

Interior Cave

October 23, 2010

Visiting Subiaco put me in mind of two lines of Latin verse which situate in succession four founders of great religious Orders in the Church. Besides sweeping over three quarters of Church history, the lines also suggest why so many a Catholic soul today is hanging onto the Faith by its finger-tips.

Here are the lines:—Bernardus valles, colles Benedictus amabat,

Oppida Franciscus, magnas Ignatius urbes.

A free translation might be:— Bernard loved valleys, Benedict took to the hills

Francis worked towns, cities Ignatius tills.

In chronological order (slightly upset here by the demands of the Latin hexameter), St Benedict (480–547) sought God in the mountains (Subiaco, Monte Cassino); the Cistercians, galvanized by St Bernard (1090–1153) came down to the valleys (notably Clairvaux); St Francis (1181–1226) roamed amidst the small towns of his day, while the Jesuits of St Ignatius (1491–1556) led the apostolate of the modern city. One might say the modern city took its revenge when Jesuits, with Dominicans, led the collapse that was Vatican II (e.g. de Lubac and Rahner, S.J.; Congar and Schillebeeckx, O.P.).

For is not the progression from hill to city a progression from being alone with God to being only with man? Industrialism and the motor-car make the modern city with its soft life possible, but in doing so they generate a daily environment steadily more artificial and cut off from God's Nature. With the material comforts increase the spiritual difficulties. In fact big city life is becoming so inhuman that the liberal death-wish may soon bring on the Third World

War, to devastate urban and suburban life as we know it. Then if, for a variety of reasons, a Catholic cannot take to the hills, how does he stay out of the mental institutions?

One answer is logical. He must live with God, inside himself, in an interior cave, leaving the world to rush all around. He must turn his own heart into a hermitage and at least his home, if he can, into something of a sanctuary, while respecting all natural family needs. That does not mean living in an unreal world of one's own, but in the real world of God within, as opposed to the fantastical world of the Devil without, pressing on us from all sides.

Similarly, the Newchurch has closed countless monasteries and convents since Vatican II, which leaves rather fewer openings for a soul which may think that it hears an interior call from God. Has he led them up a blind alley, or has he let them down? Or is he maybe calling them to lead a religious life within, turning their little flat in the big city into a hermitage, and their godless office into a field of apostolate, by means of prayer, charity and example? Our world is in grave need of Catholic souls that radiate outwards their inner peace and calm with God.

Kyrie eleison.