incident being always the best illustration, I propose to narrate one story rather against myself, and then hasten for cover to the next chapter.

Bernardine Solvywas (the redoubtable "bishop of Boron", we see all too little of him these days) is one of those who changed stability from Saint Andre at a late stage; and is by now, I hope, my very good friend. Quite early in our acquaintanceship, when my feast day was being celebrated at the ranch house, he approached me ceremoniously towards the end of dinner bearing a bottle of Irish Mist. I vaguely wondered I suppose how he came by it, but was not about to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Dutifully I made the rounds, pouring a just moiety for each person, and then settled down luxuriously, licking my lips, to enjoy the rest. Alas, what I tasted was tepid beer...Touche.

I bided my time. Bernardine just then lived in the Stone House and, when absent for some weeks on a Summer assignment, left his window open at the bottom for air. It fronted on a sandy bank and gave me an idea. I borrowed from a friend one of those extremely realistic coiled rattle snakes that had been used to give myself a fright, and placed it carefully just under his bed where he could not fail to see it as he opened the door. It would give the show away of course if I were present myself, much as I wanted to, and there was nowhere I could conveniently hide; but I much enjoyed an eyewitness account.

He stiffened into a crouch, with a hunter's gleam in his eye (his specialty in fact was Baron Munchausen tales of the lion and elephants he

had slaughtered in Zaire), then hastened off to procure a gun. Again, he crouched at the door, gun at the ready, tossing pebbles to provoke the animal to raise its head. It was some time, and many pebbles later, before it dawned on him that he had been had. He just gave his customary persecuted sigh.

PREACHING AND TEACHING

Preaching

In the quarter century or so of Valyermo's existence, a lot of things have happened I suppose, which tended to change the very concept of preaching, and of retreats. Preaching in Valyermo will generally mean an audience of some sort of retreatants; though the principal celebrant at the noon conventual mass will regularly give a short homily to whatever congregation (usually guests, workers and a few neighbors) happens to be present.

From the beginning, the Priory had managed to provide itself with a score of simple but comfortable rooms for double occupancy, an adequate kitchen nearby (it is still the regular Priory kitchen), and a fairly handsome refectory, distinguished for the beautiful window designed by Louisa Jenkins. Later the present comfortable lounge was added. All were meant for the accommodation of live-in retreatants, and constitute in fact the only permanent stone building undertaken. All other Priory buildings are either converted ranch houses and outhouses, or of wood.

Thus, almost straightaway, small weekend retreats were the norm. They would be preached by the Director of Retreats (one of the monks) or another monk. People came in late on Friday nights, sometimes very late and rather bewildered (the place was as yet scarcely known and hard to find), and leave after lunch on Sunday. The retreat would follow the traditional pattern, three or four conferences a day to passive and patient listeners, time for individual consultation and/or confession, usually silence. Most people liked to attend the office too, which was then of course chanted in Latin. They would leave feeling apparently holier and well pleased, with many promises to return. No specific

donation was requested. This was left to people's generosity, but of course at the time, income from retreats was the main means monks had for staying alive.

Quite soon, though, came the changes, which amounted, as time went on, in the years before and during the Second Vatican Council, to a crisis of rather major dimensions in the Catholic Church as an institution. Things began with the Englishing of the liturgy, which was in fact painfully gradual, and caused far more discussion than was really necessary. Then came a lot of anxious talking and writing about apparently new religious or theological ideas: 'celebration', 'salvation history', 'fellowship', 'proclamation', 'priesthood of the laity', 'participation by the laity'. Greek words like 'kerygma', 'koinonia', 'homily', were bandied about (very often it is to be feared by people who didn't know Greek) as if they were never known before; and all sorts of new structurings for Christian groups, with new and high-sounding names, began to advertise themselves. It was all to culminate in the various manifestations of the charismatic movement, which still goes on. Enthusiasm had returned to religion.

This is not of course, the place to assess the ultimate meaning of such developments; we are dealing only with the repercussions in such a place as Valyermo. There were, and still are, raucous voices to the left, and raucous voices to the right. Cynics saw no more than frantic efforts on the part of the establishment to pump back vitality into worship-styles that were obsolescent. Starry-eyed enthusiasts, on the other hand, clerical (usually young) and lay, saw a new Pentecost; and were ready to do anything short of strip tease to make a 'celebration' ('happening' was another fashionable word) 'meaningful'. I like the

story of the jaded British priest who commented: "I suppose the next thing we can look forward to is the consecration of X as bishop on ice". I also like the story of the old Irishwoman in an American parish who hated everything, the mass in English, the kiss of peace, the singing and all the ballyhoo. The pastor meets her on Sunday: "I'm surprised Mary to see you singing today - I thought you didn't like all that stuff..." "Well Father, I'll tell you one thing. It sure beats listening..."

In Valyermo of course (Benedictines are expected to be in the forefront where liturgy is concerned), the effects of all changes were immediately evident. I became Director of Retreats in the fall of 1964, shortly after my first profession; and endeavored to give satisfaction, with passable success. I was never however, without an uneasy feeling that the people who should be making retreats (the young, say, college students and so on) weren't doing so; whereas those who were, were usually settled, elderly, pious folk who didn't much need a retreat in any case.

As director for Valyermo, there were so many angles to be balanced. Those were thin times for the community, and it had to stay alive somehow. Young people or college students, whenever they did come, were notoriously bad donors. They might leave gushing letters, but they would leave no money. If the program were to be viable at all, one had to depend on the pious elders. One did. Rather soon I turned to other pursuits, though I am still happy to preach the occasional retreat if people request it.

Since 1964, Valyermo must have seen everything in the way of retreat; and in the interval it has been producing its own 'new breed' of monks who measure up to all the most avant-garde standards as preachers;

in adaption, participation, actuality, gesture and delivery. In due to the initiative of Father John Quinn, a priest of Los Angeles diocese who was then a monk but did not make final profession, a new Youth Center was set up a short distance from the Priory. Here of course, where groups of teenage boys and girls are dealt with, goodness knows what gyrations retreat masters are called upon to perform. And, as for the Boy Scout retreats, a further rung down the ladder, complications might be expected except for the fortunate fact that Father Wilfrid, always director, is himself a perennial boy scout.

So that, at Valyermo now, nearly any sort of retreat can be structured on request. We've had cursillos, charismatic groups, ecumenical groups, open-ended discussion groups, groups of every conceivable Christian confession as well as Catholics, Jewish groups, alcoholics anonymous, emotional health anonymous, what you will. We've had summer workshops in painting, sculpture, dancing, cooking, knitting, macrame making. These will often be directed by outside professionals of both sexes, but a monk will coordinate. And of course, non-Catholic groups are usually directed by their own clergymen. Once, at the peak of the changes, we even had our own (monks') annual retreat conducted by some nun. It was rather peculiar. She had particular ideas about 'togetherness' and communication; and would be aghast if any listener's chair were withdrawn even a fraction out of plumb from the exact semi-circle which surrounded her.

Today, both Priory retreat-house and Youth Center are so busy as to be usually reserved practically for a year in advance. Then all priests in the community have long been accustomed to weekend assignments in neighboring and city parishes, and to holiday duty for absent clergy.

Some became so identified with particular parishes (like Alberic in Lancaster or Bernardine at the moment in Boron) as to be virtual institutions. Felix has worked as hospital chaplain in parish for upwards of ten years. Vincent at the moment is full-time permanent Catholic chaplain to the massive Cedars of Sinai hospital in Hollywood. All this pastoral engagement means of course constant preaching for everyone. Requests to preach retreats to Benedictine and other religious communities, sometimes far afield, sometimes in other countries, come the way of everyone too, but particularly to well known monks like Eleutherius and Vincent. Raphael, during his lifetime, and indeed up to the very end, did this a good deal.

My own most formidable invitation of the kind came from a fashionable school for wealthy girls (still in existence I believe, Santa Catalina, Monterey). It may have been a mark of confidence; but I was somewhat embarrassed afterwards to have the headmistress request my return to give a week's 'marriage course' to the senior class. I did so, always uneasily conscious that I was too unfamiliar with the state of marriage to have much to convey to those young ladies. Some of them probably knew far more than I did. I never did the like again.

Whether changes, new styles and new fashions, have made for the betterment of preaching all around seems a moot point. It doesn't seem to be generally realized for instance that in the great eras of sermon giving in Christian history, preachers, so far from being worried about actuality, eyeball to eyeball confrontation, emphatic gestures....invariably read their sermons. This was true in the fourth century, in both east and west, when the sermon was lifted to its highest ever prestige by people like Saint Basil, Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Saint Augustine in the

west. It was true of the great sermon-givers in nineteenth century England like John Henry Newman. It was true of the beginnings of the Unitarian movement in Massachusetts with people like Chandler and Emerson.

What seems to have been happening in our time is a concerted attempt by everyone to borrow the technique of the successful revivalist preacher or the popular evangelist. This is well enough, I daresay, if one naturally fits into that mold, if one is a natural Billy Graham or Oral Roberts; but if one doesn't, the effect can be somewhat ludicrous. The same holds for gesturing. If one is a natural gesturer, and Italian like Raphael Vinciarelli (the Italians can conduct a conversation across a crowded street without uttering a syllable), that is fine. But otherwise you have the fairly sorry spectacle of a man making contrived hand movements, and feeling that every sentence he utters must be weighed with emphasis. It is perhaps high time that trainees in preaching (and in everything else) be simply told once again that their business is not the imitation of any particular style or technique, but to express themselves naturally.

Because it is very questionable whether very much successful adaptation can be done in efforts to capture the interest of particular types of audiences. And certainly, if adaptation is done at the expense of the speaker's natural style, the thing is usually a failure. A dead American bishop is being described, perhaps (though not certainly) tongue in cheek, by one of his clergy. "You know, Father, the great difficulty we all have in getting down to the level of little children when we preach. Do you think that Bishop X had any difficulty in getting down to their level? My God, he was below their level..."

Teaching

Preaching and teaching are really different charisms I suppose. But both have a long history in the Benedictine framework; and both have been successfully practiced at Valyermo. The place has no school or university, and it seems unlikely that it ever will. Regular teaching of the formation group goes on; but, as the studies of a novice according to canon law must be confined exclusively to spiritual material, all classes fall within that framework. For other academic studies, it has been the practice to send brothers elsewhere. Over the twenty-five years people have attended a variety of places that it will, one hopes, bring a fairly rich mix to the community. In USA: Loyola, Los Angeles; Claremont; Mount Angel, Oregon; Saint Meinrad's, Indiana; Saint , Washington; Saint Anselm's, New Hampshire; Berkeley Theological Union; Du Cane University; Boston College. In Europe: Saint Andre; Louvain; Sant Anselmo and the Biblical Institute, Rome. Just recently, as already mentioned, new ground has been broken by sending young men to Saint Benet's Hall, Oxford.

The Belgian founders of Valyermo of course, tended in the main to be teachers by avocation anyhow. Every one of them, with the possible exception of Gaetan, taught at some stage: Raphael, Thaddaeus, Werner, Wilfrid, Vincent. And as for Eleutherius, at the moment he must come close to having established a world record as a teacher. He has always reminded me, mutatis mutandis (substitute the verb 'teach' for 'argue', though you would not err grievously indeed by allowing the original verb to stand) of GK Chesterton's famous remark about his brother Cecil in his Autobiography. "He was born on (such a date). Shortly afterwards he began to argue, and has continued to argue ever since, with brief pauses

for meals." Eleutherius, who comes from a Belgian family of teachers, has taught in Belgium, in China, in Rome, in Minnesota, in California, in India and he proposes obviously to die teaching. He is an excellent one (teachers are born, not made), preparing everything meticulously and constantly worried if he fails to make things clear to even the dullest student. By now, generations of anxious young people Claremont Graduate School cite him as the man who finally elucidated Aquinas for them, or Plato or Aristotle, or Kant, or Husserl, or Heidegger, or Wittgenstein, or Jean Paul Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty. He reads them all; but maintains an undiminished loyalty to his beloved medieval schoolmen. Classes could never complain about obscurity in his thinking, but sometimes newcomers find it hard to get attuned to his heavily accented English. Once when talking about the unicity of God (he regularly handles the God non-God topic, proving a la Aquinas that there is one), he noted some consternation on his students' faces. Every time he said "unique" they understood 'eunuch'.

I myself, though very far indeed from the ambit and record of Eleutherius, have taught all my life, in Ireland and in the States. I was Professor of Ancient Classes in Maynooth (1943-1959) coming to California only when my health broke down in 1958. Ever since, I have taught in various California colleges and universities, and was (in '78-79) visiting lecturer at Northern Kentucky University. Not literature in Greek or Latin of course (at least not directly). Students in USA do not know these languages as the Irish did when I was professor there. So, I've had to turn to teaching modern literature and humanities, maybe some history. For the past ten years or thereabouts, I regularly teach courses of that kind for UCLA extension; and have also taught on the San

Diego and Davis campuses. On entering Valyermo in 1964, I sometimes taught various courses in the Claremont colleges too, but not continuously like Eleutherius.

Vincent, who did his Harvard doctorate in sociology, has over the Valyermo years given courses on various Catholic college campuses; and, up to the time he became full-time chaplain to Cedars of Sinai hospital, had been for some years regularly teaching in the religion department of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Bernard Wang, on leaving Valyermo, taught religion at the University of Oregon in Portland. Augustine Flood, originally, too, a monk of Valyermo, is the present president of Saint Vincent's College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. And his contemporary, John Borgerding, the present prior of Valyermo, has for some years taught a regular course at the Los Angeles seminary of Camarillo. So that, all told, in the teaching field, Valyermo has tended to radiate the same wide influence in the States that the group originally exercised in China.

While preaching and teaching are different charisms, they are nevertheless related. Teaching obviously offers a wider sphere of influence, and perhaps more intellectual stimulation; but it is without the authority of an established doctrine from an established pulpit. Doubtless, it is not unheard-of for the man in the pulpit to be challenged from the congregation. But it is certainly not common, even in these days of universal challenge. There is no such relative immunity in a classroom, certainly not nowadays; and the teacher who invokes the platform of priest or monk is not likely to be ultimately very effective. Teaching indeed, at the university level anyhow, is probably best

understood as a function of raising questions rather than providing answers.

Some may very well bewail the demise, in our time, of the 'oracle-teacher'. In universities all over the world, students, hot for ultimate answers, are often at a loss where to turn. They have specialized experts on everything from Anthropology to Zoology; but have very little reason to expect wisdom from the expert outside his narrow field. Indeed our array of experts often create the impression of intellectual 'monsters' - one lobe of the brain enormously developed, the others stunted. Information and knowledge have so proliferated that no single person can hope to have anything approaching an adequate grasp of the total field. Gone are the days when Plato or Newman even in the last century, could speak of the philosophic overview "the clear, calm, accurate vision of all things in so far as the human mind can embrace them". The human mind just can't embrace them. Wisdom in that sense is not possible any more.

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

In more senses than one we are reeling in space, in inner as well as outer space.

There is a sense though, in which the teacher, as distinct from the preacher, may take comfort from his role. In preaching, very often one has to pull punches, through fear of hurting the simple faith or prejudices of a particular audience. It's a bit like using 25% of oneself and shutting off 75%. Teaching is more exciting; the whole self has to be used. One doesn't have to insist on agreed answers; there is just the 'infinity of questions', the arva Ausoniae semper cedentia retro - the fields of Ausonia that are always receding as you press on.

And finally, there is a sense in which teaching is a second fatherhood, perhaps ultimately more meaningful than physical fatherhood, in so far as the mind is more meaningful than the body. Two quotations will serve to illustrate the point. Marguerite Yourcenar in her memorable historical novel (one of the best such novels ever written) Memoires d'Hadrien, has the aged emperor Hadrian muse about the ambiguous finale in Plato's Symposium. Did Alcibiades, or did he not, physically seduce Socrates? "D'apres tout" ruminates Hadrian "le vrai seducteur, c'etait Socrate". One might freely translate "Who cares? The winning seducer in the long run would be Socrates."

The second quotation is a verse by a Irish schoolmaster, T.W. Rolleston.

"Boys that I knew is a schoolroom by day,
Till a strange man came and called you away,
Whither he did not say:
Did a word I said or a tale I told
Fuse ever to gold?
Tell me, men,
Did I give to the young soul in you, then
A faithful marriage?
Do I share in the very least degree
In the shaping of you eternally?"

ART AND ARTISTS

What is good or bad in art or artists is of course, one of the great imponderables. De gustibus non est disputandum. Of a picture for instance, especially in California, people love to say, if necessary in defiance of critics or canons, "Well...I don't care...I think it's good". The same holds for music, or poetry, or for literature generally. Some people will just go on all their lives liking nursery rhymes or the lyrics of popular songs. For the simple reason that their poetic taste (most but probably all mortals have a rudimentary one) has never been educated. So that in spite of the non est disputandum norm, there is one fairly basic principle we can rely on. That what it is agreed to call good taste is educated taste; and bad taste is uneducated taste. Thus the challenging assertion "I think it's good" is in general no more than a proclamation of the (sometimes all too obvious) fact that a person's taste is bad, or uneducated.

Education in this sense, however, is not what we customarily mean by the word. Taste is trained and refined and educated by exposure principally. A very famous connoisseur of paintings once told me that the person with the best taste in art he had ever encountered was the washer-woman in the National Gallery in London. She had been for so long daily exposed to masterpieces that her appreciation perforce became discriminating and refined. Most of us in fact never acquire an educated taste for greating painting. We don't see paintings enough. The great ones are stashed away in galleries or museums. To produce their effect they must be lived with over a prolonged period. The perfection of reproductive techniques in our day has helped a bit; but reproduction is not the same thing.

Here is the one contrast indeed between medieval and modern Europe that modern Europe is the loser by. The very masterpieces we now house in museums, to be seen fleetingly on an afternoon visit by bewildered and exhausted tourists, were once in churches, viewed daily or almost daily by simple folk who couldn't read or write, but who examined a painting with all the more intensity for just that reason.

Possibly some day a scheme may be devised whereby a nation's art treasures will again be made constantly available in places where people constantly are. In schools and universities for one thing, where the young are being trained. Churches have, I suppose, ceased to be the great public forum. There would be the matter of security; but the problem of providing adequate security does not seem to be ultimately insoluble.

As it is, in southern California now, we are beset by bad taste in almost every domain; popular TV; popular advertising; popular movies--the whole range of popular entertainment. The lowest common denominator is always the normative standard. So that in endeavoring to maintain better standards you swim against the tide. Valyermo does and always has. It has been remarked already that the Belgian founders must have had the blood of Flemish masters flowing in their veins. They started things off on a shoestring, but they started them in good taste. Some of them (Thaddaeus, Werner) were practising artists themselves; in the local environment. Louisa Jenkins was a lifelong friend of Thaddaeus (her window in the refectory is beautiful, and she has also donated other works to the Priory). She was probably the first creative artist to be closely associated, but many others were to follow as the years passed, and to donate their products. Now, after twenty-five years, a very

worthwhile art-exhibition (at which Southern California artists get an opportunity for exposure) is a normal feature of the annual Fall Festival. And the products of the ceramics workshop, probably the most widely-known aspect of Valyermo art, have everywhere a deserved reputation for superiority in quality.

We do not of course have any masterpieces; we have never been able to afford them. But whatever we do have, or put on display, always has something to recommend it. Naturally, the little chapel has our principal attention; and probably our greatest actual expenditure has been to acquire the beautiful antique crucifix (of Spanish provenance) which dominates the altar. The window and tabernacle are also very handsome; and the tasteful little stations are the work of Father Maur.

Father Maur van Doorslaer, who, because of his ceramic designs, is now quite widely known in California, must be regarded as not alone the greatest artist associated with the Priory, but also as one of Valyermo's most munificent benefactors since its inception. In 1925 he was born Etienne van Doorslaer at Saint Remy les Chevreuse, in France. But his principal artistic training was in Belgium, a six-year (1942-1948) stint as student at the Hoger Institute Saint Luc of Ghent. For an art student, especially a Flemish art student, it would be difficult to discover a more rewarding ambience. Imagine being able to contemplate Van Eyck's Adoration of the Lamb every day, for free. In 1951 he entered Saint Andre Abbey and was ordained priest in 1958.

Throughout all the intervening years he has been painting assiduously. And Valyermo, which, since initiation, owed some small debt to the old Flemish masters, has been especially fortunate in attracting the benevolent attention of a new Flemish master. Since 1966 it has been

Maur's practice to spend a portion of each year, sometimes a prolonged portion, at Valyermo; and it is no exaggeration to say that, since 1956, no one has made such a considerable contribution to the growth of Valyermo.

In California of course, he is best known for those charming designs, evidence of an extraordinarily fertile imagination, which have been popularized by Valyermo Ceramics. But it is very likely that the discriminating few have already been picking up, at one local exhibition or another, more ambitious items; paintings and ink drawings of California desert and beach scenes. Any modern Flemish artist, it might reasonably be supposed, would tend by the sheer weight of predecessors to be locked into the medieval tradition. Not so Maur. In painting he seems altogether avant garde (white on white), even by Californian standards. Californian painters of course are seldom other than avant garde; but one is not invariably sure that they are in fact artists.

In 1966, Maur had an individual exhibition at Comara Gallery in Los Angeles; and in the same year he was shown at Los Angeles County Museum and the La Jolla Museum of Art. In his own country of course, he has exhibited very widely, alone and with others. In Ghent, Bruges, Antwerp, Brussels, Louvain, Charleroi. His most recent showing was during the European Festival of Poetry, held at Louvain in 1982.

Maur's shyness and engaging modesty are possibly misleading for some. He does not readily communicate about his art, certainly not in the English language. In Valyermo I imagine the people who get closest to him are children. On summer mornings as, under a blazing sun, he toils away (he is quite a workaholic) from breakfast to lunch outside the ceramics shop; he is liable to be surrounded by an audience of curious

children. They will interrupt, and ask questions, which he answers patiently. He may not realize it, but here in a way could be his greatest contribution. It is a fact that over the twenty-five years of Valyermo's existence, no one among the American generations succeeding in the community has so far shown any evidence of the creative artistic talent some of the Belgian founders brought. Perhaps it is not too much too hope that amongst those tots who nowadays solemnly watch a real artist at work on summer mornings, is someone who will catch the spark. Someone who will one day present himself as candidate to the community he has known since childhood. Then one could be sure that torches, once lit, do not necessarily have to flicker out in the USA.

Maur apart, since 1956, the European contribution artistically to Valyermo has naturally tended to narrow down. Werner at coming, was in possession through some French friends of a Georges Braque and a Jacques Villon, and these obviously have now an increased value. The chapel windows and tabernacle are the work of European artists; and so is the monastery bell (if bells be works of art). It was donated, during the priorship of Philippe ver Haegen, by the parishioners in the south of France he ministered to for so many years. It carries an inscription in English, which I'm afraid I find somewhat silly. Bell inscriptions in Europe, by a tradition dating from pagan Rome, would be couched in the first person and represent the bell as talking. "X me fecit"...and so on. The convention is just about tolerable in Latin. In a modern language, it borders on the ridiculous.

Any other art treasures we boast of (we are far from being an art gallery), are of American provenance. Almost exclusively donated by the artists themselves. Louisa Jenkins' beautiful refectory window has

already been mentioned; we also have her Risen Christ, a collage water-color on meisonite, and her portrait of Thaddaeus Yang (ink on meisonite). Quite a number of older and younger California artists are represented besides, usually by religious subjects (crucifixes or madonnas). The quite elaborate and well organized art exhibition which is a regular feature of the Festival tends of course, to bring many local artists in touch with the Priory; and very many are quite anxious to donate a painting and be hung at Valyermo. One should perhaps (though it is invidious to single out names) mention Joachim Probst, Corita Kent, Steve Berardi, Enrique de la Vega, Gordon Wagner, Richard Herold.

It would of course, be comforting if one could go on to list treasures produced by members of the community. Thaddaeus' lovely driftwood sculptures will always be among our most valued possessions, and Werner's portrait of Thaddaeus' Buddhist father is very successful. But for a Fra Angelico amongst the upcoming generations, we shall just piously have to hope for one of Maur's tots to come along. Artistic creation is such an imponderable, and raises indeed so many puzzlements, that it is perhaps prudent to bow out. When the very distinguished British artist and creative writer, Percy Wyndham Lewis, years ago published his Dilemma of Progress in the Arts, he went on a good deal about the principle of simplicity or restraint. As we began with the De Gustibus norm, we may as well end with that.

It sounds reasonable, that in any artistic creation simplicity and restraint are of the essence. Simplicity in this sense has its basic Latin meaning of sincerity; the expression must be honest. Whatever is contrived (deliberate warming up or watering down to suit fashionable trends) is probably bad; though, when an artist is skillful; it may not

be easy to detect. One of the tests our predecessor Aldous Huxley (he was a very good music critic) subjected himself to when he took mescaline in Llano was listening to great composers. He claims that his heightened perception enabled him to detect weak or contrived passages in symphonies (padding I suppose), that had eluded him before. How right he was I don't know.

In speaking of restraint, Wyndham Lewis seems to be maintaining that an artist is always backing away, as it were, from his audience. Backing away from expressionism that is. The more his viewers come to know his style, what he wants to express, the more he leaves things unspelled out. Again this seems reasonable. It's rather as if someone whose conversation you know very well need make no more than half-comments to be fully understood. Not spelling things out may become part of his stock-in-trade indeed.

The Latin style of Tacitus is an excellent example of this; and it is told of Andre Gide that he reached the stage when the only writer he could read without exasperation was Tacitus. The only trouble about this is precisely the point of Wyndham Lewis' title. That, if this be progress, you eventually reach nothingness, inarticulateness, where the image or observation just stays unexpressed in the artist's head.

It is obviously time to bow out.

THE FESTIVAL

In Southern California, when you consider that each year the roster of county fairs, mammoth outdoor events such as the Renaissance Faire, ethnic gatherings on an elaborate scale, and mere fund-raising junkets for schools, hospitals, or churches, are sufficiently numerous to jostle one another off the calendar; it is quite remarkable that the Valyermo Festival has managed to achieve such a prominent place in the sun. It seems so firmly established now that there will probably never be question of its discontinuance.

It has a network of planners, organizers and hundreds of voluntary workers all over southern California who tend to perpetuate the tradition in their own families. From the moment they can toddle they bring their children (who naturally love the experience) round at Festival time; and after twenty-five years a generation has grown up to whom the last weekend of September at the Priory has become as fixed a tradition as the celebration of their own birthday. Unthinkable to miss.

My own first real experience of the Festival (which incidentally always manages to include my own birthday), was in the fall of 1963 when I entered the Priory. Before that I may have occasionally visited for an hour or so. To be candid the first experience was less than positive—just another of those loud, crowded, fussy and exhausting gatherings that had to be endured. One could of course, see the necessity of the business as a fund raiser; and to date proceeds (which have gone on increasing), from the two-day occasion constitute the major source of yearly income for the maintenance of the community. But surely in long-distance planning, continued dependence on this sort of thing would be highly precarious; and when more solid sources of income would be

developed, the Festival could, one hoped, be phased out. The weather for one thing. True, the September Valyermo climate must be one of the most benign and predictable in the world; but you can play your luck too recklessly. Once we did have very heavy rain on the very eve of the occasion; but whether it was prayed away (as some of course believed), or just went away, we all breathed a sigh of relief when Saturday dawned sunny as usual. On a recent year, the local cities had heavy rain though Valyermo had none. This did, of course, affect our attendance and intake.

Today though in 1983 I had changed my mind about the Festival, and should be for its continuance even if all the Priory's financial needs for the foreseeable future were satisfactorily met otherwise. Continuance that is as a very necessary contribution to Southern California society. Observation over twenty years has convinced me that, whatever about income for the Priory, the main value of the occasion is the humanizing and liberating effect upon many thousands of Southern California residents who badly need such liberation.

As the crowds pour from the parking lot at 10 a.m., on Saturday morning, one can literally see the glow come over previously tense countenances as people get their name-tags, and sniff a totally different atmosphere in every sense of the word. On Sunday nights when the last stragglers tear themselves away from a final beer at the Cafe Continental, they go with backward and longing looks. Tomorrow, the city and saltmines once again. I myself, who for academic purposes am frequently absent for periods from the Priory, always now make a point if I can of being in residence for the Festival. I love it. Or perhaps I should say, I love watching people expand under the experience.

Children, the young, the not-so-young, the middle-aged, the old, the very old. Especially of course the young, boys and girls, jeunesse doree, whose high as they jostle to join the Vesper dance is, for once anyhow, not drug or alcohol induced. That is not to say, naturally, that over twenty-five years, we have not had our share of tragedies or near-tragedies due to drugs among the young. But the overwhelming majority of the people who cavort about the grounds during the Festival days, begging sometimes if they are newcomers to be allowed to work or help, are the most wholesome human beings imaginable. If folk coming through the Priory gate normally come 'hunting for peace'; it is certainly just as much within the Benedictine tradition that they should sometimes come to be liberated from their uptight selves.

The factual history of the Festival, since it first teetered into existence, is of course, adequately chronicled in the promotional matter annually printed by the Festival committee itself, and there is no point in repeating it here. For the Priory's silver jubilee, a particularly handsome brochure was produced which goes on finding customers. Every year there seem to be new enterprises and additional booths, so much so that now there is a friendly rivalry between the various groups. Whose idea paid off best? What ought to be developed? And they all work like demons, losing food and sleep, dropping their normal avocations or taking time off from them.

The Festival booths run the whole fun-fair gamut of course, from hot-dog stands and pizza counters and Belgian waffles to flea-market and face-painting for those who want to be clowns (children always do). But then newcomers will notice dimensions that don't normally go with fun fairs. The Priory booth gleaming with charming ceramics, while Father

Maur heroically sits by ready to autograph purchases. The quality and quantity of the books offered for sale. The dignity and elegance of the exhibition by California artists set up in the recently decorated lounge (items accepted must pass a competent jury, and rejections are not unknown). The civilized atmosphere of the centrally placed Cafe Continental (where Oscarine Brasseur's ghost will always hover). The quality of the food and service; the charm of the pretty teenage waitresses (they compete now to get taken on, without pay of course). Newcomers will probably marvel at the apparent ease with which such diverse elements get mixed, decide the Valyermo Festival has an added dimension, decide they like it, and decide to come again.

The monks are ubiquitous, each doing his own thing, or controlling the ebb and flow, and the sinews of war, from some remote corner. Some have been working like dray-horses for weeks now, clearing sites, setting up complicated structures, hefting immense loads. I don't suppose I myself, whenever available was ever considered particularly suitable material for training as a worker, and am all the more satisfied that last year I was allowed to paint (my first painting) the Priory booth and the dancing floor. They looked alright, though I say it myself.

But mostly these years all I do on Festival days, I must confess, is wear a name tag, look as if I might possibly have some responsibility, but in reality be a drone. I'm interested in the new side-shows and booths, and wonder a little where the old ones went. Out of all, the only gimmick I feel a slight pang of regret about was some sort of hayride, with a donkey I think, and a dray or the like. I retain a favorite picture of Alberic years ago, reclining like Nero in the hay, as

the donkey ambled along, smiling a beautiful smile, and literally festooned with ecstatic children.

Then people come along of course, out of the present or out of the past, buy me a beer or a glass of wine, and it is all very pleasant. Invariably, I meet my birthday girl, though I never see her otherwise; Shirley Archambault. We were both born on September 26th, she much later than I. She will be there with Virgil, her husband, and the children, now all grown. Sitting with them at some stage is a must. For so many years, Shirley and I shared the birthday with no less a person than Pope Paul IV. So it goes...

I have already referred to the manner in which the Festival teetered into existence in 1956-57. The earliest exact information I can find comes from a ms. chronicle kept by Father Thaddaeus in the early years. The entries are well worth quoting if only to show the contrast between then and now.

"In the June 1956 issue of the Christian Bulletin they ran three announcements:

(1) Cherry-picking time.

Make your plans now for a day of cherry-picking at St. Andrews Priory orchards near Valyermo...If you will call either Mrs. Howard McDonnell or Paula Ogren, they will give you the best route of travel from your particular location...

On Trinity Sunday (June 16) 1957, car after car drove in without interruption. Cherry picking. But the proceeds were amazingly meager. Some people spent hours in the orchards and came out with 50 cents worth of cherries. Others were astonished (or pretended to be) when the lady in charge of the counter asked them to pay for what they had picked. One

man in a 1957 four door sedan said inimically: "Do you want to weigh out car too?" Betsy the calf jumped over the fence to join in the cherry-picking fun for all. There will be no cherries left for the Cherry Festival. Packages after packages have arrived for the "Parcel Post Booth" of the festival. The 'office' is full of toys and dolls and aprons and other objects. "You Catholics begin Christmas well ahead of time don't you?" remarked the Valyermo postmistress, Mrs. Brandenburg. The post office has been raised from 4th class to 3rd class.

22-23 Cherry Festival - without cherries (all having been picked on Trinity Sunday). Barbecue, 12 booths, 3 stands. Quite widely publicized, the affair was a success. Judging from the number of barbecue tickets sold during the festival not less than 1,000 people attended. Net profit: \$4,000.

\$4,000!!...which Thaddaeus when he wrote the entry seemed to think a pretty good intake. Doubtless it was, set against the disastrous cherry-picking debacle. But set against Festival intake figures since I've been closely associated, since 1963 that is, even allowing for inflation, the sum seems ludicrous. Over recent years gross intake has always been in excess of \$200,000, sometimes considerably in excess.

If this can be taken as measurement of growth in Valyermo's influence generally, within a phenomenally short span, (and it is as good a yardstick as any), at this point I think we may well end our story.

It is the final moment of the Vesper celebration, 4 p.m., the most crowded moment of the day. Everyone has been watching with admiration the Valyermo ballet dancers, led by John West. Young men and women on the raised dancing floor interpreting with exquisite grace sacred texts and music. Some monks emerge from the sacristy, liturgically garbed for

the ritual incensation, incense, and then join the dancers in a simple pas that comes as near as may be to David dancing before the ark. Hands joined, they all snake their way slowly down the ramp to merge with the dense crowd below. Already some sort of ripple has been passing through the crowd, like the sussuration of an oncoming storm, and soon the ring of dancers is tremendously augmented by people manifestly high, as David was high.

As the music, semi-sacred semi-profane, swells, the dance movement round the stage spreads and spreads, more and more rushing to join hands, until there is a general swaying that lasts while the music lasts. Chiefly, the young of course and children. But by no means exclusively. The moment is one of great and genuine euphoria, which seems to convey a message of hope all round, religious hope for those who are religious, humane in the best sense for those who are not. All of these people, religious or not, combat the stranglehold of dehumanization in their daily lives.

As it happens, I have witnessed precisely this effect, in a more colorful and elaborate way perhaps, at a remarkable International Folk Festival in Cincinnati in the fall of 1978. During the folkdance competition, where, so far as I was concerned, all the competitors deserved prizes, the winners were a team of Chinese girls dancing a ribbon dance which dated from 200 B.C. As they danced their way down the ramp waving their multicolored ribbons, the scene was one of breathtaking beauty. And somehow of memorable hope, like dawn breaking over a darkened world.

It is ultimately for the creation and preservation of such moments that places such as Valyermo exist. Through all the mess and murk and

gloom, the authentic and ultimately indefectible, voice of humanity once again breaks through. And we know that all is well.