

## chapter 3: Taking Root in the tradition

### 3.2.1. Dom Anselme Le Bail (1878–1956) Abbot of Scourmont 1913–1956

This article, by Armand Veilleux, published in French in *collectanea cis-terciensia* (63 [2001] 224–33) and in English translation in *cistercian Studies Quarterly* (38 [2003]: 27–34), is reproduced here with several additions and modifications to adapt it to the context of this chapter.

#### Historical Context

The years 1892 to 1914 were years of great spiritual vitality. it was the time of great conversions among men of letters: Verlaine, bloy, huysmans, claudel, Péguy, Psi-chari, Massignon. in those same years, bergson, at the Collège de France, redis-covered the heartfelt knowledge of mystics, and blondel, reviving the approach of augustinian ontology, taught that deification was the logical transcendence of every human action. During that same time, several great abbots deeply influenced the orientation of our order by rediscovering, if not the authentic cistercian spirit, at least the spiritual and even contemplative dimension of the monastic life.

we have pre-sented several in the preceding chapters, namely Dom lehodey (§ 2.4.1) and Dom chautard (§ 2.4.2), who were personally involved in a movement of foundations in distant countries which heralded the great expansion of our order a few years later. however, while these great masters had been nourished by a personal read-ing of the Rule of Saint Benedict and had acquired a certain knowledge of Saint bernard, their contact with the cistercian tradition proper was limited. between the two world wars, there was not only considerable numerical growth in the order, but also a rediscovery of the cistercian spirit, and the spiritual riches of the great masters of cistercian spirituality were rediscovered, beginning with the abbot of clairvaux. in this respect, no one was more influential in the order than Dom anselme le bail and the entire movement he engendered, a movement that was first spiritual and then intellectual. Formationemmanuel le bail was born on December 31, 1878, in brittany, which gave two abbots general to the order: Dom ollitault of Kéryvallan and Dom Dominique nogues. his mother died two years later in giving birth to a child that would not 45 Dom armand Veilleux has been the abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (can-ada) from 1969 to 1976, of conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990, and Procurator of the order from 1990 to 1998. From 1892 to the Close of the Second Vatican Council 180 survive.

Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

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Deprived of the tenderness of a mother, he was not deprived of all affection. after primary school, he began his greek and latin "humanities" at the minor seminary of Sainte-anne-d'auray in 1892. Six years later, wanting to be a missionary, he requested admission to the novitiate of the holy Spirit Fathers. he received the habit on September 29, 1898, and made first profession for three years on october 10, 1899. but then he needed to fulfill his military service. he was called to serve at lorient in his native brittany. at his return he undertook his philosophy studies at the scholasticate of chevilly near Paris, with an exam taken at the Sorbonne, then his theology studies. he received minor orders in July 1903; three months later he had to renew his vows for a period of five years, and advanced to the subdiaconate. but he hesitated. and because of his hesitations, the Superior general, bishop leroy, dismissed him from the congregation. after a retreat at timadeuc, he decided to go to Scourmont, without even saying goodbye to his family. was it his missionary spirit that made him choose distant belgium rather than brittany? we will never know.he knocked on Scourmont's door May 21, 1904, at the age of 26, and was admitted to the novitiate with the name of br. anselme. his novice master was Fr. alphonse bernigaud, who held this position until 1907. in 1905, Fr. alphonse had the idea, which was original at the time, of using the Rule of Saint benedict as a formation manual. not having a great knowledge of it himself, he gave his novices homework on the Rule. br. anselme was captivated by this Rule and did his homework with great zeal. he filled a huge notebook, which was finished on May 10, 1906. he was thus in possession of a vast synthesis that he would continue to develop throughout his life as monk and abbot.ordained a priest on august 24, 1909, he was named master of the lay brothers and also of the novice lay brothers (their novitiate being distinct from that of the choir novices at that time) by his abbot, Dom norbert Sauvage, who had recognized the innate talents of a formator in Fr. anselme. he not only taught them the Rule but also liturgy, which was becoming one of the principle nourish-ments of his spiritual life. no one else at this time would have thought to teach liturgy to the lay brothers, unless it would be to give them a course in the rubrics. The young Fr. anselme explained the liturgical cycles to them after the manner of Dom guéranger, and the Sacrifice of the Mass. he composed a small manual for them entitled The Divine Office of the Cistercian Lay Brother (1910), where he presented the office of the Paters and aves as a veritable "prayer of the church." in 1911, he became master of the choir novices. he then took up his novitiate notes and produced a complete exposition of the doctrine of Saint benedict from the very text of the Rule. at a time when almost everyone, including the monasteries, used Rodriguez for religious formation, anselme le bail adopted the Rule