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MOUNT ST. BENEDICT AND THE IMPACT OF VATICAN II IN THE CARIBBEAN.
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INTRODUCTION TO PART I:

Monastic life is Christian life lived from a certain viewpoint. Monastics are inspired to follow the person of Jesus by embracing the Gospel, modeling ourselves on the Early Christian Community as described in Acts 2 & 4, and guided by the Rule of Benedict of Nursia and the great monastic tradition before him.

Although set somewhat apart physically, the Monastery is a place of encounter:

- Encounter with the beauty of nature, since the Monk takes his responsibility for caring for the earth.
- Encounter with seekers of all or no religious persuasions.
- Encounter with God hidden in those who knock at the Monastery door.
- Encounter with God in the depths of one's being.

The Abbey at Mount St. Benedict has been one such place of encounter for the last 100 years. For those of you who do not know the Abbey, and also for those who are familiar with the place, the 30-minute DVD I present to you now, will give an insight into how the theory of monastic life has taken on flesh in a particular manner in the Southern Caribbean.

PART 2:

We will now consider four areas of the Abbey's apostolate in the light of the Second Vatican Council:

- Liturgy and Liturgical Music.
- Education for Leadership in church and civic life.
- Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue.
- Pastoral Ministry and Movements for Spirituality.

Liturgy And Liturgical Music:

That the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, of the Second Vatican Council should resonate deeply with the Monastic Community at Mount St. Benedict comes as no surprise. It was already *in the blood*, so to speak. In the first place, Bible and Liturgy are at the heart of the monastic life, in the Eucharist, in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the practice of *Lectio Divina*. Monks are people of the Word of God. Secondly this liturgical sensitivity was handed on to Mt.

St. Benedict from its great-grandmother, Beuron Archabbey. The German Archabbey of Beuron, was in the forefront of the liturgical reform in the late 19th century; Beuron carried over these reforming ideas to its daughter, the Abbey of Maredsous, in Belgium; and Dom Mayeul de Caigny, the founder of Mount St. Benedict, had his monastic formation at Maredsous, carrying this liturgical sensitivity to Brazil, and thence to Mt. St. Benedict.

Abbot Adelbert Van Duin, OSB (1947-1972)



1. Under the leadership of Abbot Adelbert Van Duin (1947-1972), the impulse of liturgical renewal had already begun at Mt. St. Benedict. By November 1960, the altar already faced the people, (much to the discomfiture, I understand, of Archbishop Finbar Ryan who could do nothing about it since the Abbey was outside of his jurisdiction) and, with the help of Frs. Ildefons Schroots, Augustine Schreurs and Bernard Vlaar, the so-called Dialogue Mass was in place, and the people were singing the *Missa de Angelis*. Thus, when, in #11 of the Constitution on the Liturgy, Pastors of souls are told that:

*it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part
fully aware of what they are doing,
actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.*

such was already in effect at the Abbey, and continued during and after the Council.



[Dom Charles Hoskins (circa 1962) celebrating Mass facing the people. The Altar Server is (the now Msgr.) Michael

deVerteuil Chairman of the Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission.]

2. The Seminary: The Benedictines were responsible for the Seminary at Mt. St. Benedict. In order the better to equip those who taught at the Seminary, Fr. Augustine Schreurs was sent to St. John's Collegeville, USA, in 1963, and in 1964 Fr. Hildebrand Greene was sent to the Benedictine University, San Anselmo in Rome to study Liturgy. In this way the decision of the Council was fulfilled:

15. Professors who are appointed to teach liturgy in seminaries, religious houses of study, and theological faculties must be properly trained for their work in institutes which specialize in this subject.

16. The study of sacred liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies; in theological faculties it is to rank among the principal courses. It is to be taught under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects.

Both these men absorbed the liturgical ferment centred around Fr Godfrey Diekmann, at Collegeville, and Fr. Augustine Mayer, at Sant Anselmo, and, upon their return, transmitted learning, insights and enthusiasm to both Seminary and the home Community.

3. The Vernacular: The Constitution on the Liturgy recognised that there could be a distinct advantage in praying in one's own language:

#36. 1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

2. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended.

At Mt. St. Benedict, the need to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in English arose primarily because fewer and fewer candidates for the monastic life had a sound formation in Latin. When the Constitution, promulgated in December 1963, opened the possibility of praying in the vernacular, the Monks seized on the opportunity. This coincided with the return from studies at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem of one of the Monks, Fr. Francis Friesen in 1965. At once the Community was given copies of the 1953 Grail Translation of the Psalms, and those in formation were encouraged to have this English translation alongside their Latin breviaries. Subsequently, through the untiring efforts of Fr. Augustine Sehreurs, an in-house edition of the Monastic Breviary in English appeared between 1967 and 1969, in a series of booklets for the Seasons of the Liturgical Year. In 1970, the Abbey chose to adopt the *Interim Roman Breviary* in English, so that all who joined them in prayer – clergy, religious and laity – could pray with understanding. Thus, from 1974 to the present, we have used the Roman Breviary in English.

The appearance, in 1969, of the Missal of Paul VI meant that, from then onwards, English was used in the celebration of the Eucharist.

4. Liturgy:

Fr. Ildefons Schroots

From 1971 three Monks from Mt. St. Benedict – Frs. Ildefons Schroots, Hildebrand Greene and Bro. Paschal Jordan – were members of the Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain. Through them, and together with Fr. Brendan Ryan, OP and Fr. Cyril Ross, a campaign of liturgical education began. The *Liturgy Bulletin*, a monthly periodical aimed at educating clergy, religious and laity, saw the light of day in January 1973; the *Liturgical Ordo* was prepared and printed at the Abbey; the Seminary and the Abbey were designated authorised places of liturgical experimentation; and, in 1977, in collaboration with the Seminary and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, the Antilles School of Liturgy was born – a summer school of liturgical education and experience, which continues up to the present time (2013).



[Bro. Paschal Jordan, Fr. Michel de Verteuil & Fr. Ildefons Schroots
at the School of Liturgy.]

5. Liturgical Music:

Bro. Paschal Jordan

With the onset of the vernacular, a serious lack of good Liturgical Music in English was soon felt. At the Abbey, as elsewhere in the English-speaking world, there were borrowings from Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist hymnody and the use of the Grail Psalter to the music of Fr. Joseph Gelineau, SJ and his Team of composers.

Whereas in the late 1960s and early 1970s North American and British 'folk' songs from the Medical Missionaries, Russel Roide, Joe Wise, Sebastian Temple, Estelle White et al. and the music of the local "Mayaro Six" and the *Goretti Group* ('Sing Out My Soul') were used in Parish Liturgies in Trinidad & Tobago and around the Caribbean, the Abbey resisted this music at first, preferring the Gregorian-English modal music of the Anglican nuns of Wantage and the Roman Catholic Benedictine nuns of Stanbrook Abbey in Great Britain. This diet was supplemented by the efforts of Bro. Paschal Jordan to set the Latin Antiphons of the Liturgy of the Hours to English, while retaining the basic plainchant melodic lines. These efforts proved satisfactory, and Bro. Paschal Jordan was sent to the *Institut Supérieur de Liturgie* and the *Institut de Musique Liturgique* of the *Institut Catholique de Paris* to study Liturgy and Liturgical Music.

The rise of the Black Power Movement in 1970 and the subsequent consciousness, together with the appearance of the Antilles Pastoral Institute (API) in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, made the territories of the AEC acutely conscious of cultural heritages. This began to spill over into new music for worship – especially the work of Richard Ho Lung and Barry Chevannes in Jamaica.

This new consciousness coincided with the return of Bro. Jordan from Paris, the invitation of the Archbishop of Port-of-Spain to form part of the Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission – on which body, two of his Confreres, Frs. Ildefons Schroots and Hildebrand Greene were already serving – and the formation of the Archdiocesan Liturgical Music Sub-Committee which Archbishop invited Bro. Jordan to head in 1971.

121. Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, should feel that their vocation is to cultivate sacred music and increase its store of treasures.

Let them produce compositions which have the qualities proper to genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works which can be sung only by large choirs, but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.

The texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine; indeed they should be drawn chiefly from holy scripture and from liturgical sources.

In this period of the 1970s, there is a cluster of events that profoundly marked all the territories of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, and in which members of the Monastic Community played pivotal roles:

- a) The formation of Liturgical Music Sub-Committee in T&T, by Archbishop Anthony Pantin, in September 1971, and its subsequent work in holding composition workshops in that Territory, in view of #121 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, quoted above.
- b) The 1973 revision of the Holy Week Music Book by the Liturgical Music Sub-Committee, and the addition of new compositions by a team of local composers.
- c) The formation of the Antilles Episcopal Liturgical Commission in 1973 initiated and animated by Bp. Anthony Dickson in Barbados, of which Fr. Ildefons Schroots and Bro. Paschal Jordan were founding members.



Bishops Dickson, Clarke and (later) Reece with Caribbean Participants and Experts at a Liturgical Consultation around May 1974 at Benet Hall, Mount St. Benedict. Three Monks of Mount St. Benedict, Fr. Edward Theunissen (Bible), Fr. Ildefons Schroots (Bible & Liturgy) and Bro. Paschal Jordan (Liturgy & Liturgical Music) are present.

- d) The 1975 “We For Jesus” festival in Trinidad & Tobago, showcasing local compositions collected by the Liturgical Music Sub-Committee.
- e) A similar liturgical music outreach (1973-1981) by the Caribbean Conference of Churches with Noel Dexter (Jamaica), Patrick Prescod (St. Vincent) and Paschal Jordan (Abbey, Mt. St. Benedict).
- f) The rise of the Antilles School of Liturgy (begun in August 1977 in T&T by the Abbey, the Pastoral Centre and the Seminary and held subsequently in several Territories of the AEC, up to the present).
- g) The publications of Caribbean Hymnals I & II (1980; 1983) and the AEC Catholic Caribbean Hymnal 1998.

- h) The publications of the Caribbean Conference of Church's *Sing A new Song I, II & III* (1974 to 1981), which include music from the Monastic community.
- i) The publication, in 1984, of a book of Responsorial Psalmody for the 3-Year Cycle of Sundays, coming directly from the weekly Monastic Conventual Mass.

6. Ecumenical Outreach and Inter-Faith Dialogue:



Abbot Hildebrand Greene (1979 – 1995)

The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council has this to say:

6. Every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this is the basis of the movement toward unity.

Under the leadership of Abbot Hildebrand Greene, as the Abbey strove to understand the monastic charism more deeply and to live it more faithfully, it had to recognise that both Ecumenical Outreach and Inter-Faith Dialogue were part of its calling to a greater sense of hospitality.

Since the inception of the Caribbean Conference of Churches in 1973, the Abbey's personnel and facilities have been put at the disposal of meetings, gatherings, study-sessions, liturgies and retreats of Sister Churches, particularly Anglicans, Presbyterians and Ethiopian Orthodox. Bro. Paschal Jordan has served as one of the Music coordinators for the Caribbean Conference of Churches and on the Worship Committee of the World Council of Churches.

In the early days of the Abbey, Fr. Sebastian Weber learned Hindi in order to communicate more effectively with the many Hindu pilgrims who frequented the Mount. Latterly, particularly after the Vatican Council II, Abbot Hildebrand Greene enjoyed membership of the InterReligious Organization, both in Guyana and in Trinidad & Tobago, and gave lectures at the Blue Star Ashram in Central Trinidad. When the Dalai Lama visited Trinidad & Tobago in 1995, he came to the Abbey for an exchange on the monastic life and witness.

One anecdote from the mid-seventies is worth recounting here: Several of the Monks were holidaying in Carapichaima, Central Trinidad, and Fr. Hildebrand arranged with the President of the local Mosque that the Monks should visit at Friday Prayers. We all tramped in, dressed in our monastic habits, took our places and joined in the prayer. At a

certain point, the President invited Fr. Hildebrand to address the gathering. After this brief address, the father-in-law of the President of the Mosque, a venerable, patriarchal figure, began to weep uncontrollably. Upon enquiry, we discovered that he was praising Allah that he had lived to see the day when Christian Monks could pray with their Muslim Brothers.

Education for Church and Civic Life:

The DVD you have just seen, and some remarks above, have already given an insight into the beginnings of the Seminary and the Schools started by the Monks of Mount St. Benedict .

The *Caroni Bible School* came out of the early days of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, with Fr. Bernard Vlaar and Fr. Ildefons Schroots of the Abbey, making significant contributions. The following excerpt from the 40-year jubilee in 2011 gives the background:

The CCR was instrumental in the formation and advancement of the Catholic Bible Institute (the Institute). Prior to the establishment of the Institute, a small group of early CCR members journeyed to Mount St Benedict every weekend to meet with Fr Bernard Vlaar OSB who taught them the Word. The group was joined later by Fr Ildefons Schroots OSB who assisted Fr Bernard. News spread and soon enough prayer group leaders joined the original group. These leaders then taught their people. Meanwhile, Fr Ildefons travelled throughout Trinidad teaching the Word. Like Fr Ildefons, a few members of the original Mount St Benedict group, took the Word and their love for Jesus to many.

While all this movement was taking place, the then Archbishop of Port of Spain, His Grace Anthony Pantin, was inspired to gaze upon the dilapidated house of God, Our Lady of Victories, in Frederick Settlement. On March 9, 1982, Archbishop Pantin offered the chapel and grounds to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to use as they saw fit. By this time Deborah de Rosia had been infused with zeal to have the Word of God go out to all who would hear. Conferring with the then Spiritual Director of the CCR, Fr Ildefons, Deborah organised a campaign to clean and renovate the chapel and build a centre for teaching and reflection. By June 1983, the chapel was restored to the extent that Charismatic Masses and sacramental baptisms were celebrated every first Sunday in the presence of the leaders of the various Charismatic prayer groups. In September 1983, evening school for Bible study began at the chapel. Subsequently, plans began for the official establishment of a Catholic Bible Institute. In 1986, the Institute was launched at the CCR Centre in Caroni, to meet the needs of the Roman Catholic laity for knowledge and training in the Bible. In its first year, there were 40 registered students, 27 of which graduated at the Institute's first graduation.

[Taken from *The Fruitful Vine*, I & II, published by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and relayed by the Catholic News on December 12 20012.]

What was most remarkable was that Fr. Ildefons simply went ahead with Deborah de Rosia and started the school, with no reference to the usual protocol with regard to the Monastic Superior. When he was rapped on the knuckles by the Superior, he simply shrugged and said something like "The Word of God has to be taught and brought to the people." And that was that. No turning back. And the Bible School has not only flourished, but several monks have taught there; and, ironically, study at the Bible School has now become mandatory for all novices to the monastic life.

The Declaration on Christian Education of 28 October 1965 set the scene for another development at the Abbey:

*Therefore, though primary and secondary schools, the foundation of education, must still be fostered, great importance is to be attached to those which are required in a particular way by contemporary conditions, such as: professional(30) and **technical schools**, centers for educating adults and promoting social welfare, or for the*

retarded in need of special care, and also schools for preparing teachers for religious instruction and other types of education.

[Declaration on Christian Education: par. 9. My emphasis.]

In 1967, with the help of the Dutch Government through its Embassy in Port-of-Spain, the Abbey began the St. Bede Vocational & Technical School. Under the leadership of Bro. Joseph Perez and, after him, Bro. Ian St. Louis, several monks worked in the school. There was even an experiment, under the directorship of Fr. Maurus Superville and Bro. Joseph Perez, linking St. Bede's with the Abbey School, forming Mt. St. Benedict Comprehensive School. Unfortunately, the linking was not the success hoped for, and the two schools reverted to their own spheres.

Pastoral Ministry and Movements for Spirituality:

To conclude this survey of the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the monastic life at the Abbey, Mount St. Benedict, we need to focus on Pastoral Ministry and Movements for Spirituality:

In his *Rule for Monasteries*, St. Benedict has only one requirement for those applying to join the monastery: *The concern must be whether the novice truly seeks God* (Reg. 58:7)

This seeking God and encounter with God is reminiscent of the Patriarch Jacob in Genesis 28:

16. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!'

17. He was afraid and said, 'How awe-inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'



[Charismatic Meeting at Benet Hall, Mt. St. Benedict.]

And so, Mount St. Benedict has become a 'holy place' or 'shrine' where God is sought and his presence encountered. The response of the monks to this encounter and this seeking of the people has been for a long time in the 'Parlour Ministry' – a daily ministry of compassion, prayer, instruction and encouragement, either face-to-face with the pilgrims, or else by letter. Coupled with this is the Retreat Ministry, where seekers of all persuasions or of none, can have the space

and the ambience to seek God in prayer and silence, alone or in a group, with or without the guidance of the monks. The Oblate Movement helps the laity to imbibe Benedictine spirituality and live it in their own circumstances in their individual milieu.

And, from around 1972, under the guidance of Abbots Bernard Vlaar and Hildebrand Greene, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal had a home at Mount St. Benedict

Conclusion: Fifty Years Afterwards:

The picture that emerges is disconcerting: Fifty years after the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (04 December 1963), the Biblical model of the Church as People of God has largely reverted to one of the Church as Institution, with the centralization of power (and the virtual emasculation of Bishops and Bishops' Conferences), the imposition of a hybrid Latin-English vernacular translation of the Missal, with what seems a contemptuous disregard for the fraternal links forged with Sister Churches who speak the same language; and more than a hint of rubricism creating a hardening the liturgical arteries.

The Benedictines relinquished the Seminary at the turn of the 1970s, and now, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the Seminary as Seminary has been closed. The Monks' Abbey School and St. Bede's Vocational School folded up in the mid-1980s and 1990s respectively.

There is a corresponding desiccation in the Abbey: those visionaries who embraced the Vatican II documents and ran with them have either gone to their eternal reward, or are left to plod along, still hopeful despite their diminishing strength and despite the inimical climate in the Church. Vocations once plentiful have all but dried up, with very many juniors and solemnly-professed monks having quit the monastic life. Even the pilgrims come in fewer numbers...

But perhaps there is still hope for a new burgeoning? The Lord seems to be saying to this new FRANCIS: "Rebuild my Church!"

Paschal Jordan, OSB
The Abbey, Mount St. Benedict,
St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago.
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