



Souvenirs of Father Olivier Raquez Postulator for the Cause of Blessed Columba Marmion

First contacts

My first contact with Dom Columba Marmion goes back to the early years of the Second World War. A short stay in the Abbey of St. André, in 1941, made such an impression on me, I decided to become a Benedictine monk. My brother-in-law, a Magistrate in Brussels, though originally from Namur, told me one day that the Abbot of Maredsous, Dom Marmion, visited his grand-mother several times in the castle of La Motte-en-Gee, at Tihange, near Huy. This was the first time I heard his name. While a novice in St. André, I read some of his writings, but I must admit that I was more impressed by the writings of other spiritual authors, such as St. Benedict and St. Gregory the Great. Also in St. André, I had come to know Fathers Théodore Nève and Gaspard Lefèbvre, both former monks of Maredsous, who were sent to St. André in 1906. The former became Abbot of St. André in 1911, and the second became one of the principal architects of the Liturgical Movement in Belgium and elsewhere. Both had known Maredsous in the last years of the nineteenth century, and had evidently been influenced much by this experience, though they seldom referred to it. In 1947, I spent a month in Maredsous, where I met Father Gisbert Ghysens several times. He was very much attached to the memory of Dom Marmion, though I do not remember him speaking to me of him at this time.

In 1954, Abbot Nève sent me to Rome to the Greek College, which, in 1897, Pope Leo XIII had confided to the care of the Benedictine Confederation, under the leadership of the first Abbot Primate, Dom Hildebrand de Hemptinne. The latter took up the challenge, and gave much of his attention to successfully executing the plans of the Roman pontiff in regard to the Eastern Churches. Dom Hildebrand had been chosen Abbot of Maredsous in 1890, a position he held until 1909, when, to his great satisfaction, he was



replaced by Dom Columba Marmion, with whom he had frequent and excellent relations. The Greek College, founded in 1577, was destined to cater for the formation of clerics of the oriental Churches of the Constantinople tradition. These latter were Greek-speaking, and united to Rome. They were called Greek Catholics, even when they used some other language. When confiding the Greek College to the Benedictine Confederation, Leo XIII had strongly insisted that they respect the particular values of the Eastern traditions.

Introduction of the Cause: Dom Benedict Becker, first Postulator

On arriving at the Greek College, Rome, on 25 September 1954, I met Dom Benedict Becker, a monk of Maredsous, who was then the Rector. It was, in fact, during this month of September that Dom Benedict, who was also the Procurator of our Congregation of the Annunciation, made contact with several of the Roman authorities, among whom in particular was Mgr John-Baptist Montini, at this time Substitute of the Secretariat of State, and who later became Pope Paul VI. As a result of these meetings, the question was raised, regarding the possibility of taking the necessary steps towards the official introduction of the Cause of Canonization of Dom Marmion, underlining especially the great influence of his books, which had contributed so much to the spiritual formation of several generations of Christians. After hearing all these opinions, Dom Benedict set about studying the matter, and approached Abbot Godefroid Dayez, who was then the Abbot of Maredsous, with a view to taking the necessary initiatives. In 1955, the Abbot made several nominations. Dom Becker, who resided in Rome, was named Postulator, with the power to direct operations and all other matters relating to the Cause. Dom Gisbert Ghysens, then residing in Maredsous, was named Vice-Postulator, with a mandate to deal with matters in so far as they related to Belgium. Dom Ghysens thus found himself in charge of preparing the Enquiry into (i) the Reputation for Sanctity of Dom Columba, and (ii) a study of all the writings of Dom Columba, which was due to be held in the Diocese of Namur. Dom Ghysens immediately began assembling and classifying all the writings of Dom Marmion. The Abbot of



Maredsous likewise nominated, as Vice-Postulators, Dom Alcuin Deck of Marmion Abbey, U.S.A., and Dom Bernard O’Dea of Glenstal Abbey, Ireland.

The diocesan Process and examination of the Writings

In 1960, Dom Ghysens brought to Rome the complete collection of the Writings of Dom Marmion. The Enquiry into the Reputation for sanctity, held in Namur from 1957 to 1961, interrogated 45 people in all, and the Acts of this Process, countersigned by the Bishop of Namur, Mgr Charue, were sent to Rome in 1961.

As for myself, on arriving in Rome, I took the occasion to deepen my contacts with Marmion, but I must admit that my principal interests at this time were quite different. Sent to Rome to work in the Greek College, I had to concentrate on forming the students, who lived there, with the authentic thoughts and spirituality of the Oriental traditions, as was demanded by the Motu Proprio of Leo XIII “Sodalium Benedictinorum” of 1897. While the thought and spirituality of Marmion were excellent, they were clearly based on the Latin-Roman traditions, and related more especially to the world to which he belonged. I had, on the contrary, to steep myself in the world of the Eastern Christian traditions. In order to do this, I began – with the approval of Dom Benedict – a course of studies in the Oriental Institute, applying myself above all to the study of the Liturgy, the Eastern Fathers and their successors. This orientation was hardly conducive to a deeper understanding of the writings and spirituality of Dom Marmion.

With the ending of the diocesan Enquiry, and the presentation of all the Writings, the Process officially opened in Rome on 27 March 1962. The Writings were approved in 1973. At this stage, the historian, Carlo Snider, was nominated Judge-advocate for the Cause, and set about preparing a long Summary of the diocesan Enquiry, which was published in 1981. During this same year (1981), another volume was published, containing “Postulatory Letters”, in which many church dignitaries requested that Rome proceed to the Beatification of Dom Marmion.



A Miracle?

Further to these above-mentioned steps, which concerned the past, it is necessary to add a new fact, which appeared in 1966, and which constituted one of the major elements in the overall process towards Beatification. I am describing it here because, later, I will have to give it more attention. In this year, 1966, a very special Grace, due to the intercession of Dom Columba, was accorded to an American lady, Patricia Bitzan. Struck down with a very serious and life-threatening cancer, she spoke with a monk of Marmion Abbey, Illinois, U.S.A. The latter suggested that she make a pilgrimage to Maredsous, to the tomb of Dom Columba. She took him up on this, and with her husband, visited Maredsous, imploring the intercession of Dom Columba. Already at the tomb, she felt an improvement in her health, and experienced the evident disappearance of the cancer. On her return to the United States, the doctors examined her with great care, and pronounced a cure which they could not explain. To begin with, it was thought wise to wait for some time, in fact, for twelve years, before taking any further steps in this matter. Then, in 1978, realising that she had been completely cured, the authorities in the diocese of St. Cloud, U.S.A., where the Bitzan family lived, submitted her case to a meticulous scientific examination. This lasted until 1996, and concluded by affirming the extraordinary character of the case. Their conclusion was later approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1997.

Throughout all these events, Dom Becker kept me up-to-date with developments, but too many other matters filled my mind. There was first of all the Council, then the aftermath of the Council. In 1967, I was nominated Rector of the Greek College. At the same time, I was Professor at the University of the Lateran, at the Benedictine Athaneum of Sant' Anselmo, as well as at the Gregorian University, not forgetting my work as Consulter to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches. As a result of all these commitments, I was unable to give much of my time to Dom Marmion. However, my many conversations with Dom Becker allowed me to know and retain a number of details, which later on, provided me with a basis, or point of departure, for a better understanding of the process and problems of the Cause.



My nomination as Postulator

Dom Benedict Becker, in residence in Rome since 1936, had, by the middle 1980s, reached an age when it was necessary for him to retire from his many duties and responsibilities. Who would be able to replace him as Postulator? We had known each other since 1954 and had often spoken about Dom Columba. I was in Rome and knew my way about the city and the Vatican. No one else seemed to be available. I was thus chosen, for better or for worse. Abbot Nicolas Dayez of Maredsous, nominated me officially as Postulator on 13 February 1986. And so a new page in the history of the Canonization opened. Many of the above-mentioned steps had already been taken, but it would be necessary to pursue and finalise them. The Roman analysis of the Writings of Dom Columba had been positive. The enquiry into the reputation for sanctity, undertaken by the diocese of Namur, had been brought to a conclusion by the publication in a large volume of a Summary in 1981, under the Vatican imprint. However, a recent Apostolic Constitution had modified some of the previous norms, and called for a more detailed study (*Positio*) on the virtues and reputation for sanctity of the candidate for Beatification. In 1984, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had nominated Fr. Yvon Beaudoin as the guide (*relator*) for this detailed study. Thus, it was necessary to find someone who would undertake the particular task of producing this *Positio*. It was also evident that the medical examination of the miracle, which had begun in the United States in 1978, still required some clarification and needed to be dealt with. There was a lot of unfinished business to be done!

Towards the “*Positio on the virtues and reputation for sanctity*”

My first move was to make contact with those responsible in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, to ascertain what initiatives were needed to further the Cause of Dom Marmion. This meant contacting Fr. Yvon Beaudoin, and also Dr. Snider, the Advocate, who knew not only the history, but also the practical aspects, of the process of Canonization. I had already been in contact with these two people in connection with another Cause, with which I had been charged for several years, namely, that of the Servant of God,



Brother Meinrad of the Abbey of Einsiedeln. Furthermore, I continued to question Dom Becker, who had retired to Maredsous, where I visited him several times. I also had many contacts with the Vice-Postulator, Dom Gisbert Ghysens, who came to Rome for a brief stay, in the interest of the Cause. It was in the course of conversations with these two latter monks of Maredsous, that I became aware of the urgent necessity of finding someone competent to undertake the indispensable task of preparing the *Positio on the Virtues and Reputation for Sanctity*, which meant, in practice, the writing of a critical biography of Dom Marmion.

The name of Fr. Mark Tierney, a monk of Glenstal Abbey, Ireland, and a specialist in History, quickly appeared as the most likely candidate. The task was proposed to him and accepted. At the same time he was nominated as Vice-Postulator, in place of Fr. Bernard O’Dea, also of Glenstal Abbey, who retired on account of his age. The choice of Fr. Tierney proved providential. The preparation of a biography, authentic and scientific, required considerable research. While it was possible to base his study on the “Summary” of Dr. Carlo Snider, it was necessary to complete this by consulting numerous archives, especially in Maredsous, but elsewhere as well, such as Rome, where we had the opportunity of meeting, and also in France, Ireland, England and the United States. The new Vice-Postulator undertook numerous journeys, and his researches were crowned in 1994, with the publication of his *Dom Columba Marmion: A Biography*, which was successively translated into several languages, and which furnished the essential elements for the final official discussions in 1998 and 1999. It should be pointed out that the year 1994 did not put an end to the work of Fr. Tierney, as he is occupied today in preparing the definitive edition of the Letters of Blessed Columba. The publication of these Letters seems opportune, because they will present a Dom Columba which conforms to that of his spiritual writings, although these latter were couched in the style of his secretary, Dom Raymond Thibaut, whereas the Letters present us with a more immediate and spontaneous Marmion, making it easier to savour the richness of his personality.



Towards a better understanding of Dom Marmion

Throughout this same epoch I had the opportunity of coming to know Dom Marmion more intimately, as I did not limit myself exclusively to the task of overseeing the necessary steps towards his Beatification. When he left Rome, Dom Becker had given me his archives. Among these I found the original big volumes in manuscript, containing the depositions of the 45 witnesses, who were interrogated regarding the reputation for sanctity of Dom Marmion. Today, these volumes, which I have examined with interest and curiosity, are kept in the Marmion Archives, in the Abbey of Maredsous, along with all the other documents of Marmion interest. They are the testimony of those who had personal contact with Dom Marmion during his life. Many of these were monks, who had lived with him, and were under obedience to him. Some showed their appreciation of him in whole or in part, while others underlined the negative aspects of his life and rule. These latter did not share his outlook and even criticised him vigorously. Such was the case of one monk who went to the diocesan tribunal saying: “I go to Namur to testify against Marmion”.

The reading of these volumes allowed me to experience, in a very special way, the often disturbed circumstances and situations, in which Dom Marmion had to exercise his abbacy. The War, 1914-1918, had brought about a big and lengthy dispersal of his community. Apart from the trials entailed in the occupation of Belgium by the German troops, a group of Marmion’s younger monks had to seek refuge in England and in Ireland. Marmion joined them for two years, 1914-1916, thus living apart from his community in Maredsous, where life continued as normal as circumstances allowed. Other young monks had to engage in the actual war, either as chaplains or stretcher-bearers, and faced very grave difficulties in re-adapting to the traditional monastic life afterwards. Finally, it must be said that not all of Marmion’s monks held the same monastic outlook, or subscribed to the same principles of monastic living. Ever since his first visit to Monte Cassino, when he was a seminarist in Rome, Dom Columba had upheld the values of a serious monastic way of life, although open to a certain apostolate, which included missionary work, and at one



moment he considered entering a monastery in Australia. In all honesty, one must say that this particular outlook, which he never abandoned, led him, both before and after becoming abbot, to spend a great deal of time outside his monastery. Other monks, taking a contrary view, concentrated on observing the regular life, lived in the interior of the monastery. In Maredsous, during the abbacy of Dom Columba, these two concepts of monastic life were in evidence in a very real sense, each being upheld with conviction and sincerity.

It is precisely in these difficult situations that I am able to admire the courage and willingness of Abbot Marmion, as he faced them seriously. On the one hand, he insisted on what appeared to him to be essential. In this he was definitely marked by his time, for he lived in the era of modernism and anti-modernism, being clearly attached to the traditional habits and ways of the past centuries. Despite his deep spiritual sense, which he owed to his knowledge of the Scriptures, and love of the liturgical life, he was in no way an innovator or path-finder. Yet his personal convictions did not impede him from acting in a very human manner. He was convinced of the real concrete possibilities of each individual, refusing to impose his own ideas or external observances on others, believing that they were capable of listening to the voice of the Lord within themselves. I came to appreciate, above all, at what point he could, in every circumstance, maintain his peace of mind, and place himself in the hands of Providence. He had discovered the joy of knowing that he had been transformed in Christ, and become a son of the Eternal Father. I was happy also to discover the most intimate feelings of Blessed Columba, his unshakable devotion to his brethren and to all those who sought his counsel, his constant search for the Lord and His Will, as well as his faith and self-confidence in times of trial. The aim of the Postulation was to make Dom Columba better known, so that people might admire and pray to him for favours. By a better understanding of the manner in which he had lived his earthly life, I could appreciate the wonderful things the Lord had accomplished in him. Following his example, I was led to adore the Lord, who is to be admired in His Saints, because He allows them to participate in His own sanctity.



Dom Ferdinand Poswick succeeds Dom Gisbert Ghysens as Vice-Postulator in Maredsous

The years rolled by. The Vice-Postulator residing in Maredsous, Dom Gisbert Ghysens, had worked well at the task set him in 1955, organising the diocesan tribunal on the reputation for sanctity of Dom Columba, as well as providing all the necessary material for an understanding of the details of his life. Having been born on 11th September 1911, he gradually lost his energy, and died in 1993. It thus became necessary to find a successor. The choice of Dom Ferdinand Poswick proved an excellent one, as his collaboration contributed in a decisive way towards the advance of the Cause, and to the Beatification on 3rd September 2000. He has continued his involvement up to the present moment, promoting the knowledge and understanding of Dom Columba, as well as his cult, giving his special attention to collecting information on any extraordinary favours or graces received through the intercession of Blessed Columba. We await the appearance of a new miracle, which will allow us to pass to his full Canonization, and to his universal cult, which at this moment is limited to those who were connected with him, that is, the monks of the Benedictine observance, the countries and regions where Blessed Columba lived, and where his influence was most marked.

In 1993, the moment when Dom Poswick entered on his charge as Vice-Postulator, the preparations for the Beatification of Dom Columba had not been completed, though they were well advanced. Dom Tierney had completed his critical-historical biography, which demonstrated the spiritual character of his life. On the other hand, the American doctors were making progress in their investigation into the unexplained character of the miraculous cure of 1966, at the tomb of the future Blessed Columba.

The first point had been well received and accepted, as Dom Tierney had done his work efficiently. The second point was more delicate, and needed to be resolved quickly, in order to open the doors to an official and definitive approval. The experts in the Congregation had certain reservations regarding the conclusions of the American doctors. Dom Poswick, and also Fr. Tierney who made frequent trips to the United States, succeeded in getting the



doctors in charge of the enquiry, set up by the authorities of the diocese of St. Cloud, to make another and more detailed study of the case.

Dom Poswick submitted this study to some Belgian specialists, and these latter gave their approval to the findings of their colleagues across the Atlantic. At this moment, in 1997, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints finally accepted their decisions, thus allowing the opening of the official and definitive debates, which were concluded in a positive manner.

Would it be possible to conclude the Roman Process in time to obtain a Beatification during the Jubilee year of 2000?

The detailed statement of his “virtues” had to be submitted to two Commissions, that of a group of theologians, which was held on 11th December 1998, and that of the Cardinals and Bishops on 20th April 1999. The Decree on the “heroicity” of the virtues was published by the Congregation on 28th June following. As for the “miracle”, it had to pass through three Commissions: the first was that of the medical doctors, which was held on 13th October 1999. The second and third meetings were those of the theologians and the Cardinals and Bishops. There is a small problem relating to the actual dates of these two meetings. In actual fact, many people expressed the wish that the Beatification of Dom Columba Marmion would be celebrated during the year 2000, which marked the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era. Two difficulties seemed to make this impossible. First of all, the time factor; the medical commission had approved the miracle on 13th October 1999, but the other two commissions would not be able to meet until the end of that year. The decision to insert our Beatification in the programme of the year 2000 could not be made at the last minute, as one had to take into account the numerous ceremonies of this Jubilee year of 2000. In addition there was another problem. The Roman office, which concerned itself with the liturgical celebrations of the Holy Father, had already foreseen a number of Beatifications for that year, and each one had to await its turn. That of Marmion was not among the first, and it would be necessary to put it back to a later date. However, a number of



circumstances, quite extraordinary, allowed us to realise our great wish.

Speaking of our hopes and difficulties to some friends, one of them suggested that we make known our desires to Pope John-Paul II, and explain to him the reasons for approaching him at this juncture. I spoke of this to Br. Ferdinand Poswick, who happened to be in Rome at the time. A short time later, by chance, he had a long meeting with Mgr Jean-Baptiste Re, then the Substitute in the Secretariat of State, who had frequent contacts with the Pope. He spoke to him of our wish, and Mgr. Re, who had himself read the works of Dom Marmion, and had been spiritually nourished by his doctrine, listened willingly, took note of our request, and promised to refer the matter to the Holy Father, which he did almost immediately. The Pope, likewise, knew Dom Marmion well. He understood the significance of his Beatification at the dawn of the 3rd millenium, and approved of the request.

After that, everything became easy and fell into place. The month of January 2000 saw a succession of rapid events, which were decisive for our Cause; the commission of Theologians was held on 5th, that of the Cardinals and Bishops on 18th, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints published the decree on the miracle on 27th, and on 28th, the Secretariat of State notified me that the Beatification would be celebrated on Sunday 3rd September 2000.

It was thus, at this moment, that our Postulation overcame the last obstacles, and brought its mission to a good conclusion. All that remained then was the need to organise our participation in the celebration of the Beatification. We had, however, to do everything with an eye to the eventual Canonization, which would depend on the manifestation of a new miracle.

The Beatification by John-Paul II on 3rd September 2000

The celebration of 3rd September called for a considerable number of official arrangements. I recall a few by way of example. The Beatification of Dom Columba would take place in St. Peter's Square at the same time as several others, among whom was Pope John XXIII. It was necessary to come to an agreement with the



authorities in St. Peter's, in connection with a large picture, representing Dom Marmion, which had already been executed, with Marmion standing between the two towers of Maredsous, to adorn the façade of St. Peter's on the occasion of the Beatification. Most of the other arrangements were financial in character. I met with Mgr. Piero Marini, the Master of papal liturgical ceremonies, in order to prepare the ceremony, and the little book which would allow the participants to follow the details. It was also necessary to make contact with the Prefecture of the Pontifical House, for the celebration itself, and to arrange the Audience which the Holy Father would give the following day for the pilgrims who had come to Rome for the Beatification. The pilgrimage to Rome had also to be arranged. The date of the Beatification coincided with that of the Congress of Abbots of the Benedictine Confederation, which would be held in the Abbey-University of Sant' Anselmo in Rome. These latter would evidently participate in the various ceremonies in connection with the Beatification, especially the Mass of Thanksgiving, celebrated by the Abbot Primate, on Tuesday, 5th September, in the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the Walls, which was confided to the Benedictine monks of St. Paul's. It became necessary to organise a lunch, both on the Sunday and the Tuesday for many of the pilgrims, among whom were the monks of Maredsous and Glenstal, and also Mrs. Patricia Bitzan, who had been miraculously cured of terminal cancer by Dom Marmion and continued to be in good health, and who would come to Rome with her husband and numerous family. One had to foresee that the Pope would arrange a special Audience for the Abbots, during which he would speak of the newly beatified monk. In order to occupy the pilgrims and to honour the memory of Marmion, we thought of organising a religious concert in the Church of St. Charles in the Corso, which would be performed by some of the more musical monks, and the choirs of the abbeys of Maredous and Glenstal. We also had to find suitable lodgings for the pilgrims. And there were many other such matters to be attended to! I was in Rome at this time, and remained there for the entire summer of 2000 to sort out all the problems. The Vice-Postulators Poswick and Tierney contributed much, each according to his proper ability and



expertise. Father Philippe Rouillard, a monk of Wisques and Professor at Sant'Anselmo, was nominated temporary Vice-Postulator, with a mandate to help organise the welcoming of the pilgrims who came to Rome for the Beatification. Father Pierre Paul, OMV, who played an important role in organising the daily liturgical celebrations for the year 2000 in the Basilica of St. Peter's, and who had helped us on many occasions, was nominated delegate to the Postulator, to represent him and act in his name. Providence helped us in many ways, so that these and all the other arrangements were made harmoniously.

Why all these efforts?

The first end of the Postulation had been successfully achieved, but it would be necessary to prolong its activities for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Beatification was supposed to produce some useful fruits for the kingdom of heaven. Its end was not to help Dom Columba enter into paradise. To all extent and purpose, he was already there, along with the multitude of the chosen who awaited the final Day of Judgement, when they would hear the words: "Come, you blessed of my Father, receive your share of the Kingdom, which has been prepared for you since the foundation of the world" (Mt:25,34). If the church had beatified Marmion, it was to make official and help advance his cult, while recognising the great things that the Lord had accomplished in him, and to ask his intercession to obtain divine Graces. Following the Beatification, the Postulation had, as its first task, to publicise the thousand ways in which the Good News announced by Christ was made manifest, mysteriously though truly, in the life of His servant, Blessed Columba. The Postulation had also to help people understand how the example of Dom Marmion and his intercession could obtain for them the same mercy.

The second motive was that the title of Blessed, while having its own special value, was relatively limited: in order that it might extend to the whole universe, the liturgical cult is tied to the later stage of the Canonization properly speaking. The actual Process, undertaken by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, is



entitled “The Cause for the Beatification and Canonization”, thus, when it prepares the Beatification, it opens up the possibility of a Canonization. This final Process is called simply “The Cause for the Canonization”, when it prepares for the Canonization of someone who has been Beatified. After the Beatification of 3rd September 2000, our Postulation had to interest itself in this new stage, which entails many factors, above all the development of the cult of the Blessed Columba, as well as encouraging a renewed interest in his life and writings, and more especially to ascertain and verify a new miracle.

The future of the Cause

Since 3rd September 2000, several initiatives have been taken, in accordance with different needs or situations. These have originated in the three main Benedictine centres associated with Blessed Columba Marmion: in Belgium, at the Abbey of Maredsous; in Ireland, at Glenstal Abbey, and in U.S.A. at Marmion Abbey. In order to stir up interest in regard to Blessed Columba, each of these centres has its own Vice-Postulator: Br. R.-Ferdinand Poswick continues his efforts in Maredsous, while in Marmion Abbey, Abbot Vincent Bataille has succeeded to the late Fr. Alcuin Deck, and in Glenstal, Fr. Mark Tierney is engaged in producing the definitive edition of the Letters of Blessed Columba, but on account of his age, has handed over his responsibilities as Vice-Postulator to Fr. Columba McCann, whose main interest is in the theological thought of Blessed Columba.

Keeping in mind the 150th Anniversary of the birth of Blessed Columba, which will be take place on 1st April 2008, those responsible for the Cause considered it would be useful to hold a special meeting of the Vice-Postulators, to discuss this up-coming celebration, and plan for future events to further the Cause. This meeting was held in Belgium on 24-25 June 2007, hosted by Fr. Olivier Raquez (the Postulator), with the following in attendance: Br. R.-Ferdinand Poswick, Abbot Vincent Bataille and Fr. Mark Tierney. Fr. Columba McCann was unfortunately unable to attend. Fr. Luc Moës of Maredsous also attended, as he has special responsibility for the tomb of Blessed Columba, and also for the



publication with Br. R.-Ferdinand Poswick of a bi-annual review *Le Courrier du Bienheureux Columba Marmion*. This meeting allowed the five monks in question to discuss various matters of interest, and to take a global view of the present situation relating to the Cause for the Canonization of Blessed Columba Marmion

Activities of the Postulation during the years 2000-2007

Since the aim of these “Souvenirs” is to make known the History of the Cause, it has seemed good to recall some of the major initiatives taken since September 2000, which were discussed at the above-mentioned June meeting.

The greatest number of these took place in Maredsous, being the place where Dom Marmion lived his personal religious life. It was there that he had to direct the lives of his community in the ways of the Lord, and from where he often went forth to transmit to many others the spiritual treasures which he had himself acquired, and finally, because it is in a chapel in the Abbey church of Maredsous that his body now rests.

It may be helpful, first of all, to point out the special cult which has grown round his tomb, thanks to the numerous pilgrims who come to pray there, often leaving prayers and thanksgiving notes for graces received. Equally important is the celebration of the “Feast of Faith for young people”, which is held each year in Maredsous, on a date as near as possible to the Feast-day of Blessed Columba (3rd October). Furthermore, a special Mass and Office has been produced by Fr. Nicolas Dayez, comprising various texts and accompanying music. It should also be pointed out that several pilgrims, and other devout members of the faithful, have requested relics of Blessed Columba. The authorities in Maredsous, at the time of his re-interment, (1961) decided to keep, his body intact, but the Abbey has kept some of his monastic clothes, and other objects belonging to him. It is in this way that some pieces of his monastic habit have been used to make small reliquaries, which are available to those who request them. Finally, some medals and other objects have been made, carrying his image on one side, and his pectoral cross on the other. These reliquaries and medals may be requested from the Vice-Postulator in the Abbey of Maredsous.



Besides these initiatives relating to the external cult of Blessed Columba, several other enterprises have helped to make known his doctrine and thoughts. In the Abbey of Maredsous itself, a modern archival development has been put in place, to house and preserve with care the documents and other material relating to Blessed Marmion. These are in process of being fully catalogued and databased, in such a way that they may be used by researchers, who wish to have recourse to original source material. Following on the re-edition, in 1998, of his Major Works (in French and in English), which included the English letters, other publications have appeared in several languages, dealing with the history of his life, his doctrine and his teaching. I wish to indicate several of these publications: a useful and indispensable biography, written in English by Mark Tierney (1994 and 2000), and translated into French, Flemish and German; in 2000, Ferdinand Poswick, published *Dom Columba Marmion. Troisième Abbé de Maredsous: Un guide spirituel pour notre temps*. In 2004, Br. Poswick produced another book *Priez 15 jours avec Columba Marmion*. The quarterly review *Lettre de Maredsous* in which Br. Poswick is a frequent contributor, often contains original articles concerning various aspects of the life of Blessed Columba. Volume No 3 of the year 2000 was entirely given over to articles on Blessed Columba. Another important publication is that of a bi-annual bulletin, under the direction of Fr. Luc Moës: *Le Courrier du Bienheureux Columba Marmion*, which has already appeared in thirteen issues, and which keeps those interested up-to-date with developments in the Process of the Cause for Canonization.

In other parts of Belgium, especially where the Flemish language is spoken, a genuine interest in Blessed Columba has been awakened, centred on the Abbey of Zevenkerken (formerly called St. André) in Bruges. In the year 2000, the review *Sanctifier* contained many articles on Blessed Columba, while in 2006 a Conference were organised at Bellem on the Theme: “Searching for the face of God”, and in 2007 in Zevenkerken, a presentation of mystical texts, with special reference to the writings of Blessed Columba.



I know less regarding such matters organised in Marmion Abbey, USA, and in Glenstal, Ireland, but it is certain that interest in Dom Columba remains real and alive. Abbot Vincent Bataille, the Abbot of Marmion Abbey, in Aurora, Illinois, U.S.A., who is the Vice-Postulator for North America, has recently published some imaginative leaflets and other promotional literature on Blessed Columba. It is hardly necessary to stress the importance of this Abbey, founded in 1933, and dedicated to Dom Marmion. It has contributed over many years to make known the doctrine, and to further the cult, of Blessed Columba, throughout the United States of America. Furthermore, it was responsible for originating the miracle, worked through his intercession, by advising Mrs. Patrizia Bitzan, from St. Cloud, to go to Maredsous to pray to Dom Marmion for a cure from terminal cancer. Also, in the U.S.A. new English translations of the writings of Blessed Columba have been published by The Ignatius Press and the Zaccheus Press. In 2005, a Symposium was held in Conception Abbey on “The Life and Teaching of Blessed Columba” and the texts of the Conferences have since been published in the February 2006 issue of *Josephinum: a Journal of Theology*. In the autumn of 2007, it is planned to hold another such Symposium, in the Chicago area.

The third monastery associated with Blessed Columba Marmion, is Glenstal Abbey, in Ireland. This monastery was founded in 1927, by the Abbey of Maredsous, in memory of Blessed Columba Marmion, who was born in Dublin in 1858, and lived there for the first 28 years of his life, apart from a short time spent in Rome studying theology in the early 1880s. While in Italy he visited Monte Cassino, the cradle of Benedictine monasticism, and was so impressed by the place, that he determined to become a monk one day. As there were no Benedictine monasteries in Ireland at this time, he joined the Belgian Abbey of Maredsous in 1886. Eventually, in 1909, he was elected Abbot of this monastery, and remained in office until his death in 1923. Glenstal has become the centre for promoting the cause of Blessed Columba throughout Ireland. There is a shrine to him in the abbey church, and promotional literature is provided for those coming to ask for favours through his intercession. In Dundrum, a suburb of Dublin,



where Blessed Columba served as a curate for one year (1881-1882), there is a Day-Care Centre, “Marmion House”, named in memory of him, for elderly and handicapped people, as well as a “Marmion Walk” and a “Marmion Bridge”. There is another bridge, named in his honour, over the river Slaney, in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, near Edermine House, where Marmion spent some years during the First World War.

Future projects to help promote the Cause

One of the first projects will be to appoint two new Vice-Postulators, to further the Marmion Cause in Italian and Spanish-speaking countries. Considering the number (14) of languages into which Blessed Columba’s writing have been translated, it is evident that he has a world-wide clientele or following. Abbot Vincent Bataille has been charged with the appointment of a Spanish-speaking Vice-Postulator, and he is at present examining several possible candidates. I have decided to appoint a monk of the Abbey of Our Lady of Praglia, near Padua, Fr. Paolo Fassera, as Vice-Postulator for Italy. The monks of this monastery translated Marmion’s spiritual writings into Italian many years ago, so it has a long-standing association with him. Fr. Fassera has been for a long time the Procurator in Rome for the Subiaco Benedictine Congregation. He is also a well-known historian, and will undoubtedly be able to render a fruitful service to the Marmion Postulation.

Secondly, the approaching year 2008 provides us with an urgent need to organise some celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Marmion, who later became known as Dom Columba. One project – already nearing completion – is to publish the definitive French edition of the Marmion Correspondence. Another is to lobby the Superiors and Superioresses of all the Benedictine monasteries throughout the world, asking them to promote an interest among their communities, and among their lay contacts or oblates, in the person and spirituality of Dom Marmion. A Circular Letter could also be sent to certain bishops, who have shown an interest in the Benedictine way of life. Another initiative might be to profit by the “Congress of Abbots of the Benedictine



Confederation”, due to take place in Rome during the month of September 2008, with the proposal to hold a “Marmion Day” during the Congress. The abbots will expect to be given the customary audience with the Pope, during which mention of the 150th Anniversary of Blessed Columba’s birth could be brought to his notice. Finally, it is hoped to organise an international Symposium on Blessed Columba, which would consist of reputable and well-known theologians, discussing the relevance of Marmion’s Spiritual Message for the people of the 21st century. Surely his message is not out-of-date, but rather needs to be couched in more modern language, and in a form more suited to our computer-orientated age.

In concluding these Memoirs, I wish to thank those who have contributed to the Beatification of Dom Marmion, and to say what a joy it has been to collaborate over a long period, in such a wonderful and fraternal way, with Dom Ferdinand Poswick and Dom Mark Tierney. I also wish to thank Abbot Vincent Bataille, Dom Columba McCann and Dom Luc Moes, for their continued support of, and interest in, the Cause, and to say how much we all look forward to the future Canonization of our dear Blessed Columba Marmion.

Fr. Olivier Raquez, O.S.B.
Postulator of the Cause