

LAURENTIAN REACTIONS

TO DIU QUIDEM

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AN ATTEMPT TO ASSESS the reactions of the monks of St Laurence's to the promulgation of *Diu Quidem* by Pope Leo XIII may usefully begin with recording the reactions to that event in the publicly published works of two members of the conventus, both of which may make reasonable claims to express the official reaction of the conventus.

The first to appear was an article in the recently founded *Ampleforth Journal*. In an article simply entitled 'Ampleforth Abbey' Dom Ildephonsus Cummins, a Laurentian now serving on the mission in Cumberland, reported the event to the readers of the *Journal*. He began with an opening whose understatement, whether ironic or eirenic, must be apparent to any reader even slightly aware of the disputes of the preceding years:

The raising of Ampleforth to the rank and style of an Abbey is an event which calls for some notice in the pages of this *Journal*, if only as altering the name by which the College has hitherto been known, and as finally closing a question upon which some difference has existed.¹

Cummins proceeds to explain that the changes made as a result of the Papal decision had been recognized as inevitable: the customs which had grown up in the Congregation were peculiarities which existed as a result of the exiled and missionary status of the Congregation. They had become anachronisms, and the Congregation was now returning to the main stream of monastic usage. Cummins is, of course, aware that the change had been the subject of considerable controversy. His reflection on this is interesting:

Whether this is altogether desirable need no longer be discussed. 'Roma locuta est; causa finita!' The honour comes to our Houses now directly from the Holy See, in most gracious guise and with unstinted meed of praise; - it is none the less welcome for being unsolicited, or even deprecated in the past!²

The mention of Roman authority is an indication of one of the most important factors that went to make up the Laurentian response to the Bull. The influence of Roman authority will be examined further; at this point one need only notice that Cummins appeals to it as closing the argument. In the changed circumstances of our own day it is worth recalling that for all the participants in the dispute the authority of the Holy See was something taken more seriously than it is today. Cummins attempts to sugar the pill by a short historical review, in which he compares the situation of the monastic communities to that of the English Church as a whole:

They were content to be monasteries ruled over by simple Priors whilst they were exiles in foreign lands, or 'until the Lord had turned back the captivity of Sion.' So long as England was lost to Christendom and its Catholic Faith was suppressed, so long as no Hierarchy remained to rule its ruined Churches, it did not beseem religious houses or their superiors to deck themselves with titles or robes of glory. Essentially an hierarchical body the English Benedictines are bound by many ties to the episcopate, ties which they at least are proud to recognize.³

Cummins develops the image in even more purple prose:

And so, during the long widowhood of the English Church, its chief religious houses were content to put aside ornaments of rank, and to be vested in weeds of mourning.⁴

¹ *Ampleforth Journal*, 5 (1900) 138-142

² *Ibid.* page 139.

³ *Ibid.* page 139.

⁴ *Ibid.* page 140

Now, though, the monasteries are described as returning to their rightful rank as Abbeys. Cummins notes the antiquarian fitness of this, which he links both to the conventual buildings at Dieulouard and the associations with Westminster. Cummins does not, though, seek to rest his case on the antiquarian argument:

If Ampleforth has now become an Abbey, the honour is conferred not so much for its historic past, as for its position and its future prospects. The stability and prosperity of the House, the number of its children, the work they have achieved whether in community and college, or in numerous and widely scattered parishes, all these, far more than archaeological pretensions entitle St. Lawrence's to a rank which in other times and circumstances it never claimed.⁵

The second major Laurentian reaction to *Diu Quidem* is found in Dom Cuthbert Almond's *History of Ampleforth Abbey*, which was published in 1903. Almond's account of *Diu Quidem* begins with a lengthy quotation from a sermon preached in 1886 by Bishop Hedley, who was himself a Laurentian and had remained in close contact with the community since his elevation to the episcopate. The sermon traced the history of the Ampleforth community since its settlement in Yorkshire, and celebrates the order brought to the English Church by the Bull *Romanos Pontifices*. The historical perspective is important. Almond seeks to compare the two developments and to present them both as improvements. He reviews the history of the Provincial system, commenting that:

It was a system designed, and admirably designed, to stimulate and develop personal effort, suited to the days when safety lay in remaining unnoticed, and strength in offering no point of attack; when mobility, adaptability and individualism were necessary tactics, and any close and evident organization would have been quickly broken up. The arrangement was thoroughly Benedictine in so far as it was an adaptation of the best means to the end in view – the conversion of England.⁶

Almond hastens to point out that although this may have been within the scope of the Rule of St Benedict it was an abnormal departure 'from traditions and formulas almost as sacred and time-honoured as the Holy Rule itself'. He describes the Benedictine norm with the aid of a military metaphor:

Their normal place is now and has long been in the solid phalanx of the army of Christ. They man its walls and keep its castles; they fortify its outposts. Their monasteries are the strong places to hold the enemy in check and to secure the positions that are won.

Almond is less specific about how these changes have come about. His account of the historical background of the changes relies heavily on the historical preamble to *Religiosus Ordo*, which he seeks to present as the approved history of the Congregation. He does seek to assert that the changes that have taken place had their beginning in England not in Rome.

They had been discussed for many years and were believed by some, who were neither innovators nor enthusiasts, to be inevitable. But it is doubtful if the English monks would ever have dared to introduce so complete a reversion to Pre-Reformation ways if left to themselves.⁷

Almond suggests that the monks felt relief when the Holy See took the matter out of their hands, and solved the question with the promulgation of *Diu Quidem*.

The relief that was felt may well have been shared by Almond. The reader of his history feels that he is happier describing the splendours of the new monastery building than recounting the constitutional alterations made while the building was being constructed. He describes the key moves in the historical process in the words of others: the authority of a Papal Bull need not be underlined, but it is important to remember that Hedley had great status in the minds of Laurentians, and his views were sought and attended to on many matters connected with his monastery. At the end of his history Almond comments:

⁵ Ibid. page 141

⁶ *History of Ampleforth Abbey*, pages 371-372

⁷ Ibid. page 373

As English missionaries, our fathers of old made themselves as little distinguishable as possible from their zealous secular brethren. They fought in the ranks under the common flag. Now the monks have been marked out for a separate service, not a higher or more distinguished one, but more distinct and characteristic.⁸

Almond's tone is one of wistful regret at the passing of the days of anonymity. He accepts it, but takes pains to support it with as many authorities as he can muster. It is a different tone to that of Cummins, and although the two were close in age⁹ their outlook was markedly different. Cummins clearly supports the reform, but Almond's reliance on authority in the attempt to create a publicly acceptable consensus view makes it difficult to discern what his own opinions really were.

Neither, however, embodies the reaction conventionally ascribed to the monks of Ampleforth, despite the fact that the reactions of both are contained in semi-official publications. This view is usually said to view *Diu Quidem* as a 'revolution', which 'changes the obligation of profession'. Such a view was expressed in a letter¹⁰ written to Dom Bede Prest, a distinguished senior Laurentian who was Cathedral Prior of Winchester and parish priest of Leyland and who had been one of the leaders of those who had campaigned against any changes in the Constitutions and structures of the Congregation. The need for caution in embracing the conventional view of the period of change is, however, highlighted by the fact that the author of these words was Dom Alphonsus Morrall, a senior Gregorian resident at Downside when he expressed these sentiments.

In fairness to the reputation of the Gregorian community, one should at once say that Prest would have agreed with every word Morrall wrote. Surveying these texts, however, it is clear that one cannot speak in simple terms of a single common Laurentian reaction. There is, rather, a diversity of opinion. Within all this there is perhaps only one common thread. This is the opinion that *Diu Quidem* is the final settlement of the question. Before it there was room for discussion and debate, now that opportunity exists no longer. With this in mind, an assessment of the pattern of reactions to the Bull must look back into the history of its formation, and try to grasp the reactions of Laurentians to the issues and questions it raises. The long process out of which the Bull emerged offers insights into the reasons that underlie these reactions.

Firstly, the reactions of those who opposed constitutional reform of the Congregation must be examined. These views were held, in closely similar form, by most of the senior members of the Congregation. Abbot Snow, who was the leader of the opposition party, was Provincial of the Northern Province, and his allies included many others of those who held office in the Congregation. Snow himself stood at the centre of a hard core of opposition. This opposition was not confined to the members of one house (Snow himself was a Gregorian), and was recognised by others to be a cohesive group. President O'Neill commented to his Roman representative Abbot Bernard Smith¹¹ that if the reform required by *Religiosus Ordo* were to be carried out properly the old fathers should be kept out of the process whereby it was to be done. There were, he said, three or four who would use every stratagem to wreck it.¹² Snow was once again linked with the opposition in a warning that Prior Burge passed on to the Abbot President from Dom Wilfrid Sumner. Snow, Austin Bury and Wilfrid Brown (both senior Laurentians) and Romuald Turner (an Edmundian) had met in Warrington; Burge commented 'mischief is brewing'.¹³

⁸ Ibid. page 379

⁹ Cummins was clothed in 1866, Almond in 1871.

¹⁰ Prest papers, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 257.

¹¹ Smith was not a monk of the Congregation, despite the fact that he acted as its Procurator in Curia.

¹² Letter from O'Neill to Smith, 26 February 1891, in St Anselmo archives, copy in Ampleforth Abbey Archives, BX 22.

¹³ Letter from Burge to O'Neill, 20 July 1891, Ampleforth Abbey Archives DX 69.

The grounds upon which the reforms were opposed were principally three. The first was attachment to the work of the missions, and a strong sense that the work of the missions was and ought to remain the primary task of the Congregation. The second was a sense that the reforms were an alteration of the obligations that each monk had accepted on his profession, and as such ought not to be altered without the consent of each monk. The third was a desire to preserve the unity of the Congregation. Each of these objections demands further examination.

An early contribution to the controversy makes the importance of the missions clear. Bishop Hedley wrote an important memorandum opposing the placing of the missionary fathers under the head of their monastery.¹⁴ This memorandum was read out by Abbot Bury at the General Chapter of 1889, and well expresses the priority given by the opposition to the work of the missions. Hedley realised that the essence of the family scheme (as it was called) required men to live in monasteries, and that if they were to do so they would necessarily become involved in the day-to-day work of the monastery. If they also had parochial responsibilities they would belong neither to mission nor monastery. Hedley is vehement in his opposition to the idea of 'men working in the school for a week and then going to a mission for the weekend.' The weekend would, he says, be an outing. His reasons for objecting to this are illuminating. This would, in his opinion, lead to a lack of stability in mission staff, which would be undesirable, not because of the need for stability in the life of a Benedictine monk, but because of the need of the missions for 'continuous and ongoing work'.

Hedley's defence of the needs of the missions finds countless echoes in the correspondence of the members of the opposition. For them it is axiomatic that the interests of the missions are in the words of senior Laurentian Dom Paulinus Wilson 'much larger than those of the monasteries.'¹⁵ Perhaps the most potent symbol of this attachment to the missions was the missionary oath. Those who objected to its abolition saw clearly that such abolition was part of a programme of constitutional reform, which would lead to the structures that ensured the primacy of the missions in English Benedictine life being changed.

It should not be thought that the opposition to the attachment of missions to monasteries sprang from a deep-seated objection to all monastic values. This was the view taken by some. One monk complained to Archbishop Vaughan (soon to be Cardinal), attacking the level of monastic observance on the parishes. The English monks were more lax than the secular clergy (or at least were indistinguishable from them) and monastic obedience and poverty were at a low ebb. The only remedy for the spirit of liberty and independence that existed was community living, which implies numbers, obedience and poverty.¹⁶

Such concerns find an echo in Bede Prest's proposal to improve monastic discipline on the missions. At the level of the life of the individual missionary he proposes timetables, according to which such things as prayer (he links meditation with visits to the Blessed Sacrament) should be done by all at the same time (though of course all would be separated in their individual parishes). He is not without concern for the communal dimension of the monastic life and proposes to strengthen this by renewal of the office and nature of the *Praepositura*. These were the local divisions of the Provincial organisation, and Prest wanted there to be more of them to allow for more frequent conferences (at least a monthly meeting) and the possibility of a few meetings each year for monks to live together and celebrate the divine office in choir. These proposals show some awareness of the desirability of improving monastic observance, and some realism in recognising that such duties would have to be conventual acts. Even so, Prest's ideas are firmly

¹⁴ Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 87.

¹⁵ Letter from Wilson to Fr Provincial (presumably Abbot Moore), 26 February 1889, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89. Wilson was a Canon of Newport and parish priest of Swansea.

¹⁶ Unsigned and undated memorandum in Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 87; the reference to Archbishop Vaughan ties it to 1892/1893, and the handwriting may be that of the Laurentian Dom Sigebert Cody.

within the existing structure of the primacy of the missions. In the same notes he defends single missions, listing 22 that have developed into plural missions in the last 40 years.¹⁷

Such concerns may suggest that Prest and the unknown complainer are not separated by so wide a gulf as might be supposed; the complainer urges that there should be action to establish communities on the parishes, and sees worry about constitutional reform as a distraction. In fact, however, there is a profound gulf between the idea of monastic discipline held by Prest and that held by the reforming party. Although Prest uses the phrase 'monastic discipline' the content he gives to it is by and large that of the ordinary sacerdotal piety of his day. His programme may well have produced devout and effective missionaries, but they would have been difficult to distinguish from the seculars around them. He interprets monastic within the context of the mission structures he knows, rather than looking to monastic ideals from other sources to renew the Congregation.

The view that priority should be given to the missions was not wholly eradicated from Laurentian minds by *Diu Quidem*. In the process of revising the Constitutions after that Bull Abbot Oswald Smith made one of his few contributions to the process of reform. This was to add, at the stage of the second Schema of the new Constitutions, provision for an economus of the mission fund, who was given the important permission to have a separate banking account. The position of the missions vis-à-vis the monastery was thereby safeguarded, and fears such as those Paulinus Wilson had expressed in the 1890s that the monasteries would seek to appropriate the *Commune Depositum* to their own use¹⁸ were allayed. At a time of expansion, and hence of the need for funds, both in the monasteries and on the mission such a concern must have been close to the hearts of many.

The second point that the opposition felt strongly about was the alteration of the obligations of profession. Dom Alphonsus Morrall's objections to this point have already been observed. The general conception of the vows among the opposition was that of a contract between the individual monk and the Congregation. In accordance with the prevailing contemporary notions of a contract, an alteration to this contract could only be made with the consent of both parties.¹⁹ Dom Maurus Anderson, a Laurentian who was Cathedral Prior of Rochester and parish priest of St Peter's Liverpool, expressed the fear that a change was to be imposed beyond the obligations of profession, and linked this with a desire to be consulted.²⁰ This desire to be consulted has as its obverse the frequent expression of the fear that superiors are trying to push their own will through.

These fears are expressed with particular frequency in the aftermath of President O'Neill's publication of his own draft constitutions.²¹ They are frequently linked to the expression of the desire that all should be consulted. The opposition frequently call for the consultation of missionaries about the changes; Wilson, for example, calls for the summoning of representatives from each of the missionary praeposital districts, to ensure that numerical representation of the missionaries at the 1889 General Chapter would represent their numbers in the Congregation.²² The question of power here is a complex one. The main

¹⁷ Prest's notes for the 1892 General Chapter, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 87.

¹⁸ Burge had sent out a circular about the need for a new monastery building at Ampleforth. Wilson replied to Burge on 3 May 1891, and his reply was reprinted with others in a pamphlet (Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 255). Burge discussed Wilson's opposition in a letter to Dom Ildephonsus Brown, 5 May 1891, in Ampleforth Abbey Archives, DX 69.

¹⁹ PS Atiyah *The Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract*, (Oxford, 1979) illuminates this question.

²⁰ Letter from Anderson to President O'Neill, 19 December 1894, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

²¹ E.g., letters from Wilson to Prest (19 December 1894) and Anderson to Prest (12 January 1895), Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

²² Letter from Wilson to Fr Provincial (Abbot Moore), 26 February 1889, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89.

members of the opposition were all members of the powerful governing elite of the Congregation. Their fear of change may contain elements of fear of an authoritarian new system: the Congregational 'democracy' they seek to preserve was a system they dominated. Their fear of abbatial absolutism was also a fear of loss of personal power. For Laurentians it had an especial point: the Prior of St Laurence's in the nineties was a powerful man whom many accused of absolutist attitudes.

This insistence on consultation could sometimes backfire. There is an amusing letter in which Dom Dunstan Ross (an Edmundian) writes to Prest, who had invited him to join in signing a petition of protest at the President's action in producing his own draft Constitutions, that at least the President has trusted the rank and file. He draws a contrast with the actions of the 'old gang', who in 1889 scorned to let people know what was going on.²³ Ross's concerns were more widely shared: Dom Placid Whittle (a Laurentian) commented on a reference to the 1892 General Chapter Commission draft, and asked how, since he had not seen it, its recommendations could be endorsed unknown?²⁴

This contractual concern is not mere legalism, but rests on deeper theoretical foundations. The case for the reformers depended on the desire to return to the Rule of St Benedict, as it was being lived in the rest of the Benedictine world, and as it had been lived in the pre-Reformation period. This desire was not shared by the opposition. Paulinus Wilson went so far as to deny that the Anglo-Benedictines were indeed Benedictines in the strict sense of the word. In one of the first Laurentian pamphlets on the Reform question he opposed the reform and asserted that there was no continuity between the medieval English Congregation and the Anglo-Benedictines of his own day. The present congregation had received an important initial impulse from the Benedictine ideal, but no longer remained part of the Benedictine family.²⁵

This historical suggestion was not much followed up in the writing of the opposition, but it is worth remarking that President O'Neill thought it worth inserting a historical preamble into *Religiosus Ordo*, which explicitly contradicts Wilson's view. On the wider issue, his opposition to the influence of reforming Benedictine ideals met with much support. Dom Cuthbert Pippet wrote to thank Wilson for his pamphlet, which expressed the 'good old views', and accused the proponents of reform of 'medieval romanticism'.²⁶ In Pippet's eyes, the missions were modern: not old-fashioned as we are apt to see them today.

The third issue that stimulated opposition to the reform focussed on the idea of the increased role for the houses. The question had been aired early in the controversy by Bishop Hedley, who feared that there would be competition between 'house' and 'mission', and that in a reformed Congregation the house would always win: even at the present day, he commented, Provincials had been known to change men for house reasons. The retention of the missionary oath would maintain the unity of the Congregation, and the retention of special superiors for the missions would ensure that that unity was centred on the missions. The existing structure of the missions made it easier to foster Congregational unity. At the time of Prest's petition against the President's draft Constitutions Morrall commented on the difficulty of getting southern missionaries together to sign, and contrasted this with the effective Praeposital structures in the North.²⁷ The North Province had a preponderance of Laurentians, and this may explain why they are found in proportionately greater numbers among the signatories of that petition. Others wished to air this concern. In his comments on the redistribution of the parishes the Laurentian missionary Dom

²³ Letter, Ross to Prest, 31 January 1895, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

²⁴ Letter, Whittle to Prest, 21 September 1895, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

²⁵ His pamphlet is entitled *Remarks on the Troubles which, at this moment, disturb the peace of the Anglo-Benedictine Congregation*. The historical argument is on page 14. (Ampleforth Abbey Archives, A 236, folio 147v).

²⁶ Letter, Pippet to Wilson, 19 July 1889, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89.

²⁷ Letter, Morrall to Prest, 31 December 1894, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

Gregory Smith begins from a desire to preserve the bond of union among the houses. Others had advocated schemes in which the parishes were re-distributed in order to promote administrative convenience, fairness and above all, the opportunity to create house groupings. Smith wants to avoid compact territories, not merely because it would hamper a fair division of the missions, but because it would make the houses of the future too exclusive and would weaken the family ties of the houses one with another.²⁸

This survey of the opposition to the reform measures has focussed on the attitude of Laurentians. It would be a mistake to ignore the significance of members of this party from the other houses: Abbot Snow, the leader of the opposition party, was, as has already been said, a Gregorian, and there were other significant figures from the other houses. It would also be a mistake to ignore the other side of Laurentian opinion. At the very beginning of the controversy President O'Neill had written to Abbot Bernard Smith in Rome:

A very large proportion of the members of the monastery of Ampleforth seems to be in favour of the change.²⁹ O'Neill was speaking of the resident community, and acknowledged that they were led in this by the Prior, Dom Anselm Burge. He was not the only one to see this. Cuthbert Pippet had commented to Paulinus Wilson that he wished to return to the 'happiness of the Congregation previous to the advent of Burge and Cummins from Belmont.'³⁰ Suspicion of Burge could be found in other quarters. Dom Paulinus Hickey expressed to Wilson the view that Burge would prevent his community seeing Wilson's paper, and alleged that he had already done so in the case of a paper by Bede Prest.³¹

Dom Anselm Burge did not have an altogether conventional background. He was a Londoner, not a Lancastrian, and had spent some years working as secretary to Bishop Hedley. Although Hedley was quoted earlier as opposing the family scheme, he was on the whole desirous of move towards a renewed monastic observance. Burge also had (perhaps from Hedley, perhaps from his studies at Belmont) an interest in the wider non-Catholic world. He introduced public examinations into the school at Ampleforth, set up St Benet's Hall and sought to be in friendly contact with the local government education officers. He was one of the leading members of the reform party, occupying a moderate position within it. He was not an extremist, as Prior Ford of Downside was perceived to be, but instead he aimed to stick close to the position of the President. He used his influence as Prior to lead the Laurentians resident at Ampleforth to accept this course of action.

An early example of this in the controversy can be seen in a circular letter he sent to all Laurentian missionaries before the 1889 General Chapter.³² In this he announced that the Laurentian community proposed the acceptance of the Pope's desire for the missions to be united with the monasteries, the erection of the three familia and the appointment of Definitors to divide up the missions. These were precisely the points that the President wished the General Chapter to approve, and Burge was able to persuade the resident community to follow the Presidential line. He records that he was doubtful of the result of the meeting at which he proposed this: the sub-prior usually opposed him and he was doubtful of the regard in which the community held him. In the event, the Laurentians were enthusiastic about the changes, and replies to the circular indicated that out of 68 professed nearly 40 favoured change.³³

²⁸ Memorandum to the Papal Commission (undated), Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 87.

²⁹ Letter, O'Neill to Smith, 15 March 1889, in St Anselmo archives, copy in Ampleforth Abbey Archives BX 22.

³⁰ Letter, Pippet to Wilson, 19 July 1889, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89.

³¹ Letter, Hickey to Wilson, undated, but within 1889, Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89.

³² Circular letter dated 18 April 1889.

³³ Anselm Burge *Reminiscences of the Years 1888-1893*, Chapter 2, pages 3-4.

Burge's own attitude was made clear in a speech he made at the General Chapter of 1889.³⁴ He spoke in favour of the change, which he saw as one not of discipline but of jurisdiction. It was necessary for the monasteries that the change be made, in order that they should survive. The monasteries were nearly bankrupt, and yet they have to pay the overwhelming proportion of the costs of training and teaching young monks. The General Chapter is dominated by missionaries, and so has no scruple in placing burdens on the monasteries that the missions do not help shoulder. Indeed, the Provincials oppress the monasteries (Burge mentioned with particular emphasis the way they had recently obtained the *peculia* of some senior missionaries by what he regarded as sharp practice, which diverted them from their proper destination in the monastery of profession). Burge referred to the constant dissension that existed between the Provinces and the monasteries: he alludes to 20 appeals by the monasteries to the President in the last 8 years. (In the light of this claim, which is never challenged, subsequent claims of good relations by Abbot Snow ring hollow.) The conclusion of Burge's speech makes it clear that he is not merely speaking for the monasteries because he happens to find himself a Prior. He claims that either the Provinces or the monasteries will go under, and that at the moment secondary interests are being placed above the primary work of the body. The claim that the primary work of the body lies in the monastery is a clear statement of reforming principles. It is, moreover, the opposite of the opposition fear that monasteries will exploit missions.

In the aftermath of *Religiosus Ordo* Burge became an important member of the Papal Commission which dealt with the division of the parishes and the funds of the Provinces. Dom Ildephonus Cummins, although a missionary, a friend and ally of Burge's, had commented to him that the main interest of the Laurentian fathers was in the division, and only a few, he opined, had views on the larger questions.³⁵ The rise of house feeling can be seen in Cummins' comment that 'we have done somewhat better than I feared... [and]... not lost so much of our fair claims'.³⁶

It would be unfair to Burge to see him as being solely concerned with the question of mission distribution. He was the Secretary of the Commission and took a leading part in the whole work of the Commission, being responsible for one of its actions that though appearing small may well have been one of its most influential. This was the commissioning of an authorised English translation of *Religiosus Ordo*. Burge persuaded the Commission at the end of its second session to order Dom Ildephonus Cummins to make this translation, and then wrote to Cummins to ask him to make the translation as a matter of urgency.³⁷

Burge worked loyally with the President throughout the time of the Commission, and records his disappointment that the President should have turned from it in 1892 to summon a General Chapter which was most unlikely to be sympathetic to him.³⁸ Indeed, at the conclusion of the Second Session of the Commission Burge recorded his impression of the Commission meetings. There had, he thought, been a good feeling, in which a decided sifting of questions had taken place in a pleasant atmosphere. Moreover, he recorded an increasing sympathy with the reform party led by Prior Ford. There had been

³⁴ Anselm Burge *Reminiscences of the Years 1888-1893*, Chapter 3, pages 7-9. Burge kept full records of all the speeches at this Chapter and used them to compile his *Reminiscences*.

³⁵ Letter, Cummins to Burge, 15 February 1891, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 255.

³⁶ Burge agreed, and recorded that he and Dom Wilfrid Sumner, the Laurentian delegate, only agreed to the terms of the settlement with reluctance and to promote a compromise solution; Anselm Burge *Reminiscences of the Years 1888-1893*, Chapter 4, page 8.

³⁷ Commission minutes, Second Session (13-18 March 1891), Item 25 (Ampleforth Abbey Archives EX 89) and a letter, Burge to Cummins, 18 March 1891 (Ampleforth Abbey Archives DX 68).

³⁸ Anselm Burge *Reminiscences of the Years 1888-1893*, Chapter 4, page 18.

‘excellent papers of suggestion sent in by the ‘young men’ of Fr Ford’s side’, who had a good knowledge of the law and practice among Benedictines.

The ability and zeal for Benedictine tradition is pre-eminently among them. A little more practical acquaintance with men and things is all some of them require to make them really distinguished men.³⁹

Burge attempted loyally to fulfil the prescriptions of *Religiosus Ordo*. This was not always easy. The Bull called for missionaries to spend a month each year in the monastery of their profession. In July 1893 Burge wrote to the President informing him that he had 18 Fathers on their month, who were complaining bitterly because other houses are not obliging missionaries to observe the month. One comment is recorded: ‘Fr Davies was ordered in – but he went off instead to the Continent.’ The decree needed to be carried out strictly by the other Priors, or it was hard on Burge. It led to further trouble. The Ampleforth Council had refused Burge permission to send a junior to study at St Anselmo: ‘Other people, they said, can get out of the Pope’s commands when they like – and they did not see why they should be exempted.’ Burge speaks highly of the excellent effects of study at St Anselmo, and his desire to send someone to study there is another indication of his adhesion to the monastic ideas that underlie the reform. The only reason that someone is not going is the Constitutional requirement of consent, which ties his hands.⁴⁰ Although Burge’s thinking was clearly actuated by the educational perception that the expansion and improvement of the school was important for and beneficial to the English Church, and to a lesser degree by the cultural desire to provide educated centres for the Church, but an episode like this shows that his primary motive was monastic, in the sense that that word was understood by the reformers.

Throughout the nineties the Laurentian conventus discussed two major building plans. One was for the erection of a missionary monastery, an idea that had been proposed by the opposition as a way of staving off reform. Sites were discussed and St Anne’s Liverpool was chosen. Elaborate plans were obtained from Pugin. But the scheme came to nothing. The contrast with the other plan is marked. Burge’s great legacy to the Ampleforth community is the monastery building that was erected in the 1890s. Burge had realised that the surroundings of the old Ampleforth Lodge were no longer adequate for the monastic community, and with determination and skill he carried the building programme through almost to completion.

In presenting Burge as a representative of the Laurentian body who was committed to the reform of the Constitutions there is one fact which requires some explanation. The petition that Dom Bede Prest raised against the draft constitutions proposed by President O’Neill has already been mentioned. It became the latest in a series of rallying flags for the opposition group, and was a successful one. Prest obtained 116 signatures.⁴¹ Burge’s was among them. At first sight this seems to rank him among the opposition. To interpret his signature in this way would be a mistake. Prest was most anxious to obtain Burge’s signature, and it should be remembered that Prest was a Laurentian missionary councillor. He and Burge corresponded regularly on house matters which had no reference to Constitutional affairs, and it would have been inconvenient to Burge to alienate so important a member of the community. In a letter to Prest Burge expressed views which qualify the support he was giving to him. He doesn’t like attacks on Priors: for his own part he would gladly relinquish the burden, and to speak of Prior Ford and his ‘following’ is unfair, for they are only trying to be obedient to the wishes of superiors. Moreover, this petition does not help discern the way forward, and having sent in a memorandum of his own Burge is reluctant to sign anything else and appear to be in opposition more than is necessary. None the

³⁹ Letter, Burge to Dom Ephrem Guy, 19 March 1891, Ampleforth Abbey Archives DX 68.

⁴⁰ Letter, Burge to O’Neill, 23 July 1893, Ampleforth Abbey Archives, DX 68.

⁴¹ He lists them in an epitome, Ampleforth Abbey Archives, A 256.

less, he agrees to sign, but only so long as he can sign opposing the particular action of the President, not the reform *tout court*.⁴²

Burge explains his position at greater length in a letter to the Abbot Primate, Dom Hildebrand de Hemptienne. He regards the President's text as an unfortunate business, which has isolated him and excited opposition. Although Burge has tried to stand by him and support him loyally he is forced to differ from him in his new text. The draft constitutions do not embody the complete return to Benedictine law and traditions that Burge wishes to see: the President's draft changes only some parts of the old structure. In particular there is inadequate recognition of the position of conventual prelates and the conventual chapter is not given adequate powers. Too much is left with the President and the General Chapter. Burge also objects to the tone of the draft, which is too aridly legal and does not give men a sufficient feel that they are being led to greater fervour in the spiritual life. He concludes by urging the Primate to summon all the Prelates to Rome. This will be the only way to make progress, for the only thing that will satisfy the brethren is the settlement being seen to come from the Holy See, to which all will bow at once. A locally arranged solution will cause much heartburning.⁴³ Burge's coalition with the opposition in fact expresses the dissatisfaction that was felt by the supporters of *Religiosus Ordo* at the President's draft.

Perhaps the truest indication of Burge's opinions on monastic issues can be gained by reading the conferences he gave to the community at Ampleforth during his priorship. These conferences reveal his deep familiarity with the Rule, and his desire that the Rule should not be a mere dead letter: he sees St Benedict as providing the spirit which animates monastic life, whose details are filled out by the superiors of the day.⁴⁴ His conferences stress the monastic virtues of poverty and obedience (in which context it is interesting to note that he sees the need for perpetual Abbots as a support for obedience⁴⁵) and reaffirm the everyday qualities of monastic life such as silence. One theme, which is particularly prominent, is his praise of the Divine Office. He repeatedly teaches that the Office is central to Benedictine life, and is the primary means by which monks are sanctified. This point represents a change from the older tradition which stressed the daily period of meditation. Burge of course does affirm the need for daily meditation, but the Divine Office is given priority. He makes the Office the theme of his first conference after the promulgation of *Religiosus Ordo*, pointing out the spiritual benefits that flow from it and its honoured position in the teaching of the Church.

In all these conferences Burge can be seen to be a distinctively monastic teacher, forming his community in the ways of monastic life. He is preparing a community which will be able to accept and live out the life outlined in *Diu Quidem*. His sources in doing so are not the traditions of the Congregation, or the general spiritual teaching of his age. Instead he looks back to the Rule, and seeks to teach a life inspired by its spirit. It is this return *ad fontem* which is above all the sign of the reformer, and Burge shows himself clearly to be a reformer by his devotion to the Rule and the monastic spirit.

This paper began by looking some Laurentian reactions to *Diu Quidem* that were published shortly after the promulgation of the Bull. It then endeavoured to show how those reactions were formed by looking at the attitude of Laurentians in the period before promulgation. The outlook of the opponents of reform was seen to rest above all on an attitude which was truly conservative: the existing missionary structure was to be maintained at all costs, and the whole business of the Congregation was to ensure that

⁴² Letter, Burge to Prest, 3 February 1895, Ampleforth Abbey Archives A 256.

⁴³ Letter, Burge to de Hemptienne, 27 November 1894, Ampleforth Abbey Archives DX 69.

⁴⁴ This is particularly clear in his Lent conference in 1887. (Burge papers, Ampleforth Abbey Archives, DX 69).

⁴⁵ Renovation Conference (for the renewal of vows) in 1888. (Burge papers, Ampleforth Abbey Archives, DX 69).

this took place. Prior Anselm Burge was selected as a representative Laurentian who favoured the cause of reform. His motivation can be clearly seen to be the desire to be faithful to the Rule of St Benedict. These two poles express the two poles of Laurentian reaction to the Bull: Cummins, a close associate and supporter of Burge, stands at the monastic pole; Prest and the opposition whose sentiments he articulated so frequently in the 1890s, at the other. Almond is representative of the body of the community that was between the two poles. In this he is perhaps the most truly representative Laurentian: the subsequent history of the community is still playing out the constant need to achieve a compromise between the needs and the attractiveness of the mission and the impulse to monastic life of ever greater fidelity.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Dom Bernard Green for his perceptive and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.