

Turvey Benedictines

Year in Review 2010



Heart Speaks unto Heart

The media—print, broadcast, internet, you name it—gave such blanket coverage to Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to England and Scotland that it almost seems redundant to mention it again here. Almost. The very prevalence of all the news coverage, of so many people outside the Catholic Church taking such an interest in the event speaks volumes about its significance. The Holy Father’s packed agenda of meetings and Masses culminated in the beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman, but his visit was more than the sum of its parts. To young people on the piazza outside Westminster Cathedral, he gave a short talk on contemplative prayer—not the obvious choice of topic for a quick *al fresco* chat—and opened with

these words: ‘In these few moments that we are together I wish to speak to you from my own heart, and I ask you to open your hearts to what I have to say’.

And there it was, the key to Pope Benedict’s popularity: he was speaking from the heart, a contemplative heart united to Christ in love. Sadly, it isn’t every day that we get to see a man in love with Christ on the front page of *The Times* or preaching on BBC2, but now we know that when one appears, people *will* open their own hearts and listen to him. There’s no telling what the long-term effects of the visit will be, but we can take heart from the impact that one person’s love of Christ had on our country and know that each of us can have an impact, too (though probably without all the media coverage). “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

February 2010

On 24 February, **Sr Zoë** and **Sr Ruth** participated in a trustee’s training seminar, one of the various events that they and our other trustee, **Sr Benedict**, attended throughout the year in order to keep abreast of current developments in the charity sector.

March 2010

On 6 March, **Sr Zoë** and **Sr Miriam** attended an evangelization day held in and for the Diocese of Northampton.

Sr Esther has continued to run icon painting workshops here and elsewhere in the country, including at the Bernardine

Cistercian monastery at Hyning (in Lancashire) from 6-13 March.

Sr Esther writes... I was most impressed by the progress shown by those who have been coming to the previous workshops at Turvey and at Hyning. It is always a joy to see familiar faces again as well as new ones. Much of the progress at Hyning has been due to the icon support groups whereby people who have been on previous courses continue to meet on a weekly basis in a reflective atmosphere and conclude the day by joining the Sisters in worship. We have now started to do this at Turvey on a *monthly* basis and dates have been fixed for 2011. If you wish to know more please contact me.

This year I have also given a talk and reflective session in relation to icons to a Spirituality Group in London and at Oare in Kent. This has been inspiring for me and others and it is a good “outreach” for the Community.

April 2010

On 17 April, we hosted the first of two groups of young people preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at Pentecost. Their own instructors led the days, but **Sr Johanna** stopped by to explain the vocation to religious life within the Church, to answer questions, and to give them the grand tour.

On 29 April, **Sr Zoë** left for our Motherhouse at Schotenhof in Belgium to join in the festivities for Mother Erica’s golden jubilee. M Erica is the Prioress General of our congregation and in that capacity has been a frequent visitor to Turvey.

May 2010

14 May saw the arrival of Sr Marie David from the Benedictine community at Ermeton-sur-Biert in Belgium for a short sabbatical. She was a friendly and good-humoured addition to our community and we enjoyed hearing all about life in her monastery.

On 27 May, **Sr Judith** went as the delegate of the Diocese of Northampton to the meeting of the National Spirituality Group. A follow-up meeting of people from our diocese, including Bishop Peter Doyle, took place here in October.

Sr Johanna writes... I had the joy of spending the last week of May with the nuns at the Visitation Monastery in Waldron, East Sussex. My visit took place during a special jubilee year for the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary: the 400th anniversary of its founding. Not one but two saints were there at the start on 6 June 1610: St Francis de Sales handed over the Rule to St Jane Frances de Chantal, who had already gathered other women prepared to live it. The Visitation was an alternative to those Orders that had given way to laxity as well as those whose great austerity prevented many women from joining them. It focused on the “little virtues” such as gentleness and patience that could be quietly lived out day by day—and it obviously met a real need because it grew to over 80 monasteries by the time of St Jane’s death. Unique to the Visitation nuns is their tradition of welcoming women into their enclosure for periods of retreat, living and praying alongside them in the monastic routine. The nuns themselves will tell you all about it at www.visitationmonastery.co.uk

June 2010

Sr Miriam and **Sr Judith** attended the third meeting of young Benedictine women in Europe. The meeting took place at the Monastery of Notre Dame, Ermeton-sur-Biert, Belgium from 14–18 June.

They write... The theme was obedience and the speaker was Mother Máire Hickey of Kylemore Abbey, Ireland. She shared with us from her long experience of community life in both Germany and Ireland, and gave us many insights on the spiritual, theological, and practical aspects of obedience. Mother Máire began by looking at obedience as a response to our Baptism. She continued by looking at it through the lens of Scripture, the Rule, and our own monastic experience. The meeting was structured as a dialogue between Mother Máire and the participants. This provided both formal and informal opportunities for discussion and sharing within the group. These were informative and enriching for us all. We also had time for a short visit to the monasteries of Maredsous and Maredret. Fifteen sisters attended the meeting. They came from Belgium, Germany, Poland, Great Britain (one via India), Spain and Holland.

When the meeting was over we spent a few days at our Motherhouse in Schotenhof. We had a very restful and enjoyable time, visiting the workshops, spending time with the community, getting to know something more of our history and traditions, and praying the Office with them.

July 2010

On 23 July, Fr Kevin McGinnell visited us to briefly fill us in on the background to the forthcoming revision of the Missal. See *November* for more...

August 2010

Over the weekend of 30 July-1 August, **Sr Esther** attended an Orthodox Fellowship Conference on “Mothers and Fathers in God: Spiritual Guidance in the Orthodox Church”, held at Swanick Conference Centre. She noted that the weekend enabled all those attending to interact and learn from one another as well as from those leading the talks and worship.

Sr Esther writes... We also held a Christian East/West prayer afternoon at Turvey, which was intended to be for a small number of people but more than anticipated turned up. I have not been able to continue this but I intend to hold a day here next year. Please contact me if you are interested.

September 2010

Sr Zoë attended the Sixth International Symposium of the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* in Rome during the first two weeks of September. The theme of “Benedictine Women: Witnesses of Hope” featured Benedictine women from around the world as speakers. More details are on the CIB website at: <http://www.benedictines-cib.org/>

Sr Johanna represented our community at Pope Benedict's meeting with members of religious congregations on 17 September at St Mary's University College in Twickenham, south London.

Sr Johanna writes... I was thrilled and grateful that Mother Prioress nominated me to attend Pope Benedict's meeting with religious. I stayed the night before with the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Notting Hill (of *No Greater Love* fame) and travelled with the Carmelite contingent early the next morning. As instructed, we arrived by 8AM for the 10AM start and were relieved to breeze through the security screening. I saw a few familiar faces at the gathering and then, finally, the most familiar face of all: Pope Benedict's! We were very fortunate as it was a small chapel where everyone could see him up close and hear him distinctly. For me, the best moment came just after his arrival, when he and the cardinals and bishops were standing in silence with all of us religious and the many other laity who were there. I just had an overwhelming sense of the unity of the Church and, of course, of great love for the Holy Father. He was truly "gentle and humble of heart" and preached Christ by his very presence.

Sr Lucy writes... At the end of September I was invited to attend the breaking of the Ramadan fast at Milton Keynes Jamia Mosque. Fr Paul Smith, who was also going, gave me a lift there and back. It was a strange experience. The separation of the women (upstairs) from the actual religious gathering downstairs meant that I felt very much excluded from the "real" religious celebration. Almost everyone was from Pakistan, but I saw one "Western convert". We could see on a large TV screen what was happening below, but the upstairs room was so full of "women's activities" and noise that it was impossible to hear the commentaries, speeches etc. Fr Paul told me a bit about it on the way back home.

Nevertheless, there was a strong sense of joyful celebration upstairs, as mature women and young girls laid long rolls of white paper on the floor (“tablecloths”) and eventually plates of food for everyone. Numerous toddlers and babies were also there being lovingly cared for by mothers and big sisters. I also noticed that some of the younger women sat very near the TV screen and did join in the prayers when the men were praying, and they were teaching their little boys to imitate the men.

October 2010

Sr Lucy writes... The Monastic Interfaith Dialogue (MID) Conference was hosted by MID-GBI in London from 4-7 October. A full report can be read on our web site, www.mid-gbi.com. Feedback since the conference shows that everyone enjoyed it. Organising such a thing, from a distance, was a big learning curve for me. I am happy that all went well. The public Day of Theological Exchange on Wednesday called forth some particularly enthusiastic evaluations. It was good to meet members of other communities who went to a lot of trouble to attend, even managing the Tuesday evening visit to Westminster Abbey for Choral Evensong. We had nuns (and one monk) from Kent, north Yorkshire, Chester, London itself and Sussex in addition to all the international participants.

Sr Ruth was away from 5-8 October for the annual conference of the Association of Provincial Bursars at High Leigh. She remarked that it’s always worth attending, especially for the opportunity to hear professionals speak on a range of financial and related disciplines.

As soon as Sr Ruth was back, **Sr Zoë** left for the General Chapter at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. She attended for five days rather than the entire three weeks, as **Br John** did, because the nuns' affiliation with the congregation is different from that of the monks. She was able to meet our newly elected Abbot General, Diego Rosa.

November 2010

On 2 November we began our preparations for the new Missal in earnest with a day on the subject led by Fr Paul Turner, an American who works with the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. He gave us the background to the third edition of the *Missale Romanum* and walked us through the major changes from the second edition. We were delighted to welcome friends from Worth Abbey, the Grace and Compassion Benedictine Sisters, and Ware Carmel for the day.

News from the News

Br John writes... Our helter-skelter existence continues and happily so. Perhaps the most important event of the year has been our General Chapter, which took place at Monte Oliveto in Tuscany for three weeks in October—but first a little context.

Br Herbert and Br John have thoroughly enjoyed attempting to run a monastery for the past four years with only ourselves and a group of lay people to help. This has very

much meant living by our religious wits, that is, relying on whatever and whomsoever providence has brought to our door. This has, paradoxically, given us several years of relative stability, but this year has seen something of an upheaval and a sometimes sudden change in personnel, quite unplanned by ourselves. We began the year by visiting other communities at Willen in Milton Keynes and Pilsdon in Kent which operate with a similar mix of lay and religious staff to see how they did it and, in particular, how they managed boundary issues with a view to making our own mix more viable and more secure for both lay and religious alike. Since then we have lost three of our lay helpers only to find that providence has not only provided further lay help but also several potential recruits to the monastic life. This has meant that Br John was able to get to the General Chapter and beat the Turvey drum with some resonance and with an interesting result which, please God, you will hear more about in next year's newsletter. Suffice to say that we continue in real hope and great confidence in the future—whatever it brings.

And so to the details of the year both at home and abroad...

At home, Psychotherapy courses continue to flourish despite the economic downturn, with eight new recruits as the last intake on the MSc course who we hope will be with us for the next five years, and thirteen people signing up for this year's Introductory course. The regular Turvey Centre staff continue to run two groups during the week and are also taking on board new staff to replace Patrick McGrath and Liz McLure. Patrick is gradually winding down towards retirement and Liz is starting a new life and practice in her native Scotland. Br John completed his Introductory course in Oxford and has a much better understanding now of how the whole process works but is still very much a beginner.

Br Herbert's autobiography has attracted great interest and we will soon be ordering a third printing. He has also been privileged to have one of his early paintings featured on an Isle of Man stamp. It is a scene of the camp at Peel done while he was interned there as an enemy alien for a few weeks in 1940. Read the book to find out more. We were prompted by both the book and the painting, but above all by Br Herbert's Jewish roots, to invite him to speak at one of our CCJ meetings. This he did without notes wonderfully well. Our other speakers this year were Dr Jane Clements and Rev. Dr Marcus Braybrook. Our ecumenical review *One in Christ* continues to be well received in the ecumenical world and we owe thanks once again to our oblate John Bolger as overall editor and to Simon Villette for his administrative work, as well as to the editorial board generally. Our immediate ecumenical links continue to be very important to us, especially those with the parish of All Saints. The study groups have been inspiring and we will sorely miss Jo Spray when she retires soon. We wish her well.

As for the news from abroad, the General Chapter was an exhausting but very worthwhile experience not least because of the friendships which can be made or remade. Highlights included the talk on Christian meditation by Dom Laurence Freeman and especially his measured responses to some of those with a more 'traditional' take on prayer. Dom Laurence made it clear that his is in fact as traditional a stance as any other, if not more so. Equally fascinating was Dom Henri Capdeville's talk detailing how his monastery of Holy Trinity in Arizona has organised its oblates and especially those who live on site. Perhaps the best indicator as to the richness of the Congregation was the fact that the English language group which met for prayer each morning at 6.20AM consisted at various times of two or three Americans, a Pole, a Ghanaian, an Italian, a Korean, and an Englishman (actually half-Irish, ie, Br John) and was ably led by a Frenchman, Dom Eric Loesel

from the monastery of Rostrevor in Northern Ireland. It was a very prayerful experience as we all struggled to make sense of the words and to sing. There was no trouble making sense of the food—it was delicious.

And, of course, there were the natural history highlights to sustain Br John in a few stolen moments. These included the giant crickets and praying mantises attracted to the lights of the loggia at night; the sight of passing winter migrants such as starlings, finches, and skylarks just as at home; and a few lingering reptiles and butterflies to remind one of the summer: a Moorish Gecko playing hide and seek on a drainpipe, a real wild tortoise caught half-way through a meal on a sandy path, and Woodland Graylings and Silverwashed Fritillaries gliding past in stately glory. Br John was in full agreement with the monks who wanted an earlier General Chapter next time—we might just be able to catch the tail end of the summer migrants.

For information on retreats, liturgy and more, please visit us at:

www.turveyabbey.org.uk

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