

Father Luke

Father Luke Eberle, O.S.B.
1910-1995



By THOMAS BROCKHAUS, O.S.B.

Father Luke Eberle, 84, died on April 6 after a long battle with emphysema. He was born in Linton, North Dakota, on May 10, 1910, the fifth of the nine children of Joseph Eberle and Christina Wolf, immigrants from Ukraine. Being the first boy, he was given his father's name, Joseph, at baptism. When he was three years old, the family moved to Mt. Angel, Oregon, where his father owned and operated a general merchandise/grocery store that remained in the family until 1973.

Father Luke is survived by his brother, Brother Benedict Eberle of Mount Angel Abbey, and by two sisters, Sister Therese Eberle of the Benedictine Queen of Angels Monastery in Mt. Angel, and Hilda Eberle who lives in Portland. Abbot Peter is his nephew.

Joseph Eberle (the future Father Luke) received his elementary education in the parish school in Mt. Angel. He spent the four years of high school and the first two years of college in Mount Angel Seminary. He entered the novitiate of Mount Angel Abbey in 1930 and pronounced his triennial vows on September 8, 1931, being given the monastic name Luke.

Then, in order to learn the pipe organ and accompany the Gregorian chant, he was sent to the Benedictine Abtei Maria Laach, Rheinland, Germany, for his last two years of college. The monks of Maria Laach at the time included theologians and artists who were making major contributions to the liturgical movement, but most of all it was the abbot, Ildephonse Herwegen, whose vision dominated the future life and teaching of the young monk from Oregon. Father Luke became the interpreter of the great German abbot's writings on the meaning and spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict.

For his first year of theology Father Luke studied in the Benedictine Abbaye

de Clervaux in Luxembourg. His fellow students there, like those at Maria Laach, provided him with a circle of friends and correspondents he cherished all his life. The most kindred spirit of these, and the most famous, was the Father Jean Lelercq, a scholar of Christian and Benedictine spirituality.

Father Luke returned from Europe in time to make his solemn profession of vows on September 8, 1934, as a member of the first class to be received by the newly elected Coadjutor Abbot Thomas Meier. He completed his theological studies at Mount Angel Seminary and was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Edward D. Howard on May 21, 1936.

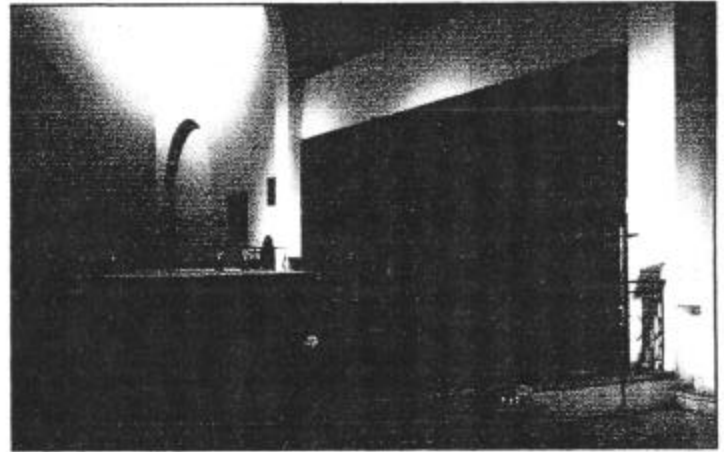
His first assignment when he returned from Europe was that of organist. The instrument at Mount Angel was not a pipe organ like those he had learned to play in Europe, but a small reed organ. The nave and transepts of the abbey church had not been built, so there was no space for organ pipes, and, besides, the monastery could not afford one. That was the situation until a gift from his widowed mother's estate was made available for the purchase of a pipe organ, and choirmaster Richard Key Biggs of Blessed Sacrament Church, Los Angeles, learned that a Hook and Hastings organ was being dismantled with its pipes for sale, and Kilgen organ builders found space in the triforium of the abbey church for some of these pipes. The result was the pipe organ that has served so well for half a century and has provided an instrument on which Father Luke trained a generation of organists. A small metal plate on the organ console notes that it is "in memory of Christina Eberle." Some of the Hook and Hastings pipes will be incorporated in the great organ to be built in the rear gallery over the entrance to the church and in the choir organ.

At the same time he was appointed organist, Father Luke was named associate editor of *St. Joseph Magazine*, a periodical serving a Catholic family readership. After two years as associate editor under Father Eugene Medved as editor, Father Luke became editor for two years. These were four years of unremitting labor: planning, gathering material, and editing a 32-page magazine each month twelve months a year. After these routine tasks, whatever time and energy remained were devoted to contacting the kind of writers needed to upgrade the contents of the magazine. Father Luke's skills as a correspondent enabled him to enlist the help of professors and students he had met in Europe to contribute the theology of liturgical spirituality that he processed into practical teaching for Catholic families.

He succeeded Father Eugene again in his next appointment, this time as rector of the Seminary of Christ the King, New Westminster, British Columbia. The year was 1944, and Westminster Priory, Mount Angel Abbey's first foundation, was still dependent on Mount Angel and staffed by its monks. Father Eugene had been rector of the seminary from the time the Abbey took charge in 1939 and he left this office vacant when he was appointed prior of the monastic community.

Besides being rector, Father Luke was the organist, back again to a reed organ. One of the seminary students was Edward Nicholson, whom Father Luke trained to accompany the Gregorian chant and alternate as organist every other week. Edward joined Mount Angel Abbey and became Father David.

Father Luke served for six years as rector in Canada and then with the election of Coadjutor Abbot Damian Jentges in 1950 was recalled to Mount Angel (Continued on Page 7)



The church at Inkamana Abbey.

Father Luke (continued from page 2)

Abbey to begin the most important chapter in his life story: novice master for fourteen years leading up to and through Vatican Council II. Fathers Blaise Turck and Placidus Zach were in his first class of novices and Father Kenneth Jacques in the last. Abbot Peter Eberle and his predecessor, the late Abbot Bonaventure Zerr, as well as Prior Boniface Lutz of Mount Angel's daughter house in Idaho, were among the many monks trained by Father Luke. Abbot Peter echoes Abbot Bonaventure's sentiment when he says that whenever he is planning on doing something new he weighs his decision against Father Luke's criteria.

His longest tenure in an assignment was 37 years as custodian of Mass intentions.

During these years too, Father Luke taught a variety of classes in the seminary: English, French, German, ethics, experimental psychology, liturgy, religion, and sociology. In 1965 he attended the liturgical institute at the University of Trier in Germany.

He published three books, two of them translations from the German and one from Latin. In 1973 his first book, *It Began with Benedict*, was from the German work of the same title by Abbot Leodegar Hunkeler of Engelberg, the Swiss abbey from which Mount Angel was founded in 1882. In 1977 *The Rule of the Master* translated from the critical Latin edition of the *Regula magistri* as it appeared in Adalbert de Vogüé's *La Règle du Maître* was acclaimed by Terrence Kardong as "an indispensable tool for interpreting the Rule of Benedict against its most influential literary source." This was published as volume six in the Cistercian Studies series. Father Luke's third

book was number forty-nine in the same series. It was published in 1983 and was titled *The Way to God*, an English translation from the German *Der Weg zu Gott* by Abbot Emmanuel Heufelder of the Benedictine abbey of Niederaltaich in Germany. Even in the last year of his life Father Luke translated an article in German on St. Hedwig by Dr. Hanna-Barbara Gerl for one of Mount Angel Abbey's oblates, Heinke Martens, who chose St. Hedwig as her patron.

Father Luke celebrated the golden jubilee of his monastic profession in 1981 and of his ordination to the priesthood in 1986. In his homily at the funeral Mass Abbot Peter described Father Luke as a man of contrasts: self-effacing, gentle, warm, gracious, and grateful, especially to those who cared for him in his last illness; and tough and self-disciplined beneath this surface, faithful in community prayer and other observances, meticulous and dependable in his work, and adamantly opposed to any worldly dampening of the monastic spirit. He remembered what St. Benedict wrote in his Rule 1,500 years ago: "As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen." □

Abbot Peter to Pietersburg (III) (continued from page 4)

go to a witch doctor to "discover" the reason for the tragedy. The witch doctor might point a finger at someone—an uncle, a neighbor. If so, that person is "tried" (in a kangaroo court), condemned and executed.

In addition, the country has been suffering from a taxi war. All over one can see these "taxis," little minivans stuffed with passengers which make runs from city to city. Apparently there has been a lot of conflict over routes and often they are settled by gunfire. Abbot Willibrord told me that a few years ago he missed a shoot-out on his way to Mass one Sunday only because he stopped first to get gas. In that one six people died, and there have been several. Moreover, people die by the score in traffic accidents. I was told of one accident in which a truck hauling people was involved and twenty-five people were killed.

That violence thus can easily carry over to politics. However, everyone I talked to is very hopeful about the present state of affairs. Everyone was frightened and tense before the election, but now there is a completely different mood in the country. People have hope, greatly relieved that everything has gone smoothly. Much credit is given to President Mandela, the one-time revolutionary who is proving to be a first-class statesman. Of course there is still uncertainty. The ANC has made lots of promises. Can they be kept? How long will people wait patiently? Time will tell.

Speaking of time, if you have persevered this far you have expended enough of it reading this report. So here I shall end. It was an experience I shall never forget. □