

# Some Notes about Myself

The August, 1971, ODM published an obituary by Canon Kenneth Packard on John Perret (vicar of Cassington, Oxon, 1948-1957, and Oakley, Bucks, 1957-1961, hon. chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford, 1970-1971), who died in 1971. After his death, some notes about himself were found in his house at Whitchurch. They are of more than passing interest and by permission of Mrs Perret some extracts are being serialised in the ODM.

W.R.F.B.

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Jean-Marie Perret was born near Lyons, France.

In my first year (1892) I was taken to Lourdes a dying baby, condemned by the doctors. In spite of the official experts and nurses my mother herself dipped me into the cold water of the grotto. Since that moment I began to improve slowly but steadily.

Our family doctor, an agnostic, confessed to me much later that he could not explain the cure: for him it was due to some unknown virtue in the water . . . as at the Epidaurus and Pergamon shrines. For my parents it was a miracle.

Sociale at Lyons) on one side, conservatives (intransigents), royalists (Action Francaise) etc. on the other, divided even families. I had to find my way and I sided with the left, the reformist groups.

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In 1912 I joined the Benedictine order. Three of my friends became Jesuits. The reason for my choice was my family's attachment to the 'Liturgical Year' of Dom Guéranger. This veneration for the Restorer of Benedictine monachism in France by my family had a mixed origin. Dom Guéranger was not only a 'Liturgiste', an infallibilist, but also an intransigent supporter of Pius IX. So was my mother's father who fought in the papal army in 1870. One of the family treasures was an engraving representing the then head of the tribe on the way to the scaffold in 1793. The spirituality of 'Année Liturgique' had prevailed over that of the Jesuits. Spiritual Exercises, three-point meditation, rosary during Mass, benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament etc. never aroused great enthusiasm in the family. Unconsciously we were perhaps pre-counter-Reformation Christians!

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I was sent to Farnborough Abbey in England, which was suspected somewhat by the authorities. Men like von Hügel and Edmund Bishop were frequent visitors; Germans, even Russians, appeared occasionally. Indeed at recreation time when the community was walking to and fro in two lines opposing each other, on the wide terrace, outspoken statements were made against curia and infallibility. After my novitiate I was admitted in that company. It was thrilling.

My novitiate was the happiest days of my life. I learnt there something of contemplation and psalm worship which stood me in good stead all my life. The freedom and spontaneity of the psalms, their sublime, so simple, mythology of God, so transparent and suggestive, saved me from the temptations which have perturbed many.

The Abbot, Dom Fernand Cabrol, was a liturgical scholar and had attracted around him a number of people notably eminent in liturgics, patristics, celtic and oriental history and archaeology as well as in medieval music. Speculative theology and scholasticism were lightly treated and all stress was laid upon positive theology, scientific objectivity, critical method.

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The war came at the end of my novitiate. I joined an alpine regiment at Montelimar in July, 1914. All was in

For me it has remained a great mystery of love.

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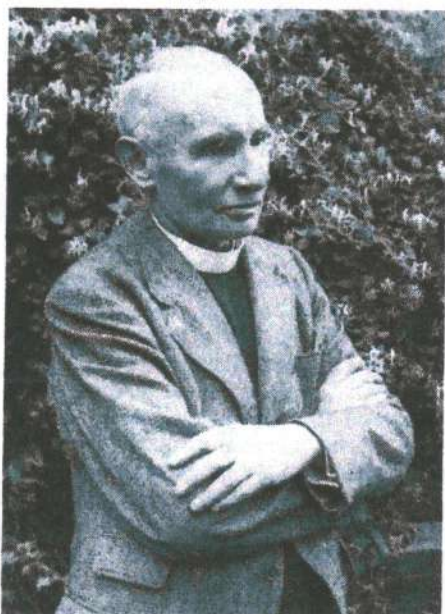
When I was at school, French Catholicism was tested by the crisis of the 'inventaires', a time of religious riots organised to prevent the police from taking control of the ecclesiastical buildings made property of the state by the new laws.

Everywhere religious riots tried to prevent the police from taking possession of ecclesiastical buildings. Huge crowds keeping watch around the churches tried to stop the 'inventaires' from taking place normally. During the riots Christian boys were more active in the streets than in the classrooms. I enjoyed the fun of it.

It is at that time that my father was sent to prison for a short time about some breach of the law in connection with his management of the new church school which my grandmother had built at Limonest. Such was the religious climate in which I grew.

This turmoil was complex, for the Catholics were divided. Modernists, liberal Catholics, Sillonists (Action

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confusion. The battle of the Marne was on. They hurried our training and within a month we were sent to the battlefield—August 20, 1914. On September 2, we were ordered to keep the village of St Remy, near St Die in the Vosges, at all costs and were given some ammunition. We used it heartily on the waves of Germans rushing from their trenches. It was a hard and cruel day, hot blood everywhere, villages and woods burning all around. As the night came not one cartridge was left. Twenty of us, the remains of the company, waited for the night to rejoin the regiment which had moved back. Alas the Germans surrounded the village. The sergeant waved his handkerchief. We were marched through the German lines and beyond to

Karlsruhe and eventually entrained to Stuttgart. On the march I fainted and was left by the side of the road. Fortunately a German soldier passing by noticed me moving; he gave me some wine, stopped an ambulance and eventually I rejoined my fellow prisoners. Not a bad welcome to Germany.

After the war I returned to Lyons where I was attached to the Franco-American staff until demobilisation two years later. During a leave I managed to visit Farnborough and of course noticed great changes, caused by war, death, age. I even managed to visit my former Novice Master who had been sent to Mont St Michel to found a monastic centre open to the world, with pilgrimages, conferences, conventions, etc. That great vision was squashed by the Abbot of Solesmes. The Maurras affair was dividing the French Benedictine world. Rome had condemned the royalist Action Francaise run by Maurras, but in spite of the Vatican the Action Francaise remained on the table in Benedictine reading rooms.

Abbot Cabrol had resigned and become Titular Abbot. His successor, Bernard Jacquilot du Boisvouvray, was a very different man, specialising in the preaching of convent retreats and the spiritual direction of nuns. As, in the rule of St Benedict, the abbot is the father of the Community, endowed with an authority still redolent of the old Roman conception of the 'paterna auctoritas', his personal influence is decisive, the Cabrol tradition faded away. The intellectuals were found sinecures and chaplaincies which allowed them to pursue their studies.

A great disillusion invaded me.

(to be continued)

Bishop Douglas Milmine

## Don Alejandro in Paraguay

After four years out of South America here we are back again . . . We have been aware of the wonderful, invisible power of prayer sent through your prayers.

We have a new home and I have a new name. Our little rented house is about three hundred yards from the Mission office. It is a yellow bungalow with three rooms, high ceilings, tiled floors, shuttered windows, patio and small garden with grapefruit trees.

Christian names are conveniently used in South America with a 'Don' attached, but Douglas is too foreign-sounding and

no-one has ever used it of me. Before returning I puzzled about what to do and decided to try my late father's name, Alexander. I got the approval of a congregation I went to visit the evening of the day we arrived in Asuncion, so am now called Don Alejandro!

How are things as we find them? The RC Church in Paraguay has remained hard-line longer than in most republics. The total of all protestants here is very small, only a fraction of one per cent of the country's two and a half million population. The Paraguayan Anglican

## 2) Some Notes about Myself 2

(A continuation of John Perret's autobiographical notes from the September ODM.)

I was soon sent to the Catholic Institute in Paris to study theology which I welcomed. I was to live at the Benedictine priory of Notre Dame de la Source at Neuilly and go to rue du Bac for the lectures.

Although the climax of the Modernist crisis had subsided, its aftermath was acutely with us. Shortly after my arrival the professor of Old Testament, reading the newspaper at the refectory, suddenly rose up very pale and, shaking all over, left the room. We never saw him again. He had read his condemnation by Rome for an article on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Consternation.

Later Father Condournin, an eminent Jesuit, in a seminar attended by a few safe students, told us that, locked away in his drawer, he had an essay on the problem of the Two or Three Isaiahs which he could not publish, but at our request he summarised it briefly 'because one day it will be accepted'. We were fascinated. Discussing St John with Lebreton I remembered Allo in Fribourg calling the fourth gospel a meditation on the life and teaching of Jesus. He smiled and gave me Lightfoot and Westcott to read, adding: 'You are safe with Anglican Biblical scholars. Would God that we should be free as they are.' A few days afterwards he gave me the key of 'Hell', the 'strong room' where non-Catholic theology was locked in, because, he said, 'You are an old soldier, ex-Albertinensis and a Farnburgian'. This licence and holidays in 'Hell' saved my faith, but undermined severely my regard for Rome.

It started me wondering more and more about the legitimacy of her claims and turned me towards despised Anglicanism which kept faith and free inquiry

in proper balance, and yet was rejected. Gore, Hort, Frere, etc. kept me enthralled in 'Hell' in my spare time. I discovered a new Catholicism and began to understand the positive side of Protestantism as a liberator, perhaps muddled and defective, but necessary. Eventually 'Hell's' door was closed and it became very difficult to get heretical books.

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It was a time of utter darkness, for me the great temptation. I was ordained priest in 1922, a crucifixion with Christ. I offered my sinfulness to God. A dark joy and gratitude was associated with this aspect of the sacerdotium of the Cross. My spiritual companions were those on Calvary, Mary, John (my patron), Mary Magdalene. I never lost my faith, but walked in the dark until I crossed the channel to discover a branch of the Church preserved for a purpose.

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It was decided at the end that I should be secularized. In any case I became fifth vicar on St Vincent de Paul's staff at Clichy — a thrilling appointment. Then Abbé Guerin was launching J.O.C. I was made chaplain of the J.O.C. Feminine.

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The Anglican chaplain at St. George's in Paris was Father Cardew, an outstanding pastor, widely known in Paris for his care for the sick and the lonely. He had even founded a Hostel for Actors and Actresses and for Ballet Dancers. His reputation had spread to 'red' Clichy next to gay Montmartre.

One day, one of the parish nuns, a Sister of St Vincent de Paul, asked me to visit a sick woman in the disreputable part of the parish. The girl was a ballet dancer. She explained that she wanted



CHAPEL AT POTIGNY

Here Fr Perret led many parties to the Seminary of the Mission de France.

to see the Anglican chaplain and receive her communion from him, being a member of his Guild. It was a Godsend for me. As I shall explain, I was then desperately anxious to meet a responsible, experienced Anglican priest to discuss with him my strange problems, which had matured all these years.

I met him many times and we became good friends. He proved a wise, enlightened, generous adviser. He introduced me to the Bishop of Gibraltar, Dr Barry, assistant bishop of London and to the Rev. Fr Drury of the Community of the Resurrection. I was advised to go to Mirfield and study Anglicanism on the spot. I accepted the invitation.

Meanwhile I was debating with myself, praying for light and strength to follow it at the required cost. It took me two years to take the final step.

The situation was complex. St Vincent de Paul was a most attractive parish. It was the time when the Abbé Guérin was founding French Jocism, with the help of his fellow curates; a crucial period for the French Church. My role was difficult. As chaplain of the girls' association I had to deal with the formidable staff which was running the girls' guild. They and the Curé were absolutely opposed to Jocism and I could do nothing. Guérin and his supporters were firmly backed by the Archbishop and the clergy of the neighbouring parish. My contribution was to draw vignettes for the Jocist journal and to help *dans les coulisses*.

When all these great things were happening, I managed to preach two sermons on St Peter and on Adam and Eve which brought a firm rebuke from the Curé and reminded me of my own

problems. My errors were that I preached not the infallibility of St Peter but only that of the Holy Spirit, and that I treated the story of Eden as a parable, not a historic fact. It was then I decided to take the jump. Jocism was not the Church—alas. It was considered by many as a dangerous temporary error. The True Church was the obscurantist, integrist, immobilist Church of the Curia, entrenched behind its antique canons. Already Teilhard de Chardin's typewritten conferences were circulating *sous le manteau*, spreading alarm.

It was then that I wrote to the Archbishop, Cardinal Dubois, to tell him of my decision to join the Anglican Church, *catholique et reformée*. He answered me in a most fatherly way, but he assured me that his arms would be always open to the prodigal. Very kindly he suggested my meeting Mgr Battifol before leaving. In a last letter I thanked

him for his kind suggestion, but I reminded him of the gesture of the Mgr confessing that he could not refute Fr Puller, the Cowley Father, in his book on Anglican orders and showing an interfoliated edition of the book.

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Jean-Marie Perret was received into the Church of England by Bishop Winnington-Ingram. After a period at Kelham, where he formed a lasting friendship with Fr Gabriel Hebert, he had curacies at Lavender Hill and at Guildford (where he was married). Much of the subsequent story was told by Canon Packard in the ODM in August 1971, but the famous visits to Pontigny deserve an account to themselves. It is written by the Rev. W. J. Milligan, vicar of Roehampton in the diocese of Southwark, and will be published in a forthcoming issue of the ODM.

W. J. Milligan

## Perret & the Mission de France

In 1954 when Father Perret was first visiting the theological colleges and trying to interest staff and students in visits to the Mission de France, many of us who wanted to see changes in the way the Church operated looked to France—and especially to the Roman Catholic church in France—for inspiration. Surveys, team ministries, worker priests, were new. A liturgy which involved the congregation, offertory processions, parish breakfasts, even altars where the priest faced the people, caught our imagination. And it seemed that it was in France where all these things—and a good deal more—were happening.

'In the common room they come and go', wrote a friend of mine who knew his T. S. Eliot, in the Cuddesdon College magazine, 'And speak of Abbé Michonneau.' *Fêtes et Saisons* was frequently on the common room table, and *Revolution in a City Parish* and *Is France Pagan?* in the library and in many a study.

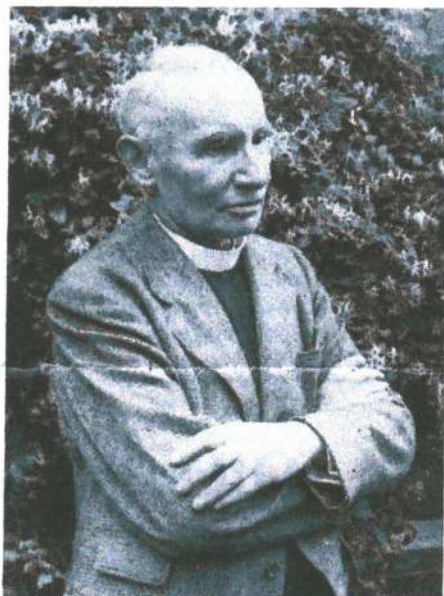
So Father Perret was right on target when he came to Cuddesdon one summer evening and talked about the Church in France. We—with Ely where he had a strong link through his friendship with Canon Balmforth—were, if I remember rightly, the first to fall to his charm and accept his invitation.

His style helped. He was vicar of a parish in the heart of rural Oxfordshire, living in a vicarage that could not be more English if it tried. Yet with his French accent, his expressive hands, his sense of drama, his beret, he seemed to bring with him the authentic air of Gaulloise cigarettes and Pernod. He belonged to both countries and—in those days before Pope John and Vatican II—to both Churches. And he wanted—with a single-minded ardour and an iron determination—to build bridges.

So, after our first visit to Pontigny, Father Perret continued his tour of the theological colleges, always aware that as he himself grew older, the people to capture were the young. And gradually more and more colleges became involved in the visits and received visitors from the Mission de France. It wasn't only the more 'high church' colleges, or those most likely by tradition to be open to the Roman Catholics; Wycliffe, Ridley, and others, were between 1955 and 1960 brought in to the relationships and I have no doubt that some of those most in danger of becoming fiercely anti-Catholic in their

convictions, found a new approach to the Roman Catholic Church by their encounters with the Mission de France, its vigorous evangelism, its conviction of people's need of the Gospel, and its commitment to Christ.

All this was the work of Father Perret. A generation before, the religious communities, led by such men as Fr Kelly, had ensured, by their commitment to the ecumenical movement and to a growing



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relationship with the Free Churches, that ecumenism in England did not become simply pan-protestant. So, in a smaller way, Father Perret worked to involve all sections of the Church of England, so as our growing together with the Church of Rome was not simply a 'high church' exercise.

Those of us who came to know John Perret better, discovered, of course, that his enthusiasm to build bridges between the Church in France and the Church in England was not simply because he wanted Christian unity. Nor was it only because he wanted us to learn at first hand about their liturgical life, or their parochial organization, or their teamwork, or their attitudes to work and politics. It was chiefly because he himself had experienced in his own person the pain of disunity, of being cut off from part of his life, and he had recently had the moving experience of reunion of the two parts of his life—the French and the English, the

Roman Catholic and the Anglican—being brought together again. What he had to offer us, and what he wanted to share with us, was a part of himself.

When the first motley collection of priests and ordinands arrived at the Seminary at Pontigny we found a place with as much gallic charisma as our leader and guide. In the middle of the rich pastures of north Burgundy, a towering avenue of chestnuts, a twelfth-century Abbey with the Shrine of St Edmund, and a wide ambulatory round which the seminarists processed singing Gelineau choruses; a refectory where we arrived terribly late (because of a strike, I think) and whose vaulted ceiling and lancet windows made us feel as if we were taking part in a medieval play; a vast pantry for washing up, in whose sinks, had they been filled with Malmesey wine, many princes could have drowned.

There was, indeed, an air of conspiracy over the whole exercise, for we were behaving most unconstitutionally in those days before Vatican II. It was unheard-of for an Anglican priest to celebrate Holy Communion in Roman Catholic premises, but this is precisely what Fr Perret did the first morning of our visit in a sitting room in the prelatore, and, on a later day, in a chapel in a country church we visited where there was a 'Mission de France' parish.

I suppose I remember Jean Perret's hands partly because of his use of them in conversation—not staccato like an Italian, but gently and expressively; and partly because of the action songs I remember him singing to our two-year-old child when he visited us some years later; but chiefly because I remember him taking the bread, 'real' bread, of course—a piece of a long French loaf—at those communion services which meant so much to him, and to which many seminarists came.

The need for secrecy may seem strange now, but it was real. And it was something which Fr Perret rather relished. 'Toujours la discrétion', he would say, and his face would wreath with smiles as he explained the ridiculous legal niceties through which he had wriggled, or the ecclesiastical laws he had decided to disobey.

Pontigny was one of the most lively and vibrant communities I have ever visited. The men never stopped talking, arguing, laughing. They were impatient with the hierarchy. They mocked the Sulpicians—the far more proper, conventional, soutane-clad seminarists in Paris. They were passionately interested in politics, and almost to a man left-wing. They cared deeply about the rift between the French working classes and the rest of the nation, which included, of course, the Church, and they intended to bridge the

gulf by being a part of the working-class culture. They took seriously the college discipline which laid upon every member the need to work. They were keen to learn how to live together in the small group (and the *équipes* within the college were a training for working in the *équipe* in the parish). They were exhilarating company.

Fr Perret stood back to watch the encounters, hoping and praying that the thing would work, and that the more reserved English would really meet the volatile French. For he was above all else, a bringer-together. And when we returned, and I started work in a parish, I received many letters from him telling me of a French priest who wished to visit England, or reminding me of further addresses to write to, or urging me to start a newsletter to maintain contacts, or telling me of men coming to work near me who had been over to Pontigny on later visits. His zeal was inexhaustible.

The visits increased and often took place twice in a summer. Others were brought in to lead them—especially men with a foot on both sides of the Channel like Victor de Waal and John de Satge—and usually serious study was included, as at the regular September schools when many former seminarists came back to Pontigny for refresher courses. But gradually, as the official relationships between Rome and Canterbury improved and the cloaks and daggers could be set outside, more ambitious schemes developed—chiefly the plan whereby an Anglican ordinand was seconded to Pontigny for part of his training.

There were also, in the late fifties and early sixties, an increasing number of visits by priests from the Mission to this country, frequently including conferences of clergy from a deanery or area. Père Chopin was among the closest of Father Perret's collaborators in this and a frequent visitor; and some of the group ministries in Norfolk have special reason to be grateful for the relationship after a memorable visit to a country *équipe* of the Mission de France, and a successful return visit to the Norwich diocese.

I invited Fr Perret—by then retired to Whitchurch—to come with us when a party from the Southwark diocese visited Pontigny in 1968 for what was the last visit from England. But he was not able to come, though he was, of course, immensely encouraging throughout and overjoyed to think that 'your Robinson' would meet and engage in theological dialogue with his beloved French radicals. The visit had all the punch and vitality I had expected, and Pontigny, for me, proved to have even more magic than before with the unending talk on politics and religion, the dreamy eternity of the chest-

nut avenue and the abbey, and the inevitable dodgems in the village place.

But already they were negotiating to move nearer to Paris and more recently, the Seminary has closed and the Mission has, I am told, only a minimal administration. It is said that many of the ideas of the Mission de France have been accepted in the Church and therefore there is no need for a special organization and a college.

This may well be so. I cannot judge. It is true that the battle lines in the seventies have been redrawn; that the French Church is no longer blazing the trail as it was in the fifties when Cardinal Roncali was Nuncio in Paris and seeing new ideas being born which he later called upon in his preparations for the Council he called as Pope; that central altars, team ministries, and worker priests are now both easier to establish and less obviously the answer.

Yet the Mission was not only about techniques; it was about life. They say that our word spirituality—in French *spiritualité*—is the same word used for the fizz in the champagne. And for my part I discovered this in practice more in the vigorous life at Pontigny than almost anywhere else, where the rugged facts of daily life, of injustice and conflict, of

work and human relationships, were brought unselfconsciously into a most reverent worship. I hope that has been well and truly handed on into the Church at large.

Pontigny is now a convalescent home. A friend of mine who came on the Southwark visit—a deacon who did not proceed to ordination as a priest and who is now a schoolmaster—went to Pontigny two years later. Like me, he is basically a sentimental fellow, and his account was enormously nostalgic and almost tear-jerking. The Pontigny era is over. But there are enormous possibilities for continuing and growing links with the Church in France and one hopes that with closer political links these may indeed develop.

But the interesting thing about Fr Perret's feelings when we discussed the closure of Pontigny and the virtual end of the Mission was that he appeared to find it all very hopeful. He was always seeking young people to carry on the work, and wanting new insights and new enthusiasms to be released—knowing this would always mean change. And in the same spirit he accepted the news from France, with perhaps a tinge of sadness, but with no empty resignation and with much faith in the continuing fact of Death and Resurrection.

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A. J. M. Saint

## Other Men's Ministries

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The Anglican church of St Paul at Athens is splendidly situated on one of the main streets of the city, so that the visitor can hardly miss seeing it. It is an adequate but undistinguished construction, designed by an amateur architect, Sir Henry Acland, the well-known Oxford physician; it was consecrated in 1843.

There is a fairly large British community resident in Athens, made up of the staff of the Embassy and the Consulate and of business people. The church is also well supported by a number of American Episcopalians who work there in various capacities, and there is a constant stream of visitors. On one Sunday I was there fifty Japanese presented themselves for the Holy Communion—a parish trip from Tokyo.

The Chaplain lives in an agreeable flat close to the British Embassy. There is evidently plenty of work for him to do, though everybody was kindly concerned to see that his locum was left free to travel about as much as possible and see the sights. Greece is even more

wonderful than people tell you. We found our way to Delphi and to Daphni, to Sounion and Aegina; but an inopportune fever robbed me of Corinth and Mycenae. It was a very moving experience to sit on top of Areopagus at sunset and think of St Paul discussing the resurrection with the Athenian philosophers; the Acropolis towers above you and the Agora lies just below.

The Embassy maintains a delightful school for expatriate children at Kifissia—the feeling here is very much like that of a church school in an English parish; the Chaplain visits regularly and is always welcome. He also works closely with the consul in dealing with people in difficulty. There are many problems arising from mixed marriages; one of them is that of the elderly widow, English by birth, living on a small Greek pension.

For a Christian with a sense of history Istanbul—Constantinople, Byzantium—is as thrilling a city as Rome itself. Today the ancient pride is humbled. Istanbul is not even the capital city of Tur-

been made by abolitionists who would have England 'go Danish', but it is far too early to be sure what has happened there. For the moment the reader should treat the evidence with caution.

Arguments for the Danish solution are that if there is no law against obscenity, then that will remove the lure of the prohibited titillation. It will also bankrupt the back street racketeer in pornography. Further, free use of obscene material will have a cathartic effect, and allow those that way inclined to work out their obsessions in phantasy not practice.

We need to be fair to the cathartic argument. No doubt some people will project into a phantasy world undesirable conduct which they might otherwise put into practice. But when I asked a qualified psychiatrist about that infamous Moors Murder trial where it was obvious that sadist books had influenced the murderers, his reply was on these lines.

'There is a small group of deviants who are deeply perverted, and for whom such books only encourage them to new, and perhaps more bestial, ideas. There is a much larger group of people who have more or less powerful pulls in deviant directions, some slight and relatively innocuous, some more serious and harmful. These people will be endangered by outside stimulation from books, pictures and so on.' Against gains along cathartic lines must be set this doctor's opinion.

Another solution, advocated by A. P. Herbert in *The Times*, suggests separate treatment for literature as against visual obscenity in picture form, on the stage or in films. He advocates the return to a simple canon of common decencies for the latter.

Public opinion, via a jury, would determine what constitutes decency. Christians must influence that opinion. With all the mass media and journalistic pressures to concentrate on the sensational, the horrifying, the dramatic because it is news, Christians can counter-balance this by remembering St Paul. *Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report . . . think on these things* (Philippians 4.8).

The Editor is grateful to the Marcham Press, and to 'News Extra' for permission to reprint this article.

KENNETH G. PACKARD

In Memoriam

## JOHN PERRET: MAN OF GOD

We are properly critical of the flowery panegyrics pronounced at the funerals or inscribed on the marble tombs of very ordinary persons. With Jean Marie François Perret (to give him his full baptismal name) the case is very different. For he was no ordinary man; he was in fact a man of God, and that not in the conventional sense, though he possessed very deep spirituality, but because he was a man whom God had called and set apart for a special task.

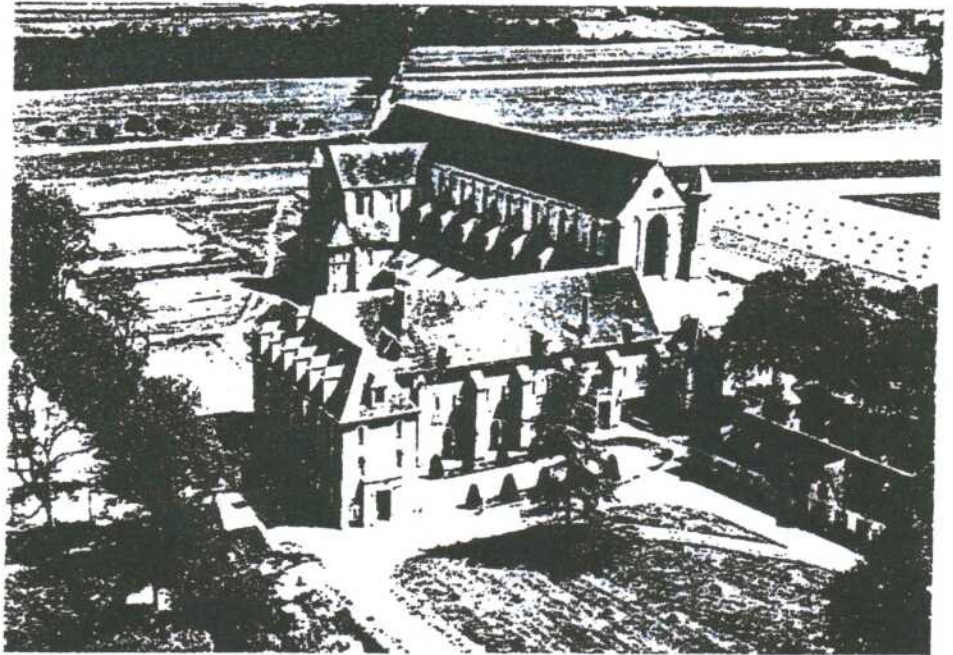
The hand of Providence may be plainly seen at a number of points in his life. He was for example led in early life to leave the Society of Jesus, for which pious parents had destined him, for the Order of Saint Benedict. In this way he came under the influence, we may rather say the spell, of the great Dom Lambert Beauduin (who was also the inspiration of the work of Paul Couturier).

Was it not Providence again which brought him to England with that part of the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes which, in the expulsion of the religious orders from France, had found a home at Farnborough? Thus he had a foretaste of our English way of life and gained more than a smattering of our language. But soon he was called to join the French army in

the First World War and was quickly plunged into active service in the Vosges. It is said that he owed his life to the action of a German soldier who pulled him out of a ditch where he was bleeding to death.

After many harsh months as a prisoner of war in Poland and elsewhere there came another providential deliverance. At Farnborough he had been able to benefit from the 'patrimony provision' which allowed members of the Order to opt out of their monastic vows so as to enter the pastoral ministry, and John had begun his studies for the priesthood. Thus under a scheme for the exchange of student prisoners of war he was able to continue his studies in a neutral country. It was Providence again which sent him to the Swiss University of Fribourg where he had ample access in their great library to the works of Anglican theologians, and a new world opened for him.

Back at Farnborough after the war John finished his studies and was ordained priest in 1922. As *vicare* of a parish in the Parisian 'Red Belt' he learnt something of the 'de-christianisation' which was later to lead to Godin's *France, Pays de Mission* and the founding of the Mission de France. Absorbed though he was in his pastoral



THE 12th CENTURY ABBEY, AND PART OF THE ANCIENT MONASTIC BUILDINGS AT PONTIGNY, HOME OF THE SEMINARY OF THE 'MISSION DE FRANCE'.

work at Paris, he was still in touch with Dom Lambert Beauduin and was able to visit his unity centre at Amay. He also shared Dom Lambert's keen suffering at the collapse of the Malines Conversations and the resulting long banishment of Dom Lambert.

So it came about that John Perret went with his courage and conscience in both hands to Frederick Cardew, the chaplain of St George's, Paris. Cardew rightly insisted on his making things right with his Bishop, whom he seems to have found unexpectedly sympathetic. But it was a different matter with his own conservative family. To them John's lapse from the Catholic Church and his change of nationality was a shattering blow, and for many years he was completely estranged from relatives and friends across the Channel, including Dom Lambert himself.

Cardew fixed up for him to go to Mirfield, where John does not seem to have got on easy terms with Frere; but when he was moved to Kelham, Providence had again prepared the way. From the first John found in Gabriel Hebert a man after his own soul and soon they were to launch the first unity journal in this country with the title of *Oecumenica*.

By 1928 John had gained enough fluency in our language to go to a curacy under Egbert Lucas (later to be Archdeacon of Durham) in south London. In due course he moved with his Vicar to Guildford. Here he met and married the wonderful helpmate, who for over forty years was to give him just the support he needed for his varied tasks and ventures. Then next as pastor of three country parishes he was always a friend to all and sundry. At Stanton Fitzwarren he found time to paint two striking frescoes in the chancel of St Barnabas, Swindon, but his skill in this direction he was, alas, never able to develop.

While Vicar of Cassington near Oxford (1948-57) he was drawn into the first beginnings of the *Parish and People* movement which aimed at reproducing in the Church of England something akin to the Liturgical Movement which was already renewing the life of the Church in Belgium and France. John Perret himself had never dared to make any contact with this movement abroad or even to revisit his native France. Through *Parish and People* he was induced in 1948 to make a fresh start, and here a quite unexpected act of Providence took place. With some friends he called at the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* in

Paris and was told that a distinguished visitor happened to be there that morning. This turned out to be no other than Dom Lambert Beauduin himself, back from his long exile. John had every reason to think that he might be regarded as a renegade, but without a moment's hesitation the old Benedictine monk, on entering the room, embraced John warmly and kissed him on both cheeks.

So John knew that all was well, and the psychological effect was magical. From that moment John not only resumed many contacts with France and began a series of visits to centres of the French *Renouveau*, but specially linked up with the Mission de France which had now established itself in the ancient Abbey of Pontigny. From this sprang the successive exchanges of French and English students which has done much to prepare for the cordial climate which now exists between Rome and Canterbury.

More recently, and particularly since Vatican II, the long estrangement between John and his family was healed. One of his brothers, a Franciscan missionary in Madagascar, wrote more than once of his warm interest in what John was doing in the field of Church Unity. His sister, a social worker at Lyon, stayed with him in England and both she and another brother who is in business in Paris flew over for the Requiem at Whitechurch on July 9.

Others have written of John's wonderful capacity for friendship and his gay, even youthful attitude to life. In his last years he came to be specially conscious of the work of the Holy Spirit, so active and yet so hardly recognized in men's lives and in the Church at large. He was sure that a new Pentecost is in store for us if only we have the faith to claim it.

J. M. COBBAN

## FAIR COMMENT

I suppose you can explain what is happening in East Pakistan as a tidying up operation—the closing chapter of the vast (and bloody) exchange of populations that took place as a result of the Great Partition. You could also interpret it as the first large-scale demonstration of Nature's use of her own efficient but ruthless regulator to control over-population. But a Christian is primarily concerned with the hard fact that millions of human beings—his own brothers in Christ—are being herded around, in circum-

stances of unbelievable suffering, as a result of political and military action. The Pakistan Government will be hard put to it to justify itself at the bar of history. Meanwhile the immediate responsibility lies on all of us, governments and individuals alike, to do what we can to alleviate a situation which, to the onlooker in this country, should never have arisen.

I don't believe in mixing politics and cricket. Let the Pakistani team play its matches in this country by all means. The players may well learn while they are over here to be rather more critical of their own government. But in all the circumstances the inactivity of those who had a field day stopping the South African tour is as curious as the silence of the dog that did not bark in the night. Why should religious apartheid (for that is what this amounts to) be less odious than racial?

\* \* \*

The meeting of the Diocesan Synod on June 12 left us all with much to think about. There were real grounds for encouragement not only in what was said but in the way in which it was said. The initial Celebration seemed to weld us all together into a unity which survived sharp difference of opinion — a difference which was mainly of means rather than of end. On the question of aid to foreign missions we were surely right to refuse to set off contributions against the quota assessment. It is bad business and bad ethics to rob Peter in Rome, so to speak, to finance Paul in the provinces. And the motion was eventually carried, to instruct PCCs to tackle the problem and report to their own Deanery Synods, neatly involved both the lower levels of government in precisely the right way.

When we discussed whether to support the introduction of a Measure to give the Church power to order its own worship, a delaying amendment was heavily defeated. But it served its purpose if it reminded us all of the difficulties that face any part-time legislative assembly. Gervase Duffield has had a long experience of Church government. If we are going forward in spite of his warnings, at any rate we shall keep a weather-eye open for the reefs ahead.

What I found especially interesting was the Bishop's clear-cut decision that a division of the diocese was out, at any rate for the foreseeable future. At a time when local government faces large-scale territorial reorganisation (!

### Cremation

August 6th Gladwyn Iredale.

**NOTE.** Many people these days express a preference for cremation. Those who think on these matters may agree that the best way of doing things is the reverent burial of the ashes in a special reserve plot in the churchyard, when an entry can be made in the parish register (of importance to future generations) and a local spot of hallowed memory is near at hand for visits and the placing of flowers by the memorial stone. The Rector believes that this will meet with approval, and invites comments on the reservation of such space at St. John's.

### YOUNG WIVES GROUP

Our next meeting is at 8 p.m. Wednesday September 1st. Please bring a recipe, suggestions for the year's programme, and photos of British family life for composing an album for an overseas group.

The Young Wives are organising a Jumble Sale 2.30, September 25th at the Village Hall. Please inform Mrs. Piper, Pangbourne 507, before the 23rd if you wish anything to be collected. Newcomers welcomed on September 1st. P.C.G.

### NEW REFORMATION" IN FRANCE

It is at the Rector's request that I am writing these lines to share with you some of my discoveries during the short fortnight I spent in France in July. One of my companions was the founder, inspirer and first director of the influential group called Parish and People which did not a little to modernize our Church in our time of rapid and drastic change.

A similar movement has been at work in France between the wars and more especially since the last war. During that period the fermentation which led to the bold steps taken by the 2nd Vatican Council, was brewing in many places on the Continent. John XXIII understood where the Spirit was driving, summoned the largest Council ever held by the R.C. Church and firmly gave its directions and programme. So the "new reformation" is now transforming the Roman Catholic Church everywhere, here more slowly, there more quickly. It was most interesting to see how it had progressed in France.

(1) Our first stop was in a Trappist monastery, the Abbey of Bricquebec, where we had good friends and were welcomed most warmly. In the old days the Abbey was famous for its cheese today it is famous for its spiritual writers. It has some sixty members, working in the fields according to the rule of St. Benedict and St. Bernard. Bricquebec is some ten miles from Cherbourg, our starting point. There we attended the new way of celebrating H. Communion, called "Concelebration".

In the past each of the 18 priest monks used to say his private low-mass alone with a server. A row of small altars was provided for that purpose. Since the early Middle-Ages the celebration of the Lord's Supper had too often become a kind of private devotion. It had lost the corporate character the Lord gave it in the Upper-Room, when He,

in the midst of the twelve, made them members of His Body, when he gave them to eat the bread he had blessed and broken. What we saw was the 18 priests celebrating together, grouped around the altar and facing the congregation which included some 30 lay-monks and a dozen R.C. visitors. There was one chalice and one loaf (a sort of large wafer easily broken). The most remarkable and significant thing was that the Prayer of Consecration (Roman Canon), including the Words of Institution, were sung by the 18 priests, together.

It was a magnificent, simple celebration, full of joy because of the presence of the Lord, reminiscent of Act 2, 46. All the lay-monks, filing in front of a priest received their communion in both kinds, standing, as it is now the custom in convents of men and women in France. The reason why communion in both kinds is not yet extended to the parishes is the problem of distribution to congregations of many hundreds.

(2) Driving leisurely down the Cotentin peninsula we stopped here and there to see what was happening in the village churches. Half of them were stripped of most of their statues and ornaments, some had even a severe presbyterian look. Shrines, side-altars, votive candles, altars, etc. had disappeared. The change which explained all this destruction was the new position given to the high altar. It had been brought away from the East Wall, towards the congregation, and placed in such a way that the celebrant was facing the people. So the devotion of the people was no longer diverted towards secondary objects, but concentrated on the evangelical celebration of the Lord's Supper. Besides they were learning to be One Family through the Parish Communion, acknowledging his presence in the midst of them, not far away beyond the East window.

(3) Reaching north Touraine we had a glorious time with a French family in a farming village. Our host was the squire, a historian of medieval agriculture, with an organ in his spacious study. His eldest daughter was breeding 500 white turkeys to be sent to England for Christmas. The hospitality was charming. It was there however that we learned that the religious revolution we had noticed in many parishes may cause difficulties. Our host objected strongly to the havoc their zealous young vicar has caused in the parish church with the full sanction of the Bishop. On the walls one could see the marks of the many statues which had been removed. The altar had been brought forward and seats for priest and servers had been placed against the East wall, the Architect had achieved a remarkable ensemble, simple, homely, and dignified. Congratulating the parish priest, we asked for his permission to take a photo. It was then that he explained his clash with some local families, which, he thought, will eventually be peacefully settled. On the other hand the alterations had brought back to the Church some for whom the pious folklore of the past had become a "scandal".

Not far from this village is a team of worker-priests who are in charge of a rural-deanery. We did not see them, but an Anglican Bishop and eight of his priests went to stay with them. So no doubt we shall hear more about them.

John Perre,

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