

# Ab Austro

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

July/August 2024 No. 73

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## Priory update

The winter months in Colebrook have been calm, as the monastic round of prayer and work goes on, eternal and yet ever new, as our journey towards eternity brings with it unsuspected insights into the mystery of God and His love for us.

For a few years now, we have been blessed at this time of the year with the discreet and jovial presence of Dom Mark Bachmann from Clear Creek Abbey. This year was no exception. In addition to helping out with many jobs around the monastery, Fr Bachmann has mainly been busy giving philosophy and chant classes to our juniors.

Winter is also the time of the annual Christopher Dawson Colloquium in Hobart. On 6 July, Fr Prior was in attendance, with the theme this year being “Authentic Humanism and the Crisis of Culture”. Through their involvement in education over the centuries, monks have never been strangers to these questions, and it was heartening to hear so many good talks from seasoned educators on how to help our world rediscover a sense of what is authentically human, far removed from the ideologies that wreak havoc in so many minds and hearts.

From 19 to 24 August, Fr Prior conducted the annual winter retreat for women at Don Bosco, Lysterfield, Victoria. Nineteen women were in attendance for this event.

The interior renovation of the chapter house nears its completion, and it is hoped that we will be able to inaugurate it very soon, leaving the exterior finishing for the nicer summer days.

On the last day of August, the community was blessed to pay a visit in Hobart to the Eucharistic miracle exposition that was put together by Blessed Carlo Acutis. It was also a wonderful time to pray before a relic of this amazing young soul, and admire the power of divine grace in God's saints. The commu-



nity also took advantage of the outing to have a rather cool lunch at Mt Wellington!

Brother Chronicler

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





## In the school of St Benedict

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As we pursue our study of chapter four of the Rule, we now come to the following tools:

*To put one's hope in God.*

*To attribute to God, and not to self, whatever good one sees in oneself.*

*But to recognise always that the evil is one's own doing, and to impute it to oneself.*

For many, the virtue of humility consists in thinking you are a terrible person who has no talents or goodness. In reality, humility is about the truth. It is about acknowledging the reality that, of ourselves, we have and are nothing, and that anything that we have is a gift of God. This is essentially what St Benedict is trying to get across in today's tools. We should not be afraid to see the good in ourselves, but whenever we do, we must be quick to give God the glory and show our gratitude to Him for it. In this way, we can make use of the talents we have received without the danger of falling into pride, that supreme vice which steals from God the glory by attributing our talents to ourselves. At the same time, whenever we see any evil in ourselves, we must be prompt to acknowledge that it is our fault, not someone else's and certainly not God's.

Both these attitudes, though quite simple, are deeply opposed to our innate tendencies, which are to promote ourselves and demote others, to think we are good and all our problems come from others. Such is the egotistical, self-centredness we must all deal with since the fall of our first parents.

To prevent this, a deep conversion is required, and St Benedict summarises this conversion in the short tool that precedes these: *to put one's hope in God*. In other words, we must not put our hope in ourselves or in any created being. If we do, we will be bitterly disappointed, for we will be living a falsehood, a lie.

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One day, St Faustina Kowalska was offering herself entirely to God, striving to remember everything she possibly could, so as to omit nothing in her offering. At the end of her prayer, the Lord told her that still there was something missing. She tried again to remember what it might be, but in spite of her best efforts could find nothing. Finally, the Lord said that what she had failed to give Him was the only thing that was really hers, namely her sins. Everything else was a gift of God.

How true. The only thing we have that is 100% ours is our sins, and that's nothing to be proud of. Whatever good we have is a gift of God's grace. Let us then trust in His care for our soul, and we will find great peace, a peace that will be contagious.



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## Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

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“My dear Brothers,” begins Fr Germanus, “it has been brought to my attention that in your noviciate studies you have recently considered the love of enemies and the refusal to speak ill of them. Today I’d like to take you to the source of that precept, which is the very love of God Himself.

“My first point is that, if we exist, it is because God has loved us. If He did not love us, we would not exist at all. Since all existence is good and all existence comes from God, insofar as anything exists, it is the object of God’s love. In other words God’s will is the cause of all things. As St Thomas puts it: ‘To every existing thing, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists.’”

Br Paphnutius interjects: “That’s beautiful, Father. But since the love we show to others also has its source in God, does this mean that we can cause good in others like God does?”

“There is a fundamental distinction between the way God loves and the way we love. We love things because we see some goodness in them, goodness which was created without us and is independent of us. We discover it there and are attracted to it. For example, a man witnesses an act of virtue accomplished by his friend, and seeing this virtue, he is attracted to love that friend even more. He is drawn to it because it is good. He also wishes his friend well and wants what is even better for him. The goodness of his friend calls forth his love.

“With God however, it is very different. Before a thing exists it has nothing to recommend itself to God, and so it is God Himself who infuses goodness by creating it. The various kinds of creatures receive a greater portion of divine goodness according to the love He

pours into them. For example, God loves the angels and saints more than He loves other rational creatures. He loves humans more than He loves animals, animals more than plants. He loves more the creatures into which He has poured fourth more of His goodness. (As an aside, this explains why there is more created perfection in coffee than in tea: God loves coffee more, and that’s why it’s better!). *Giggles from the monks...*

“The lesson this holds for us is that if we exist, it is simply because God loved us into existence. It was an act of sheer goodness which drew us out of nothingness and gave us a place in the world of creatures. That, my dear Brothers, is a thought that should nourish our contemplation throughout all eternity. We did not have to be here, and if we are it is only because the eternal Creator decided that our existence was worthwhile.

“One final point: even though, unlike God, we cannot create goodness in creatures, it remains that we can love them with the love of God and want what is really best for them. We can also have a desire to imitate God’s goodness by bringing forth goodness into the world. Christian parents are moved by love to want to cooperate with God in bringing into the world other human beings. Tolstoy was right when he referred to the birth of a child as ‘the world’s most solemn mystery’ that causes ‘the melting of hearts before the great unknown’.

Giving birth to souls, however, is an even greater mystery. Unseen by the eyes of the body, it brings into existence a higher form of life, the unending life of grace in a soul. Our task as religious and priests, is to cooperate, through our exclusive love for Christ, in that mysterious birthing of souls, most of whom we will come to know only in eternity.”

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## JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

I am come to cast fire on the earth,  
and what will I, but that it be kindled?

Lk 12:49

In our last instalment we considered St Ignatius' teaching on spiritual consolation. This month we move on to the consideration of spiritual desolation. "I call desolation... : darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord" (Sp. Ex. # 317).

Just as the good spirits seek to help us advance towards God by removing the obstacles which lie in our way, giving joy and peace, so the enemy seeks to halt our progress towards God. He does this by creating obstacles. Just as a runner can be prevented from advancing by a material hurdle placed on his path, so there are spiritual obstacles that can prevent our going to God and progressing in the ways of the Spirit.

*Darkness of soul.* God is light, St John tells us (cf. 1 Jn 1:5), and when He is present in a soul, He brings that light and clarity with Him. One feels the confidence one might imagine on a bright spring day. We see things as they are, without illusion. When the Enemy is in control, it is quite the opposite. Since he is in eternal darkness, he can only create darkness around him. Under the influence of this darkness,

truths that were formerly held with great conviction are no longer clear. All was limpid before, but now all is dark. It's as if someone had just turned out all the lights. And where there is no light, progress becomes impossible until the light returns, at least enough for us to see the next step.

*Turmoil of spirit.* This turmoil or confusion goes with the darkness. Just as a person in a bright room is seized with uncertainty if the lights go out all of a sudden, so the soul formerly walking by the clarity of divine light finds itself troubled in spirit when that light disappears and the darkness seems to envelop all things. They say that Satan fishes in murky waters. That is certainly true, and it is why we will be told in a subsequent rule that when in such a state of mind we should not make any changes in our good resolutions, but hold firm to those taken before when we were in the light.

*Inclination to what is low and earthly.* This is a sign of desolation that few people are prone to recognise for the simple reason that their lives are often immersed in the earthly and sensual. Let's take a simple example. A woman is at Mass, assisting devoutly and enjoying being close to God. The music is heavenly, the light coming through the stained glass windows is divine, the preaching is good, everything conspires towards creating a profound spiritual consolation. As she considers the light effects, her thoughts turn to the colour of her sash. When she put it on in the morning, she thought it was so beautiful, but now she is concerned about the shades of green that line its extremities. The thought occurs to her that it really is too dark, and she starts imagining how she will go about fixing it as soon as she gets home. The rest of the Mass is spent in this exercise, to the extent that she no longer knows why she is there. From a state of spiritual consolation at the beginning of Mass she has come to a state of spiritual desolation because she has been worrying about the colour of her clothes. Colour is a good thing, but it is certainly low and earthly. It has its place in life, but if it becomes an obsession in prayer, it is the sure sign of a spiritual dark cloud hanging over the soul.

