

Quicquid agunt homines: **The Benedictine Mission to Postmodern Culture**

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In a lecture delivered at Oxford in March of 1864, British poet, essayist, state school inspector, and vowed agnostic Matthew Arnold paid tribute to the greatness of Roman Catholicism and its significant contribution to Western European culture.¹ Despite the “lordly oppression of public opinion” found in such an “anti-Catholic society” as that of Victorian England, noted the author of “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,” English Catholics still had much with which to “console” themselves. Just let any Catholic take a trip to “the sacred quarter” of that “Happy Island in Bloomsbury, the reading room of the British Museum” and he would find there upon the shelves a “Catholic Leviathan” dwarfing and “lording it over that whole region, reducing to insignificance the feeble Protestant forces which hang upon its skirts: . . . that immense Catholic work, the collection of the Abbé Migne.”²

“Everything is there,” says Arnold, “*Quicquid agunt homines* . . . Religion, philosophy, history, biography, arts, sciences, bibliography, gossip. . . . Like one of the great Middle-Age Cathedrals . . . the work embraces the whole range of human interests. . . . Like the net in Scripture, it drags everything to land, bad and good, lay and ecclesiastical, sacred and profane. . . .” A wide-embracing power “eminently the Church; not,” he concludes, “the Church of the future, but indisputably the Church of the past.”³

When Sister Jacquelyn approached me two years ago to request my participation in this weekend’s conferences on Benedictines and Evangelization, I initially responded that this simply was not my area of interest or field of expertise. I had crossed paths with various Benedictine missionary monks and nuns, some from Europe, some from the African continent, and even some from the United States. But, outside of encountering them as fellow travelers on the road to everlasting life, I had no particular interest in their specific spin on the mode of *regular* living that we hold in common. However, Sister Jacquelyn, before hanging up the phone with a click that sounded all too decisive in its punctuated staccato, assured me that I would think of something—and, indeed, I have!—with some helpful prompting from her “President’s Message” published in the *American Monastic Newsletter* of October 2008 announcing the theme for this year’s meeting of the ABA. There Sister noted that, “historically,” Benedictines have been “involved in bringing monasticism” and “Christianity and Christian culture to new frontiers” and “new lands.” Quoting Bishop Claude Champagne, she continues, ““Being a mission church today involves seeking to discover the other, knowing them for what they are in their culture, their mentality, in their search for . . . the profound meaning of human life.”” Noting the call of the Church to see evangelization “in a new way,” Sister Jacquelyn concludes that Benedictines

¹ Matthew Arnold, “Pagan and Christian Religious Sentiment” in *Matthew Arnold’s Essays* (London: J. M. Dent 1911) 127-45. For historical information concerning this essay see Matthew Arnold, *Lectures & Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan Press 1990) 458-62.

² *Ibid.* 127-28.

³ *Ibid.* 128-29.

can fulfill Bishop Champagne's exhortation to "know the other" by way of their profound valuing of "presence, humility, listening, and respect. . . ."⁴

For the rest of the time allotted to me this evening, I wish to provide at least a provisional discussion of just what twenty-first century, postmodern Benedictines can bring culturally to their mission of evangelization in the world today. It goes without saying that times have changed considerably since the days of Augustine of Canterbury's Gregorian mission to the people of Britain. Perhaps the most radical change has been one of the most recent: the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council challenging the Church to re-think, re-develop, and re-energize its understanding of its place in the world, of its own unique Catholic voice, and of its interaction with the prevailing culture of the West as well as with other cultures around the planet. Pope St. Gregory the Great, that sixth-century avatar of monastic missionary evangelization, was prescient in his instructions to Augustine concerning the proper Christian manner of interacting with other cultures: by the subtle adoption and then adaptation, but never outright condemnation and destruction, of the "other's" way of doing things. Much to Gregory's chagrin, Augustine initially failed to heed his pontiff's suggestions and that first mission turned out to be a somewhat rocky affair.⁵

Keeping in mind this missionary methodology of Pope St. Gregory the Great, let us ask ourselves: What should be the attitude that contemporary Benedictines hold and exhibit as both members and evangelizers of contemporary culture? How can we prepare ourselves for the actual encounter in the field with the other by drawing on our long tradition of humble listening to and engaging with men and women from different lands, who possess different ways of thinking and acting? And finally, what can we cull from a postmodern culture here in the West that arises from what is now a long, well-established and well-respected line of secular-humanist thought, (echoing in a striking manner the encounter between the people of late classical pagan antiquity and our own Christian monastic forebears) and then employ in our exchange with the men and women we encounter in this truly global mission of the third millennium? Certainly, we need not be reminded that for centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire, many Benedictine men and women made the focus of their daily *ora et labora* the preservation of classical pagan culture, saving it from what they took to be the obliterating forces of the Dark Ages.

Late Nineteenth Century

In 1858-59, only five years before Matthew Arnold would select Migne's collection as his desert island literary companion,⁶ John Henry Newman, that bastion of religious conservatism, set to work on a series of essays about Roman Catholic religious life for the *Atlantis* magazine. Newman's two essays on Benedictine mission and Benedictine schools will serve as a partial foil to Arnold's take on Catholic culture and provide our initial launching point for an historical survey of Benedictine cultural mission and evangelization.⁷

⁴ Jacquelyn Ernster, "President's Message," *The American Monastic Newsletter* 38.3.

⁵ See F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge 2002) 51-55 esp. at 54.

⁶ Arnold 129: "People talk of this or that work which they would choose, if they were to pass their life with only one; for my part I think I would choose the Abbé Migne's collection."

⁷ John Henry Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays* in Works of Cardinal J. H. Newman: Millennium Edition, vol. III, ed. J. Tolhurst (Notre Dame, IN: U Notre Dame Press 2001). The two

Newman's first essay focuses on charism and mission. In it he emphasizes the non-intellectual and anti-rational aspect of early Benedictine monachism. Without denying that the faculties of reason and intellect are divine gifts, the monks consciously denied themselves these means of cultivating the mind in order to more fully cultivate the earth, ultimately creating an environment of solitude and peace in which to "consecrate themselves to divine meditation."⁸ Like many Christians living in the declining Empire, the monks sought to leave it outright but in no way "to influence, challenge, or change it."⁹ Monks avoided intellectual activities at this particular point because they "excited the mind" and "fatigued it."¹⁰

The second of Newman's *Atlantis* essays, entitled "The Benedictine Schools," notes immediately that the new upheavals of the ninth century so directly affected the monks, that they could no longer maintain their distance from the world at large. Benedictine life had been so successful and the monks had become so visible that the "lonely Benedictine rose from his knees and found himself a city."¹¹ Paradoxically, once the monks had seen the old world die from a distance, they "found" that they now had "a young world close to them."¹² Some of the monks obediently answered the call of the Church and the world, left the refuge of the cloister desert and soon found themselves "priests, missionaries, bishops, teachers and controversialists," imprinting these duties with the Benedictine "idea and spirit" rather than changing or modifying the charism and its foundational Rule outright.¹³

This stamping with the Benedictine character rather than an outright revision of basic tenets of the Order, meant that even with a restored engagement with the world, Benedictine life continued to be characterized by simplicity, "originating nothing, [and] living . . . by tradition."¹⁴ Newman emphasizes again and again that the Benedictines' unstinting adherence to the traditions of the past along with their eschewing critical enquiry or any embracing of the "new" and innovative (what Arnold called "indisputably the Church of the past") guaranteed the success of Benedictines and their mission during those centuries. However, it also spelled the Order's decline in the years to come, when the advent of the mendicant Orders and eventually that of the Society of Jesus provided an abundance of polemicists and controversialists to help guide the Church through hostile cultural and theological waters. "Loyal and devoted adherence to the past, and transmission of its treasures to future generations, were the hallmarks of monasticism."¹⁵ Newman continues, "St. Benedict . . . was no professor in a University. His convent was an infant school, a grammar school . . . not an academy."¹⁶ And even as allowances were made for those monks who wanted to broaden their learning beyond the basics of grammar in the so-called public *schola*, that "shadow" and "even nucleus" of the future universities,¹⁷ the emphasis of the Benedictine life, as far as learning and its dissemination were concerned, remained one of retention of the old (meaning mostly Scripture, the Fathers, and, to include the pagans, Virgil) and its faithful handing on to the next generation. Much of the attention paid to

essays in question "The Mission of St. Benedict" and "The Benedictine Schools" follow successively on pages 365-430 and 433-87.

⁸ Mary K. Tilman, "Introduction" to *Rise and Progress* listed above, I-LXXVI at LIX.

⁹ Tilman LXV.

¹⁰ Newman 413.

¹¹ Newman, "Schools" 443.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Tilman LXVI.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* LXIX.

¹⁶ Newman 456.

¹⁷ Newman 462.

the classical Latin authors whom they chose to study was a matter of so-called monastic leisure and recreation, although they did find in these “beautiful authors . . . the prophets of the human race in its natural condition.”¹⁸

And yet, Newman was perceptive enough to recognize that the exceptions to the rule of what was commonly found among the “monastic masses” in terms of advanced learning and engagement with pagan culture should still be regarded as “true offspring of the Benedictine discipline, and in no sense the result . . . of relaxation and degeneracy.” That, although the likes of a Cassiodorus or an Alcuin “did certainly fall from their proper vocation,”¹⁹ those monks who ventured far and wide into the cultural environs outside of the strict confines of the monastic cloister and scriptorium were frequently “those very persons . . . who were pre-eminent in devotional and ascetic habits, and who were intimately partakers in the spirit of mortification.” In fact, they have “come down to us with the reputation of saints” or have actually received “canonization or beatification.”²⁰

Nevertheless, Newman quickly reminds us (and the dichotomous oscillation—or even uncomfortable waffling, if you will—between these two poles of thought is at the crux of what we are discussing) that, on the other hand, “it must not, of course, be supposed . . . that critical scholarship or classical erudition was the business of [monastic] life.” The monk’s “intellectual exercises were for the most part combined with his devotional, and consisted” predominantly “of his study of the sacred volume.” Certainly, prior to the Benedictine centuries, the Patristic Fathers had been called upon for innovation, for creative theological thought pioneered by “powerful . . . (o)riginal minds . . . engaged in the production of original works. There is no greater mistake, surely,” says Newman, “than to suppose that a revealed truth precludes originality in the treatment of it. . . .” Nevertheless, “(t)his gift is not the characteristic of the history, nor is akin to the spirit or the object . . . of the Benedictine Order.” The “faithful, conscientious, affectionate, and obedient” monk, steward of “his master’s goods,” preserving them from “waste” and “decay,” was he who spent his days fusing together “catenated passages” from Scripture and the Fathers, turning them “into one homogeneous comment of his own” seldom adding “anything original.”²¹

Mid-twentieth Century

In what has become a contemporary classic about medieval monastic culture and history, Dom Jean Leclercq’s *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, John Henry Newman’s basic conclusions concerning the Benedictines’ contribution to cultural development and cultivation are confirmed, but they are also qualified and developed.²² Leclercq asks whether or not medieval monks were “indebted to their classical formation for artistic themes and literary reminiscences and methods.” Did the classical authors read and studied in the scriptorium in any way influence the “psychology and the personality of medieval monks”? Did the monks find in classical tradition a basis for their own specifically human values, “with the power to enrich, not only their (monastic) style and intellectual capital, but also their very being”? If humanism is the

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 467.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 472.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 473.

²¹ *Ibid.* 476-77.

²² Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham UP 1993).

“study of the classics for the” enrichment of the reader’s personality, says Leclercq, then “the monks are in the fullest sense humanists.”²³

Dom Jean refines his argument further by suggesting that the medieval monks were neither “antiquarians nor bibliophiles . . . pedants . . . nor aesthetes.” They did not look to the secular texts at hand for lessons in morality (Scripture provided that), but for examples of first-rate beauty.²⁴ Nevertheless, classical literature could and did serve the monks as a source of salutary “wisdom and truth” in which the “ancients had condensed human experience” that the monks then transposed “spontaneously . . . to the plane of human virtue.” As an example of this technique of transposition, Dom Jean cites a Cluniac monk who, in order “to defend the ideal life as described by St. Benedict,” draws on the works of “Phaedrus, Terence, Plautus, Stautius, Virgil, Juvenal, Persius, Cicero, and the historian Josephus.”²⁵ This sort of “integral humanism,” as Leclercq terms it, proves that a scriptural/eschatological humanism can be harmoniously “reconciled” with an historical one. Even “(t)he most dangerous author” could be “converted” so that “(l)earned once and then forgotten, perhaps even denied, they remained present even in the deepest recesses of the soul.”²⁶

The development and dissemination of the integral humanism of which Leclercq speaks, remained a fundamental element of the Benedictine cultural mission throughout Europe for the next eight hundred years. It was about the formation and evolution of this mission that Newman and Arnold wrote in the 1860s. However, by the mid-twentieth century, the cultural mission of Benedictinism, as well as that of the Catholic Church at large, had reached a juncture of significant proportions especially in its confrontation with modernity and most especially, although not exclusively, in the area of Catholic higher education. On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, Catholic cultural historian Christopher Dawson, who held at that point the Stillman Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard Divinity School, published an article entitled “American Education and Christian Culture.” Significantly, and most especially for our purposes here this weekend, the essay appeared as the lead piece in the 1958 Spring/Summer issue of *The American Benedictine Review*.²⁷

In his article, Dawson identifies a growing disproportionality between materialistic pursuits and spiritual interests in both secular and religious institutions of higher learning, especially in terms of the “radical secularization of the Western educational tradition,” a tradition, he observes, that was, once upon a time, “profoundly Christian.” The “central function” of this “education was the transmission of Christian culture, and this was conceived as something much wider than the culture of the particular society and much more fundamental than the professional or vocational training which is the main object of education today.”²⁸ Never mind the Reformation, the Enlightenment, or Modernity, says Dawson, the English university system prior to the First World War was still, at least in essence, Christian in its “institutional framework” and even “in a sense Catholic” in that it stressed a “continuity with the Christian past and at least an impressive external recognition of the place that religion could and should occupy in higher education.”²⁹

²³ Leclercq 133-34.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 134.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 137-38.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 143.

²⁷ Christopher Dawson, “American Education and Christian Culture,” *The American Benedictine Review* 9.1 (Spring and Summer 1958) 7-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 8-9.

²⁹ Dawson 9.

Late Twentieth Century

By the second half of the twentieth century, however, Catholic education finds its mission challenged. Dawson surmises that Catholic education in America has been reduced to a minor player within a much larger secularized culture. As a result, it has become “isolated,” living in “a closed intellectual world”: defensive of its minority stance but, paradoxically, needing to “compete with the secular system on its own ground” albeit with noticeably “smaller resources” than those of the large secular mega-schools.³⁰ This dilemma can only be resolved, suggests Dawson, by a reaffirmation and new dissemination of the “intellectual apostolate” of Catholic culture. “We cannot separate ourselves from the society in which we live,” he concludes, “but we can bring back to that society the consciousness of that spiritual element which is the life of the soul of true culture. . . . It is only by the rediscovery of man’s spiritual vision that it is possible to save humanity from self destruction.”³¹

Even closer to the post-Vatican II, twenty-first-century world of our own day in its assessment of monasticism’s encounter with postmodern culture is M. Francis Mannion’s 1993 three-part article “Monasticism and Modern Culture,” significantly, once again, published in *The American Benedictine Review*. Perhaps even more importantly, these essays were “originally presented as papers to a meeting of the General Chapter of the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictines held at St. Meinrad’s Archabbey on July 29 of 1990.”³²

By proposing and then assessing four paradigms of “relationship between Christian community and modern culture” as they coexist, often in great tension, in both lay and religious Roman Catholic life today, Monsignor Mannion hopes to render “an adequate diagnosis of the present situation” involving these tensions and so point “the way of further renewal.”³³ Favoring the so-called neoconservative (or as he terms it “postmodern”) model, Mannion notes its “disillusionment with liberal thought and culture, with radical individualism and the collapse of the communal, with the fragmentation of modern life, the technological assault on nature and the rational reduction of spirituality.” Instead, neoconservatism favors the liberal cultural elements of “freedom, creativity, responsibility, human rights, respect for the individual, emphasis on justice, and the overcoming of oppressions of various kinds.”³⁴ While maintaining its “strong respect for history and tradition as well as a rejection of the kind of abstraction and utopianism to which radicalism is prone . . . the neoconservative strategy rejects as unrealistic the restorationism of the paleoconservatives or old-fashioned conservatives.”³⁵ Accordingly, Mannion proposes that among the four paradigms offered “neoconservatism . . . seems more suited to the Benedictine spirit, which is self-consciously moderate, sober, balanced, proportional and discrete.”³⁶

Monsignor Mannion warns that “ecclesiastical communities are under siege today from without (and perhaps from within) by profoundly negative and disorienting cultural dynamics.” He continues, “The heretic at the monastery door is modern liberal culture. By a lack of

³⁰ *Ibid.* 10.

³¹ *Ibid.* 11, 14.

³² M. Francis Mannion, “Monasticism and Modern Culture,” *American Benedictine Review* 44.1 (March 1993) 3-21; 44.2 (June 1993) 125-42; 44.3 (September 1993) 290-307 at 3.

³³ *Ibid.* 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 14-15.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 16.

³⁶ Mannion 18.

vigilance, the heretic can easily be received and even become a professed monk.”³⁷ We do not have time or space here to summarize let alone critique this impressive and thorough evaluation of the situation as Francis Mannion sees it (and I would encourage anyone interested in this subject to consult his articles in the *Review* where he draws on a wealth of information from scholars and writers—and not all of them Roman Catholic either—ranging from Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas, to Wendell Berry and George Lindbeck, and to Aquinata Böckman and Joseph Ratzinger). Ultimately, Mannion claims that the vital witness that Benedictine monasticism gives to the postmodern world is not of “this or that point or element or idea, but . . . (rather) the witness of its own intrinsic shape as a rightly ordered way of life, witness to the salvific shape of human culture. . . . [What] the western world desperately needs,” he concludes, is “a new pattern of cultural integration, unification, wholeness, order and harmony.”³⁸

Mannion ends his triptych with what has become a much-quoted statement from the final pages of Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* calling for the ““construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.”” MacIntyre urges that traditional virtues must be cultivated if there is to be hope of survival beyond the “barbarian” presence that has already held sway over postmodern Western civilization ““for quite some time. . . . We are waiting,” he portends, “not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.””³⁹

Before bringing this first half of my presentation to a close, I would like to share with you one more appraisal of classic Benedictine culture and its mission to humanity.

Perhaps one of the finest and most inspiring syntheses of the themes set before us tonight is contained in yet another public address, made by yet another non-Benedictine scholar (like Newman, Dawson, and Mannion), and publically presented under the auspices of yet another American Benedictine community. It was during the opening ceremonies for the newly constructed library at Mount Angel Abbey in St. Benedict, Oregon in May 1970 that the Oxford historian Sir Richard Southern presented his “A Benedictine Library in a Disordered World.”⁴⁰

In his consideration of the specific elements that constitute a Benedictine library, Sir Richard marshals many of the same forces as did the authors noted above. Cassiodorus, for example, was a man who decided that he could “best preserve the values and institutions” that he revered by serving the barbarians who were destroying them, ultimately creating his library at Vivarium in order to copy, translate and preserve the “elements of Christian and pagan learning” that he found most useful in the face of overwhelming oppression and deemed important for the use of future generations.⁴¹ Benedict Biscop, Venerable Bede, and the monks of Wearmouth/Jarrow obtained, cataloged, copied and created books, which, in finding their way to “monastic centers in France and Germany . . . became the essential tools for missionaries in their work of evangelization.” The collection of texts at Jarrow, in Sir Richard’s estimation, appears to be “the finest example of the power of the library to bring order out of chaos”—a seminal *raison d’être* for a Benedictine library and for its mission to the disordered world around it.⁴² But even more impressive than the monks of Wearmouth/Jarrow in “repairing the disorders of

³⁷ *Ibid.* 125.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 305.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 307; see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P 1984) 263.

⁴⁰ Sir Richard Southern, “A Benedictine Library in a Disordered World,” *Downside Review* 94 (July 1976) 163-77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 165-66.

⁴² Southern 169.

the world” and bringing “stability and order to a chaotic scene” were the monks of the Congregation of St. Maur. Their struggle, particularly during the course of the eighteenth century, was not so much with the physical threat of barbarian hordes as it was with the “break-up of a traditional way of thought” especially when “the adherents of the old took their stand on the wrong grounds, and often relied on prejudice or force to attain their ends.”⁴³

In a circular letter of 1648, Dom Gregoire Tarris (President of the Maurist Congregation 1630-48) listed guidelines for collecting, cataloguing and preserving texts. At the end of his letter, he exhorts his confreres to “Reject and despise nothing, even if it is only a distich or an epigraph. . . . (F)inally,” he counsels, “be on your guard against those who will have no scruple about taking away your manuscripts, on the pretense that it is a pious theft.” It was by way of this methodology that the Maurists, sought to “raise the facts of Christian experience above the hostilities of Jansenists and anti-Jansenists, of spiritual extremists and reactionary conformists.”⁴⁴

Ultimately, says Sir Richard, the Benedictine library and its cultural mission of bringing healing and peace to a disordered world is best expressed in visual form by the Maurists’ emblem that appeared on the title pages of their editions for almost forty years: a crown of thorns encircling two hands reaching out to each other in a grasp of friendship, while above them burns a heart pierced by an arrow, the whole of which is surmounted by the motto “Ex arduis pax et amor.” Thus, this symbol expresses “. . . the love and peace, the reconciling of all men through the toil and suffering, that are never far below the surface in all learned endeavour.”⁴⁵

I wish to use the Maurists’ device and motto as a linchpin to the second half of this presentation, emphasizing this notion of a peace attained through difficulties and struggles, of an effort to reconcile all men by means of cultivating and disseminating a distinctly Benedictine view of culture, thus bringing some sort of unity to a disordered society.

We have now surveyed the work of a number of authors and their individual takes on Benedictine culture and its mission to the Church and to the world outside of the institutional and dogmatic confines of that Church. The most of these investigations have focused on the transmission of Benedictine culture primarily through the written word, i.e. via literary devices and forms. However, Francis Mannion’s paper alerts us to the fact that contemporary Benedictine culture includes disciplines other than the literary: the plastic arts, music, architecture, cinema, elements of technology, etc.—the whole gamut of those pursuits and disciplines that make up a postmodern civilization’s cultural profile now complete the picture. Furthermore, the issue has been broached as to *what is* and *should be* the relationship between the Church, with the Benedictine Order as part of that body, and the prevailing so-called pagan or barbarian or liberal-progressive or postmodern cultures prevalent during a particular historical juncture. More than once, we have seen the Benedictines portrayed as curators in a sort of high-cultural museum rather than as active participants in a contemporary *phrontisterion* of cultural innovation and integration. And finally, throughout it all, there seems to be a distinct strata of suspicion and distrust hovering just above our Catholic/Benedictine love of and appreciation for the profound beauty and wisdom of those non-Christian cultures that we frequently choose to identify by whatever sort of convenient, derogatory, and sometimes embarrassingly inaccurate terminologies currently in fashion.

The Postmodern World

⁴³ *Ibid.* 171.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 173-74.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 176-77.

An example taken from real life will, I hope, provide a context for what I am about to suggest in terms of our Benedictine cultural mission to and evangelization of the postmodern world. In addition, this is looking more and more like a mission that we must simultaneously make to ourselves, both as Benedictines and as Roman Catholics!

As a required culminating activity at the seminary college at Mount Angel, every senior-year student must compose and defend a thirty-page thesis demonstrating facility in interdisciplinary research, academic writing, and public oral presentation. The topic of this so-called Capstone Project should be apposite of his liberal-arts studies of the previous three years. In the spring of his third year of college, one of our students arrived at my office, and then subsequently at that of the head of our Music History program, to request that we serve as supervisors and readers on his Capstone panel. He then announced that his thesis topic was as follows: How Igor Stravinsky, by cultivating an aesthetic of atonal and polyrhythmic disorder in his ballet *The Rite of Spring*, significantly influenced the collapse of traditional values and morals in early twentieth-century Western European society. A corrective aesthetic to that of modernist chaos would then be offered by way of a return to a Platonic system of ordered harmony and wholeness.

A lifelong familiarity with the music of Stravinsky, including his late-period liturgical compositions—one of which had been personally championed for its premier performance in St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice by the city’s Patriarch, Angelo Roncalli, when the Vatican had questioned Stravinsky’s non-Roman Catholic status—made it difficult for either myself or my colleague to accept this student’s proposal as it stood.⁴⁶ And yet we knew “where he was coming from” and were even familiar with some of the bibliographical sources that he had listed to support his thesis. Of course, the construction and focusing of a topic statement is an essential component within the research and writing process. And that is, in fact, exactly what our student did with his proposal: ultimately, and successfully, submitting and defending his entire Capstone paper one year later. What perplexed me in that initial topic statement was an annoying cultural paradox present in the form of said student citing Stravinsky’s music as being culturally, even morally, degenerate when the student himself was known on occasion to take part in local pick-up bands as an electric bassist—playing a type of music that only fifty years previously had sent our grandmothers running to their rosary beads because their grandchildren had fallen under the spell of Satanists and Red Communists!

The uneasy alliance sometimes established between the strange bedfellows of a hypercritical, relativist, deconstructionist postmodern culture and the growing post-postmodern conservative, traditionalist, reactionary return to premodern paradigms is becoming more and more evident in our parishes, in our seminaries, in our colleges and universities, and even in our monastic formation programs. This incongruity was noted above by Francis Mannion, but had already been identified and scrutinized by Thomas O’Dea in a 1958 publication that Christopher Dawson drew upon for his *ABR* article. In his work, O’Dea noted that “Catholics tend to be imitators of non-Catholics . . . from educational procedures to tastes in house furnishings, but they do not always show much understanding of what is best and most noteworthy of imitation in the culture of non-Catholics. . . . (O)utside of a specifically religious, and often closed-off,

⁴⁶ See Christian Feldman, *Pope John XXIII: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroad 2000) 97.

sphere of consciousness . . . designate(d) as sacred, American Catholic middle-class life . . . tends to be more materialistic than is that of many Protestant and secularist groups.”⁴⁷

In our own day, philosopher Paul Lakeland has made a similar observation about this genus of individuals who inhabit the postmodern world of technology and expertise comfortably, making use of and consuming the fruits of modernity and “so much of its produce” while continuing to view it “as the enemy. . . . These individuals,” he notes, “are at one and the same time postmodern and premodern” and yet “seem to see no conflict in their position.” Among their number, Lakeland recognizes Pope John Paul II and Camille Paglia (talk about strange bedfellows), but also Jerry Falwell, Richard John Neuhaus, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Pat Robertson.⁴⁸

Fr. Hans Kung, in his introductory essay to a multi-authored collection entitled *The Church in Anguish*, has also discussed this same sort of heterogeneous, hybrid offspring of a premodern and postmodern parentage, noting that it flourishes particularly well among the Church’s hierarchy. Thus, in our present day, the surreal images of “medievally hatted prelates riding in helicopters or participating before TV cameras” abound. While many of these “premoderns” in the curia freely adopt the postmodern critique of technology, scientism, and consumerism “whenever it costs nothing,” they simultaneously uphold a “medieval antimodernist paradigm” whenever it favors, protects, and undergirds their traditionalist grip on patriarchal systems and ecclesiastical power structures. Nevertheless, proposes Fr. Kung, “critical voices ‘from below’ refuse to be suppressed,” with original “theological research” progressing ever onward. The steady “revolutionary breakthrough” of things more “Catholic” than “Roman” from these postmodern theologians ultimately proves them to be stronger than the premodernist patriarchs who are so much at pains “to acquire” and maintain “a postmodern varnish.”⁴⁹

What I would like to suggest here this evening at a conference focused on Benedictine men and women who are set on bringing a monasticism that is “relevant in the twenty-first century . . . to new cultures and new lands,” is that we do so by acting not so much as curators of a cultural museum or as corrective prophets calling for a reactionary and unwavering return to the paradigms of a golden past, but rather by serving as *creators, leaders, reformers, models* and *archetypes* (to employ the words of this Academy’s current president).⁵⁰ But first, we need to comprehend and then somehow resolve these vexatious tensions and dichotomies that encumber our interaction with the contemporary world. We must come to terms with the duplicitous love-loathe relationship that characterizes our interactions with modernity and postmodernity in the West. At the same time, we must confront the uneasy ecumenical intercourse we have been maintaining with the already well-established but seemingly still alien cultures of “the other”: those men and women with whom we are growing closer and closer with every heartbeat in this constantly shrinking global village—whether we want to or not.

Now, perhaps there are those of you asking yourselves: Hadn’t we better just leave this sort of thing to the Jesuits? Are there really any precedents for Benedictines taking such a

⁴⁷ Thomas F. O’Dea, *American Catholic Dilemma* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward 1958) 117-18 cited in Dawson 10-11.

⁴⁸ Paul Lakeland, *Post Modernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1997) 9-11.

⁴⁹ Fr. Hans Kung, “The State of the Catholic Church” in *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1986) 12-13.

⁵⁰ See Ernster, “President’s Message.”

leading role in the advancement of new forms and understandings of a contemporary culture? Does not everything that I have rehearsed thus far point in the opposite direction?

Well, yes, it does. But, keep in mind, dear sisters and brothers, that even Cardinal Newman noted in his *Atlantis* essays that certain Benedictine monks of unquestionably saintly virtue, obedient to the Rule in an exemplary manner, were at times groundbreakers in their fields of scholarship and cultural evangelization. Of more recent times, evidence of the same sort of Benedictine maverick has remained obscure and hidden. Nevertheless, these Benedictine innovators have and still do exist. One such example is found in that of Dom Antoine Joseph Pernety (1716-96/1801?) who, after joining and training with the Maurists, became abbot of Burgel in Thuringe and then of Saint Germain-des-Pres in Paris. After leaving the Benedictines completely, evidently having proposed at one point that the Order be formally dissolved, Pernety acted as librarian to Frederick the Great of Prussia (1767-83) and accompanied Louis Antoine de Bougainville on his historic voyage to the Falkland Islands where they established the town of Port Saint Louis. Pernety served as the expedition's naturalist and subsequently published a two-volume account of the flora and fauna of both the Falklands (especially its *stone runs* phenomenon) and the island of Santa Catarina off the southern coast of Brazil. Furthermore, Pernety, and this may have something to do with his eventual alienation from institutionalized monasticism, also became deeply involved in the alchemical and Christian esoteric movements that were thriving in both Western and Eastern Europe in those days. He is, perhaps, best known for helping to popularize the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg.⁵¹ *Quicquid agunt homines, indeed!*

Closer to home and perhaps a bit more faithful to the Benedictine tradition as we know it, is the work of Camaldolese Benedictine Fr. Bruno Barnhart, former prior of the Immaculate Heart Hermitage at Big Sur, California. Fr. Bruno's recent publication, *The Future of Wisdom*, a synthesis of just about everything he has laid his hands on over the last five decades, provides us with a superb assessment of postmodern culture, theology, and monasticism. Furthermore, his book offers us a working model for the future cultivation of the Benedictine tradition of engagement with other cultures and a subsequent appropriation and spreading abroad of what is best in those cultural systems. Fr. Bruno insists that, firmly grounded in the "historical energy of the Christ-event," postmodern Christianity rests "upon a huge affirmation of meaning . . . a *metanarrative* of universal comprehension."⁵²

Building primarily upon the work of Karl Rahner, but with a great deal of assistance from fellow Camaldolese-Benedictine theologian Cipriano Vagaggini and Cistercian Thomas Merton (perhaps the epitome of a postmodern monk),⁵³ Fr. Bruno suggests that the twentieth-century has been the time of a privileged, renewed awakening to and a culminating evolution of a sapiential consciousness. This ancient wisdom tradition reemerged, with fresh theological perspectives

⁵¹ Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraff, *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, Gnostica 2 (Leuven, Belg.: Peeters 1998) 235-36 and "Dom Joseph Pernety (Books)(Photos)," *Dark Books*, <http://darkbooks.org/articles/Dom-Antoine-Joseph-Pernety.html> Web July 16, 2010.

⁵² Bruno Barnhart, *The Future of Wisdom: Toward a Rebirth of Sapiential Christianity* (New York: Continuum 2007) 150-51.

⁵³ Note Ernster's statement in the October 2008 *American Monastic Newsletter* concerning the previous summer's ABA conference that focused on the life of Thomas Merton: "We were presented with an image of someone who lived and understood Benedictinism in the 20th century and integrated it with the major themes of the 21st century. Ecology, globalism, cross-cultural understanding, and consciousness of self with its potentials and its limitations were the images given us of Thomas Merton." Compare the similarities between this statement and those of Barnhart found in *Future of Wisdom* 34-41, esp. at 39, most significantly in terms of his larger sapiential/cultural program described in the following paragraphs of this current paper.

advanced and new methodologies proposed, most noticeably at the time of the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁴ For example, the use of *ressourcement* to access anew Patristic, Monastic, and Scholastic texts, has not only reminded us of their impressive sapiential fruitfulness, but has also alerted us to their profound limitations.⁵⁵

Proposing four periods of historical evolution in the sapiential journey, Barnhart notes that the current culminating phase of postmodernity and globalization is “marked particularly by our transition from a Eurocentric to a global consciousness.” As this massive paradigm shift takes place, the Church at large as well as its monastic substructures “are invited to open themselves toward a larger emergent reality, which can be seen as the fruit of continuing incarnation—of the working of the Christ-mystery in the earth of humanity.”⁵⁶ In this postmodern, global culture, we as Benedictines are asked to “comprehend from within our sapiential perspective the ripening of earth and its humanity; to read Irenaeus together with Teilhard and discover a new depth and breadth of meaning in incarnation and in eucharist.” This act of comprehension implies “an active participation in the movement . . . toward a united humanity aware of its communion with Earth and cosmos.”⁵⁷ This new understanding and embracing of Christian wisdom will invite us to “experience the expansive freedom of new perspectives”⁵⁸ and finally to break free from the “objectification . . . and rigidification produced by defensive polemics” that have “carried theology very far from the sapiential perspective.”⁵⁹

Thus, the current period of postmodern globalization becomes a key, critical moment for all of Western society, and more specifically in our case, for the Roman Catholic Church and Benedictine monachism. At this moment we are called to break free from “the European cultural container”: an arduous and demanding job, with which we as Benedictines, given our long tradition of dynamically engaging with cultures both past and present, can assist. But we must be careful to recognize that in this current bout with a “Dark Ages” (if that is indeed what they are), we are not limited to dealing solely with contemporary Western European culture. As Fr. Bruno concludes, “The movement toward globality is accompanied on the personal level by a breaking out of inherited cultural containers . . . toward the fullness of the human person.”⁶⁰ This breaking free from once dynamic but now stagnant cultural structures and paradigms is accomplished by means of the postmodern critique of Modern, Enlightenment, Medieval, and Classical cultures all together. In turn, the characteristic postmodern elements of “indiscriminate eclecticism,” “robust skepticism,” “radical critical rationality and unconditioned creativity” which can at times render postmodernity “a kind of compost heap,” may all be vigorously and successfully integrated by the reemerging Christian wisdom tradition. Finally, this sapientially-attained integration of the disparate elements of postmodernism has been initiated by the Second Vatican Council’s call for a turning toward *the other*: “. . . toward the world . . . toward humanity as a whole . . . toward the other Christian churches . . . (and) toward the other religions . . .,” in one great turning from “monologue to dialogue.”⁶¹

“Although our postmodern era is a time of cultural decomposition,” there are, according to Barnhart, numerous “positive gifts of postmodernity” to be deeply appreciated and actively

⁵⁴ Barnhart 1-3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 7-13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 152.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 146-49.

employed, especially in terms of calling on the newly liberated human person as individual “to examine carefully . . . the limitations . . . of our earlier sapiential tradition and then to exercise boldly and even playfully the imagination of faith.”⁶²

Unquestionably, this is a huge project, even vaster and more comprehensive than the one found in Matthew Arnold’s *Quicquid-agunt-homines*-appraisal of the Abbé Migne’s literary leviathan. And, perhaps, it is that much more formidable and challenging precisely because it pushes well beyond a mere systematic cataloging of “all the things that men have done” and demands in addition our creative, dynamic, heartfelt engagement with those very same men and women and with the cultural worlds that they inhabit. It then insists that we effect a conscious, imaginative, living integration of these experiences and materials. That is asking quite a bit—and yet, as the Maurists reminded us in the face of their own very massive and intimidating cultural undertaking, *Ex arduis pax et amor*: with hard work, suffering, and struggle, with the shaking of hands from opposite sides of the frame, come love and peace, “the reconciling of all men” in Sir Richard Southern’s words. Thus, despite the daunting magnitude of Fr. Bruno’s proposed sapiential global Christianity, especially given his well-delineated program and assuming our own familiarity with the riches of our Benedictine tradition, this plan of action is undoubtedly “doable.” Furthermore, those of us who are already steeped in the cultural riches of the many and varied “others” whom the Benedictines have encountered over the past 1500 years, should have, as Fr. Bruno exhorts us to, a playful and imaginative time of it, realizing and incarnating the essential points of his model.

In his evaluation of Thomas Merton in *The Future of Wisdom*, Fr. Bruno notes that in the last decade of his life, Merton “had moved back toward the modern world which he had left behind” when he entered the monastery as a young man. “He was moving into the wide ecumenical territory of the sapiential, in which he was able to discover everything that he loved. The sapiential world . . . included the mystery of Christ and the archetypal contemplative East . . . (as well as) everything of value that had been left outside the walls of his earlier theological enclosure, labeled ‘Toxic-Secular.’”⁶³

To conclude, I would like to offer one example of a possible Benedictine/postmodern encounter chosen from among many similar examples that I have collected over the past two years in preparing this talk. It will, I hope, give us some idea of how our own monastic journey toward that “wide ecumenical territory of the sapiential” can be of assistance in our now globalized cultural mission.

On May 30, 1956, in the large broadcast auditorium of West German radio’s newly established Studio for Electronic Music at Cologne, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the *enfant terrible wunderkind* of the post-war Darmstadt School of music, premiered his latest electronic composition, *Gesang der Jünglinge*, a setting of the “Song of the Three Youths” found in the Book of Daniel, familiar to Benedictines from its traditional inclusion as the “Benedicite” at the Lauds portion of the Divine Office.⁶⁴ Stockhausen’s composition is still considered a postmodern masterpiece of early electronic music, groundbreaking in its use of spectral analysis “to devise a continuum of sound elements . . . integrated structurally into” a composition “with serial procedures.” For a year, Stockhausen worked five floors below ground level in a room that

⁶² Barnhart 151.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 39.

⁶⁴ See Ralph Lorenz, “Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Gesang der Jünglinge*: A Faith Reaction to events of World War II,” unpublished lecture originally given at the *Forum on Music and Christian Scholarship*, University of Notre Dame, February 28, 2009.

had originally served as a nuclear bomb shelter for Nazi soldiers. Here he combined electronic sound with that of *musique concrète*, explored the spatial movement of sound within a performance space, and investigated the comprehension of text via “structured compositional technique.”⁶⁵

A few years after the fiftieth anniversary of that premier, at a forum conducted at the University of Notre Dame focusing on *Music and Christian Scholarship*, musicologist Ralph Lorenz presented what was probably the first analysis of the *Gesang* from the perspective of the young Stockhausen’s devout Roman Catholicism. As a reaction to his own “passing through a fiery furnace” during the years of Nazi rule in Germany⁶⁶ (e.g. considered by the State to be useless and a drain on dwindling food resources, Stockhausen’s mother, a sufferer of debilitating depression, was put to death in a state hospital in 1941 when Stockhausen was only fourteen),⁶⁷ the *Gesang* serves as an example “of how German culture was directly and indirectly impacted by the Holocaust and events of World War II.” Lorenz concludes that “a better understanding of the psychological and sociological background of *Gesang*” (which would very definitely include Stockhausen’s Catholic faith) “will lead to a better understanding” of the composer’s “spiritual approach to composition in his later works.”⁶⁸

Not surprisingly, much like the legendary opening night of the *Rite of Spring*, the premier of *Gesang der Jünglinge* “produced a scandal, with . . . protests from the media” and furious concertgoers alike. I believe that it is precisely in the cutting edge engagement with and appreciation of postmodern cultural watermarks like the *Gesang der Jünglinge* that we Benedictines need to involve ourselves at this time. Certainly, we must continue bringing forth from our monastic storehouses the old things that have served the test of time and helped stand us in good stead as stewards of culture. But we also need to be open to and just as appreciative of the new and challenging things in our world that we will want to store among those same reserves for future reference. We can no longer afford to label anything secular as necessarily “toxic,” or, for that matter, anything toxic as necessarily “secular.” Thus, as we continue our encounter with “the other” in a mission of cultural evangelization in the centuries to come, we can serve as *creators, leaders, reformers, models* and *archetypes*, truly men and women of wisdom—drawing forth from our storehouses both new things and old.

⁶⁵ Lorenz 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 7.

⁶⁷ See Lorenz 2-3 and 15.

⁶⁸ Lorenz 7-8.

Where There Was Need: Evangelization and North American Benedictines

Ephrem Hollermann, O.S.B.

Introduction

My charge in accepting this invitation to address you on the theme of this year's Convention was to explore some historical perspectives on North American Benedictines and evangelization. I had a hunch from the beginning that a unique challenge lurked within the very use of the term *evangelization* itself. My hunch was more than confirmed when the first few Convention notices that reached you announced this year's theme as "Benedictines and *Evangelism*." Without hesitation, I contacted Sister Jacquelyn to tell her that I had not agreed to speak on *that* topic and probably needed to decline the invitation with regrets. She assured me that a mistake had been made, and would surely be corrected as soon as possible. Indeed, we would be pondering "Benedictines and Evangelization." While that clarification seemed absolutely essential to me, it did not diminish the challenge that lay ahead in attempting to define the term *evangelization* in a way that would be useful for our purposes here. Limited *academic* ink has been spilled on the topic of evangelization in the Roman Catholic context. A relatively quick journal search for "theories of evangelization" or the "theology of evangelization" or even the "history of evangelization" in Catholic periodical literature yielded minimal results. The majority of articles written on the topic appeared in pastoral magazines and newspapers—such as *Today's Parish Minister*, *Homilitic and Pastoral Review*, and *Missiology*, just to name a few. The article titles were fascinating: "Evangelization and the Digital Generation," "Coffeehouse Evangelization," "Facebook and the New Evangelization," "Radio Evangelization from the Cloister," "Singers of the New Evangelization," to name some of the more interesting ones. While begging a whole study in itself, this search failed to yield what I was looking for. I was in search of some kind of theoretical framework within which to ponder the role of evangelization in American Benedictine history.

I soon caught on to what seemed like a dearth of scholarship on the topic of evangelization in the Roman Catholic context. Some reasons for this are immediately apparent. Historically, evangelization in North America has been too closely identified with "revivalism," which had as its aim the task of bringing individuals to a *decision* point, with minimal attention given to initiating them into a lifelong school of discipleship. More recently, the Catholic Church in the United States has struggled with the challenge of "evangelism" (that other word!) in the wake of scandals surrounding television evangelists. Thirdly, we have seen for decades a kind of spiritual abdication on the part of many members of the laity who believe it is the task of clergy and religious to do the work of evangelization.⁶⁹

The causes of this Catholic reluctance are far too complex to explore here, but it is safe to say, in the words of Avery Dulles, S.J., that "many Catholics have failed to grasp the Church's concept of evangelization, as taught by Vatican II and the recent popes. They confuse it with certain practices of sectarian Protestants, who use very aggressive tactics and seem satisfied to generate a subjective experience of having been saved by the Lord."⁷⁰ In defense of the Catholic grassroots, however, it must be acknowledged that "evangelization," in the contemporary sense proposed by Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ("On Evangelization in the Modern World," 1975) was new to American Catholics thirty-five years ago. It simply had not been part of Catholic consciousness and vocabulary until after Vatican Council II.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI defined evangelization as "the grace and vocation proper to the church, her deepest identity. . . . She exists in order to evangelize—that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners to God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the [Eucharist], which is the memorial of his death and resurrection" (#14).⁷¹ Fifteen years later, John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio* ("The Mission of the Redeemer," 1990) called again for a renewal of missionary evangelization, describing it as "the

⁶⁹ Factors suggested by Eddie Gibbs from Fuller Seminary, in a review of *The Great Commission: Models of Evangelization in American Catholicism*, by Timothy E. Byerley (New York: Paulist 2008).

⁷⁰ In the "Forward" to Byerley, *Great Commission*, x.

⁷¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html.

primary service which the church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world" (#2).⁷² He called for a "new evangelization"—not new in its content since its very theme is the one Gospel given in Jesus Christ, but rather new in its "ardor for holiness," its methods, and its expression (#90). In subsequent years, these two documents have been landmark messages urging Catholics to engage more vigorously in evangelization. With these introductory comments as a backdrop, what can we draw from the more scholarly literature on evangelization that could serve as a possible lens for naming and understanding the role of evangelization in the North American Benedictine experience? I think two approaches in this limited body of literature can be useful for us: 1) a history of Catholic evangelization in the United States, and 2) a description of certain elements/models of evangelization in the American Catholic context.

As I examined these approaches, the subtitle of this presentation shifted from "North American Benedictines and Evangelization" to "Evangelization and North American Benedictines." It seemed to me that an analytic approach to evangelization would be more provocative than a mere retelling of the history of Benedictine mission and work in the United States, a story which is well documented in many places and which many of you know well. I believe that considering the history and elements of Catholic evangelization in North America will be a useful framework within which to insert aspects of our 150-year American Benedictine story, with the goal of gaining some insight into how Benedictines have tended to do the work of evangelization within the Catholic and American context. Sometimes I will be explicit about the Benedictine piece, and at other times you will have to supply the insights yourselves.

Catholic Evangelization in the United States, 1776-1908

In what follows I am relying heavily on work done in this area by two American Catholic historians: William L. Portier, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Dayton, and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., of St. Meinrad Archabbey, currently a Professor of Church History at St. Meinrad School of Theology.

In his work, Portier acknowledges at the outset that what we have in American Catholicism is a "rich but largely untold history of evangelization."⁷³ He divides that history into two periods: 1) the early republic and immigrant Church, 1776-1908, and 2) the immigrant Church consolidated, 1908-Vatican Council II. The year 1908 is a marker for this author, because it was until that year that the Catholic Church in the United States was mission territory under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. Cyprian Davis deals with 1965 to the present, and I will refer to that period later. (Bear in mind that by the year 1908 there were 51 Benedictine houses in the United States: 21 men's communities and 30 women's communities. Benedictine history began in this country in 1846).

Prior to about 1840, which was the era of circuit-rider clergy, Catholic evangelization was preoccupied with defending the faith when attacked. There was little room for the goal of witnessing the Catholic faith to the wider culture. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Catholicism's ranks had swelled with European immigrants and was now the nation's largest single denomination. Not surprisingly, a shift in "missionary consciousness" took place, from that of defending against attack, to a focus on "preserving the faith of the immigrants." Evangelization now had as its goal "nurturing the faithful"—a kind of "internal evangelization."⁷⁴ (Here recall the dates for the founding of men and women's Benedictinism in North America: from Bavaria in 1846, under Boniface Wimmer's leadership; in 1852, under the leadership of Benedicta Riepp; from Switzerland a decade or so later (1854), under the recognized leadership of Martin Marty, O.S.B., (St. Meinrad Archabbey) and Frowin Conrad (Conception Abbey); in 1874, under the leadership of Anselma Felber, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and Gertrude Leupi a few years later).

In this period, evangelization seemed to have a threefold task, that of: 1) forming a Church from a diverse population in a pluralistic American environment, 2) attending to the "household of the faith"—that is, the religious orientation of Catholic immigrants focused on a parish-centered devotional spirituality, and 3) combating the anti-foreigner sentiments of the Nativist movement.

⁷² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html.

⁷³ "Catholic Evangelization in the United States from the Republic to Vatican II," in *The New Catholic Evangelization*, ed. by Kenneth Boyack (New York: Paulist) 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 28.

Decidedly, Catholicism was on the cultural defensive. Catholics were outsiders in a hostile environment, in no position to make missionary overtures to the dominant Protestant culture.⁷⁵

It should be noted, however, that there were two exceptions to the predominance of “internal evangelization” during this period. First of all, the Second and Third Plenary Councils of Baltimore (1866 and 1884, respectively) both called for the Catholic evangelization of southern African Americans and of Native Americans. This work was to be done largely through mission schools. Second, Isaac Hecker, a Paulist priest of this period, sometimes referred to as an “evangelical Catholic,” raised an alternative voice in the immigrant church, a voice that saw church-state separation and political freedom in this country as opportunities to transform American society by gaining converts to Catholicism. Hecker and his Americanist followers hoped to evangelize America through lectures, preaching and publishing. The Americanist movement, however, came to an abrupt end in 1899 when Pope Leo XIII issued *Testem Benevolentiae*, condemning what he called “theological Americanism,” by which he meant excessive accommodation to the culture, religious subjectivism, and ecclesiastical nationalism.⁷⁶

While the predominant thrust of evangelization in the period of American Catholicism from its beginnings to 1908 was on “nurturing the faithful” within, there are also minor themes of evangelization as inculturation (as in the case of African Americans and Native Americans) and evangelization as the conversion of America (as in the Americanist movement).⁷⁷

Benedictines and Evangelization in the United States, 1846-1908

What light does the foregoing history shed on the work of Benedictines in this country from 1846 to 1908, if we are to speak of their work in the context of this Convention as “evangelization?” From my very earliest years in initial formation, I was very carefully schooled to understand that Benedictines were founded to do no *particular* work. Rather, they rooted themselves in a particular locale and then served where they were needed. In our formation studies, we learned of the early missionary impulse in Benedictine history that sent monks to England in the seventh century, to central Europe in the following centuries, to South America in the sixteenth century, and to North America, to Africa, to Australia, and to Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We never spoke of Benedictines as “evangelizers,”⁷⁸ but Benedict’s mandate in the Prologue to “set out on this way with the gospel (*evangelii*) as our guide” (RB Prol 20) echoed the call of Jesus to his disciples to live in such a way as to preach the “good news” wherever they went and to all people.

The impulse that sent Benedictine women and men from Europe to North America in the middle of the nineteenth century was a “mission” to America in every sense of the word. I do not believe it is a stretch to name that impulse “evangelization as nurturing the faithful” (to use Portier’s words). The vigorous post-secularization Catholic revival going on in Europe at this time saw the rapid development of numerous new congregations and the revival of the older Orders. While these movements posed a variety of canonical problems for the Holy See, Rome soon looked upon these developments as fortuitous for the times. The work of rebuilding a European Church that had been torn asunder by war for decades required a workforce, as did the American Church which was still in its infancy.⁷⁹ It is not difficult to imagine how monasteries in Metten and Eichstätt (in Bavaria) and Einsiedeln and Maria Rickenbach (in Switzerland), got caught up in the missionary thrust of the Catholic revival in Europe, admittedly with differing expressions. It is clear in the historical record that the nineteenth-century sense of mission among Benedictines did not *originate* in the United States, but rather grew out of the fervor of the Catholic revival in Europe. The refounded Bavarian congregation, for instance, was viewed by progressive government ministers as a means for the delivery of pastoral care and education to the newly born Bavarian kingdom.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield 2008) 65.

⁷⁷ Portier, “Catholic Evangelization” 29-33.

⁷⁸ However, we spoke of them as “missionaries.”

⁷⁹ Roger Aubert, “The Rebirth of the Old Orders and the Blossoming of New Congregations,” in *The Church Between Revolution and Restoration*, vol. 7 of *History of the Church*, edited by Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (New York: Crossroad 1981) 215-16.

And when Saint Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt reopened in 1835 after the Napoleonic secularization, the thirteen remaining nuns were given three options⁸⁰ from the government as a means for their self-support. They chose to staff the girls' school of Eichstätt, and by 1846 were recruiting new members with explicit qualifications for the work of teaching.⁸¹ Benedicta Riepp clearly stated the goal of the sisters' mission to America in a letter to Archbishop Von Reisach of Munich in November of 1852 (four months after their arrival in Pennsylvania): "Your Excellency perhaps has heard that St. Walburg Convent also has taken some part in foreign missionary work and has sent . . . several of its members to Marystown, Elk County, Pennsylvania, in America, to perform a twofold mission, namely to instruct young girls, and to spread the Benedictine Order in this part of the world."⁸²

The stories of early Benedictine endeavors in North America (both among women and men) are well told and documented, and illustrate the zeal—yes, zeal for "evangelization" with which Benedictine founders and foundresses in North America were imbued. Aside from the complexities of Boniface Wimmer's personality and motivations, his zeal for promoting the Gospel, for evangelization if you will, often showed through in his vast correspondence. In 1847 he wrote to Abbot Rupert Leiss of Scheyern about "entire families without baptism, without the knowledge and practice of prayer, without any religion, even those born of Catholic parents: people who have *never* gone to *any* church, even a Protestant church. . . . How can one who has a heart and a love of God and his fellow men regard this with indifference!"⁸³

Portier's secondary themes during this period of Catholic evangelization (inculturation and the conversion of America) are overshadowed in American Benedictine history by the major thrust of priestly ministry and education in service to the German immigrants. It should be noted, however, that both Benedictine women and men, soon after their arrival in this country, became involved in Native-American and African-American ministry. Whether their service can be described as evangelization through "inculturation," as we understand that term today, is questionable, of course.

The bishops at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866 were taken up with the many problems confronting the American Church in the aftermath of the Civil War. They called for religious communities to open schools and other institutions to serve the educational and spiritual needs of the freed black slaves. According to the historian, Jerome Oetgen, "the Benedictines were among the few religious communities in the United States to heed this call when a decade later [in 1876] Wimmer opened a school for African Americans in Georgia."⁸⁴

Abbot Martin Marty of St. Meinrad's Archabbey (1870-79) had a legendary zeal for the furthering of Native American ministry, particularly among the Sioux in Dakota Territory. In a letter to Prior Frowin Conrad of Conception Abbey in Missouri, in July of 1878, Abbot Marty wrote: "I took over the Dakota missions in the name of the Benedictine Order. I did so because neither the secular clergy nor any other religious Order wanted to enter upon this work; yet till this hour no other Benedictine family has offered either persons or means to support me in this work of the conversion of pagans, work that was formerly a very familiar one to the sons of St. Benedict and well accomplished by them."⁸⁵ By the time Martin Marty wrote this, he had already secured four sisters from the women's monastery in Ferdinand, Indiana, to help in what he called "the spiritual and educational conversion of the Indians."⁸⁶

In the same year, monks from Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, and sisters from Saint Benedict's Monastery in nearby St. Joseph, began what came to be a more than 100-year history of work with the Chippewa of Northern Minnesota, at that time numbering more than 2000 members of the Mississippi, Ottertail and

⁸⁰ The other two options given were to reopen the brewery that had been a part of their earlier history, and to sell the holy oil of St. Walburga from the Abbey's shrine. Ephrem Hollermann, O.S.B., *The Reshaping of a Tradition: American Benedictine Women, 1852-1881* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press for the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict 1994) 27-28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 282-85.

⁸² For the complete letter, see Incarnata Girgen, O.S.B., *Behind the Beginnings* (St. Paul, MN: North Central Publishing for the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict 1981) 23-26.

⁸³ Quoted in Jerome Oetgen, *An American Abbot: Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B.* (Washington, DC: Catholic U of America Press 1997) 94.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 286.

⁸⁵ Quoted by Albert Kleber, O.S.B., in *History of St. Meinrad Archabbey, 1854-1954* (St. Meinrad, IN: A Grail Publication 1954) 268.

⁸⁶ Frederica Dudine, O.S.B., *The Castle on the Hill* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing 1967) 183.

Pembina tribes.⁸⁷ In addition to their ministry on the Minnesota reservations, each of these communities had industrial schools for Indian boys and girls at their monastery locations from 1886-96, under the sponsorship of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Affairs.

Catholic Evangelization in the United States, 1908-Vatican II

Removal of the mission status of the Catholic Church in the United States in 1908 resulted in a greater mission awareness among American Catholics. Mission awareness, according to Portier, came to express itself in five major elements of evangelization: 1) as Church extension, 2) as overseas convert making, 3) as public witness, 4) as Catholic action, and 5) as the conversion of America.⁸⁸

By the turn of the twentieth century, American Catholicism was in the process of becoming a “formidable structure,” characterized by an emerging “national Catholic consciousness.” As a subculture, it was forced to overcome nationality differences, which resulted in a growing “mission awareness” among the Catholic population. The primary metaphor for evangelization during this period, suggests Portier, was “church extension.” The Catholic Church Extension Society, begun by Francis C. Kelley in 1905, “rode into the imaginations and hearts of American Catholics.”⁸⁹ National mission organizations proliferated and success was measured by the numbers of chapels and schools built, rather than by the number of converts.⁹⁰ Evangelization as “extension” quickly moved into evangelization as “overseas convert making.”

In 1911, Maryknoll was founded, and in 1918 this organization sent the first of many departure groups to China. During most of the twentieth century, Catholics supported the so-called foreign missions with both money and vocations. Interest in these missions was fostered by organizations such as the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Association of the Holy Childhood.

During this time, some Catholic laity experienced a call to a deeper participation in the Church’s missionary task. As early as 1909, lay apostolic organizations emerged, focused not only on service but also on public witness. Lay missionaries participated in spiritual formation programs designed to prepare them for more direct apostolic works, such as home visiting, catechetics, and hospital and prison ministry.

By the 1930s, various forms of lay evangelization emerged in reaction to the new wave of anti-Catholicism ushered in by the defeat of Alfred J. Smith in the 1928 presidential election. These groups engaged in everything from outdoor speaking on Catholic doctrine (sometimes calling themselves “street preachers”), to newspaper advertising and direct mail communications, all aimed at presenting and clarifying Catholic beliefs to Americans. Those Catholics of the first half of the twentieth century who did not feel called to street preaching, yet wanted to do more to share their faith than pray and contribute money to the missions, formed “Catholic action” groups (for example, the Christian Family Movement and the Catholic Interracial Council) of that period. Catholic *action* promoted the idea of the laity as a leaven in society and intensified evangelization consciousness.⁹¹

Perhaps the most comprehensive model of evangelization prior to Vatican Council II was the effort toward the “conversion of America” epitomized in the Glenmary movement (otherwise known as the Home Missioners of America)—a movement aimed at evangelizing rural America, and erasing hundreds of priestless counties off the map of the United States.⁹²

Benedictines and Evangelization in the United States, 1908-Vatican II

American Catholic historians have described the American Catholic Church in the twentieth century as “brick-and-mortar” Catholicism. Joel Rippinger, in his book *The Benedictine Order in the United States: An Interpretive History*, found this to be an apt description for Benedictinism during this period as well. His fifth chapter is entitled “Brick

⁸⁷ Colman Barry, O.S.B., *Worship and Work* (Collegeville, MN: Saint John’s Abbey Press 1956) 137-40; Grace McDonald, O.S.B., *With Lamps Burning* (St. Paul, MN: North Central Publishing for the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict 1957) 227ff.

⁸⁸ Portier 33-39.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 33-34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 35.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 37.

⁹² *Ibid.* 37-38.

and Mortar Benedictinism.”⁹³ The flurry of new buildings (notably magnificent churches), investments in land, and expanding institutional ministries among both female and male Benedictine communities reflect Portier’s description of this era of Catholic evangelization from 1908 until Vatican Council II: “the immigrant church consolidated.”⁹⁴ I am not going to deluge you here with example upon example of these developments from American Benedictine history. That story is well known, and the legacy of this immensely fruitful era is visible on the American Benedictine landscape still today.

Portier’s “evangelization as Church extension” fits this history both literally and thematically. One can pick up almost any centennial history of Benedictine communities to find that the table of contents reads much like my own community’s Part Three of *With Lamps Burning* entitled “Full Flame in a New Century.” The subheadings are: Building Projects, 1900 to 1957; Educational Movements; Chippewa Indian Missions; The St. Cloud Hospital; Homes for the Aged and Orphans; and Foreign Missions.

The institutional growth during this period was a testimony to the ways in which American Benedictines were evangelizing—that is, living and communicating the Gospel in the areas of education, health care, liturgical renewal, early ecumenical efforts, and spiritual life and formation. Leadership in introducing the Liturgical Movement going on in Europe during these decades, provided by monks of Saint John’s Abbey in Collegeville, reached a high point in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Virgil Michel’s contributions in the area of liturgy and the reconstruction of the social order spawned enriched understandings of Catholic social teaching—a venue, perhaps, for what Portier describes during this period as “evangelization as public witness” and “Catholic action.” Less known, perhaps, were Benedictine efforts in the ecumenical apostolate prior to Vatican II.

Rippinger reports in his history that in 1924 Pope Pius XI made an appeal to “Benedictine congregations throughout the world to make special efforts on behalf of Christian unity and appealed for one monastic house in each country to take particular interest in advancing the cause of ecumenism.” St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Illinois, “stepped up to the plate” in the “groundbreaking endeavor of furthering dialogue and promoting reconciliation with Eastern Rite Churches.”⁹⁵

“Evangelization as overseas convert making,” in the words of Portier, was a call to American Benedictines as early as 1924, when the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith asked the abbeys of the American-Cassinese Congregation to undertake the work of university education in mainland China. Twelve years prior to 1924, a Chinese Catholic scholar petitioned Rome to establish a Catholic university in the then-named city of Peking, because “he knew that the ancient literature and culture of the Chinese people [were] being lost in their eagerness to become westernized,” and he “believed that a university was the best means of bringing the truths of Catholicism to the intellectuals, and of training Chinese Catholic leaders.”⁹⁶

The monks of St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, were the first to respond to this missionary call in 1925.⁹⁷ In 1930, the Benedictine sisters of Saint Benedict’s Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota, sent six sisters in answer to the request of a Latrobe monk, Francis Clougherty, to open classes for women in conjunction with the Fu Jen Catholic University of Peking.⁹⁸ This remarkable story is currently running in a museum exhibit at Saint Benedict’s Monastery’s Art and Heritage Place. I find it most interesting to note that one of the sisters who was in the first group to go to China later remarked in her oral history that “evangelization was not the primary emphasis. Rather than missionary work of conversion, the Benedictines looked upon the establishment of the University as their service to the Chinese [people],” especially the education of girls and women.⁹⁹ This particular mission endeavor led to opening a number of other missions in Taiwan, Japan, and Puerto Rico in the late 1940s and 1950s. These are just two early examples from among the many American Benedictine monasteries who responded to the call of what were then called the “foreign missions.”

⁹³ (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical 1990) 159.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 33-39.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 190.

⁹⁶ McDonald 268.

⁹⁷ Campion Gavalier, O.S.B., ed., *St. Vincent: A Benedictine Place* (Latrobe, PA: Saint Vincent Archabbey Press 1995) 69-71.

⁹⁸ McDonald 267-83. See also Wibora Muchlenbein, O.S.B., *Benedictine Mission to China* (St. Paul, MN: North Central Publishing for the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict 1980).

⁹⁹ Donald Terhaar, O.S.B., inscription on the entrance wall of the museum exhibit. Oral history, Saint Benedict’s Monastery Archives.

Catholic Evangelization in the United States since Vatican II

Perspective does not come easily for the best of historians seeking insight into the last forty-five years of American Catholic history. “The Second World War,” Cyprian Davis writes, “changed the course of world history and contemporary civilization. The Second Vatican Council was part of the chain reaction. Pope Pius XII brought to an end an ecclesiastical style dating from the early nineteenth century; Pope John XIII began another. Questions raised in the harsh climate of war and total destruction demanded new answers as a new society was formed across three worlds [political, cultural, social].” “In the United States,” he says further, “1965 marked not only the end of Vatican II but the coming of age of a generation conceived and born during the Second World War. This generation conceived in upheaval unleashed across America a floodtide of change that was at once chaotic and creative as well as vital and violent.”¹⁰⁰

These words set the stage for a less than thorough analysis of the elements of evangelization in the post-Vatican II era up to the present day. However, a few major themes can be identified. First of all, there is a sense in which the teachings of Vatican Council II solidified what had begun in the two decades immediately following World War II. An American atmosphere of “official tolerance” engendered greater dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, and a greater respect for the religious values of non-Christian religions.¹⁰¹

Second, the Council’s call for renewal was marked in the United States by pastoral letters and statements dealing with all aspects of Christian life at the same time that local ecclesial structures began embracing the permanent diaconate, the increase of lay ministries, and the development of parish councils.

Third, evangelization at the grass-roots level from about 1965 to 1985 was happening through the charismatic movement, a new interest in prayer (especially contemplative prayer), spiritual direction, directed retreats, movements such as Marriage Encounter and Cursillo, and “base communities” among the Hispanic Catholic population. It can be said that Catholicism in the United States during the two decades following the close of Vatican II was becoming more spirit-centered and spiritually alive.¹⁰²

As the 1980s waned and the last decade of the twentieth century approached, the consequences of this rapid and radical shift in the moral, cultural and religious climate for evangelization began to come into sharper relief. The church’s task of evangelization in the future would have to address the rapid drop in religious affiliation, the breakdown of traditional family structures, the technological revolution, the apathy of the white middle class, the increasing marginalization of the poor and oppressed minorities, the rampant abuse of children and women—and the list is long.

Over the past thirty years or so the call to evangelize has come into sharper focus within the American Catholic Church. In 1977 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops established an *ad hoc* committee on evangelization. In its aftermath, diocesan level evangelization centers began to spring up. A nationwide evangelization center was opened in Washington, DC. Evangelization celebrations have been held at national and regional levels. The *ad hoc* committee on evangelization had been replaced by the National Council for Evangelization (now called the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis), and Hispanic and Black Catholics have been doing the work of evangelization in the contexts of their own cultures.¹⁰³

Most notable, perhaps, in recent years is Pope John Paul II’s call for a “new evangelization” in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). In what some have called his “missionary encyclical,” he highlights three different pastoral and missionary situations that command the attention of Catholics: 1) attention to those who have not yet known Jesus Christ and his Gospel, 2) continued attention to those already in Christian communities where the Church’s pastoral activity is carried out, and 3) concern for baptized persons who have lost the sense of living faith and no longer consider themselves members of the Church. While Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* first spoke of a “new evangelization,” John Paul II saw the need for a re-launching of evangelization in the present life of the church. In *Redemptoris*

¹⁰⁰ “Evangelization in the United States since Vatican Council II,” in *Catholic Evangelization Today: A New Pentecost for the United States*, edited by Kenneth Boyack (New York: Paulist 1987) 22.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 26.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 28-32.

Missio he proclaimed that “the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”¹⁰⁴

In emphasizing the call for a *new* evangelization, John Paul II did not mean a *new* message, of course. Rather, he extends the notion of evangelization by noting the diversity of activities in the Church’s *one* mission and asserts that evangelization can be new in its ardor, its methods, and its expression.¹⁰⁵ He was clear in emphasizing that merely passing on doctrine is not enough. Central to true and authentic evangelization for John Paul II was a personal and profound meeting with Jesus Christ in his Paschal Mystery.

Study of John Paul II’s encyclical has engendered considerable literature attempting to understand more clearly what he meant by a “new evangelization.” According to one author, six characteristics stand out.¹⁰⁶ The “new evangelization” in John Paul II’s understanding is 1) Christocentric, 2) the responsibility of the whole people of God, 3) a matter of primary evangelization, re-evangelization and pastoral care [not limited to *ad gentes*],¹⁰⁷ 4) directed to individuals and whole cultures, 5) a comprehensive process of Christianization [not limited to the *kerygma*], and 6) requires a missionary spirituality. It is well known that John Paul II has had his critics for focusing on “Christianization” as a global thrust.

Benedictines and Evangelization in the United States: Some Current Perspectives

What I am about to say at this juncture will be not at all satisfying to you as patient listeners. It is simply to say that I do not know how to describe the present and future role of evangelization in the life and mission of Benedictine communities in North America, in this postmodern, postsecular, twenty-first-century world. At the level of values it is certain that Benedictines will need to continue to live out commitments to prayer and community, to authentic dialogue, to justice and peace, to education, to care of the sick, to the poor and children, to freedom, forgiveness, love and respect for all humankind and all of creation. Precisely what form evangelization will take in the Benedictine context is unclear to me, but hopefully it will be “where there is need.”

Concluding Thoughts

As I bring this presentation to a close, however, I would like to offer three somewhat random perspectives that are meant to be provocative, and possibly to stimulate further thought, study, and reflection among us.

Exploration of Models Appropriate to Benedictine Monasticism Today

Two years ago, Timothy Byerley, a former doctoral student of Avery Dulles, S.J., at Fordham University, published a book entitled *The Great Commission: Models (not surprising) of Evangelization in American Catholicism*.¹⁰⁸ In the course of this book, Byerley develops six models of evangelization that provide a schema within to explore the contemporary call of the American Catholic Church to the work of evangelization. Each chapter describes a different model’s scriptural and historical roots, a critique of the historical element, implications of the model for today, and considerations for Christian education. According to one reviewer, the book has several relatively serious flaws. Five of the six models are male-dominated, especially surprising since historically so much of evangelization in North America has been done by women religious or lay women. Secondly, in spite of the large Hispanic population in the United States, none of the models flow from the Latino/a experience, or for that matter,

¹⁰⁴ #3.

¹⁰⁵ #90.

¹⁰⁶ David Nodar (Director of Catholic Evangelization Services, Arcdiocese of Baltimore), “What Are Characteristics of the New Evangelization?” at http://www.christlife.org/evangelization/articles/C_newevan.html.

¹⁰⁷ Primary evangelization refers to bringing the Gospel to peoples in socio-cultural contexts where Jesus Christ is not known. Re-evangelization is the work of bringing renewal and revitalization to the baptized within countries and nations who have lost a *living sense of faith*. Pastoral care is to be given to healthy, mature Christian communities that are fervent in faith and have a sense of universal mission. See Nodar, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ (New York: Paulist 2008).

African-American experience. And thirdly, a range of lay evangelization efforts in the marketplace and workplace are not developed.¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, the six models presented in Byerley's book are worthy of mention in this context as elements of evangelization to be pondered by both professed Benedictine monastics and Oblates as they look to shaping a future in response to the call of the Gospel. The models are 1) personal witness, 2) proclamation by word, 3) worship, 4) community, 5) inculturation, and 6) works of charity.¹¹⁰ There is not room here to explicate each model—an exploration for another day. Suffice it to say that the author does acknowledge three major issues inherent in the field of evangelization today that must be addressed: 1) respect for *all* human cultures, 2) the tension between evangelization and ecumenism, and 3) the need for one overarching theory of evangelization.

Reflection on the Historical Shift in North American Benedictinism

Another perspective for further thought and study is one presented by our own Joel Rippinger from Marmion Abbey at the symposium on "Mission and Monasticism" held at Sant' Anselmo in Rome in May of 2009. Joel reported his participation in this symposium for the October 2009 issue of the *Monastic Researchers Newsletter*. When I asked him about the availability of his text, he generously shared it with me. I do believe that his is a crucial reflection on our self-understanding as Benedictines in North America. His paper was entitled, "American Benedictines in the Twentieth Century: The Tension and the Transition from an Active to a Contemplative Monastic Presence."

In his paper, Joel concludes from the historical record of Benedictines in North America that for approximately the first one hundred years of their presence, evangelization (although he does not use that word) happened through ministries of pastoral service (meaning parochial sacramental assistance) on the part of Benedictine men and education as the primary work of Benedictine women.

Then he goes on to describe (with a kind of clarity that was very enlightening to me), the shift that began to happen after World War II—a movement "to explore possibilities of new foundations that would by design *not* include educational or pastoral ministries" (and he gives examples). What he calls a "redirection of monastic mission" was connected, he suggests, "to the broader cultural shifts taking place in American society in these decades, as well as the monastic renewal mandated by Vatican Council II." And it is the following summary statement that I think merits fruitful pondering in the context of this Convention's theme:

By the end of the twentieth century it seemed that the earlier ascendancy of an active, missionary-based monasticism had been displaced by one that manifested a distinct preference for liturgical life and hospitality, focused on having the monastery become a stable spiritual center for the local community . . . a center for hospitality in the form of retreats and liturgical life, spiritual direction and sacred space, in a society surrounded by discordant voices.¹¹¹

Given this evolving historical shift, how might we characterize the uniquely Benedictine role in the Church's mission of evangelization in the twenty-first century?

Potential for Evangelization through Benedictine Presence

My final perspective is a very underdeveloped personal one, but I am going to offer it here as further "grist for the mill." I began thinking about this only as I was nearing the completion of this presentation, so left no time to develop it any further here.

I remembered reading an article in *Tjurunga* (the Australasian Benedictine Review) some fifteen years or more ago that "struck a chord" in me and stayed with me. It was written by Abbess Máire Hickey, O.S.B., of Dinklage Abbey

¹⁰⁹ Angelyn Dries, book review in *American Catholic Studies* 120.2 (Summer 2009) 89.

¹¹⁰ I prefer Avery Dulles' terminology in summarizing Byerley's models in *Origins* 37.1 (May 17, 2007). A relatively recent book explores "five marks of mission" for these times: 1) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; 2) to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers; 3) to respond to human need by loving service; 4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and 5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Andrew Wallis and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (New York: Orbis 2008).

¹¹¹ Rippinger, unpublished text, p. 3.

in Germany, and entitled “Evangelization and Monasticism.” In it she questioned what seemed to her to be an underdeveloped missionary charism in European monasticism, bordering on narcissism. Her monastery was founded in 1949, in post-World War II Germany, when an enclosed monastery would have been the norm. But she tells the story of her monastery’s desire to respond to the challenge of Vatican II renewal in these words: “I believe that we are moving from a form of contemplative, cloistered life such as was normal for Benedictine women from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, to a holistic contemplative-cenobitical-missionary form more appropriate to the social situation of women in Europe at the end of the 20th century.”¹¹² She went on to explain how this form could be described as

living in structures of monastic liturgical life according to the *Rule of St. Benedict* that combines work with quite a lot of time and space for prayer, liturgy, Bible, meditation, reading and community life, and at the same time a guest house which invites people to share in the liturgy, which tries to be open to the world in which sisters are committedly engaged in pastoral work. . . . [We] are convinced that his kind of “missionary” work is an essential part of the kind of Christian life we want to live in our monastery.¹¹³

At the outset of the article, Mother Máire insisted rather emphatically that, “Christian and Benedictine monasticism cannot be other than contemplative, cenobitical and missionary because Christianity [itself] is basically contemplative, cenobitical [community-based] and missionary—listening to the Good News, growing in depth and breadth and love of one’s sisters and brothers through this Good News, and passing it on.”¹¹⁴ It is her description of a “contemplative-cenobitical-missionary” monasticism that caught my attention, especially when she suggested that the effectiveness of whatever forms of evangelization a monastic community embraces today will depend upon the integration of those three facets of their essential identity as Christians. Up to this point I have said nothing about “Oblate Benedictinism,” but please be assured that I have been thinking a great deal about the explosion of Oblate memberships in North American Benedictine monasteries of both women and men today. I truly believe that Oblates are an integral part of our new future in the United States. I regret not speaking more directly to the Oblates here present, but may I suggest in closing that Mother Máire’s model may be eminently useful in pondering a two-pronged approach to the Church’s call to evangelization in the life of North American Benedictines today, a call to unambiguous spiritual presence, 1) expressed in cenobitic Benedictine monastic presence from within the monastery flowing out to the world, and 2) Oblate Benedictine presence from outside the monastery, in and along the byways and marketplaces of contemporary life. Decidedly, this is not a neat and wrapped up conclusion to this presentation. Rather, it is an open-ended call to reflection and dialogue among us during the days of this Convention.

¹¹² Vol. 44 (May 1993) 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 12.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

How Universal Is the Benedictine Presence Today?

Notker Wolf, O.S.B., Abbot Primate

Overview of the Situation of Benedictines Today

Statistics

If you look at the Atlas-OSB in the Internet you will be surprised at how many countries have a Benedictine presence. Alas, these statistics are from 2004 and are already out of date. Some say that there are 800 Benedictine monasteries, others say 1,300. It depends on whether one counts independent houses only or includes the smaller houses.

Foundations continue to be made at the rate of up to four a year. In recent years foundations have been made in China, Kazakhstan, Guinea-Bissau, Cuba and Thailand. Benedictine women seem to me to be more courageous and to have more staying-power. Visiting the Ukraine three years ago I found seven monasteries of women but no monastery of men.

Soon there will be few countries left in which there is no Benedictine presence. I have even greater grounds for hope in the fact that foundations made in the 1960s in the so-called Third World are now making their own foundations. Up to now foundations were always made from Europe or the United States but now there are houses in Africa and Asia which are themselves making foundations and these are a source of great hope (African foundations in Zambia and Guinea-Bissau in Africa, an Indian foundation in Myanmar, and a Vietnamese foundation in Thailand).

The fact is that monasteries in the so-called “old world” are no longer strong enough—among other things for demographic reasons—to support their older foundations or undertake new ones. The two missionary congregations of Tutzing and St. Ottilien have begun to “plant” sisters and brothers from several countries in their new foundations. For example, in Cuba we have three confreres from Togo, two from Germany and one from the Philippines. The superior is from Togo.

According to the statistics in the new *Catalogus* which will appear shortly we have 7,358 monks. In 2005 there were 15,438 Benedictine women. The second women’s *Catalogus* will appear next year. With this, we will have the statistics.

Vocations

The greatest growth at the moment is in Vietnam where there are over 300 Benedictine monks (the Cistercians have 800). I do not have statistics for the women’s Benedictine monasteries but in these too the monastic life is blossoming. In South Korea and the Philippines we had many vocations in recent years but with the fall of the birthrate the number of vocations to the religious life leaves a lot to be desired. The same reason starts already to have its effect on our communities in India and Sri Lanka.

It is no secret that in the West there has been an enormous decline in vocations and several communities have had or will have to close. This is the bitter truth. In Benedictine history there have always been ups and downs. Monasteries were closed and new ones opened. In the middle of the last century there were many vocations. Older members have died or are dying and these losses can no longer be made good by new entrants. At least in Europe we simply do not have the children. But neither do we have any reason to complain. There are young people in the United States and in Europe who are attracted by the ideal of a good liturgy and a living community. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, Latin America had a Benedictine upsurge but this has given way to stagnation.

Precarious communities need special attention. It is not easy for sisters and brothers to face up to the fact that a community is headed for closure. Here, more cooperation between monasteries is needed as well as, perhaps, more authority for the leadership of a Congregation or Federation to become involved. Again, much depends on communities themselves which in some cases are prey to individualism rather than foster a genuine community life. The more autonomous we are the more we must work together at the most basic levels, the more we must help one another—and allow ourselves to be helped.

In Sicily I know two communities of nuns both aged and dwindling in numbers who have no contact with each other although they live about 500 meters from one another. Therefore I welcome the new regulations of the American-Cassinense Congregation which allow the abbot president with his council to intervene if a community is lacking in administrative or economic leadership. I can understand that no community is happy when for years or decades no new members have made profession. No one wants to leave the home where he/she has lived for a lifetime. I admire very much the courage of communities who are merging.

I also notice that monasteries of a more traditional outlook and observance have more vocations. This is particularly so in France and the United States (see also Norcia). But in other European countries, too, young candidates are more like to be liturgically traditionalist. Have we, perhaps, gone too far in our attempts to adapt and inculturate? Be this as it may, the fact is that many are once more seeking a life which is more strongly directed by the RB, indeed even in its smallest details. I shall refer more particularly to this problem below.

Benedictine Women

In the CIB (Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum) I see great progress in bringing Benedictine women together under the same umbrella. Since the 1960s my predecessors worked towards this goal and finally it was Mother Máire Hickey who at an annual meeting of the representatives of Benedictine women, with great sensitivity and respect for individual and national sensibilities brought about this unification of the nineteen regions of the world. This happened in 2001 at Nairobi. The nuns and sisters of some regions such as Italy and Chile were worried that they would be taken over by a centralized leadership. For this reason, I suggested that we establish a "Communio," i.e. a spiritual connection, but not a juridical link. Sister Judith Heble is the current coordinator (reelected in September 2010), a role which she fulfills with much sensitivity. When I became Abbot Primate I had hoped to be able to create for women a structure parallel to that already existing for men, i.e. a confederation of women Benedictines headed by a "Primatess." However, it became clear to me very quickly that women's communities are very differently structured than those of men. The canonical structures of men's communities are very clear and all possess the same autonomy. Monasteries of nuns, however, are in some cases subject to the bishop, some are incorporated in men's Congregations such as the English Congregation or those of Brazil, Cono Sur, Beuron or the Annunciation. There are also two women's monastic Congregations. Monasteries of sisters are partly modeled on modern congregations and are of papal rite, others belong to Federations which are similar to modern congregations. Under these circumstances it would not be possible to devise a juridical unity. But, despite this, Benedictine women have come together. Every four years they hold a symposium in Sant' Anselmo—the next one will take place this September. The representatives of the nineteen regions worldwide meet once a year, each time in a different country. Benedictine women are getting to know one another and growing in their appreciation of one another. (By the time this conference is published the symposium "Women as Witnesses of Hope" has taken place. Again it has showed the growing unity of Benedictine women. It is becoming something like a parallel institution to the Confederation of men.)

Benedictine Organizations

In the 1960s a decisive role in Benedictine globalization was played by AIM (Alliance InterMonastères) in both its European and American branches. In the past there were many differences that, happily, in recent times have been clarified. What is at issue? New foundations need help for many years: help to build the physical monastery but also help in spiritual building, particularly in the formation of younger candidates. The founding monasteries are often too weak to provide this help in the long term. Thus, in 1961, several abbots, along with the Cistercians and the Trappists, founded AIM. Nowadays the emphasis is not so much on aid as on solidarity. For this reason, "Aide Internationale pour les Monastères" has become the "Alliance Inter-Monastères." One of the best "institutions" to grow out of this is the annual three-month course for formators. AIM has always been concerned more with help for studies and formation than with subsidizing new buildings.

When I look at AIM today, though, I see many "old folks" who have undoubtedly done much for young monasteries. But they are not being replaced by younger brothers and sisters. Has the élan declined? Are we interested anymore in new foundations and their problems? Solidarity is contracting and that at a time when precisely this value is high on the list in our society. Or can it be that the younger monasteries have in the meantime grown so much that they no longer need any help from outside? That would, indeed, be ideal. But even then solidarity would be important so that monasteries would not be swallowed up in their own loneliness. So, I see AIM as more than just a temporary organization which has served its purpose.

The Benedictine Commission for China would seem to be in a similar position. This was founded as a result of a request by the American-Cassinese Congregation to the Congress of Abbots of 1996. Since then it has served as a medium for the exchange of news and ideas and for the coordination of the activities of monasteries which are involved in China—such as St. Vincent, Latrobe; St. John's, Collegeville; and St. Ottilien. Up to now it has been made up of monastics and abbots who, following the opening up of China, took up again the contacts their monasteries had previously had there. China is developing quickly. It has a big future. Its Church is vibrant while at the same time facing many difficulties. Can we Benedictines simply stand aside? Despite many cultural breaks with the past, this country is still strongly marked by monasticism. Where are our younger brothers and sisters who are learning Chinese and concern themselves with the development of this huge country?

I hope that the apparent lack of interest in AIM and in China is not a sign of a new provincialism in this era of globalization.

This concern also touches a third initiative of the three Orders based on the RB. I am talking about DIM/MID (Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue). Originally part of AIM, this group gradually became separate and followed its own course of development. Just as for cultural reasons AIM has American and European branches, so does DIM/MID. For several years these branches have been cooperating very well. At first it was the discovery of another kind of monasticism in the Buddhist and Hindu tradition that was attractive and prompted study and the exchange of visits. The contemporary cultural ferment has led to the existence of these religions and monasteries on our very doorsteps. Some years ago Tibetan monks in France had more novices than the Benedictines. Encounter can be a healthy challenge to re-think our own monastic traditions. Maybe that there was a certain exoticism about the first meetings and this created enthusiasm but also some irritations. We must ask ourselves today how we want to structure further monastic interreligious dialogue. We in Europe have reached a situation of great religious pluralism already present in the United States. How do we as monastics deal with this? And again the same questions: Where is the younger generation in DIM/MID? Who will address these issues? What role does our monasticism play in the multitude of cultures and religions, being as we are communities that draw their life from Christ? And in this we are faced with the great challenge of an Islam which is becoming more and more strongly missionary. At present I know only one confrere from Kenya who is learning Arabic. Maybe here we should not think in too "Western" a fashion, but integrate more our communities in other countries. There is, for example, a group for interreligious dialogue in India and there are the beginnings of such a movement in Korea.

In 2002 a new group was established in São Paulo, the ICBE (International Commission on Benedictine Education), of which the Cistercians are also a part. We had become aware that worldwide we teach 150,000 secondary-school pupils in our monastery schools. What does a Benedictine school stand for? What is its profile? What does it want to communicate to young people? Teachers and school administrators meet every three years. At the last meeting in Santiago de Chile there were over 70 participants from 39 nations (in November 2010 in St. Ottilien there were 190 teachers from all over the world). In our globalized times international meetings of students and pupils have a particular significance. We see this time and again at World Youth Congresses. Therefore we have combined the international meetings of our pupils with the time of the World Youth Congresses. It is a good thing for children from the West to experience something of the everyday life of African schoolchildren. Young people make the best contacts at once. The Manquehue Movement, a lay movement in Chile, played an important role in the foundation of the ICBE. For a long time they have been in contact with Ampleforth Abbey and are now officially associated with the English Congregation. They are spiritually rooted in *lectio divina* and this is practiced in their schools. With initiatives like this, the teaching activities of our monasteries acquire a stronger spiritual accent.

More and more laypeople are discovering the riches of our Benedictine spirituality. The number of Benedictine Oblates is growing all over the world in particular in Korea, in the Philippines and in Brazil. Oblates have long since ceased to be a small group of elderly ladies who descend on the parlors of our monasteries. Oblates see their role as that of Christians living in the world who find their direction in the RB. As I became aware of the ever-growing number of Oblates during my various journeys I invited them to come to Rome for an exchange of views and experiences and to deepen their spirituality by common study and by visiting the Benedictine sites. The two world congresses of 2005 and 2009 were a wonderful experience of worldwide fellowship and of the universality of Benedictine principles.

Summary

While the Jesuits and Salesians, thanks to their central strategic leadership, already are or will become present everywhere, we Benedictines are also present in many places, but in a Benedictine way. With us, everything begins from below, from the grass-roots. For a time there was an idea in AIM, particularly among the French and the Latin Americans, that we should take a more strategic approach and, for example, try to implant a contemplative monastery in every diocese and pay attention to the where and when of this implantation. But this kind of implantation is very seldom evident in Benedictine history. Many foundations, also in recent times, seem to have resulted from the play of external circumstances: through acquaintance with a particular bishop, through novices from another country who were followed by others who wanted to make a foundation at home, or through the initiative of communities themselves to found another community elsewhere. Not infrequently, foundations happen because of the need felt by some brothers and sisters to start something new. Benedictine foundations cannot be programmed but they should be well planned and supported by all as a common endeavor. Some foundations have crises and later need a kind of re-foundation. Founders themselves have to have a strong personality because they need to be able to cope with many difficulties. Often these begin with the need to learn a new language. Then come all the organizational and bureaucratic hurdles—not all are up to these challenges.

So much as our monasteries are autonomous—and should remain so—all the more is cooperation important. Not only are our brothers and sisters infected by contemporary individualism, this can also infect a community. The establishment of monastic Congregations or similarly structured Federations would be very helpful for the further fruitful development of Benedictine women. Many, however, were against this because they were afraid to lose some of their autonomy. We do not need to go so far as the Cluniacs in the Middle Ages who, because of their centralization, were very efficient, but we badly need more cooperation in this era of globalization. This would be of enormous help for new foundations and precarious communities. Autonomy does not mean independence which easily may lead to isolation.

In addition to the Congress of Abbots there are also national and international meetings such as the annual workshop of American abbots, the annual meeting of German-speaking, Italian-speaking and French-speaking abbots, the superiors of India and Sri Lanka (ISBF, the Indo-Sri Lankan Benedictine Federation) as well as those of southern Africa (BECOSA, the Benedictine Communities of South Africa) and the triennial meeting of the superiors of East Asia and the Pacific (BEAO, the Benedictines of East Asia and Oceania). These meetings are very valuable and have led to shared projects such as those concerned with the formation and ongoing formation of our monastics. For men, the basis is provided by the monastic Congregations and I could imagine something similar for women's monasteries.

Globalization has widened the horizons of our communities. Foundations have been made in Africa and also in Eastern Europe. Monasteries have come in contact with other religions, with their religious and monastic lives. They have become more aware of a common heritage and more conscious of its significance for the training of young people as well as for Christians in the world. Here, it is not only statistics that matter. Here we are dealing with the universalization of Benedictine spirituality, with its contributions to the life of Faith and the life of the Church. In the second part of my presentation I should like to speak about this.

How Universal is the Benedictine Charism?

We have seen that there are Benedictine monasteries in every part of the world. But how strongly are the ideals of the RB really rooted in our various cultures? This question can be asked of the younger monasteries but also of the older. Have monastics really made the Benedictine charism present in their cultures? That is the main question. But we who come from older monasteries have no right to look only at younger monasteries and arrogantly imagine that we have found, once and for all, the proper expressions of this charism. Monks are people who, according to St. Benedict, are constantly in search of God and are never finished with this search. Nevertheless our society continues developing at high speed.

Inculturation

In previous years there was much talk about inculturation. By this we meant primarily the implantation of young communities in an African or Asiatic context. But are we older communities still part of our cultures as the monasteries in medieval Europe were? Indeed, these monasteries have put their stamp on these cultures. It is part of the Holy Father's program that Benedictines would once more play this role.

A kind of osmosis does exist. Monasteries influence and stamp their environment but are themselves influenced by their environment and its changes. In previous centuries the thought-structures of societies were constant. Until relatively recently there was a unified concept of the world that characterized all of society and its authority structures. Thus, we can recognize that in fact there are cultural differences between our monasteries. French monasteries are more oriented towards *esprit* and consequently are more contemplative than German or Austrian monasteries which have an essentially more practical orientation. In Austria even the Cistercians have schools and parishes and do not distinguish themselves from Benedictines. The English lay great store by individual development, just as the English university system gives priority to the tutorial system. In the United States monasteries have provided a valuable service to the Church in the areas of education and healthcare. And I could go on. Everywhere the life of monastics is stamped by the surrounding society and its culture. One notices this as soon as one visits a monastery in another country. But at the same time one sees that it is a Benedictine monastery. There is such a thing as a Benedictine "stable-smell." Up to the present day, it is through their activities that monasteries have helped to stamp their societies. This is why the ICBE (International Commission for Benedictine Education) is so important.

Individualism

If we look, though, at the old monasteries then we can say that they have been influenced by prevalent modern values and this prompts some questions. Individualism has crept into European communities. In Munich, half of the households are composed of so-called "singles." Many monks live like singles inside their communities. In the worst cases, monks live alongside one another but not *with* one another. Silence is observed not because of a need to maintain an attitude of constant prayer but because one has nothing to say to anyone else. No one is interested in the other, in his welfare or his work. Not much remains of community life. And, as mentioned above, communities, too, live like singles inside their Congregations. Solidarity seems to be an ideal of one's youth which evaporates as times goes by. This is why young people find living communities attractive.

Things look different in Africa and the Philippines. There, community really forms the focus of life just as the family does in normal everyday life. This does not mean that in these countries there is not individualism in the form of egoism but, generally, living together takes precedence over personal, individual life. The communities will have to reflect on and reflect this traditional value in order not to lose it as a result of global influences and contacts. I cannot yet make any assessment of the situation in Japan and Korea. In India individualism has already begun to show itself.

Status thinking

This can also be seen in various forms in younger monasteries. In some countries it is very difficult to convey the notion of monasticism as a value in itself. Status thinking rules. All want to be priests and are encouraged in this desire by their families. In these societies a priest is something better. Here, it would be good to reflect again on what St. Benedict has to say about the place of priests in the community. In many Western monasteries lay monks have almost died out. This, too, is connected with developments in our society. Farmers and handworkers in the traditional sense hardly exist anymore. Levels of education have risen sharply and the range of occupations from which possible candidates might come has widened radically. What professions can be of use to the monastic community when candidates have not learned a manual trade? But it is precisely these basic trades that are demanded by the present economic situation in our monasteries. In the period following the Second Vatican Council, lay brothers were essentially more stable than the priests. It was precisely the latter who experienced the crises while the handworker or gardener had a different bond with the place and found self-esteem in his work. With regard to rootedness in a place, a school provides a good area for priests in which to exercise their talents.

Monastic Poverty

Monastery buildings can often be impressive. But many communities are much poorer than such buildings might suggest and the contemporary economic and financial crisis has left its mark. In Europe monasteries have considerable difficulties with European Union regulations. Agriculture, formerly one of the economic pillars, no longer gives the necessary returns and some monasteries have had to close their farms. Despite this, I think that in many cases a few cows and hens and a garden can still make an economically valuable and inexpensive contribution towards feeding a small community. In India I saw a small community of sisters

which was able to live mostly from the fruit and vegetables produced by their small garden. Some monasteries have followed current business trends and run large workshops, breweries, furniture factories or industrial farms. In order to guarantee a proper return, confreres need to acquire professional qualifications and employ professional help. The risks are high but such communities provide employment for many in the surrounding area. (Admont, for example, has 1,200 employees.)

Cellarers and superiors are concerned with financial worries. Often, members of the community are not very aware of this. They are taken care of and complain mostly only if they do not like the food or the superior refuses some request. Monastics never have the worries of a father and mother to provide for a family. One can always draw from the common purse. In Africa, families have expectations of relatives in a monastery. Monasteries are better off than the surrounding areas. I can well understand how a monk, seeing that the monastery has everything and comparing this with his family, could be tempted to make presents to this family. The family looked after him when he was a child. It needs to be made clearer that he has now separated himself from his family, just as a married son who now must care for his new family. It is against this background that RB 59 must be read and, no less, chapters 32-34 and 54-55. Benedict's monasteries were also richer than their neighbors. This follows automatically from the cooperation of many working together. But monasteries were also always places for guests and for the poor. Benedict too had an option for the poor (cf. RB 53, 15). The porter of the monastery, who was responsible for the poor, exercised this responsibility not in his own name but in that of the community. This aspect too needs to be reflected on anew.

Modern Means of Communication

Mobile telephones and the Internet are a particular form of modern society's influence. With these, communities are suddenly faced with completely new problems. We can hardly exist now without these technical aids but they also present challenges that are completely new. If the telephone had already penetrated the cloister walls and broken the monastic silence, these walls and this silence are now only external symbols of protection. With mobile telephones and the Internet, monastics are reachable at any time and can go out any time without actually leaving the monastery. Since we cannot do without these aids completely, many communities have decided to have only one or two mobile telephones which can be made available according to need and the Internet is installed in public places such as the library. This provides at least some kind of control.

Because of their work, however, some monastics need a personal Internet connection. This opens the door to all kinds of dangers. Unsolicited pornographic material arrives in the monastery and a conscious asceticism is needed not to look at this material but to eliminate it immediately. Fortunately it is now possible to block porn sites. But the technically well-versed know how to get around even the firewall. Here personal maturity is called for, a knowledge of our ideals as well as the ability to exercise the will-power to put these ideals into practice. We are all subject to temptation and in monasteries, because of the structured nature of the day; there is a danger that monastics will not develop the independent personalities needed to cope with such temptations. In normal families there is a much stronger social control. These are problems that need to be named and discussed so that our brothers and sisters may be strengthened. This is a worldwide issue because the Internet is to be found even in the most recent foundations. There is no intention here of damning the Internet. Our websites are important advertisements for our monasteries, for our way of life and for our products.

Authority and Obedience

The exercise of and respect for authority and the associated exercise of obedience are a particular problem. In a democratic society all have equal rights, the people are sovereign, and positions of leadership are assigned by election and for limited periods. Persons in leadership are democratically controlled and, if necessary, dismissed. A society based on freedom and law is fully justified following as it does on eras of absolute rule and societies based on an official class structure. These earlier societal structures have also marked our monasteries. Many abbots ruled as absolute monarchs, even when they always had a seniorate and chapter. But the meetings of the latter were held simply because required by the Rule. Chapter 3 of the RB reflects quite a different spirit. The abbot is required to involve the community in all matters of concern to that community: "Do nothing without counsel, then later you will have nothing to regret." All are co-responsible for the flourishing of a community. Many abbots find it difficult really to involve the confreres in all their decisions. The expression of differing opinions can lead them to restrict discussion and thus run the danger of authoritarianism. They simply appeal to the authority of their office. For this reason many communities elect their abbots for limited periods and many

abbots are happy when this period comes to an end. It would appear that we do not try often enough to see authority and obedience in the light of faith, as the joint search by abbot, community and the individual for what is God's will. Also, there has perhaps been too little examination and awareness of the effect of societal authority-structures in Asia (e. g. Confucianism) and Africa on the life of communities.

In the light of all of these problems there is no wonder that a whole group of monastics say that they do not want to have anything to do with that kind of monasticism but want to live the pure monasticism of the RB. The solution seems to lie in a radical return to the roots of our charism. I can understand that this solves some problems and that a radical life is made possible. But the RB itself reflects the situation of monasticism of the fifth and sixth centuries and we are living in our own concrete world. We cannot expect that rich benefactors will sponsor a care-free existence apart from the rest of life. Monastics cannot be deluxe Christians.

Nonetheless, we must all constantly ask ourselves if we are on the right path and whether or not we have allowed ourselves to be captured by the comfort of contemporary life. I appreciate the clear monastic identity of the more traditionally oriented communities as well as the outward expression of that identity. I have reservations, however, if just living like in the sixth century should be an answer to the challenges of our societies. The love of the kernel of the monastic vocation, the following of Jesus in the community of our brothers and sisters, will always find new paths, but requires, too, a formation that makes possible the taking of the right path.

Conclusion

Some weeks ago I was with Maronite monks and nuns in the Lebanon. I was astonished by their deep piety, by their nearness to God, but also to their people. They have their saints and the people seek them out. The people are looking for men and women of God. Holiness itself is the goal of monastics. The nearness of the saints to God is shown by many miracles. Miracles, I think, are not so important. Indeed, the greatest gift we can receive is union with Christ and with our brothers and sisters.

Moved by the Spirit

Sister Ana Cloughly, O.S.B.

“ . . . impelled by the word of God to listen and respond to the issues of our times . . .
we will be radical signs of God’s love and compassion. . . .”

(From Benet Hill Monastery’s Vision Statement)

The women of Benet Hill Monastery wrote their vision statement knowing full well the implications of what it means to listen and respond to the issues of our times. Over their forty-five years as a faith community, they have seen many changes in the Church and in American culture which have greatly impacted their lives and ministry. These changes have challenged them to ask the deeper questions of their faith and of their identity as a women’s Benedictine community. “To start an academy . . . and to build a religious community in Post-Vatican times were no small responsibilities,” writes Sister Alice Marie Hays in her book recounting the first ten years of Benet Hill’s history.¹¹⁵ The same could be said of Benet Hill’s decision to sell their monastery and school property on Chelton Road in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and build a new monastery and ministry center in the Black Forest, just seventeen miles from the original location. Moving a monastery is no small responsibility especially in times of worldwide economic instability. Their decision to move was not based on a single discernment but rather is the result of careful and oftentimes painful discernments over the span of Benet Hill’s existence. This brief essay will trace some of the more significant moments in Benet Hill’s history leading to the discernment to move the monastery.

Foundations

Benedictine women from Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, had been ministering as teachers in both public and Catholic schools in southern Colorado since 1914. Travel was expensive and sisters were unable to go home to “the Mount” for several years at a time. In the summer of 1959 the sisters of Mount St. Scholastica held a community chapter meeting discerning the creation of a new foundation and girl’s academy in Colorado.¹¹⁶ The community purchased a twenty-three acre piece of property in the Austin Bluffs area of Colorado Springs in 1960.¹¹⁷ On the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, 1963, Abbot Thomas Hartman presented Sister Liguori Sullivan with the mission cross and a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict as she and seventy sisters left for Colorado.¹¹⁸ Benet Hill became an independent priory June 14, 1965, with seventy-seven charter members from Mount St. Scholastica transferring their vows of stability to the new foundation. The new Benet Hill community elected Sister Liguori Sullivan prioress at their first community chapter.¹¹⁹

Among the many practical concerns of the new community, a subject not many wish to think about, concerned Mother Liguori: where to bury community members when they die. She began looking for suitable options. In 1966, the sisters purchased five acres of land in the Black Forest area of Colorado Springs and applied for rezoning of the property to permit a cemetery.¹²⁰ Two additional sections of property were purchased later

¹¹⁵ Alice Marie Hays, O.S.B., *A Song in the Pines* (privately published, c. 1976) 135.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 123.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 124.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 134.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 138-39.

¹²⁰ Real Estate Purchase Agreement, January 26, 1966. “The zone change is requested in order to enable the Priory to locate a private cemetery in the center of the tract. The remainder will be used as a private recreational facility.” El Paso County, Colorado, Planning Commission, Minutes of Meeting, May 11, 1966. Petition for zoning change No. P-66-17, Benet Hill Monastery Archives (BHMA).

that same year. In 1993 another five acres were purchased and a final ten acres in 2003.¹²¹ All the land is contiguous to the original purchase coming to a total of forty-four acres.

Changes

The first Benedictine women, Benedicta Riepp and two of her sisters, came to the United States in 1852 to minister to the educational needs of the children of German immigrants. Mount St. Scholastica continued that tradition, teaching poor, mostly Hispanic children in Colorado. With the new foundation, the majority of the sisters continued teaching in the Colorado missions that had been staffed by Mount St. Scholastica. At the monastery, the sisters opened Benet Hill Academy, a college preparatory school for girls. Benet Hill Academy opened in 1963 becoming a much-loved ministry. Over the next twenty years, changes in the Church and in American culture would challenge the new community to rethink its identity as a teaching community.

The Second Vatican Council brought about many changes in the Church during the 1960s and 1970s. Sister Alice Marie notes, "The summer [of 1966] brought an urgent appeal for religious to study the documents of Vatican II and it brought many questions and fears."¹²² *Perfectae Caritatis* by Pope Paul VI encouraged religious, "for adaptation and renewal of religious life . . . and return to the sources of Christian life [the Gospels] and to the original spirit of the institutes [their founders' spirit]."¹²³ The women of Benet Hill realized wearing the habit and many of their customs were not part of the spirit of their founder, St. Benedict. They began to question what it means to be a Benedictine community in a rapidly changing world. Sister Alice Marie says, "To build a faith community according to Benedict is the whole purpose of the Colorado venture."¹²⁴

The 1960s and 1970s also brought great changes in secular society. Civic-minded people worked to secure civil rights for Black Americans, to end military involvement in Vietnam and to assure women equal rights with men. Questions about standards in public education and inequality between wealthy and poor districts came to the fore of public consciousness. As a result of improvements in public education, Catholic schools saw a sharp decline in enrollment. In 1971, twenty-two Benet Hill sisters left their teaching positions.¹²⁵ While financially devastating, the situation challenged the community to consider other options for ministry. More than seeking positions which would generate income, the sisters began looking at the changing needs of society. Sisters were sent to school for further education allowing them to take positions as nurses, counselors, religious education directors and with the diocese in liturgy. Eventually, the community had to face an even more difficult situation.

Benet Hill Academy began to suffer financially. Costs to staff and run the academy had grown exponentially. It became painfully clear in the fall of 1981 that the school would need to be closed. The community's very identity was enmeshed with Benet Hill Academy. The sisters were asked to pray for the guidance of the Spirit while preparing for chapter discernment.¹²⁶ Benet Hill Academy closed in the spring of 1982.

Creative Ministry

With the closure of Benet Hill Academy, the community needed to refocus its energies. What would best serve the needs of the people in the local area? They began ministries in adult education including a spiritual direction certification program, Scripture study, Centering Prayer and classes in catechetics and liturgy. Leasing portions of the building to a variety of schools and religious organizations for education and worship generated income.

¹²¹ Colorado, El Paso County, Copy of Warranty Deed, Recorded in Book 1980 at page 719 under Reception No. 312244, July 6, 1966. Colorado, El Paso County, Copy of Quit Claim Deed, September 2, 1966, Recorded Book 2147, p. 358. Colorado, El Paso County, Copy of Warranty Deed, September 12, 1988, Recorded Book 5553, p. 1239. Colorado, El Paso County, Copy of Warranty Deed, March 12, 1993. Recorded Book 6136, p. 458. Copies located in BHMA.

¹²² Hays 142.

¹²³ Vatican Council II, "Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life" (*Perfectae Caritatis*) (October 28, 1965) http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html, citing paragraph 2.

¹²⁴ Hays 130.

¹²⁵ Sister Rose Ann Barmann, *The Review*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring 2000) 2, BHMA.

¹²⁶ Community Meeting Minutes (November 1981) BHMA.

Leasing also formed long-lasting relationships with the Jewish and Protestant communities. Some sisters continued to minister in local Catholic schools as well as ministering in the San Luis Valley, Pueblo and parts of northern Colorado. In 1980 the community opened the Benet Pines Retreat Center on their property in Black Forest. Sisters offered hospitality and spiritual direction for the retreatants.

A Time of Trust

“But community was not just a subject for beginners,” Sister Alice Marie wrote in 1975 while reflecting on changes in the formation process.¹²⁷ By 1998, Sister Alice Marie’s words must have seemed prophetic for this now mature community. Although, numerous women entered the formation process, it had been fourteen years since a woman made final monastic profession. The realities of an aging community and aging buildings, both carrying significant financial responsibilities, presented unique challenges.

Prioress Anne Stedman and the monastic council commissioned the *Benedictine Sisters Space Utilization Study (SUSA)* in 1998 which culminated in February 2000.¹²⁸ The study included site profiles for Benet Hill Monastery and Benet Pines Retreat Center to assess the ways each site was used, who was using it, the financial implications of the way things were done and to make recommendations for the future. The results of the study were presented at the community meeting in February 2000. The study showed something must be done within five years at the Chelton Road location.¹²⁹ Besides major renovations to the buildings, questions of ministry and income needed serious consideration. One option was to sell the property. If they were to sell, would they sell all of the property or parts? The study also evaluated the preferences of the sisters. Most of the sisters wanted to remain on Chelton Road. Sister Mary Jane Vigil explains, “There were questions about the meaning of the vow of stability. Did it mean stability of place? For some it did. For others, stability meant staying with the community.”¹³⁰ There was deep pain and struggle within the community. Making decisions about Benet Pines did not carry the same urgency. Bill Beard’s evaluation showed Benet Pines held great potential for development.¹³¹ What sort of development, needed to be determined. Sister Rose Ann Barmann, prioress by the end of the study, asked the community could they “affirm the implications of the SUSA study.” Affirmation was unanimous.¹³²

The community had to make immediate decisions on some issues while grappling with difficult long-term discernments for the future. Options like leasing to a charter school, becoming an elderly care facility or creating a catering business were immediate considerations for ministry and generating income.¹³³ They decided to lease to a charter school and continue the existing ministries while they discerned their future.¹³⁴ Over the next year the community entered into an intensive process of discernment. At the chapter meeting of June 2, 2001, the community decided to place the Chelton Road property on the market.¹³⁵ Marketing the property was not a decision to sell but rather a step toward further discernment. Dividing the property into two parts, the school building, gym and tennis courts as one part and what realtors called the “L,” the portion of property with the sister’s residences and the chapel complex forming the second part, increased the possibility for making the sale. By August, the realtors told the community several groups were interested in buying the property.¹³⁶ If they would sell, what options did they have for a new monastery? Task groups explored what would be needed to purchase undeveloped properties or to build at Benet Pines.¹³⁷ Many sites were visited and reports given to the community.¹³⁸

¹²⁷ Hays 147.

¹²⁸ Zielinski Companies, *Benedictine Sisters Space Utilization Study* (February 2000) n. pag., BHMA. Prioress Anne Stedman, O.S.B., requested that Architect Bill Beard be included on the study team.

¹²⁹ Zielinski, BHMA.

¹³⁰ Sister Mary Jane Vigil, O.S.B., interview (March 2010).

¹³¹ Community Meeting Minutes (February 13-14, 2000) of Bill Beard’s evaluation of Benet Pines, BHMA.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Community Meeting Minutes (May 6-7, 2000) BHMA.

¹³⁵ Benet Hill Monastery Information Sheet (June 14, 2001) BHMA.

¹³⁶ Community Meeting Minutes (August 31-September 2, 2001) BHMA.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Community Meeting Minutes (October 20-21, 2001) BHMA.

Throughout their years of discernment, the sisters articulated and prayerfully revisited their core values of common prayer, community life and life-giving ministry/hospitality as those values that define them as Benedictine women.¹³⁹ These values would now take on greater significance as they envisioned a new monastery and new ways of ministering. While conversing with architects, they expressed their desire for the building to reflect the values of the common life and hospitality. The chapel and dining room topped the list of prominent places they dared to dream of in a new monastery building.

Seeking God's preference in life takes time. While exploring possibilities for a new home, the sisters continued to pray and listen to the Spirit. Finally on September 21, 2004, in a spirit of trust, the community held a chapter discerning to build at Benet Pines.¹⁴⁰ Preparations for building the monastery and ministry center began.

Financing the new building was a concern. Although, many prospective buyers looked at the property, it did not sell. The sisters decided to hold a capital campaign to help finance the building project.

During their yearly retreat in June 2007, the community blessed the land at Benet Pines. The ceremony began with Sister Liguori handing the mission cross, given to her at Mount St. Scholastica so many years ago, to the prioresses who had succeeded her in leading the community through the years saying "Go to our new home and God bless you."¹⁴¹ The sisters began the blessing in the cemetery. Carrying the mission cross and peace banners, they blessed the grounds and the place where the monastery would stand. Groundbreaking would not actually occur until November 2007.

July 2008 brought two significant events. On July 13, Sister Mary Colleen Schwarz made her final monastic profession, the first woman to do so in twenty-four years. Then on July 31, Colorado Springs Charter Academy purchased the portion of the property with the school building. The "L" remained on the market until in February 2010 when the Charter Academy also purchased it. The delay, based on funding needs of the Charter Academy, gave the community time to complete the new buildings at Benet Pines. They moved to the new monastery in June 2009.

Our Lady of Peace Chapel overflowed with family and friends gathered to celebrate and dedicate Benet Hill's new monastery and ministry center, October 11, 2009. Bishop Michael Sheridan presided with Sister Anne Stedman in prayer, blessings and songs of praise. After completing the dedication ceremony, Sister Anne invited Bill Beard, the architect of the new building, to share the motivation behind the design of the monastery. He told participants, "The shape of the building is representative of the spirituality of the sisters and their commitment to the values of Benedictine life, common prayer and common table."¹⁴² Later, Beard expands his thoughts this way:

The building is designed with the two anchors of Benedictine life, common prayer and common table, the chapel and the dining room on each end of the structure. Between these two, the building is shaped in a curve, like a cupped hand or better an embrace. Everything in the monastery happens between the two anchors. The embrace reaches out to the warmth of the southern sun, the shape of the land and to all the elements of life, creating positive space.¹⁴³

For an architect, creating positive space is a matter of form, for the sisters of Benet Hill, creating positive space is a way of life. It is in their commitment to seeking God together as a community that they witness to the love and compassion of God. With all the changes in the Church and the world, all the unknowns and all the challenges, clearly these women have become a faith community according to Benedict.

¹³⁹ Sister Rose Ann Barmann, prioress, letter to the community (September 27, 2001) BHMA.

¹⁴⁰ Community Meeting Minutes (September 20-22, 2004) BHMA.

¹⁴¹ Personal knowledge of the author.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Bill Beard (March 2010).

Changing Habits, Changing Lives

Belinda H. Monahan

Clothing for religious women is a controversial topic, both among the women themselves and among the general public. In the post-Vatican II renewal, many communities, including the Benedictine Sisters of Chicago, discarded the habit in favor of modern clothing. The decision was not an easy one for the women involved and has not met with unanimous approval. Evidence from the archives at St. Scholastica Monastery not only outlines the process by which the sisters made the decision about clothing for the community, but it also provides a record of the values that they considered important in making this decision. These values included poverty, practicality, and simplicity, as well as such ideas as respect for the individual and the importance of personal relationships, all of which still play a role in the community today.

In September 1966, the first evidence of discussion of habit change within the monastery is documented in the archives, although it is clear that there had been prior undocumented or non-archived discussion. This evidence consists of a letter presenting the ramifications of a meeting of Benedictine prioresses for the process of habit change.¹⁴⁴ The first observation is that permission from Rome had to be obtained before experimentation could take place; the president of the Federation had already written for that permission. The letter iterated that sisters who did not wish to take part in the experimentation or change would not be forced to do so and presented a series of guidelines for the sisters to follow in designing patterns for the modified habit. The first changes would be largely in the area of the head-covering (coif and veil) and the habit could be shortened or simplified somewhat but would remain largely the same at first. This letter also counseled patience in this process.

Possibly as a result of this encouragement to design new habits, the sisters held a fashion show in the backyard of the monastery, modeling possible habits.¹⁴⁵ A series of photographs in the archives documents this event. The effort and ingenuity put forward on the proposed habits is evident from an examination of the photographs. Although most of the sisters are wearing the traditional habit with a modified collar and veil, even the latter must have required several hours of effort to design and create. Moreover, several of the sisters are wearing entirely new habits. This was not simply the entertainment of an afternoon, but the results of weeks of planning and effort. Each veil and, where distinct, each habit, was carefully documented by the photographer, suggesting that the event was intended to play a role in the process of habit experimentation and change. Indeed one of the veils and collars was adopted when the veil was eventually modified some four or five months later.

There is no evidence in the archives as to when approval came through from Rome to begin experimentation on the habit. Nor can the adoption of a modified veil be precisely dated through archival material; there are no documents in the archives recording the process through which this decision was made or implementing it. The only archival evidence for this step in the process is a series of photographs which show the women wearing the modified veil. Two photographs dated to 1967 show the sisters in these photos wearing the modified veil with the traditional habit.¹⁴⁶ The veil is notably simpler and shorter than the old veil, and all of the face coverings have been removed, leaving only a simple white collar at the neck.

After this first change was made, archival evidence for discussion of habit change increased. Between March and August 1967, habit change was a frequent topic of discussion; this discussion is documented in the archives in the form of agendas for and minutes from various small group meetings.¹⁴⁷ At these meetings issues such as changes in the horarium, changes in apostolate and living arrangements and return to baptismal names were discussed, along with the question of habit. Being small, these meetings provided a non-threatening forum in which the sisters were encouraged to discuss the many changes which were taking place. As the presence of minutes in the archives indicates, however, these meetings also had an official purpose: delegates reported the content of these meetings to various boards and committees within the monastery. Thus, through these small group discussions,

¹⁴⁴ Sister Agnes and the Habit Committee, Letter to the Benedictine Sisters of Chicago (September 16, 1966) File 6.5.3, St. Scholastica Monastery Archives (SSMA).

¹⁴⁵ A series of eleven undated photos, in a file labeled "habit experimentation," Box 6.5.3, SSMA.

¹⁴⁶ "Open House—Pre-Par [...] Center 1967," Sister Joanna Trapp file, 1697 photographic file, SSMA

¹⁴⁷ The agendas and minutes for the meetings discussed in this section can be found in the Advisory File 8.5 and in Area Meetings Folder 8.2, July-December 1967, SSMA.

the sisters contributed their opinions and ideas to the changes in policy which were occurring. The format of small-group meetings simultaneously allowed the sisters to become comfortable with a new process of making decisions in which everyone's ideas could be taken into account and provided a wealth of input so that these decisions could be made.

These meetings illustrate the variety of people, both inside and outside of the monastery, involved in this decision and the roles that these people played. A case in point is the question of permission to experiment with the habit itself. Several of the small groups addressed the question of whether and how much permission they had to experiment from different perspectives, but with the tacit understanding that they not only could *ask* for permission, but that they also had some say in whether that permission would be granted. Permission was no longer something that sisters simply awaited but something they crafted carefully with their own discussions. The sisters also considered the ideas presented by the people who had the authority to grant this permission. Included among the archival records in this period, for example, are transcriptions of remarks made by both Cardinal Cody of the Archdiocese of Chicago¹⁴⁸ and Fr. Bernard Ransing from the Congregation for Religious to the Major Superiors of Women Religious.¹⁴⁹ Both of the men agreed that change was needed, but emphasized also the need for the habits of women to act as a visible sign. The inclusion of these remarks in the archives is indicative of the great importance the sisters placed on the perspective of the institutional church. The sisters, however, felt that once permission was granted, the form that experimentation took was up to them. One of the questions discussed at several meetings revolved around who should be involved in this decision. It was understood that sisters who did not wish to experiment should be permitted to retain the habit, but there was disagreement about whether these sisters should be involved in deciding about the form of experimentation. The sisters also considered issues beyond whether they would receive permission to experiment and what that experimentation should look like. They discussed the principles which their new wardrobe should reflect. They considered such issues as the perspective of the institutional church and other orders of religious women, as well as the need to witness, with both their lives and their appearance, to the consecration of their lives as well as to Benedictine values specifically. They raised issues about poverty, as well as practicality and modesty. Without being explicit, these discussions of habit change were discussions of the principles which were guiding their lives through this period of change.

The scope of ministries which the sisters were undertaking was broadening and with that came the recognition that what had been appropriate in terms of clothing, might no longer be so. It was suggested, for example, that sisters might begin to teach in public schools, where a symbol of religious affiliation would be "prohibitive."¹⁵⁰ At another meeting, sisters expressed concern that "The desire to be identified as of a particular community might indicate a fear to be judged on individual worth,"¹⁵¹ indicating an increased emphasis on the individual. The sisters, then, considered the implications of an outward sign of consecration. They felt it necessary to embody not only Christian values, but specifically Benedictine values with their lives and to make those values recognizable; their discussions indicated that they were attempting to do this with their lives and not merely with their clothing. Two pieces of documentation were archived from the community meeting of November 2, 1967, at which the sisters voted to undertake habit change: the first is a copy of the remarks which Mother Jean Marie made to the community at the beginning of the meeting;¹⁵² the second are the minutes from the discussion which followed.¹⁵³ Present at this meeting were all of the sisters in Chicago. Mother Jean Marie's remarks observed that the decision to experiment was the task of the community and emphasized the role of religious norms, poverty and common decision in the process.

The minutes of the meeting following these remarks record the procedures which the sisters approved for undertaking habit experimentation. After it was unanimously approved "that our community undertake the beginning of experimentation with new types of habit," in order to determine the most suitable type of clothing

¹⁴⁸ Cardinal Cody, Address to the Major Superiors of Religious Women (September 24, 1967) File 6.5.3, SSMA.

¹⁴⁹ Father Bernard Ransing, Address to the Major Superiors of Women (September 27, 1967) File 6.5.3, SSMA.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of the North Side Area Meeting, St. Hilary's (October 22, 1967) Folder 8.2, SSMA.

¹⁵¹ Minutes of the Motherhouse Meeting (July 23, 1967) Folder 8.2, SSMA

¹⁵² Mother Jean Marie Matern, Remarks at Community Meeting (November 2, 1967) Box 6.5.3, SSMA.

¹⁵³ Meeting at the Motherhouse, Summary of Discussion of Habit Experimentation (November 2, 1967) Box 6.5.3, SSMA.

for the community, this meeting was concerned almost entirely with the procedure of experimentation. The experiment was to begin starting with this meeting and last for a minimum of two years with the possibility of an extension if its evaluation suggested that it was necessary. A committee was to be appointed with proportional representation from each area to evaluate the experiment twice yearly until the deadline. Whoever wished to participate in the experiment was free to do so. The mark of identification of the community was to be the veil, although there was a possibility of going without a veil “at certain times *for good reason*.” The veil as mark of identification was also to be subject to evaluation by the Habit Committee. Questions of budgeting and gifts from family and friends were also addressed. No guidelines were set for what kind of clothing was to be worn in this experimentation; those decisions were left up to the individual sisters.

Throughout 1968 and 1969, discussion of habit experimentation focused mainly on the details of the process.¹⁵⁴ For example, many of the women who adopted modern clothing had worn habits for their entire life, so for this reason, the Habit Committee also invited fashion experts to the monastery to provide advice about appropriate styles. In August 1968, approximately a year and a half after experimentation began, the advisory board assessed the financial aspects of habit experimentation. Questions of removal of the veil were also raised at several meetings.

A report of the Habit Committee, brought to the community in April 1970, is the final archival piece of evidence for habit change.¹⁵⁵ The report is a summary of a set of questionnaires distributed to the community: of 176 questionnaires distributed, 86 returned their evaluations. Of these, 46 sisters favored contemporary dress, 34 preferred a modified habit and 4 wanted to wear habits, while 2 stated that they were undecided. Of the last six sisters, only one felt that everyone should be in traditional habits; most of them had no objections to others changing to contemporary clothing. Reasons for choosing to remain in the traditional habit are not provided in this summary; it is not clear whether they were given in the original questionnaires or not, although it seems doubtful, given the completeness of the summary in other areas.

Since the remarks of the individual sisters are recorded in this document, it provides a glimpse of the values which were guiding the sisters’ decisions about clothing. Both groups, the sisters who favored contemporary dress and the sisters who favored modified habits, addressed questions of modesty, poverty, and the necessity of an outward sign of their consecrated life, albeit from different perspectives. In addressing the latter issue, for example, the sisters who preferred a modified habit also pointed out that the Pope had stipulated a uniform habit, while the sisters who favored modern dress felt that “love, joy, understanding, etc. are the signs that matter.” Both groups also addressed questions of the perceptions of outsiders: the sisters who preferred the modified habit pointed out that in questionnaires circulated by other communities, friends outside the community preferred sisters in habits, while those who preferred contemporary clothing suggested that wearing modern dress opened new ways of relating to the public.

The group that preferred contemporary clothing also addressed issues of identity and cultural expression which the other sisters did not. They felt that they were more able to find and express their own identity as modern adult women in contemporary clothing than in the habit. They also related the habit changes to the other changes which were occurring at the same time, suggesting that “an apostle to a culture must know and be part of that culture.” Their discussion indicates that the change in clothing had broadened their understanding of who they were and the scope of what they could do.

Thus, archival evidence for the decision about clothing among the Benedictine Sisters of Chicago shows a process which reflects the values which the community chose, and continues to choose to, represent. The sisters considered ideas of poverty, practicality, modesty, and public witness to a vowed Christian and specifically Benedictine life. Less consciously, the process by which the decision was made reflects concern for the integrity of both the individual and the community. Each sister had a voice in shaping the community decision and, in the end, each sister was responsible for her own decisions about clothing. The discussion of changing clothing, then, can act as a symbol for the many decisions made during the period of renewal following Vatican II. They reflect the values espoused by the community at that time and still shaping the community of today.

¹⁵⁴ These documents can be found in Area Meeting Personnel file 9.1 Renewal Days 1968 and Advisory Board file 8.5 and unlabeled File 9.2, SSMA

¹⁵⁵ Report of the Habit Committee (April 1970) Box 6.5.3, SSMA.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Laura Swan, O.S.B.

We have again been blessed with the thoughtful and challenging presentations of members of the Benedictine world. We are blessed indeed.

I appreciate Fr. Ezekiel's reminder: If Benedictines, with our long history and deep roots, will not exercise the courage to embrace contemporary culture, who will? Our presence in the midst of society, as leaven and in a stance of contemplative criticism, is our present evangelization. He reminds us that "all creation pulsates with the heartbeat of God."

I thank S. Ephrem Hollermann for reminding us that the Benedictine "genius" for evangelization is our ministry of presence to other people and their daily lives, significant events, and major epics. We incarnate this continuing presence through our changing ministries.

I thank Abbot Primate Notker Wolf for reminding us that "our power is powerlessness." Author Greg Mortenson, committed to building schools especially for our daughters,¹⁵⁶ has been an inspiring example of someone willing to risk appearing foolish—with the aid of his "dirty dozen"—and accomplishing phenomenal things.

The Future of the Academy

We continue to undergo significant shifts within the monastic world and within the Academy. Traditional membership in our monasteries is shrinking, and new members tend to be older, arriving with rich and diverse life experiences. The Academy has been blessed with talented and colorful members, many who have gone home to God and many who are no longer able to travel. We are blessed with the growing presence of new forms of monasticism; the Community of Jesus has been committed to the spirit and the work of the Academy. The Board is grateful for the commitment each of you has shown over the years: to the life and vibrancy of your community and to that hard-to-define nurturing of Benedictine and monastic culture. We all await, with eyes of faith, for the unfolding of the plans God holds for us.

Our monastic communities have grown rich with the presence of Oblates, associates and friends. Your involvement in our monasteries and in the Academy has been a significant and enriching contribution. You are creating and publishing. You are exploring ways-of-being, as Benedictine Oblates in contemporary culture. Your life experience, your creative energy, and your questions gift each of us with new perspectives and fresh passion. Share the *good news* of the Academy with people you think might be interested.

Many of you have rightly expressed concern that younger, newer members—monastic, Oblate and friend—dedicate time and energy to serious monastic studies. This is not easy when the immediate presses upon us. We need to pass the torch on, and there needs to be someone to receive that torch!

Signs of the Times

We have been undergoing an acceleration of major cultural shifts in recent decades. Entire peoples and nations have been displaced and rarely find a welcoming new home. Immigration issues, while complex, have become a hot-button issue that has unfortunately provided fuel for talk radio. Hate continues to be a popular form of entertainment. Ideologies are crashing into one another. Politics are nasty. Some in power recently suggested that an acceptable price for peace in Afghanistan is the loss of already minimal rights for women. After all we need to reach out to the Taliban and make peace! Rampant pathological greed remains unabated. Alleged financial reform of Wall Street was crafted by the titans of Wall Street. How long before we witness another round of junk bonds and saving-and-loan scandals and whatever we term the recent events in New York City?

In recent decades we have observed a growing conversation between scientists and theologians. Scientists are gifting us with new language to talk about and "observe" how God is in this world. Theologians are

¹⁵⁶ Greg Mortenson, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time* (New York: Penguin 2007).

gently challenging scientists and their alleged atheism. Above all, scientists remind us that our image of God may be too small and puny. They are right.

Reading newspapers and other news media sources has now become an act of faith. Do we believe it? Whose slant is this anyway? Who has been silenced and ignored? Despair could easily arise.

Monastics, by virtue of our way of life, our perspectives on life and our very presence throughout the centuries, have been prayerfully observant of historical events and culture shifts. Pondering the meaning of all this, our communities and places of gathering ask: What does God ask of us? How do we respond? Monastic life in the United States owes much of its origins to the chaotic violence of the French Revolution and the Secularization. And I wonder: Where are Benedictines being propelled now?

We are in a time of major *Reformation*—a very needed reformation. Every religious tradition is being challenged; its structures and ways of relating are rapidly changing. Abuse of power is being challenged. Our language for theology and spirituality is expanding and adapting due to engagement with diverse cultures, with the scientific community and the “silenced” who are finally finding their voices. The cry of the *anawim* has been heard. The shifting of “tectonic plates” is bringing some small semblance of balance to global society. This transformation is sorely needed. Listening to the prophets of the Hebrew Scripture, in my community heard at Morning Office, these past years has eerie resonances with what is happening in our world and in our church. The prophets say: *Woe to you!* And Benedict says: *Obsculta!*

There is upheaval upon upheaval upon upheaval; like a woman in labor, crying out. Birthing something new requires nurturing, support and hard work. People look to Benedictines and the Benedictine way of life for direction, stability and hope. I recently spoke with a (non-monastic) theologian who likened monasticism to the morphic fields of quantum physics. It is not so much that we are perceived as having the answer as we hold an interior yet global strength—that is felt and experienced but cannot be seen—for the conversation and for the possibilities to emerge. Physicists remind us that chaos (as in Chaos Theory) cannot be controlled. Such chaos can feel dangerous. For some life-forms it is truly dangerous, but new life is born. Even in the midst of concerns for global warming and the extinction of species, every year new life forms are appearing to the amazement of these same scientists. Let us think twice before declaring ourselves extinct!

The American Prioresses challenged us that “our world accepts much behavior and many attitudes that are unjust and violent, and it is not surprising that we can come to accept as normal the outlook of our culture.”¹⁵⁷ Spiritual practices, when courageously pursued, remove our cultural and personal cataracts to see what we have not seen before. Our call (as humans and therefore as monastics) is to ask questions, to seek to understand, and to speak truth to what is happening. People hunger for the authentic: that we walk our talk and mean what we say. Possibly the best truth-speaking we can do is to ask the evocative questions and engage the conversation. What might this hope look like? How might we bring life to the current Reformation that humanity—and the church—is presently undergoing?

Seek Peace and Pursue It (*inquire pacem et sequere eam*)

From Benedict’s Prologue (15-18), we read: “Which of you desires life and longs to see good days?” (Ps 34:13). If you hear this and respond “I do!” God says to you: “If you desire true and lasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit; avoid evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it. When you have done this, my eyes will be on you and my ears will attend to your prayers; before you even invoke me, I will say: ‘Here I am!’” (Ps 34:14-16; Is 58:9; 65:24).¹⁵⁸ Terrence Kardong reminds us that “seek peace and pursue it” is “more than a mere burst of initial sentiment. What is needed is long-term, dogged effort to ‘make peace,’ that is, do those deeds that build a solid human foundation for true peace. Peace is the objective aspect of love. . . . Those who seek meaning and love in life must concern themselves with objective justice.”¹⁵⁹

American Benedictine women reflected on the events of 9/11 and thereafter, wondering what the Benedictine way might say to us. With writing committees of prioresses and sisters gathering in small groups around the country, I witnessed creative chaos at its best. In part the resulting document, *Wisdom from the*

¹⁵⁷ Conference of Benedictine Prioresses, *Wisdom from the Tradition: A Statement of North American Benedictine Women in Response to Our Times* (Atchison, KS: Mount Saint Scholastica 2006) 72.

¹⁵⁸ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1996) 3.

¹⁵⁹ Kardong 13.

Tradition, states: “We know from our experience about the transformative power of mutual respect, attentive listening, the exercise of life-giving authority, the grace of hospitality and justice as the means to peace.”¹⁶⁰ The Benedictine way understands, even when we fail to incarnate this in our lives, that peace is the result of honest, right relationship. In his Rule, Benedict embedded personal, pastoral care—a care based on relationship—in his sense of justice.

Our monasteries, through our members and Oblates and friends, are involved in social justice concerns. Christ in many, diverse and colorful expressions, comes knocking at our doors. We stop and extend a listening ear to the hurting person. We feed the physically and spiritually hungry. We host formal and informal conversations around contemporary issues and concerns, many of them hot-button issues. We tolerate diversity within our monasteries and exhort our neighbors to do the same. And we do all this quite imperfectly, enjoying our “good seasons and bad.”

“Peace” is one of those vital concepts that we can easily dismiss: of course Benedictines are for peace! But what does that mean? And what is “peace” after all? A mere lack of conflict (with a commensurate war being waged under the surface)? Something more? I find myself continually faced with some difficult questions. Is God’s understanding of peace extraordinarily different than mine? Is God calling us to something radically new? Is my God too narrow and puny? Is my hope for peace anorexic and anemic?

The Gospel and our prophets have exhorted us out of our comfort zones and into a place of discomfort. Pope Paul VI taught: “If you want peace, work for justice.” And Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” insisted that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”¹⁶¹ Dr. King was not assassinated for making people comfortable; rather he was hounded, slandered, accused and killed for challenging the status quo. And finally, Bishop Desmond Tutu taught that: “The justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people. This is an expression of the African notion of *ubuntu*—interconnectedness, the idea that no one can be healthy when the community is sick. . . . You are not saved as an individual, but through incorporation into a body.”¹⁶² *Obsculta*. It is about relationship.

And so how to Benedictines “do” peace? We strive, while frequently failing, to live in mutual reverence and respect in a community of equals. We welcome “other” especially when we find them offensive, disagreeable and personally irritating. After all, they may have been sent by Christ to preach the *good news*.

We must ask hard questions: How do we live the spirit of peace in a nation conducting two or more concurrent wars? When vigilante groups gather along our borders? When we perpetuate the largest prison population in the industrial and “first” world? How can we proclaim peace as our motto so others can hear it?

I invite the Academy to gather and explore this topic of peace with fresh new eyes. Our conference theme is “*Seek Peace and Pursue It: Monasticism in the Midst of Global Upheaval.*”

¹⁶⁰ Conference of Benedictine Prioresses 13.

¹⁶¹ April 16, 1963.

¹⁶² As quoted in Laura Swan, *Engaging Benedict: What the Rule Can Teach Us Today* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press 2005) 141.