

BELMONT AND ENGLISH BENEDICTINE FURTHER STUDIES 1860-1901

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In 1865, the Prior of the recently founded monastery and House of Studies at Belmont, Dom Bede Vaughan wrote a pamphlet on University education in which he remarked that 'Oxford is poison to Catholic life.'¹ One wonders how Vaughan would have reacted some thirty years later to the opening of the ancient universities to English Catholics, and moreover to the founding of this venerable house a century ago. The focus of this paper is the further studies in which English Benedictines were engaged in during the latter half of the nineteenth century and it begins with the premise that the foundation of a common house of studies for the Congregation at St. Michael's Priory, Belmont in 1860 proved to be the catalyst for a changing mood in the Congregation. In realising the importance of further studies, it aims, furthermore, to trace the influences and themes of those further studies in the period preceding the foundation of Benet House, Cambridge in 1896, St. Benet's Hall, Oxford in 1897 and of Sant'Anselmo in Rome.

Throughout the period 1860-1900 English Benedictine theological studies were undergoing important changes, as can be seen from the deliberations and minutes of General Chapters in this period.² The purpose of this paper is not to give an analysis of the basic studies pursued by members of the Congregation at Belmont, nor an examination of the attitudes to studies in the Congregation in this period, but an analysis of some of the individuals who pursued further studies in the period 1860 -1900, the character of those studies and the influences upon them in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

STUDIES BEFORE BELMONT

Writing in the *Downside Review* in 1914, Abbot Cuthbert Butler was quick to underline the contrast between the literary output of the Downside community in the latter part of the nineteenth century compared to that in the earlier decades.³ This is true for all three houses of the Congregation. Before the French Revolution, the majority of monks had attended university, particularly the universities in Paris and Douai. The repatriation of the monasteries in England in the early nineteenth century prevented the continuation of this university education, and St Edmund's, refounded in Douai in 1818, seems never have been interested in continuing the tradition of attendance at French universities. In the early part of the nineteenth century the Congregation's contribution to scholarship was largely on the level of Benedictine bishops publishing pastoral letters and missionaries editing works of popular devotion. The only evidence of a university education was to be seen in a number of the senior members of the Congregation holding honorary Roman doctorates of divinity,

¹ B.Vaughan, *English Catholic University Education* (London, 1867) p.4

² B.Whelan, *Annals of the English Congregation of Black Monks of the Order of St Benedict 1850-1900* (unpublished typescript, 1932) vol 2, pp. 305, 307, 313-14, 317

³ *Downside Review* (1914), p.64

and others gaining external first degrees from the University of London. Only two monks of the Congregation were sent abroad to Parma for further studies, by Prior Cockshoot of Ampleforth, namely DD. Austin Bury and Laurence Shepherd.

After the foundation of Belmont, however, in 1860, the Congregation experienced a literary renaissance which was to be reflected in the publication of a number of distinguished theological and spiritual works. For Belmont brought together a large group of gifted monks whose interests were fired by the intellectual rigour which they found there. This new renaissance of scholarship in the Congregation was, as we shall see, to have a crucial importance in changing perceptions about the Congregation's character and purpose. One of Belmont's early students (later Prior), Dom Ildephonsus Cummins, observed that Belmont in those years afforded the nearest approach to university advantages then possible for the English Benedictines, and as a substitute it was far from inefficient. It gradually raised the general standard of study... and it laid solid foundations of monastic observance and interest; in all these and other ways promoting the revival then spreading through the Benedictine world.⁴

BELMONT

In 1859 St. Michael's Priory near Hereford had been established as a common Novitiate and House of Studies, or *Tyrocinium*, for the English Benedictine Congregation. From 1860 until 1910 practically all the monks of the Congregation spent their formative monastic years here, following a three year course after the year's novitiate. Seminary training was in a poor state throughout the Church during the early nineteenth century, change only coming later with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the value Thomism (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879) and Scripture studies (*Providentissimus Deus*, 1893). Contemporary Belmont, however, seems to have offered an adequate philosophical and theological course embarked upon after the novitiate. Dom Augustine Clark contends that 'responsibility for the disciplined tone of Belmont lay with Dom Wilfrid Raynal,' Prior from 1873-1901, but this was not a view shared by Dom Ildephonsus Cummins, Prior at Belmont 1901-05⁵, who preferred to credit the first prior, Dom Bede Vaughan with this accolade. Cummins asserts that Vaughan was 'succeeded by a long reign that failed to maintain the high standard of monastic training, of earnest study and literary achievement that characterised the earlier period.' According to Cummins, Raynal was a good, 'but not fitted to be the head of a novitiate and house of studies; he was narrow, intolerant and suspicious ; he was a student but not literary.'⁶

⁴ Belmont, MS696, Diaries of Prior Cummins 1860-1900 p.5. For superiors' lack of interest in providing a satisfactory course of studies at Ampleforth in 1834, see Allanson, *Records*, p.298

⁵ *ibid.* p 15

⁶ *ibid.* p 11. This view is reinforced by Whelan in his *Annals* (I, p.98): 'The aloofness of [Raynal's] character repelled the confidence of his subjects. The consequence was that the enthusiasm and fervour, both of staff and students, which had been so notable under Prior Vaughan, soon evaporated under his successor.'

Whatever the truth of the matter, the early professors at Belmont seem to have been of a very high calibre: notable in the early period of the 1860s were the first two Priors, Dom Norbert Sweeney and Dom Bede Vaughan of Downside, and Dom (later Bishop) Cuthbert Hedley of Ampleforth.

SCHOLAR PROFESSORS

Dom Norbert Sweeney (1821-1883) of St. Gregory's was one of the first monks of the Congregation to take the external B.A of London University, in 1844. Professor of Theology at Downside from 1850-54, he became the first Prior of Belmont in 1859 until internal disputes forced his resignation in 1862. Newlyn Smith's *History of Belmont 1859-1915* notes that 'for some time he conducted the studies of the Juniors almost single-handed and gave a course of lectures on the vows and monastic spirituality to the whole Community.'⁷ However Sweeney's influence on higher studies in the Congregation stemmed chiefly, it seems, from his publication in 1876 of an edition of *Sancta Sophia* by Father Augustine Baker.⁸

Sweeney's successor as Prior was another Gregorian, Dom Bede Vaughan (1834-1883), brother of the future Cardinal. Vaughan was superior at Belmont for eleven years. Although 'he had not the gifts of a pedagogue or tutor.. he had the art of making young men think for themselves.'⁹

Vaughan, like Sweeney, was a scholar in his own right. Towards the end of his priorship in 1871-2 he produced a two-volume work, *The Life and Labours of Thomas of Aquin*. Abbot Butler noted that 'though a big book, it was not a great one.'¹⁰ However it is important to acknowledge Vaughan's place in the Thomist revival then taking place.

John Cuthbert Hedley (1837-1915) of St. Laurence's joined the staff at Belmont in 1862 as Prefect of Studies, Professor of Philosophy and Librarian. As Dom Bernard Green notes, 'Hedley found at Belmont his chance, indeed his duty, to immerse himself in theological reading.'¹¹ This reading found its fruit in Hedley's lectures, and in his encouragement of his students. One of them, Dom Ildephonsus Cummins suggested that Hedley

was an inspirer and guide in all studious and literary pursuits. Ever accessible to the young men and more sympathetic than the junior Master, he was the novices' companion on their long walks...His lectures were carefully prepared and he allowed a freedom of discussion in his classes which made for interested and stimulated thought; there was little formality but much discussion.¹²

⁷ Downside Archives MS 447 p.87

⁸ N.Sweeney, *Sancta Sophia: or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation... written by the late Ven. Father Augustine Baker* (London, 1876)

⁹ *Downside Review* 1883, p.7

¹⁰ *Downside Review* 1914, p.186

¹¹ B.Green, 'Cuthbert Hedley 1837-1915', *EBC History Commission Papers*, 1987

¹² Belmont Archives, MS 696, p.5

Likewise, Cardinal Gasquet, Hedley's most distinguished pupil, recognised that at Belmont, Hedley 'by his teaching and example of work infused an enthusiasm into the minds of some of us which we can never forget.'¹³ It was also in these years at Belmont that Hedley began his association with *The Dublin Review*, and Cummins recalled that Hedley's articles were read in the Belmont refectory and 'formed subjects of discussion, of admiration, sometimes of criticism in the calefactory or class-rooms'.¹⁴

It has to be remembered that the 1860s were years of controversy, leading up to the First Vatican Council. Articles written on papal infallibility by Newman and W.G Ward, the ultramontane editor of the *Dublin Review* roused intense interest among the studious juniors at Belmont.¹⁵ The *Dublin Review* was also notable for providing a forum for students at Belmont to practice the craft of scholarship in the form of articles and reviews, especially in the 1870s and 1880s. Whilst a number of English Benedictines are credited as contributors in these years, it is difficult to name all those who wrote because of the anonymity of many of the early articles and reviews.

With the arrival of Dom Wilfrid Raynal (1830-1904) of St Gregory's as Prior in 1873 a different atmosphere began to predominate at Belmont. Cummins contends that

Raynal seemed jealous of the influence the younger professors in the house gained over their hearers and directed that each official should confine himself strictly to his own department—this did not conduce to scholastic efficiency ; it checked enthusiasm and personal interests; the authorised text-books were to be strictly followed , general reading was discouraged, the library was put out of bounds for juniors and a small selection of approved books was offered as their intellectual *pabulum*. Belmont became more of foreign seminary, less of an English University...¹⁶

Yet, despite this harsh judgement on Raynal, the years of his priorship did see an increased number of monks embarking on further studies at Belmont, the birth of new ideas to be pursued, and the first sparks of enthusiasm for scholarship among a number of monks.

FURTHER STUDIES AT BELMONT

Preaching at the Golden Jubilee celebrations at Belmont in 1910, Cummins declared that through the influence of Belmont –

a literary tradition [was] fostered that was novel in the Congregation... a goodly number of volumes have been produced this past half-century, either in Belmont days or under Belmont influence.¹⁷

However, before exploring the development of further studies at Belmont, one needs to mention the library there, which provided an essential in-house resource for both professors and students. Belmont's library had been enriched since its foundation by gifts

¹³ J.A.Wilson, *The Life of Bishop Hedley* (London 19130), p.57

¹⁴ J.I.Cummins, 'Canon Hedley at Belmont', in *Ampleforth Journal*, 21 (1916) 171

¹⁵ Belmont, MS 696 p.5

¹⁶ *ibid.* pp.13-15

¹⁷ *Hereford Journal*, 10 September 1910

from other monasteries and from the mission. The library's wealth of resources was to be reflected in the high level of published work produced by the monastery's scholars.

The course of studies at Belmont is to be found summarised in the volumes of the *Index Analyticus Studiorum*. An examination of these reveals details not just about the basic programme offered but also illustrates the interests of individual students who presented papers or discourses on topics which they later developed into major works of scholarship. To take one example of this progress: the young Cuthbert Butler working in 1879 at Belmont on a paper entitled 'Was St. Augustine of Canterbury a Benedictine?' which formed the basis of later articles in the *Downside Review* and was to be incorporated into Butler's *Benedictine Monachism* (London 1919). Butler attributed the beginnings of his scholarly interest to the stimulus and regularity of life he found at Belmont. He later wrote

I always look back on that Lent of 1879 when he began working on St. Augustine of Canterbury as one of the happiest periods of my life. We used to have long afternoons from 2 to 7, and I used regularly to have a couple of hours digging by myself in the garden, then half an hour at Cassian, and the rest of the evening with Mabillon and the Bollandists. I felt I was living a monastic life.¹⁸

SPIRITUALITY

The later nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in the classics of Christian Spirituality, and monastic scholars played their part in this. At the newly founded Cistercian monastery of Mount St. Bernard's (1835), Father Robert (Henry) Smith and Father Austin (Henry) Collins translated and edited many classics of spirituality, which included the works of John Cassian, Climacus, St. Bernard, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great, as well as early Cistercian spiritual writers. Part of this revival was a special interest shown in the works of the English mystics. Thus, Father Collins translated the *Cloud of Unknowing* in 1871, and added to it the English Benedictine Augustine Baker's notes and preface. Collins later published, in 1877 Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and the *Life of Dame Gertrude More*.¹⁹ It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that Belmont provided the setting for a parallel interest among the English Benedictines who were similarly trying to re-establish their spiritual roots, notably through a study of the teachings of Father Augustine Baker.²⁰

Baker was a revered yet controversial figure in the history of the Congregation, principally because of his belief that the mission was not an essential feature of the life of an English Benedictine monk. His writings had been vindicated by the 1633 General Chapter, which according to Dr. David Lunn 'made monastic life the essence of the Congregation, and the mission accidental.'²¹ However, except among the nuns, his works had

¹⁸ Downside 3019, MS A p.9

¹⁹ See Hilary Costello O.Cist., 'Nineteenth Century English Cistercian Spirituality', *EBC History Commission Papers* 1982.

²⁰ D. Augustine Baker, monk of St Laurence's, 1575-1641. See www.augustine-baker.org.uk

²¹ D. Lunn, *The English Benedictines 1540-1688* (London 1980), p.161

become unfashionable throughout the enlightened eighteenth century. At Belmont, however, a Baker revival had commenced soon after its foundation, when Father Baker's works were recommended by the monastery's first junior master, Dom Laurence Shepherd and its first novice master, Dom Alphonsus Morrall.²² This revived interest in Baker was given keener focus by the publication in 1876 of a new edition of *Sancta Sophia* by the first Prior of Belmont, Dom Norbert Sweeney,²³ which was favourably reviewed by Bishop Hedley in the *Dublin Review*.²⁴ Dom Cuthbert Butler remembered that his novice Master at Belmont, Dom Cuthbert Doyle²⁵ took up the work and recommended it to his novices.²⁶ In his review of October 1876 Bishop Hedley expressed the hope that his fellow Benedictines would gain some experience of contemplative prayer as set out by Baker in places such as Belmont, for contemplation ought not just to be the preserve of enclosed nuns. Hedley observed that

Baker is writing for solitary, silent, interior souls, such as are to be found in the cloisters of the enclosed orders of religious women, and such as ought to be the most religious men, at least through the facilities afforded them by the considerable space they spend within their noviciates and houses of study.²⁷

Despite this mid-nineteenth renaissance of Bakerism, it was not until the early twentieth century that serious study of Baker began. In the early years of this century, two old Belmont students published editions of Baker's work. The Laurentian Ildephonsus Cummins edited Baker's *Custodia Cordis*, a treatise on mortification, in 1907,²⁸ and the same year, Dom Benedict Weld-Blundell, a monk of Fort Augustus, edited an abridgement of *Sancta Sophia*.²⁹

Not all students at Belmont in this period, however, went on to devote themselves to the study of monastic spirituality. According to Dom Geoffrey Scott,

Belmont sought to revive Augustine Baker's lessons on the contemplative life and combine them with Francis de Sales's pastoral guidance for busy parish priests. Cuthbert Hedley... was the main inspiration behind this attempt to combine English Benedictine monastic and missionary spirituality.³⁰

Hedley's pupil and protege in promoting the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales was to be Dom Benedict Mackey (1846 -1906) of St. Edmund's, a student at Belmont from 1864-66. Mackey's famous 'library' of the works of St. Francis de Sales³¹ was edited 'under the

²² D.Alphonsus Morrall (G) 1825-1911; D.Laurence Shepherd (L) 1826-85

²³ See note 9.

²⁴ *Dublin Review* 27 (1876) 337-367

²⁵ D.Cuthbert Doyle (E) 1842-1932.

²⁶ Downside 3019 MS A p.6

²⁷ *Dublin Review* 27 (1876) 353

²⁸ *Custodia Cordis; a treatise on mortification*, revised & edited by Dom Ildephonsus Cummins (St Louis, Mo. 1907)

²⁹ B.Weld-Blundell, *Contemplative Prayer* (London 1907).

³⁰ G.Scott, 'The English Benedictine Mission and Missions', in D.Farmer (ed.), *Benedict's Disciples* (2nd ed. London 1995)

direction of Bishop Hedley.³¹ Possibly St. Francis was chosen because in 1877 Pope Pius IX had made Francis de Sales a doctor of the Church.

Besides Hedley, another Benedictine bishop was the inspiration behind another another important work emanating from Belmont. Dom Jerome Vaughan,³² the brother of Prior Bede Vaughan of Belmont, was a Professor there and, ‘at the suggestion of Bishop Ullathorne... edited in 1874 with notes and preface *The Spiritual Conflict and Conquest*,³³ a popular seventeenth-century devotional work which went through two editions in a year.³⁴

Dom Cuthbert Butler seems to have derived his interest in the *Imitation of Christ* from his own family, but there was an additional reason for his interest, that is, the contemporary controversy then raging about the book’s authorship. The dispute whether the author was the Benedictine John Gersen had involved English Benedictines for centuries: Dom Augustine Clark concludes:

Today the question [of the authorship] may seem of minor importance, but in the 1880s it was both a matter of pride for the Orders concerned in the controversy and also a possible source of income...In 1872 a new edition of Richard Whytford’s translation of the *Imitation* was published by Dom Wilfrid Raynal, soon to be Prior of Belmont.³⁵ Raynal refused to give a judgement on the issue of the authorship, adding in a note ‘the editor has carefully avoided a topic which might give rise to useless discussion’.³⁶ Nevertheless the authorship must have been discussed at Belmont and Butler would have been aware of the three claimants to authorship some years before his father developed an interest in the issue.³⁷

SCRIPTURE

The advance in biblical criticism in the nineteenth century had principally been provoked by the new scientific discoveries, and had largely been a Protestant affair. However in the early part of the century new theological faculties were founded in Germany at Tübingen and Munich, where Catholic scholars, like their Protestant counterparts, found themselves embroiled in a debate over biblical inspiration, a debate which had been fuelled principally by Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Amongst English scholars who cut their scholarly teeth on the question of biblical inspiration was Dom Aidan Hewlett 38of Downside, Professor of Scripture at Belmont from 1888 to 1894 who began serious scripture study in the 1880s, although in 1879 he had preached a sermon at Belmont on ‘scripture and

³¹ B.Mackey ed., *The Library of St Francis de Sales* (4 vols, London 1884-88)

³² D. Jerome Vaughan (G) 1841-96 was the first leader of the new foundation at Fort Augustus.

³³ *The Spiritual Conflict and Conquest* (London 1874). The treatise is cited as written by Dom J.Castaniza, but recent research has shown it to be the work of Lorenzo Scupoli.

³⁴ *Downside Review* 1896 p.294

³⁵ *Of the Imitation of Christ, as translated out of Latin by Richard Whytford anno MDLVI*. Edited into modern English with an historical Introduction by Wilfrid Raynal OSB (London 1872).

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ D.Augustine Clark, *Work in progress for a biography of Cuthbert Butler*, ch.4

tradition.’³⁸ Howlett was author of many important scriptural articles in the *Dublin Review*³⁹, including one entitled ‘Some recent theories of Inspiration,’⁴⁰ in which he warned: though no doubt, freer scope is permitted to Catholics in these days, in discussing questions of [biblical] authorship and authenticity, still such liberty must be used with prudence and caution. Nor is it right to set aside an opinion, handed down from the earliest ages of the Church, without clear and cogent necessity.⁴¹

However, the days of what Howlett called ‘freer scope’ for Catholic biblical scholars were soon to come to a close with the publication of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Proventissimus Deus* in 1893 which attempted to limit the boundaries of Catholic biblical scholarship. Censorship increased under his successor Pius X who had to deal with Modernism and effectively gave the impression that serious biblical scholarship was tantamount to heresy. And it was in the midst of this climate of suspicion that another Gregorian scholar and Belmont student, Dom Edmund Ford⁴² added his voice to the debate. Ford raised his head above the parapet in 1905 to criticise many recent theories of inspiration complaining that many of them worked from preconceived ideas of how God must or must not work.⁴³ Whilst it is important to note that English Benedictines dabbled in the field of biblical scholarship, their involvement was no different from other Catholic scholars in an unhappy controversy; no more than a witness to a slow moving debate. Two further Gregorian scholars who had had a Belmont training should be mentioned here by way of conclusion. Dom Vincent Dolman contributed articles on New Testament subjects in the *Dublin Review*, and Dom Hugh Connolly of Downside was a Hebraicist who later became a distinguished Syriac scholar.⁴⁴

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

A rather more successful and less controversial avenue of research for members of the Congregation in this period was Church history. Significant names here are Dom Wilfrid Raynal, Doni Dunstan Breen, Dom Gilbert Dolan and Dom Cuthbert Butler, all Gregorians, but the great luminary was another Gregorian, Dom Aidan Gasquet,⁴⁵ about whom much has already been written. Gasquet seems to have gained an interest in historical study from Hedley whilst at Belmont in the late 1860s where he wrote a paper on Denis the Aereopagite, but did not begin any serious academic work until 1880, during his first priorship at Downside. Gasquet himself notes in his autobiography, ‘We were so busy

³⁸ D.Aidan Howlett (G) 1856-1909.

³⁹ See, for example, ‘The Higher Criticism and Archaeology’, *Dublin Review*, July 1894; *The Book of Daniel* July 1895; *Biblical Science and the Bible* (April 1896)

⁴⁰ *Dublin Review*, 113 (1893)

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.543

⁴² D.Edmund Ford (G) 1851-1930

⁴³ Abbot Edmund Ford, ‘Inspiration,’ *Tablet* 105 (1905) pp. 44-45, 83-84, 124-26, 163-64

⁴⁴ Dom Hugh Connolly(G) 1872-1948.

⁴⁵ Dom (later Cardinal) Francis Aidan Gasquet (G) 1846-1929

teaching in the school that at first we had no time to continue our studies.⁴⁶ Another less famous, but by no means less significant historical scholar in the Congregation of this period was Prior Wilfrid Raynal of Belmont, whose chief writings were on Anglican Orders in the earlier days of that controversy.⁴⁷ His most important work was on the *Ordinal* of Edward VI, which Abbot Cuthbert Butler later described as ‘remarkable as forestalling the lines on which the Papal decision on Anglican orders was based in 1896’.⁴⁸

Dom Dunstan Breen⁴⁹ was yet another Gregorian who contributed to the debate. He had been one of Belmont’s first students. His principal works were *Anglican Orders: are they valid?* (1877, reprinted 1885), and *Anglican Jurisdiction: is it valid?* (1880). Cuthbert Butler cast Breen more in the vein of controversialist, rather than historian, commenting that he ‘dearly loved a newspaper controversy’.⁵⁰ The most important English Benedictine contribution was ‘Bishop Lightfoot and the early Roman See,’ published in 1893 in the *Dublin Review*⁵¹, of which David Knowles was later to remark,

At the time, when the study of Christian origins was still a new thing, and when the greatest works of Battifol and Duchesne had not yet appeared, it shows very great insight that a student at Downside, himself unacquainted with English university circles, should have so unerringly assessed the value of the work of Lightfoot and Wescott, and while appreciating its significance, should have been capable of re-assembling the evidence provided by their scholarship and of interpreting it in another sense.⁵²

Building on his research into Christian antiquity, Butler laboured during the last decade of the century on early Egyptian monasticism, spending twelve years on his book *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*⁵³

In the early twentieth century, the flow of Belmont and Downside historians was unabated. Like Gasquet, time has not been kind to the work of the well-known Henry Norbert Birt.⁵⁴ As the late David Lunn commented,

His two-volume *Benedictine Pioneers in Australia* (1911), though a useful quarry, has largely been superseded. As for his book on the Elizabethan religious settlement, it was perhaps too polemical to last.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Downside A.3.f , Gasquet papers MS 902 p 44.

⁴⁷ W.Raynal, *Letter on the validity of Anglican Orders* (London 1870); *Historical and Doctrinal aspects of the Lincoln Judgement* (London 1890)

⁴⁸ Cuthbert Butler, ‘Literary output of the century,’ *Downside Review* (1914) p.185.

⁴⁹ Dom Dunstan Breen (G) 1841-1911.

⁵⁰ Butler, *op cit*, p.188.

⁵¹ *Dublin Review* 113 (1893) 497-514.

⁵² Dom David Knowles, ‘Abbot Butler: A Memoir,’ *Downside Review* (July 1934) p.386.

⁵³ Volume VI of *Texts and Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1898).

⁵⁴ D.Norbert Birt (G) 1861-1919.

⁵⁵ Lunn’s Introduction to the 1970 reprint of H.N Birt, *Obit Book of the English Benedictines* (orig. Edinburgh 1913, repr.London 1970).

Nevertheless, Birt is an important member of this group of Downside scholars who were committed to putting in to practice the ideals of the Maurists, which included Dom Ethelbert Home and Dom Benedict Kuypers.

PHILOSOPHY

In the middle of the nineteenth century there had been a revival of study of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, which had been taken up by the Jesuits and the Dominicans. One of the important Italian figures in the revival was, however, the Benedictine Abbate Bianchi of the monastery at Parma, to which the Laurentian Austin Bury had been sent in the 1840s. Bury thus became an apostle of Thomism in England, and found a keen disciple in the young Cuthbert Hedley, one of his students at Ampleforth. Thus when Hedley was sent to Belmont as Professor of Philosophy in 1862 he set about the task of reforming the course in accordance with the new ideas. This reformation met with the approval of Prior Bede Vaughan who contributed to it by his two volume life of Aquinas in 1871. One of Hedley's first students of philosophy, Dom Austin O'Neill⁵⁶ went on to become professor of Philosophy and Junior Master at Belmont and later in 1888, President of the Congregation. O'Neill was by all accounts a brilliant teacher, who had a great influence on the young Cuthbert Butler.⁵⁷ O'Neill remained a convinced Thomist under the tutelage of Bede Vaughan in the early 1860s. His confrere, Cuthbert Doyle, observed that at this time 'Vaughan was not a Thomist but rather an eclectic philosopher, and in consequence his lessons did not find favour with the pupil who was afterwards to occupy his chair'.⁵⁸ It is a mark of O'Neil's ability that he went straight from teaching at Belmont to be President of the Congregation, there becoming embroiled in the long and acrimonious battle over Congregational reform.

THE END OF THE CENTURY

In conclusion, the most notable effect of Belmont and the development of further studies upon the Congregation was to change perceptions of the nature of English Benedictinism. Abbot Cummins believed that 'the whole Belmont influence has been the making of our Congregation.'⁵⁹ Belmont certainly provided intellectual breadth in an atmosphere charged with reform and revival, but more than that it provided a battle-ground for ideas within the Congregation, and ironically therein lay the seeds of its decay as a Common Novitiate and Common House of Studies. It seemed to enshrine two ideals: on the one hand, the ideal of a centralised religious congregation of the Counter Reformation, and on the other, the development of conventual life free from the distractions of external apostolic work. Thus for the 'missionary party' in the reform movement, Belmont, with its bishop and cathedral chapter, became the symbol of the Congregation's unity, and it was seen to play a central

⁵⁶ Dom Austin (later Bishop) O'Neill (E) 1841-1911.

⁵⁷ Downside, Abbot Bnino Hicks MS p.10.

⁵⁸ *Downside Review* (1912) p.8.

⁵⁹ *Hereford Journal*, 10 September 1910.

role in mainstream English Catholicism, whilst for the reforming or ‘monastic’ party, it stimulated moves for the transformation of the Congregation into a collection of independent monasteries. In general, those who were fired with zeal for research and further study at Belmont, especially the early Gregorians, symbolised the ideals of the Maurists, in their desire to restore a more traditionally Benedictine way of life, with the emphasis on intellectual, rather than pastoral work. For Abbot Basil Whelan,

It was the Belmont training, coupled with the interplay of minds and characters rendered possible there, that gave birth to and nourished the reforming zeal of what came to be known as the ‘Downside school.’⁶⁰

Whilst for the most part these protagonists were Gregorians, it would be misleading to suggest that their ideals were not shared by some Laurentians or Edmundians. Belmont had done its work well, for despite the fact that the majority of Ampleforth and Douai monks favoured the Mission, there were individuals who had been trained at Belmont and pursued further studies who favoured its demise. An interesting illustration of this is provided by one of Douai’s scholars, Dom Benedict Mackey, who went on to become Procurator in Curia, the EBC representative in Rome. Writing to Bishop Austin O’Neill on Ascension Day 1897 he declared,

We shall never be able to keep much monastic spirit or do true monastic work as long as we keep the missionary system...yet at present our missionary side is perhaps our best side-some day however the Church will permit Benedictines to withdraw from missionary life as a system and I think it will then be best to do so. We shall then be able to have real quiet and seclusion for a considerable number and our true and Benedictine life and influence will begin.⁶¹

Already in 1890 Rome had forced through radical changes in the Congregation’s Constitutions, sweeping away the two missionary provinces of the North and South and placing the missions under the control of the monasteries. Then in 1899 came the bull *Diu Quidem* which established the abbatial system, elevating the three priories of Downside, Ampleforth and Douai into autonomous abbeys and reducing significantly the powers of the President. Thus did Belmont play a major part in the movement for reform within the Congregation.

A second consequence of Belmont’s influence was is the impetus it gave to providing an improved course of studies for the monks of the Congregation. This is a recurring demand in the deliberations of General Chapters. In 1870 a report on the studies at Belmont was sent to Chapter with some suggestions for improvement. It included proposals for a longer course of theology, which would entail a monk spending three years at Belmont, then returning to his monastery for two years during which time he would study part-time, before returning to Belmont for a final two years. Although General Chapter approved the changes and gave ‘power to the President and Regimen to see that what was best should be done quickly and efficaciously’,⁶² the suggestions do not appear to have been implemented, probably because the urgent need for teachers in the schools attached to the monasteries made it impossible for an adequate in-house theological formation to be offered. The 1878 General Chapter was informed that the provision of studies on the monasteries was ‘far

⁶⁰ *Annals of the EBC*, I pp.106-08.

⁶¹ Douai Abbey Archives, VIII.A, Mackey

⁶² Whelan *op.cit.* p.307

from good, save perhaps at Ampleforth under Dom Austin Bury,⁶³ and in 1883 General Chapter ordered that ‘there should be two courses at Belmont, either two years of philosophy and one of theology or a year of *litterae humaniores* and two years of philosophy.’⁶⁴ Furthermore, it was decreed that in each monastery there should be a course of theology according to the system of St. Thomas, and each monastery should have a capable professor of Theology.

However, the most important decree of the 1883 General Chapter was that which said that promising students were to be sent to Rome and ‘live there in a hospice and devote themselves to theological study’.⁶⁵ The three men chosen for this purpose were DD Edmund Ford of Downside, Joseph McConnell of Douai, and Ildephonsus Cummins of Ampleforth. Cummins⁶⁶ outlines the story of this venture and provides some interesting details and amusing cameos of the Edmundian President General, Anselm O’Gorman.⁶⁷ The plan was to establish an English Benedictine house in Rome, to engage in advanced studies and make contacts for the new foundation. There had been support for such a scheme as early as 1842. Cummins complained that O’Gorman refused to live with the students, and would not take rooms in any religious or clerical house:

he had lodgings with one of the smart photographers of the city and the salon in which he received visitors was adorned with handsome portraits of prominent Roman ladies. He did not wear the habit but would run into his bedroom and hastily don it if more important visitors were to be met. With all his intimate acquaintance with Roman ways and language he seemed shy and diffident, almost apologetic for himself and his Congregation...! have seen him when he took us to meet Cardinals, sitting shyly on the edge of his chair and hardly daring to speak above a whisper; yet he was ! Abbot of St. Albans and President of an important and ancient Congregation of Benedictines.⁶⁸

Although Cummins and his associates at Rome made no attempt to take Roman degrees, he believed that they both gained valuable experience and insights there. He blamed O’Gorman and the Regimen for failing to seize ‘great opportunities’ in Rome at this time, such as the offer of the Church of San Silvestro and for giving no encouragement to himself and his companions. Although Cummins, Ford and McConnell ‘were soon recalled to England as failures,’ Cummins believed that the expedition to inaugurate higher studies for the Congregation ‘turned the Pope’s attention to the matter and led directly to the establishment of the new international Benedictine college of Sant’Anselmo.’

By 1900 the foundation of Sant’Anselmo, coupled with the new Benedictine houses of study at Oxford and Cambridge gave members of the Congregation a greater variety of

⁶³ J.McCann, *Annals of the English Benedictine Congregation 1850-1901*, unpublished typescript (1942) pp.168-69

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, and Downside Archives, ‘Report on the Course of Studies prescribed in Chapter xvii of the *Constitutions*’, 21 November 1883.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.211.

⁶⁶ *EBC Notes 1870- 1900*, Belmont archives MS 698.

⁶⁷ D.Anselm O’Gorman (E) 1833-1901.

⁶⁸ Belmont Abbey Archives MS 698 pp xvii-xviii. For the 1842 scheme, see Ampleforth Archives JX38, *Acta Capituli Generalis*, vol II, p.466.

opportunities to fulfill one of the principles of *Religiosus Ordo*, in which Pope Leo XIII declared:

To the field of writing, in which the Benedictine Order throughout all ages has laboured with such renown, the English Congregation, with its studies stimulated and carried to a higher level, will be able to devote itself with honour and great usefulness: for writings of learned character and literary merit do much good in England.⁶⁹ The marriage between Belmont and Oxford was consummated in 1901 through the appointment of Father Edmund Matthews, the first graduate monk of Oxford since the Reformation, as the Congregation's supervisor of the students at Belmont as well as superior of the new house at Oxford.

⁶⁹ Quoted in B. Whelan, *The History of Belmont Abbey* (London 1959), p.97.