

IN MEMORIAM

KEVIN ALBAN O.CARM. (1958-2021)

Kevin Alban was born on 15th of June 1958 to John and Yvonne Alban. As a boy he served the daily Mass at the Discalced Carmelite church at Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire but it was as a teenager that he met the Ancient Observance through the regular vocation retreats held at Allington Castle, Kent. He still had contact with friends he had made in those days.

As an undergraduate he read Modern History at the University of Oxford (1976-9) and was a member of Balliol College – an association he maintained throughout the years. It is unsurprising that being incisive and well-read, Kevin had been a member of College's debating society.



He joined the (formerly) Anglo-Welsh Province in 1979 and completed his novitiate at Aylesford under the guidance of Piet Wijngaard, who was a firm but fair novice master. Kevin recalled on number of occasions, when thinking back those days, how he had answered a question about English Church history in class so fully that Fr. Piet asked him to give a further presentation the following day, with the disclaimer "oh, you clearly know much about this than me". Not only was Kevin's ability as a teacher recognised early on in his time in the Order but the novice director gave him a few hours a week in order to begin researching Medieval Carmelites.

After first profession (25th August 1980), he began studies at the Gregorian University, Rome, where his natural academic talent was evident. However, during the early part of his formation, Kevin decided to leave the Order. He had a deep love for all things Italian and remained in Rome, where he worked initially for language to good use. He moved to Berlitz in 1986 and rose to become European Project Manager in 1990 – a position he held for four years. One of his many clients was the Italian Police, who were being trained to deal with English football fans.

During his novitiate, Kevin was asked to put into modern English the letters of the great Carmelite theologian Thomas Netter († 1430) and publish them along with commentary in the Province Bulletin (Issue 10, No 1-Issue 13, No 2, inc.) Some years later, when he was asked for permission to republish them in a book to commemorate the 750th anniversary of the Province, the

renewed contact prompted Kevin to reflect on the call to Carmel. He visited Aylesford and Walworth and after a period of discernment, Kevin was readmitted to the Order in 1995 and made what he used to call his 'second first profession' on 25th March 1996. Kevin applied himself diligently to his studies at the Missionary Institute, London, where his skills as a teacher as well – as a student – were recognised, appreciated, and utilised; shortly after he graduated, he was back at the Institute employed as the lecturer, and he was involved from that time onwards in the formation of seminarians in a number of ways until his death.

After graduation with his pontifical degree, *summa cum laude* (1996), Kevin undertook postgraduate studies at Heythrop College, London, gaining a distinction in the degree Master in Theology, in Systematic Theology (2001). During this time, he was also the director of the Shrine of St. Jude, a role which allowed him to hone his pastoral skills meeting many pilgrims from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds and attain a good grounding finance through the management of the Shrine office.

On 29th June 2001 Kevin was ordained priest by a fellow alumnus of Balliol College, Bishop Crispian Hollis (Bishop of Portsmouth), who had been Catholic Chaplain to the University of Oxford in the 1970s. Shortly thereafter Kevin was called to Rome to serve as a Secretary General (2001-2007). In 2007 he became Bursar General, a task for which he seemed aptly suited, with his financial acumen and facility for languages. Kevin was someone appropriately described as a 'multitasker' and during his time working in the College as a lecturer in Mariology, Ecclesiology, and Church History (2004-2015). In the final two academic years of his tenure, he was also one of the College's spiritual directors.

Kevin was not someone easily overcome by obstacles and in spite of living in Rome and having a full workload embarked on a research degree at Heythrop, London in 2002, pursuing a subject for which he had a long-held interest. In 2007 he was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for thesis titled 'The teaching and Impact of the "Doctrinale" of Thomas Netter of Walden (ca. 1374-1430)'; this was later published as a monograph (Brepols, 2010). On the strength of his published works, Kevin was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (2011). As already noted, although a historian by training, Kevin found himself called upon to teach in other subjects. He often remarked that a good historian needs some knowledge of these other areas – dogma, scripture, ethics, etc. – as history was largely a matter of determining context and, thereafter, analysing and expounding the significance of historical events.

Kevin was elected Prior Provincial of the British Province in 2018; he worked on the principle that obedience for obedience's sake would very likely not produce the desired results and would simply frustrate and demoralise the brothers concerned. However, he was deeply committed to community life as one of the key expressions of Carmelite identity and did what he could to promote that value in his dealings with members of the Province.

Although not in peak physical condition, Kevin had, nonetheless, seemingly boundless energy for any task or project. Even as Provincial he continued to lecture – both at the Blackfriars *Studium*, University of Oxford and at St. Mary's University, Twickenham. He was sought after as an academic advisor, helping to bring a number of doctoral thesis to successful defence, as well as a retreat giver and spiritual director.

Kevin was admitted to hospital on 23rd December 2021, where he remained for nine weeks. During his time there he reflected on the powerlessness of the human person in the depths of illness and suffering. Some scribbled notes found after his death stated simply 'accepting I have no control'. Kevin was able to return home to Aylesford, but the prognosis was poor – the Consultant explained that he had advanced pancreatic cancer and his time was short.

The Very Rev. Dr. Kevin John Alban, Prior Provincial of the British Province, died on the evening of 4th May 2021, attended by his Carmelite brothers, Fr. Francis Kemsley (prior) and Fr. Gerard Walsh, along with the Province Nurse, Mrs Patricia Golledge, who had done so much for Kevin throughout his illness. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

RICHARD COPSEY, O.CARM.