GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

ISSUE 22 SPRING 2024 WWW.GLENSTAL.COM PHONE: (061) 621 000

PHOTO: DENIS HOOPER OSB

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

Prayer is the foundation of our monastic life and each day in the monastery is centred around times of prayer, together and in private. The backbone of our prayer is the Liturgy of the Hours – sometimes called the 'Divine Office' or the 'Work of God' – where the monks gather in the Abbey church to chant psalms and sing hymns to God, to listen to the Scriptures and to pray for the needs of the world. This daily round of worship consecrates the course of the day and night as the community gathers in the stillness of the morning, at the setting of the sun, and at the closing of the day.

WEEKDAYS

6:35am: Matins and Lauds (Morning Prayer)
12:10pm: Conventual Mass
6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin)
8:35pm: Compline (Monday - Friday: Night Prayer)
Resurrection Office (Saturday)

SUNDAYS

7:00am: Lauds (Morning Prayer)
10:00am: Conventual Mass
12:35pm: Sext (Midday Prayer)
6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin)
8:35pm: Compline (Night Prayer)

Liturgies are broadcast each day as per our daily timetable:
glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/

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COVER: Icon of the Annunciation, on display in the monastery reception. As part of the wider Benedictine family of the Congregation of the Annunciation, the monks of Glenstal celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation this year on 8 April (transferred from its usual date, 25 March, because of Holy Week).

Awakening a Spirit of Hope

Greetings once again from the community here in Glenstal Abbey. This time of year is filled with hope as the days lengthen and summer approaches. The Season of Easter is upon us and the world of nature awakes from winter slumber.

All around us here in Glenstal we are reminded of the miracle of spring and summer as the trees and shrubs come back to life. In this edition of the Chronicle we want to share with you some of the stories and events of the abbey in these last few months.

The celebration of Easter is always a very busy time in Glenstal. Many guests and visitors come to the monastery for the Triduum liturgies. We need our celebration of Easter this year. We need to be reminded that Christ is Risen and has conquered sin and death.

As war and violence continue in Ukraine and the Middle East, we continue to place our hope in the Risen Lord, the Prince of Peace. We pray that Christ who rose victorious on Easter morning will bless his people with peace and rain down justice on these troubled lands.

We send you greetings and blessings in this Holy Season.

Abbot Brendan Coffey OSB

The Abbey Icon Chapel

Entering the darkness, I pass the icon of Michael the Archangel, protector and guide, and am now standing in the Icon Chapel, right at its centre, at this still point. I come here when I need to rebalance from the busyness of the monastery, to refocus and reorient myself as it were. There are no formulas or rites here. This is a map-less space with the Spirit alone as compass.

The mood is calm and comforting, hues of crimson and gold stilling my being. Above, darts of azure and steelblue, lime and onyx disturb and alert me that this space is live, that I am present and being awakened to the divine.

I am standing beneath the central dome, perfect and unbroken in design, the dome of the heavens; reminding me that this is my destination, to be with God. Standing in this spot, being drawn upwards, I am also rooted on the dome of the earth beneath. Its design,

PÁDRAIG MCINTYRE OSB

fractured, broken and in flux. The tension is real. I am aware that I am on the earth but not wholly of it and while made for the heavens, I am not there yet. In journeying to God, I am journeying to and through myself, exploring and uncovering my deepest self, that self which in the image and likeness of God was created.

Standing solitary here, I am not alone. Eyes from a thousand faces illumine the space and gaze in on me. Dimly lit from their mounted boards on anchored gates they are alive and present; icons of The Holy Trinity; The Blessed Mother and Child Jesus; St Nicholas; Mary of Egypt and Zosimas; the Apostles and Evangelists, and a whole host of unknown faces that I often name after those now gone before me, those known to me and who knew me. They console, they encourage, they cheer-on this runner in the stadium of life. Their deafening whisper from their still life, 'where you stand now, we once were; where we now are you too one day will be'. And 'How', I ask, 'Tell me how'? 'Listen, live, love', they reply, 'keep going and stick at it, in every deed, great and small', and as I look around at these storied faces, lives I know, yes of different times and far off places, but of flesh and blood not much different from my own. Men and women, who on good and not so good days, have lived, loved and longed, pondered and praised, struggled and excelled, along the way of the Lord's command. All of life is here.

There are no formulas or rites here. This is a map-less space with the Spirit alone as compass.

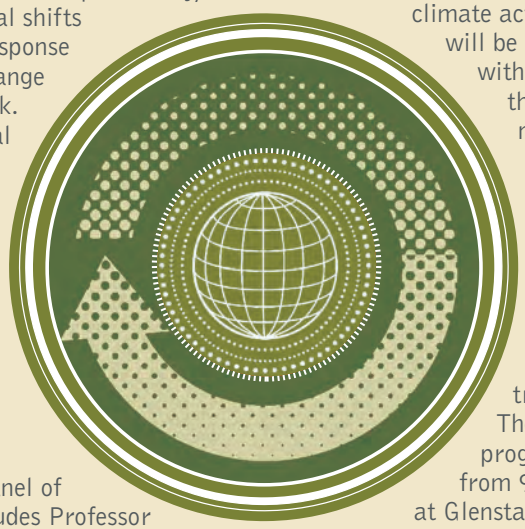
As I leave, the Icon of Christ fixes on me, the image of the God who became one of us, a neighbour's child. I'm transfixed, because face-on I can't evade Truth. I can't hide from the God who created me, who passionately pursues me, desiring me to have life, and have it abundantly. No ifs, no buts, no maybes, no preconditions.

This Good News, of God in human flesh, is as complicated, as profound and as simple as that. ■

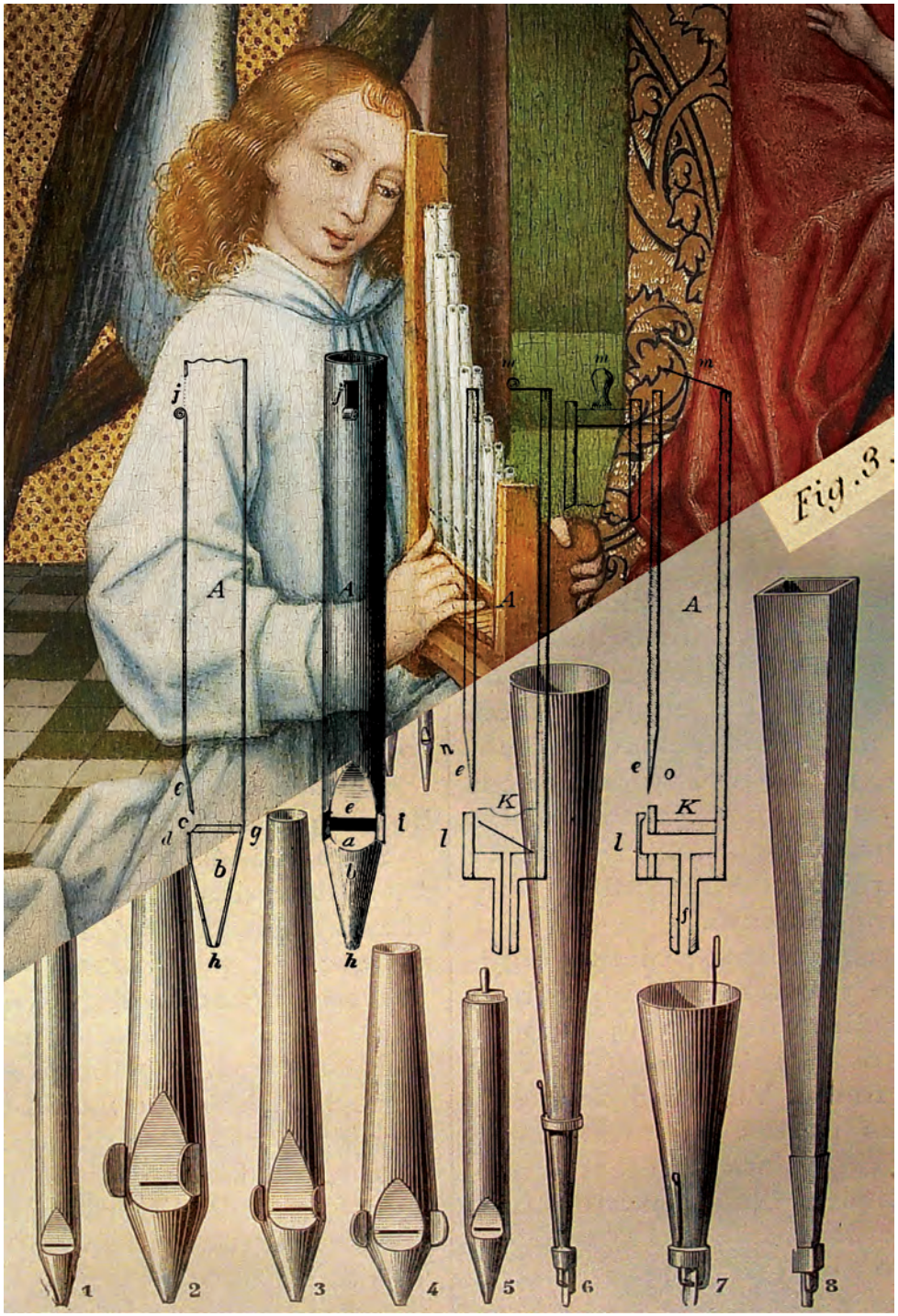
Upcoming Events at the Abbey

RESETTING THE CLOCK ON CLIMATE CHANGE: AN EXPLORATION OF PRACTICAL, JUST AND LIFE ENHANCING RESPONSES 9:45AM-5PM, SATURDAY, 18 MAY

The symbolic Doomsday clock was set up in 1947 by Atomic scientists to represent the risk of a human-made global catastrophe. Today, the clock's dial shifts as much in response to climate change as nuclear risk. The existential challenges of climate change invite responses from governments and organisations through to individuals, families, and communities. The expert panel of speakers includes Professor Edward Burke of University College Dublin, a contemporary historian; Admiral Mark Mellett, formerly Ireland's Chief of Defence; and Tobias Winright, Professor of Moral Theology at St Patrick's Pontifical University Maynooth. The interdisciplinary panel will consider the challenges and responses involved, opening up avenues for future reflection and action in order to foster the earth's natural capacity to recover and to nurture regional biodiverse habitats. The range of proposed climate action responses will be evaluated with respect to their impact not only on the global environment, but also on society, and how people of all regions can be part of a just transition.



The day-long programme runs from 9.45am-5pm at Glenstal Abbey. Cost €70 includes lunch and refreshments. For further information email: events@glenstal.com or phone 061-621005. ■



Tubular Praise

The heart of music at Glenstal is our singing of the chant, be it in Latin or in English. Closely allied with the chant is the use of the organ, which is heard every day of the year at our abbey: accompanying, introducing, commenting, prolonging. But where did this bulky musical partner come from, and why is it so big?

Mozart called the organ the 'king of instruments'. Whatever about a royal status, the organ certainly takes up a lot of space. Any visitor to our abbey church will notice that the organ, at the back of the monastic choir, is the single largest piece of furniture in the building. Its position indicates its primary role: to accompany monastic singing.

Organs take up a lot of space because of the sheer number and size of the pipes. Each pipe sounds only one note. Each note of the keyboard thus requires at least one pipe, and, for an increase of volume, several other pipes will have be brought into play at the same time. When you do your sums (the number of notes on the keyboard(s) multiplied

COLUMBA MCCANN OSB

by the number of pipes available for each key) the numbers soar. The Glenstal organ has 950 pipes. Then there is the length of the pipes: to sound middle C you need a pipe two feet long; an octave lower, it's four feet; lower again, it's eight feet. Getting into double bass territory can involve pipes up to sixteen feet long. Big cathedral instruments will even have pipes thirty-two feet long; the sound they produce is so deep that you might feel it in your ribs! The size of the Glenstal organ, and its number of pipes seems quite impressive, though in world terms it's small fry. The organ of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, for example, has 8,000 pipes.

The bagpipes and uilleann pipes are sounded by air kept under pressure in an inflated bag. Because of the number of pipes involved, the organ uses a windchest, a wooden chest that holds pressurized air to be delivered to the pipes. For centuries, this had to be pumped by hand (or foot) by someone other than the organist. Today, thankfully, the organist at Glenstal gets all of that with the flick of a switch, activating an electric blower located in the basement below the church.

Our organ was built in 1981, though some of its pipes are much older. The history of the organ as an instrument, however, goes way back. While there are references to a kind of organ even in ancient Greece (the air pressure regulated, curiously, by water), we know much more about organs from the middle ages onwards. There were small hand-held instruments holding just a small number of tin whistles on a box (Portative Organs). Then there were somewhat larger instruments, about the size of an upright piano, that were moved only with some difficulty and thus kept normally in one position (hence called Positive Organs). The big daddy of them all was the great organ. Here the number and size of the pipes was such that the fixture remained in place, with keys so large they had to be struck by the fist of the organist

(who was called the pulsator, a kind of musical boxer). These big instruments made a tremendous sound that could be heard in the surrounding countryside. The section of pipes controlled by the lower keyboard of the organ at Glenstal is in fact called the 'Great' as a distant descendant of its medieval forebear, though you won't hear it if you are walking in the grounds.

Sometimes loud is not beautiful. The organ at Glenstal can also be very soft indeed, for example when accompanying chant. There has to be a way of using only some of the pipes available for each note, in order to reduce the volume. Centuries ago someone got the bright idea of inserting wooden sliders under the feet of the pipes in order to stop some of them from sounding (these were called 'stops' for obvious reasons). To 'pull out all the stops' meant to let everything sound. A further innovation was to have the Positive Organ, with its small bright sound, near the Great Organ, with its massive volume, so that the organist could turn from one to the other quickly for special effects of contrast. Another genius decided to make a connection with the positive running under the organist's feet so that the keyboards of the Great and the Positive could be stacked on top of one another and even played together. The second keyboard at Glenstal in fact controls a different

Someone got the bright idea of inserting wooden sliders under the feet of the pipes in order to stop some of them from sounding. To 'pull out all the stops' meant to let everything sound.

set of pipes which are enclosed in a wooden box with shutters that open and close, thus giving the possibility of a gradual crescendo or decrescendo. For this reason, the upper keyboard is called the 'swell'.

Guests who accompany us during liturgy at Glenstal are often unaware that the organists also use their feet! Bagpipes and uilleann pipes have drones, that is, notes that sound all the time while another pipe plays the tune. Old organs also had drones that could be held down by a kind of latch, which was sometimes operated by the foot. Another brainwave was to give each of the low notes its own pull-down lever, creating a whole keyboard that can be played by the feet. Some organ pieces even have 'pedal solos' where the feet play on their own.

As mentioned above, we use the organ to accompany singing, but from the beginning they were also used in the liturgy to provide preludes, interludes and postludes, and this is also a feature at Glenstal. Much early organ music was written to provide an introduction to a piece of plainchant or to comment musically on it. Down through the centuries professional organists also developed the ability to improvise pieces around the chant, a tradition which continues down to the present day at Glenstal. ■

Because of the number and size of pipes in a great organ, it remained in place, with keys so large they had to be struck by the fist of the organist (who was called the pulsator, a kind of musical boxer).

Stepping into Nature's Kaleidoscopic Lens

Faced with the kaleidoscope of colour and form of the biota at Glenstal, we struggle to make communicable order. This we could attempt to do by dividing evergreen from deciduous, native from exotic, conifer from broadleaf. The weakness of such a tomographic approach is that so many of our friends seem to fall on the wrong side of the divide, don't make the cut. Yew trees for example, though

ANTHONY KEANE OSB

clearly conifers, do not seem to carry cones. The oak, our national tree and champion of the nativists amongst us, was probably introduced by intrepid arborists from Spain circa 6,000 BC. And as for deciduous trees, our lordly oak, which can do no wrong, is already keeping its green lammas leaves well into January. A question we can ask of the evergreens is: for how long do they keep their leaves? For the Holm oak, the answer is "for a year and a day", with their embarrassing moulting taking place in June, when many of them risk being condemned, as the pubescent pink and grey new leaves rush to replace the previous year's coat. For many pine trees the answer is "seven or eight years", and we can see autumn colours in mid-summer as the leaves of seven years ago turn. The Araucaria keeps its spiky plectra back along the branch for forty years, which is why it was said: "Twere a puzzle for a monkey to climb it."

It seems better for us to attempt a diachronic approach that separates through time the different strata of the present abundance.

As most lifeforms require some bit of a meteorite or something more stable if they are to thrive, it may be useful to look at the geological substratum of the trees in their history, spread and development. Of particular local interest is the Iapetus Ocean, and the Iapetus Suture which formed as that ocean closed. This suture is now marked by the Shannon estuary, the Silvermines, Soloway Firth and Lindisfarne. From this we get the superhard Greywakes,and siltstones via Rearcross quarries that form much of our paths and roads.

Overlying these Ordovician and Silurian strata are our familiar Old Red Sandstones, formed some 400 million years ago when Ireland was some 30 degrees south of the Equator, with a desert climate. Warm water dissolves away silica more readily than it does manganese and iron oxide, hence the purple and red colours, similar to tropical lateritic soils of today. Ocasional storms,

untrammelled by vegetation, sent thunderous floods of water and large pebbles down through wadis to give us our jewel filled Old Red Sandstone conglomerates.

Overlying this, though traces are now washed from our upland site, are the strata of the Carboniferous (290 million years ago) famous for its giant club mosses, tree ferns and early conifers, which came to dominate the forests of the earth until the Jurassic (200 million years ago) and Cretaceous (ending 66 million years ago). The Araucaria in this period seems to have developed significant anti-dinosaur defences against the herbivores who would have otherwise eaten the head off it, and against the carnivores who might have ring barked it as they tried and sharpened their claws. Already in the Jurassic, the brilliantly sophisticated and adaptive Angiosperms (their seeds are in vessels, their leaves are broad) had appeared and begun to challenge the conifers (these latter are gymnosperms — their seeds are naked as a gymnast and their leaves are narrow). Spectacular among the new angiosperms is Magnolia Cambellii who burst upon the scene like a supernova a hundred million years ago and remains the glory of the Himalayan forest. That was too early to establish a co-evolutionary arrangement with the honey-bee (which had not yet appeared). This

precocious magnolia produces pink and white sheets or petals into which it invites flying beetles for slumber parties. They tumble around for a while until they hear that the action is in another flower elsewhere, dusting all with pollen the while.

Thus, while there are billions of conifer specimens in the world today, there are only some nine hundred species still surviving, many of them dropped carelessly and irresponsibly on south sea islands. There are, in contrast, some sixty thousand broad-leaved tree species (angiosperms) extant. The Royal Botanical Gardens at Edinburgh are therefore running a Conifer Conservation Programme to save them from extinction, and have entrusted many of them to the forest here in Glenstal where they already show what magnificent specimens they can be.

In the meantime, deep underground, in mid Cretaceous (c.100 million years ago), the North Atlantic was opening up: America and the Eurasian landmass were torn apart from each other. A deep fissure appeared in our Old Red Sandstone rocks in Cappercullen, a few hundred yards West of the Castle. We nearly lost fields to America, but the final break occurred West of the Cliffs of Moher, whose strata can be found continuing on the East Coast of Nova Scotia. A notable arboreal effect of this separation is the division of Magnolias, Sequioas, Taxodiums, Tulip trees, Nyssa (silvestris and sinensis) Hickories and Caucasian wingnuts and others into distinct American and Asiatic groups. Intervening glaciations in Europe have made the separation more pronounced, for, while the clever Americans have their mountains running North to South, arboreal migrants in Europe, fleeing the cold, tend to get smashed on the north slopes of Pyrenees, Alps and Carpathians.

The last word must go to more recent times: the Pleistocene (Ice Age) and the Holocene. Contrary to text books and logic, ice around Glenstal flows up hill. A great frozen flood came down the Shannon valley from the snowfield of Galway and Mayo, carrying with it sandstone, limestone and pebbles of

Connemara granite, blocking the valleys of the tributary Mulcair and Clare rivers, raising great proglacial lakes, which spectacularly escape carving glacio-fluvial spillways like Glenstal (two miles north of our back gate) and Cappercullen Glen, where the Cretaceous period fault was discovered and flensed of its fault-shattered debris. This

North East –South West running fault near the lower front avenue was buried deep in sands and gravels, but made its presence felt by a line of springs which, in periglacial conditions, formed great domes of ice, which were buried before melting and forming the hollows which later, with a little help, became lakes. The same is true for the big lake near the back avenue, where springs now abound.

The ice reached its greatest extent around 25,000 BC and our climate has been warming since then, with occasional oscillations. Plants, humans and other animals have been creeping back: Dwarf Willow, Birch, Pine, Ash, Elm, Oak, Arbutus Apple, Rowan, Cherry and, in more recent centuries, with human help, Beech, Sycamore, Box Hornbeam and the conifers Larch, Silver Fir and Norway Spruce.

With the nineteenth century, the great botanical wonders of the world burst upon the scene, and we have in Glenstal and elsewhere in Ireland their worthy representatives: Douglas Fir, Redwoods, Sitka Spruce, Western Red Cedar and Hemlock from North America's West Coast, Cedrus deodara from

India, Eucalyptus from Australia, Fitzroya and Araucaria (Monkey Puzzle) from South America. Many of these have the potential of growing more than three hundred feet high, and a second wave of planting means that newcomers, enjoying the shelter of their elders, may well achieve it.

Among the trees the ivy clings, humbly making do with the light the tree crown does not want. Its wind resistance helps the tree grow in strength, its berries feed birds and squirrels, its leaves feed the deer and its warmth and shelter change what could be a cold bare tree into a thriving tower block of life.

Brilliant, reckless and persistent human hunters may have quickly driven the giant elk onto the quaking grass margins of lakes and evicted the bears from their caves before beginning to wreck the magnificent forests of oak and yew. By the seventeenth century there was little cover left for wolves and woodkerne (the displaced Irish). We sleep at night without the corncrake's rasping call, but during the day the woodpecker, having crossed from Pembroke, clinging to the rigging of Stena Lines against the prevailing winds, has added that percussion that was missing.

The hen harrier may be the most beautiful of our birds, the whooper swan the most powerful and haunting. The latter graces our big lake at times, between heroic flights to Iceland where it breeds in summer. It weighs up to 15kg and its wings are sheets of steel. Underground the fungi thrive, rushing with their silken threads to carry water and nutrients to young trees in exchange for a small tax of sugar. Through their good offices, trees form biogroups, as their roots graft with each other and become one organism. In this case, the stump of a felled tree remains alive and heals over like a cut branch, and its whole system of roots is dedicated to helping its neighbours. Thus a wood of Sitka spruce on quaking ground may survive and thrive for over a hundred years by developing a strong and stable raft of interwoven roots. ■

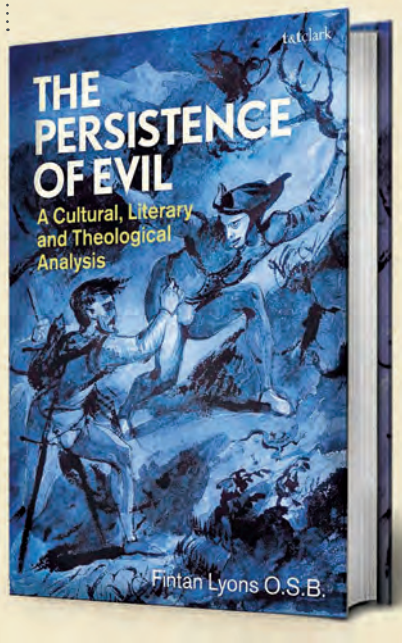
Abbey Updates

FATHER ALAN CELEBRATES HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY

The Book of Psalms speaks of those who live into ripe old age: 'seventy years or eighty for those who are strong', but Fr Alan certainly surpassed this biblical statistic, celebrating his 90th birthday on 29 January. While it is traditional, at least for young people, for the number of candles on a cake to reflect the number of years being celebrated, at a certain point the task becomes unmanageable, and Fr Alan's cake would have represented a fire hazard. It was, however, specially baked for the occasion, suitably decorated and consumed with delight. *Ad multos annos.*

THE PERSISTENCE OF EVIL

Recording the history of belief in the existence of Satan, Fr Fintan's new book, *The Persistence of Evil,* draws from the Bible, the poetry of Dante and Milton, the legend of Faust, and from modern novels and plays such as the works of Mark



Twain and George Bernard Shaw, and the spiritual writings of C. S. Lewis. At the heart of this book is the attempt to synthesise or reconcile traditional belief with contemporary concern or even alarm regarding evil in the world. Fr Fintan argues that evidence for the persistence of evil has been striking in modern times in wars and atrocities, while phenomena such as Satanic Cults and possible or real diabolical possession have continued to increase. By arguing that the transition from belief in Satan to personification of evil in historical regimes and characters brings contemporary culture into sharp focus, this book chronicles the history of humanity's attempt to understand the disturbing and mysterious reality of evil.

LE FIGARO TO FEATURE GLENSTAL ABBEY AND SCHOOL

The Abbey and School are to feature in the Easter weekend edition of the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, over an 11-page spread in the Magazine section. The journalist and author Romain Sardou and renowned photographer Emanuele Scorcelletti interviewed and photographed monks and students over a three-day visit earlier in January this year. Glenstal will be the second monastery to feature in *Le Figaro* as part of a series about European monasticism. The first monastery was the Abbey of Ligugé in France and the third will be the Irish Columban foundation of Bobbio in Italy. The series explores ways that present-day monasticism has adapted from ancient times.

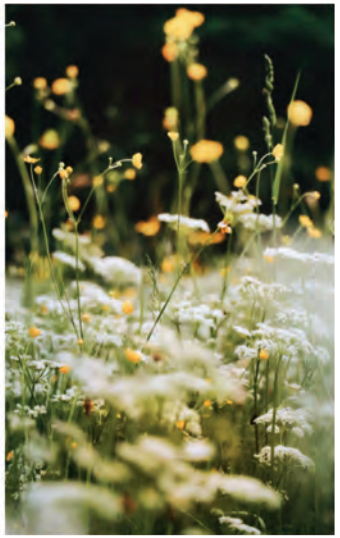
GATEHOUSE VAULT REVELATION AND CASTLE STONEWORK RESTORATION

Keen-eyed visitors will have noticed some departures and arrivals in the Glenstal precinct recently. Earlier this year, the great wooden gates of the castle were removed for restoration. They are undergoing conservation in Letterfrack, and when they return, they be reinstalled and will be operational for the first time since at least 1927. Their absence has revealed two stone carved faces in the gatehouse vault. These have been sheltered from the elements since their installation in the 1830s and their state of preservation stands in stark contrast to the opposite matching pair. As examples of weathering and erosion they are hard to beat and a number of students have been treated to an impromptu geography lesson en route to the gamefields. The castle restoration project has been accomplished largely through the generosity of a benefactor and it has enabled the community to consolidate much of the castle fabric. However, a lot remains to be done and any support, large or small, would be greatly appreciated. ■

Viriditas
In Praise of Green

Two centuries of intensive planting and careful husbandry by generations of the Barrington family and successive monk-foresters means that springtime and early summer in Glenstal is breathtakingly beautiful. From late January onwards flowers and colours increase and multiply: snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils carpet the ground while later azaleas, rhododendron and cherry clothe the boughs. Occasionally, the shocking bright red of a Chilean flame tree blazes out. All this new life is framed by a green background, not the sterile 'green screen' of the movie industry on to which all sorts of computer-generated images can be projected, but that delicate fresh shade that Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) called *viriditas* and which she viewed as the colour of the Holy Spirit, the God-given life force of the biological and spiritual worlds. In her mystical

COLMÁN Ó CLABAIGH OSB






work *Symphonia* she writes:

> O most noble greenness, rooted in the sun
> you share in bright serenity in the sphere
> which no earthly excellence comprehends.
> You are enfolded with the embraces of divine ministers.
> You blush like the dawn,
> You burn like the sun's flame.
> You are enfolded with the embraces of divine ministers.

Hildegard was not alone in her appreciation of the colour of springtime. Her monastic contemporary, Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141), composed an influential work of natural science entitled *On the Three Days.* In it he used the beauty of creation as a gateway to contemplation of the beauty of the Creator:

> Behold the earth wreathed with flowers! What a pleasing show it puts on, how it delights the eyes; how it arouses feeling. We see blushing roses, white lilies, purple violets. Not only do they look wonderful, but their origin is also wonderful — how God's wisdom produces such beauty from the dust of the earth. Finally, there is green, the most beautiful of all. How it enraptures the minds of those who see it, when in a truly new way shoots come forth with new life and standing up in their stalks, which seem to have been trodden down by death, bud forth together in the light in a symbol of the future resurrection.

This insight is available to all with eyes that are even occasionally open to wonder. In his epic poem about Irish rural life in the mid-twentieth century Patrick Kavanagh described in unflinching detail the bleak, lovelorn, frustrated lives of the Monaghan farmers of his childhood. Yet even these could be touched by the Spirit:

> Yet sometimes when the sun comes through a gap
> These men know God the Father in a tree:
> The Holy Spirit is the rising sap,
> And Christ will be the green leaves that will come
> At Easter from the sealed and guarded tomb. ■

RESETTING THE CLOCK ON CLIMATE CHANGE

AN EXPLORATION OF PRACTICAL, JUST AND LIFE ENHANCING RESPONSES

18 MAY 2024, 9:45AM - 5PM

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK

TO BOOK: **events@glenstal.com** or phone **061-621005.**

COST: €70, includes lunch, refreshments. For more information, please visit **glenstal.com/abbey/events**