



Glenstal monk shows his cards

Kate Butler

THEY are renowned for their spartan lifestyles and Gregorian chant, so who could have foretold that the Benedictine monks of Glenstal Abbey would have a tarot-card reader in their midst?

Mark Patrick Hederman, one of the order's best-known monks, has revealed that he has used tarot cards to help people with their problems. He is now calling on the Catholic church to reclaim the fortune-telling system from the occult.

"I use cards in two ways," said Hederman, a highly regarded philosopher. "In lectures I explain the symbolism, and then I may read them for someone with a particular problem. It can be useful for taking their mind off a problem in an obsessive way."

The monk will be seen on RTE television next Sunday researching tarot cards in the library of Glenstal, a monastery and secondary school in Co Limerick. However, he does not do card readings at the abbey.

"I normally wouldn't do [them] unless I know the person very well," he said. "It's not



Collins, above, frowns upon tarot readings practised by a monk from Glenstal Abbey

In the documentary, entitled *Would You Believe — The Devil's Pack*, the brother explains that the cards were invented in 15th-century Italy and have Christian origins.

"I'm saying we've got to get them back again," said Hederman, the author of a recent book on the holy spirit. "They originally belonged to Christianity and humanity. They are wonderful ways of connecting

can connect with the unconscious of other people. They can tell them so much, it's sometimes very important."

He says the Benedictine order is very tolerant of his idiosyncratic stance: "They are very understanding of other people's forms of craziness."

Hederman pointed out that a book entitled *Meditations on the Tarot* had an afterword by an esteemed theologian, Cardi-

for meditation, in the same way as icons.

But the Benedictine monk is at odds with other members of the Catholic church, including Fr Pat Collins, who also appears on *Would You Believe*.

"Divination is frowned upon by the Catholic church," said Collins. "If people get involved in the occult there's a danger that they're opening themselves up to negative spiritual influences

does not use the cards for predicting the future, but as a means of helping people.

"We make the future ourselves, it depends on what George Bush does tomorrow, not some ogre in the sky," he said. "People try to make decisions in their spiritual and physical lives, such as having a vocation as a monk."

"The danger is if they come to me as a monk and see me as a guru. To deflect that, tarot cards are one of many mediums to make people aware of a wider, symbolic world."

"It's much more impression-making than me telling you what to do. Anything symbolic, such as the stained-glass win-

The monk says the death card is used to indicate that an important decision needs to be made, such as between a wife and a lover. "The card of death is the most dreaded card in the pack, but it's actually a caricature, a jokey card. It says there has to be a death in a particular situation. In this case it has to be deciding between your wife or your lover, but the cards aren't going to tell you which one."

Hederman believes that tarot cards are an important link between lay people and Christianity and should be reclaimed by the church in order to help develop spirituality.

"The church cannot do anything about the cards — they

advised them not to read *The Da Vinci Code* [by Dan Brown]. It doesn't work, it only serves to give more publicity."

Hederman believes the cards were hijacked from Christianity 200 years ago by a renegade priest and a former protestant, who began to use them improperly for the occult.

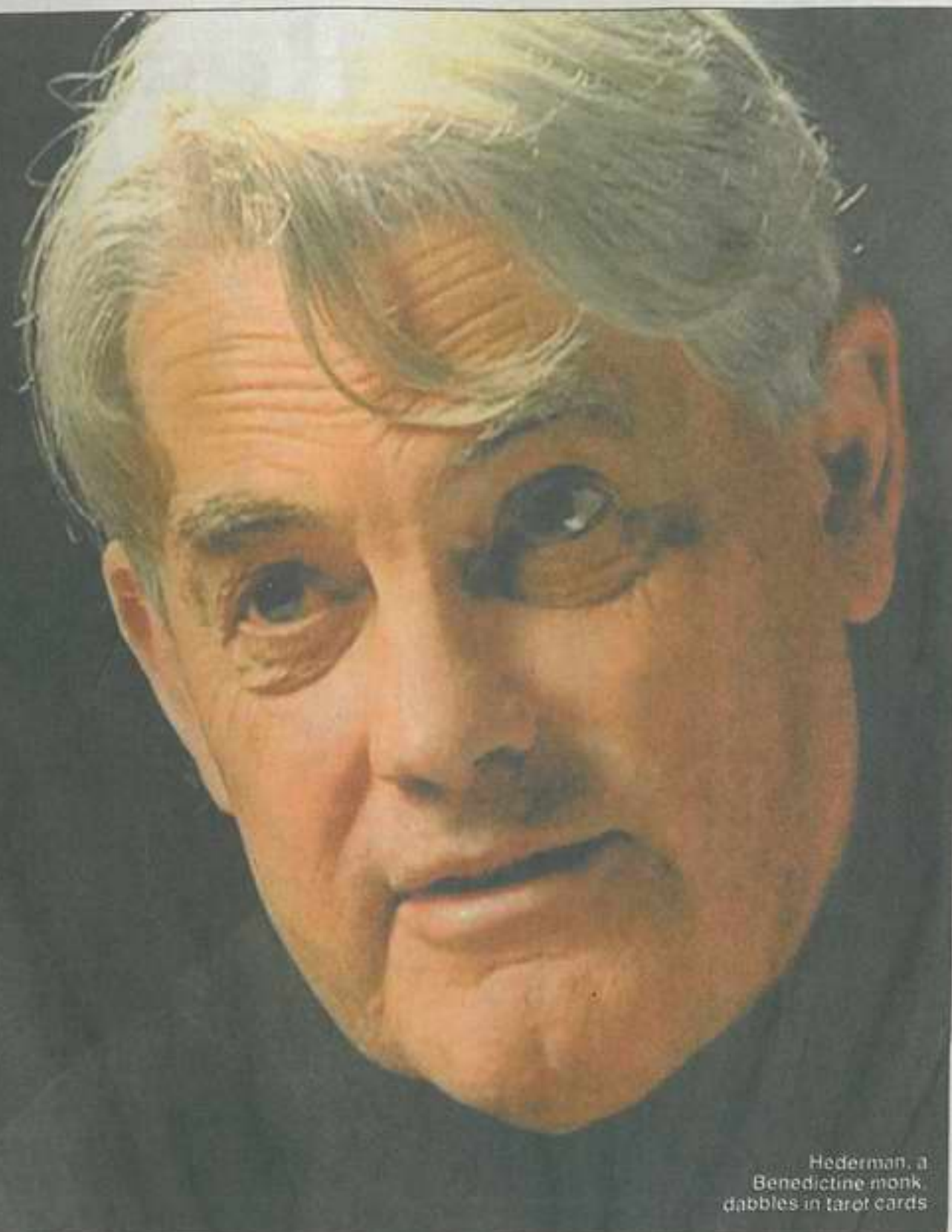
Aficionados of tarot cards are said to have included characters as diverse as Princess Diana and WB Yeats, who was a member of the Esoteric Order of the Golden Dawn.

Jacqueline Stallone, mother of Sylvester, has said she advised her son during the making of *Rambo III* on the basis of what the cards told her. "He

every day. I'd throw the tarot cards and do astrology and numerology. In case one thing doesn't fly, it's good to check the others."

The Catholic catechism states that dealing in the occult is "gravely contrary to the virtue of religion".

"If you look at the catechism of the Catholic church, paragraphs 2111 and the following deals with this," says Fr Vincent Twomey of Maynooth Seminary. I know nothing of them [tarot cards] but I would ask, why would you want to unlock the unconscious? I'd reject that as narcissism, a means of turning inward on yourself. Christianity is outward looking. There is a false curiosity about the



Hederman, a Benedictine monk, dabbles in tarot cards