



The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

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The mission of the American Monastic Newsletter is to be an instrument of communication and information for Benedictine monasteries of North America and members of the American Benedictine Academy.

Gethsemani Encounter: On Spiritual Maturation

Any religious tradition would seem to have as a goal the spiritual maturation of its practitioners. Thus this was an excellent title for the most recent in the series of interreligious dialogues known as Gethsemani Encounters. Every few years, Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), the North American branch of the worldwide DIM/MID group which works under the aegis of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome, organizes these encounters. A group of Benedictine/Cistercian monks and nuns gather with Buddhist counterparts at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, the community of which Thomas Merton was a member.

According to Father William Skudlarek, OSB (Saint John's, Collegeville, Minn.), the international secretary general of DIM/MID, "The idea came at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993. MID prepared a session on kenosis/sunyata in the Christian/Buddhist traditions in which the Dalai Lama took part. He suggested that it would be good to continue the dialogue in a monastic setting, and since he had met Thomas Merton in 1968, he suggested it be at Gethsemani." Since then a special bond has developed for monastics of both traditions, especially since some participants have attended more than one of the encounters. Father William believes that a kind of "tradition" or "language" has developed, a relationship that can be deepened and built upon.

Father Michael Peterson, OSB, also a monk of Saint John's Abbey, is the current chairman of the MID board. He praises the perspective of the Gethsemani Encounters. "They offer a unique and treasured place in the world of interreligious dialogue. Namely, the dialogue is based on monasticism, which focuses on life in community, intentional prayer and meditation, and a contemplative lens on the world. Such times of gathering bolster a level of trust. We can speak from the heart with one another."

The fourth of these encounters took place from May 27 to 31 of this year. Each morning was devoted to presentations on some aspect of the concept of spiritual maturation by Buddhist and Christian speakers. Father Michael describes how he experienced the topic: "Spiritual maturation is linked to humility. I was encouraged by simple human stories of struggling with one's

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President's Message

Once again I wrote my president's letter with thoughts about context swirling around in my head. I was in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico, at a council meeting of the Federation of Saint Scholastica, pondering what it means to be part of the American Benedictine Academy. The beneficiary of the outrageous hospitality of my seven sisters at Monasterio Pan de Vida in a low-income neighborhood of this medium-sized city in north central Mexico, I was once again blown away by the "home" that our Benedictine milieu provides for me, for us, no matter where we are.

First there was the structure and content of the Liturgy of the Hours. Though we prayed mostly in Spanish, I was encouraged by the familiarity of the psalmist's words. I don't even have high school Spanish to rely on, but when we prayed, for example, Psalm 107 ("Dios transforma los rios en desierto/ los manatiales en aridez") or Psalm 119 ("Firme es su misericordia con nosotros/su fidelidad dura por siempre"), I knew what I was saying. Several of the U.S. sisters at the meeting commented on how praying the psalms in a different language helped us hear and understand them in a new way. All of our

roots go deep in this ancient soil; language matters but isn't everything.

I was also struck by that "sense of place" that binds Benedictines so closely to their locale. Several years ago the sisters in Torreon began reciting this prayer at the end of vespers as one response to the escalating horrors of the drug and gang violence affecting their area and so many families they know, serve, and love: "Que Shaddai nos proteja la casa y nos guarde la cuidad" ("May Shaddai protect our home and guard our city"). We could do the same in Chicago. But I've also heard communities in more rural regions praying for farmers, and I know that right now Western monasteries are lifting up needs related to drought and fire. Whatever else Benedictines are, we are local in our universality.

As we conducted our meetings in the midst of this busy community's common work, prayer, and table, our shared desire to seek God manifested itself again and again. Whether the council was grappling with the details of the viability (or lack thereof) of communities, or the Pan de Vida sisters were attending a meeting of various civic groups addressing issues of corporate greed and systemic injustice, the foundation of it all was a deeply felt need to identify and grow what is life-giving and integrated. Seeking God, which can sound pretty abstract and removed from the complexity of "real" life, usually takes on an absolutely authentic practicality when lived out by Benedictines in all of the Americas (and the rest of the world.)

I am grateful, once again, for this opportunity to change my context – if only for a few days – to observe "the water I swim in" with more clarity. What I see reminds me of the gift we have in our Benedictinism and the sacred mandate to steward it well. As we look forward to next summer's coming together, I pray that you experience the same.

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The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

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www.americanbenedictine.org

CANON LAW COLUMN

The Vatican and American Sisters

Two Vatican investigations of American sisters have created consternation in many circles in recent years. The first investigation, announced in December 2008, came from the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life (CICL). It called for an apostolic visitation of all sisters in the United States engaged in apostolic work. The second investigation was announced in April 2009 by a different Vatican office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). This investigation involved the Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). [For a brief discussion of these two Vatican offices and their investigations, see the October 2012 canon law column of this newsletter.]

Both of these investigations officially ended within the last twelve months. In December 2014 a joint news conference between officials of CICL and the women religious leaders of LCWR and CMSWR announced that the Apostolic Visitation was officially concluded. A similar announcement came in April 2015 that the Doctrinal Assessment of LCWR had come to an end. [<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2014/12/16/0963/02078.html>; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2015/04/16/0278/00618.html>]

How has the relationship between American sisters and the Vatican changed with these two investigations? First of all, before either of these investigations was announced, the officers of the LCWR, and presumably those of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSWR), another Vatican-approved leadership conference for women religious in the U.S., have had meetings with various dicastery officials at the Vatican at least annually, including with the officials of the two dicasteries that announced the above mentioned separate investigations. So there has always been some personal relationship between the women religious leadership and officials of various dicasteries at the Vatican.

Because of these annual meetings, the public announcements of these investigations by the Vatican offices took the women religious by surprise because

neither of the investigations had even been hinted at during their earlier meetings with Vatican officials.

Since the time that these two investigations, one of American sisters in general and the other of the LCWR specifically, were announced, more dialogue has occurred between American sisters and Vatican officials, either by the officials themselves or their appointed delegates. Much was written in the various media, secular and Catholic, about the two investigations, and these media reports no doubt affected the relationship between the American sisters and the Vatican, for good or for ill.

In the official announcements to the media regarding the completion of these investigations, it seemed that new clarity had been reached regarding the relationship between the American sisters and the Vatican. The very fact that the closing of these two investigations was announced jointly between Vatican officials and U.S. women religious leadership speaks volumes. Neither of the investigations began jointly. Rather, the women religious in the U.S. learned about them through media reports. Therefore, I believe that the joint announcement of the ending of these investigations shows a new respect for the American sisters by Vatican officials, and vice versa.

It is hoped that, should there be any further concerns regarding women religious in the U.S. on the part of Vatican officials, there will first be direct dialogue with the women's leadership, so that true "mutual relations" can be reached. *Mutuae relationes* is a 1978 document of the then Sacred Congregation for Religious (presently known as CICL) that encouraged good communication and relationships among bishops and religious, recognizing the unique role each plays in the church. That Vatican document is presently being revised. It is also hoped that the leadership of women religious should also feel free to approach the CICL officials to discuss matters of mutual interest. Only when respectful dialogue takes place with the guidance of the Spirit can true *communio* occur. It seems we have a very good start for such respectful dialogue.

If you have a question or idea for a future column, feel free to contact Sister Lynn.

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spiritual life or life in community, but nevertheless, how struggle was overcome (or at least lived through) by the monastic's strong sense of purpose and vocation. Humility says that I am always on the road toward spiritual and human growth. In a world of religious certainty ('I've got the whole truth, and you must live like I do'), humility and knowing one is on a path and not standing already at the destination, one is then open toward another in a different religious tradition, knowing that their life helps me on this journey."

While the talks provided the intellectual input, the heart of the encounter was the shared practice. Each day, Buddhists joined in the Liturgy of the Hours and Christians sat in silent meditation.

The rest of the day provided opportunity for informal sharing and dialogue. Says Father William, "What touched me most was the ease and at the same time the depth of informal exchanges. That could only happen because this encounter had been preceded by others, but even those who were there for the first time felt that they 'had permission' to speak very personally and be heard." Asked what touched him most about the days, Father Michael responded, "It was the conversations that I had when a few of us would go for a spontaneous walk. Starting with 'let's go for a walk,' we spoke of our lives and how we became monastics. I was encouraged by the many ways the monastics became monastics. Also, there was a power created when we had our common time of meditation. It's a very powerful thing to just sit together in silence."

The dialogues flow so easily because, although their beliefs and motivations may differ significantly, all the participants share a lifestyle with the common elements of shared prayer, simple communal living, the personal search for meaning and balance, and care for the earth and its people. For Father William, "I would say the main common ground is that we take the spiritual life seriously, and at the same time realize that spiritual transformation involves a long process of emptying (dying to self). It's a process that isn't especially remarkable, but if one tries to remain faithful to it, it does bring a certain inner and outer peace."

"When I first started meditating I had a lot of techniques that I used to do. I used to challenge my consciousness to transform every time I sat down and for a period of time I was having some wonderful transformations. Which didn't lead to anything in particular other than having wonderful transformations. And now after over 30 years of meditation I just sit down. That's it, you know ... and sometimes stuff happens, most of the time it doesn't, and then I get up and I continue my day. But no expectations anymore about wanting things to happen."

Rev. Kusala, a Buddhist participant,
on his meditation practice:

The following papers were presented: "Spiritual Maturity: Self-Fulfillment and the True Self" - Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam (New Camaldoli, Big Sur, Cal.), "Learning What Really Matters" - Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB (Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Mo.), "Community Life Becomes the Training: Sravasti Abbey Monastic Community" - Bhikshuni Thubten Semkye, (Sravasti Abbey, Newport, Wash.), "Growing Old With Rites and Rituals" - Rev. Kusala Bhikshu (Los Angeles, Cal.) "Learning a Christian Contemplative Life from the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* in Zen Buddhism - Jaechan Anselmo Park, OSB (Regis College, Toronto), "Buddhist Wisdom for Christian Spiritual Directors: Spiritual Maturation Nurtured by Dialogue" - Becky Van Ness (Saint John's School of Theology, Collegeville, Minn.), "Buddhist Scriptures as a Template of Spiritual Maturity" - Rev. Heng Sure (Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, Berkeley, Cal.). Presentations made at the meeting, along with reflections, are posted in *Dilatato Corde*, DIMMID's online journal (in sidebar at www.dimmid.org) as they are submitted.



NEWS

Canonization candidate Dorothy Day, who was an oblate of St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Ill., got a large boost in public exposure when Pope Francis cited her in his speech to Congress as one of four great Americans.

A website, www.dorothydayguild.org, describes the cause for her canonization and the efforts of the guild on her behalf that is sponsored by the Archdiocese of New York. There is also a canonization support network at www.dorothydayasaint.org. Both sites have an abundance of information about her life and the Catholic Worker movement, as well as links to other resources.

One of the members of the core committee for the network, David Mueller, has been making a plea for more people from the Benedictine tradition to join in the prayer and advocacy for her canonization. He writes, "We have built a lot of prayer support from Benedictines across the country over the past 5 years because of Dorothy Day having been an oblate. Now that the cause has started moving forward, we are reaching out to oblates for an increased commitment to the cause."

One of the biggest challenges is financing. The canonization process is extremely costly because of the administrative expenses, research, and fees for related documentation, expert assistance and promotional materials. According to Mueller, "It is almost impossible to get a lay person canonized because the structure for sustaining a cause over a long period of time, including raising the money, is not present as for example a religious community getting their founder/foundress canonized."

He believes that Benedictine oblates are a natural constituency for her and has designed a new website specifically to reach out to them: www.oblatesfordorothyday.com. There, one can find out about ways to support the movement, including prayer, petition signing and donations. As the site points out, no Benedictine oblate has been canonized since Frances of Rome in 1608 and the time is now.

For any questions or to offer further assistance, contact:

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Abbot Sharbel Ewen OSB is the newly elected superior of Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, California. Abbot Cuthbert Brogan OSB, of Saint Michael's Abbey, Farnborough, England, is now the administrator of Mount Saviour Monastery in Pine City, N.Y. Sister Shawn Carruth, OSB, was elected as prioress of Mount St. Benedict, Crookston, Minn.

The 2015 Monastic Worship Forum Conference was held July 6-10 at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind. There were more than 30 participants, along with some members of the monastery community and some monks from Saint Meinrad Archabbey who joined the participants at various times during the conference. Father Godfrey Mullin and Sister Irene Nowell were the keynote presenters. Father Jeremy King shared music related content, reminiscent of the former Benedictine Musicians meetings before the liturgists and musicians groups merged. In spite of the almost ever-present rain, the participants and local community members had a good time together. The stunning views from the monastery were surpassed by the beauty that the presenters called listeners to sustain in the liturgy, as well as the beauty shared within the conference. Breakout times offered small group sharing and learning opportunities. Those involved in monastic worship are urged to keep the 2017 Monastic Worship Forum Conference at Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas on their horizon and in their calendar.

Dunstan Moore, OSB

Sister Joachim Holthaus, OSB, of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kan., passed into eternal life on August 27. A renowned musicologist, organist and composer, she was a member of ABA and the Benedictine Musicians of the Americas. In 1980, she conducted the massed choir of Benedictines for the sesquicentennial celebration at the National Shrine in Washington. She will be remembered especially for the many liturgical compositions and psalm tones

which are a part of the prayer life of monasteries across the nation.

The National Benedictine Vocation Directors meeting was held in Atchison, Kansas, on October 4-7, at Mount St. Scholastica, hosted by Barbara Smith, OSB. More than 20 men and women involved in vocation work for their monasteries heard a presentation by John Mark Falkenhain, OSB (St. Meinrad's, Ind.) on the "Internal Culture of Vocation" and were informed and challenged by Sister Raquel Ortez, SSND (St. Louis, Mo.) and her information on immigration policy. The directors also had opportunities for sharing with one another. Damian Cayetano, OSB (Christ the King - Schuyler, Neb.) will be leading the planning for the next meeting in October 2017.

General chapter of the Federation of St. Benedict was held July 16-20 with delegates representing ten member monasteries of Benedictine women.

Sister Edith Bogue (St. Scholastica - Duluth, Minn.) addressed the assembly on "Experiencing Our Changes: Individually and Collectively." Throughout the chapter, delegates were asked to report to the group what their monastery had done during the past 3 years as a response to the 2012 chapter resolution on human trafficking and there were also opportunities to share about new projects the communities were undertaking. Some of those mentioned were associates as a new form of membership changing models of "sponsorship" for related institutions, live-in volunteer programs, summer outreach with children who live in poverty, renovation of guest spaces; "Walking for Vocations," "Ministry on the Margins," opening of a "School of Benedictine Spirituality" and increased efforts for vocations.

Sister Kerry O'Reilly, (St. Benedict's - St. Joseph, Minn.) was elected federation president, to be assisted by newly elected councilors Sisters Nicole Kunze (Annunciation - Bismarck, N.D.) and Lisa Maurer, (St. Scholastica - Duluth, Minn.) and re-elected councilors Sisters Agatha Muggli (Annunciation - Bismarck, N.D. and Edith Bogue (St. Scholastica - Duluth, Minn.).

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The ABA Biennial Convention in 2016

Keep Death Daily Before Your Eyes

July 21 - 23, 2016

Hosted by Our Lady of Grace Monastery
at their
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center

Beech Grove, Indiana

Juridic resolutions were passed which included updates to the specific norms related to the process of election of prioress and federation president based on current practices.

A new resolution was also accepted regarding the latest encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'*. This resolution called all member communities to engage in prayer and reflection on the duty to care for God's creation, education about the causes and moral dimensions of climate change, actions to help reduce our own negative impact on the environment, and seeking of ways to work collaboratively with other organizations in local regions and nations to positively affect changes in the manner in which they care for the earth.

Benedictine sisters from nine monasteries participated in the 2015 Novice and Director Institute hosted by St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Ark. May 19-29. This meeting fosters the vocation discernment of novices through presentations, service projects at local community agencies, and sharing of their own stories. Novice directors also had opportunities to meet, and all attendees had a retreat day led by Sister Macrina Wiederkehr.

ABA Grant Report

As a condition of receiving a monastic studies grant from the American Benedictine Academy, recipients are asked to give a report to be shared in this publication.

My travel grant was designed to pay for my visits to three monasteries in Switzerland for my research concerning the “Explanation of St. Benedict’s Rule” which had been brought over from Maria Rickenbach to the Swiss Benedictine foundations at Maryville/ Clyde in Missouri and Queen of Angels in Mount Angel, Oregon. The foundation of St. Gertrud in Idaho was made by the monastery of St. Andreas in Sarnen, and although Sarnen does not know about this text, St. Gertrud must have received it from the Oregon sisters with whom they have always had a close relationship, especially while they were still located in the state of Washington. St. Gertrud even has the full text in an English translation by James Mercier OSB, this text privately printed in 1919. James Mercier (1864-1935) was a monk of Conception Abbey in Missouri, then part of Conception’s priory of St. Michael near St. Gertrud; he was chaplain at St. Gertrud from 1914 until 1925.

During my stay in Switzerland from June 17 to July 1, 2015, I was able to visit the archives of Einsiedeln, Engelberg and Maria Rickenbach. I was not able to visit Sarnen because their archivist was in Africa at that time and, since she had told me earlier that she had no knowledge of such a text, I decided not to go there since my time in Switzerland was very short anyway.

The visits to the three archives were most helpful, and basically have answered all my questions. In Einsiedeln I was able to see the original copy of this Rule explanation, and learned that Fr. Claudius Perrot OSB, a monk of Einsiedeln (1803-1881), had written it in 1854-55 after he became novice master in 1853. This original version is divided into “Lessons” that are numbered consecutively; the text also has additions and deletions. At times he left half a page free, so as to have space to add things later. This version as well as another one (though copied) from 1869 have all the parts which the St. Gertrud translation has; most of the subtitles appear in the longer handwritten copies in Clyde and Queen of Angels.

When visiting the archives at Engelberg I was able to see their entire manuscript of Perrot’s explanation; it is again copied by hand and is the same text.

In my visit to Maria Rickenbach I found that they have a copy of the entire text with a dedication by Fr. Anselm Villiger, then prior of the Abbey of Engelberg; it is dated Advent 1860. Pater Anselm was the spiritual advisor of Sister Gertrud Leupi who is usually seen as the founder of Maria Rickenbach. A new study by a Swiss historian, published in 2008, now shows that there were actually 4 founders: Gertrud Leupi and Anselm Villiger, and Vincentia Gretener and Claudius Perrot. The Rickenbach archives also has other manuscripts by Perrot concerning perpetual adoration, a topic about which Perrot wrote frequently, as evident in the *Professbuch* in Einsiedeln. In addition, I found some handwritten partial copies of the *Explanation* copied by sisters, similar to the individual copies in Clyde. The small books were given to a sister on the day she received the habit and became a novice. The dedication reads: “Sr. M. Alberta always remember the holy obligation you accepted by receiving this habit.”

Thus, my archival research answered all my questions regarding this manuscript: it was written by Fr. Claudius Perrot OSB, monk of Einsiedeln, then given to Fr. Anselm Villiger, monk and prior of Engelberg. He then gave a copy to “the first Superior [S. Gertrud Leupi] of the small convent in Maria Rickenbach” urging her “to teach her nuns in the spirit of this Holy Rule [and its explanation]” and thus to form them into “true Benedictine nuns.”

Having been able to examine all these manuscripts clarifies both the provenance of the text found in Swiss foundations, its author, and its being given to the sisters in Maria Rickenbach as a teaching tool for the formation of novices, a tool which then was brought over to the United States to help in forming American sisters into “true Benedictine nuns.”

I am very grateful to the ABA Board for granting me the money to travel to the three archives.

Marianne Burkhard OSB

Grant applications for this year are closed, but general information is available on the ABA website and next year’s deadlines will be announced there soon.

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

* The *Monastic Way* for 2016 pairs best-selling author Joan Chittister with some of history's great figures – lay and religious, male and female, Christian and non-Christian – who have stretched the very soul of humanity. Each month you can meet one of them in a vibrant and stunning monthly publication that will stretch your soul, too. Let heroes such as Gandhi, Teresa of Avila, Etty Hillesum, Rumi, accompany you through the year. Artist Marcy Hall contributes to this masterpiece that will inspire you all year. \$12.95/year gives you the online version that includes full and immediate access to *The Monastic Way* website and a PDF version emailed to you each month. Includes access to the past 12 issues. For \$19.95/year you'll receive your print issue in the mail each month (U.S. addresses only). Gift options are available. Give a print subscription to a U.S. address or purchase an online license that allows you to forward the monthly PDF version to your family and friends. Many more gifts and books are available at the Benetvision website, benetvision.org.

* One of the latest things in contemplative leisure is adult coloring books with designs based on mandalas and other spiritual symbols or images. Paraclete Press offers 3 coloring books to “bless and de-stress”: *Advent Calendar*, *Celtic Blessings* and *Words of Faith* (\$11.99 each) as well as packages that include a CD of contemplative music to add to the experience. These are available along with books, recordings and other items at paracletepress.com.

* Most monasteries have gift shops with their local craft and food items, and some of them produce annual calendars. If you can't find the perfect gift at a nearby monastery's gift shop, you can broaden your search at monasterygreetings.com. This catalogue includes hundreds of food and other gift items from dozens of monastic and other religious communities. You can get your Trappist fruitcake, Belgian abbey ales, or even monastery-made dog treats all in one place and help support religious communities. You'll be amazed at all the possibilities.

* Christmas cards and many other gift items are available from such major online monastic stores as abbeypress.com (St. Meinrad's, Ind.) and printerhouse.org (Conception, Mo.)

* And if you're still at a loss for that perfect gift, you can always make a donation to your favorite monastery in someone's name.

ABA EGREGIA AWARD NOMINATIONS

The Egregia (*Latin: distinguished, exceptional, with outstanding praise*) Award is the principal award conferred by the American Benedictine Academy upon individual members, publicly bestowed at the biennial meeting.

This award is conferred on persons who have been members of the Academy for a minimum of eight years, and whose achievement or contribution to the Academy's purpose is long-standing in one of the following:

- leadership in, or outstanding contribution to conferences, symposia, programs of study or research projects that focus on monastic interests or themes;
- publication of research that has a significant impact upon the understanding and development of monastic life;
- long-term service in leadership capacities in the Academy;
- development of and participation in creative expressions of monastic life in contemporary cultures.

An Academy member who wishes to nominate a person for the 2016 Egregia Award may submit the name of the nominee, together with a description of the nominee's achievement to Sister Susan Quaintance (susquain@juno.com) by March 1, 2016. Nominations will be submitted to the board of directors for selection and conferral of the Egregia Award at the July, 2016, convention at Beech Grove.

ABA Monastic Essay Competition

One of the goals of the American Benedictine Academy is to encourage newer monastics and newer oblates to do monastic research. Therefore we are enlarging the pool of those who are eligible to participate in the monastic essay competition. Monastics in initial formation and up to ten years after their first monastic professions, as well as oblates up to ten years after their oblation, are eligible to participate in this competition. All monasteries are asked to encourage participation in this competition as a means of promoting monastic scholarship for the future.

Encouraging monastic research at this early stage of monastic and oblate life is important because, as Benedict indicates in RB 3.3, younger/newer members may see things more clearly, or differently, because they bring both the enthusiasm of the newcomer (*feror novicius*) and their own individual experience in the world into the monastery and, in the case of oblates, into their thinking of how to apply Benedictine values to their life in the world. Building on their specific experiences they may be able to open some new questions or new ways of looking. It is also important for the ABA to do what it can do nurture new scholars in the field of Benedictine monasticism.

The purposes of the contest are:

- To stimulate interest in and study of monasticism and monastic history
- To acquaint newer members/oblates with the rich sources of monastic writings which are now much more easily available in print or even electronically
- To acquaint newer monastics with the history of the community, the purposes and personalities of founders, significant events, developments and challenges
- To foster use of local archives in monastic communities
- To focus on productive ways of integrating traditional monastic practices with the needs of 21st century Benedictine living, especially with the participants' own previous experience outside the monastery
- To encourage the collection of personal memoirs
- a discussion of the difficulties/possibilities of integrating tradition and current environment and possible new solutions
- a review of various adaptations of traditional practices in the past to new situations, their effectiveness in the past and possibly their significance for the current situation.

The essay is to be submitted as a double-spaced and computer-generated Word document.

Awards are given only in convention years, so the deadline is March 31st, 2016, i.e. the year of the next convention. It is to be sent to the chair of the Monastic Essay Competition:

Sister Marianne Burkhard OSB
srmarianne@cdop.org

Project requirements

Within the theme of "the monastic tradition," the essay of 2,500-3,000 words may take a variety of forms, such as:

- the connection of a monastic topic to the writer's own monastery, or at least to the writer's own interpretation of how traditional monastic practices could be authentically and productively lived out in our time either in the monastery or in the oblate life

Winner/s will be notified by May 10, 2016. The prize for the winning essay is a 2-year membership in ABA, a waiver of registration and hospitality fees at the 2016 convention, and a book of interest to monastics/oblates.

Mentoring by ABA members will be available to those who participated in the competition in order to help them to develop their thoughts for possible publication in a scholarly journal, such as *The American Benedictine Review*.

BOOK REVIEWS

Reading Matthew with Monks: Liturgical Interpretation in Anglo-Saxon England by Derek A. Olsen, foreword by Luke Timothy Johnson (Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., 2015). ISBN 978-0-8146-8317-0, \$24.95.

Appropriately in monastic life the history of liturgical interpretation relies on the “simple conviction that the world that shaped the Bible ... is ultimately less interesting and significant than the world the Bible shapes.” Knowing scripture through daily contact in the Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist, daily lectio divina, and all the ways sacred scripture intersects with monastic life is a key that opens *Reading Matthew with Monks, Liturgical Interpretation in Anglo-Saxon England*. Benedictines both at the end of the first millennium in England and we, their modern descendants at the beginning of the third millennium, connect with and live by scripture. *The Rule of Benedict* (RB) makes present through the ages communal life that is tied to the scriptures. Someone has said that we who follow the RB are people of the book. This was true for 10th century Ælfric (disciple of Dunstan, Æthelwold and Oswald) as it is for 21st c. Benedictines. The RB gives us the tools to utilize sacred scripture in all aspects of our daily monastic lives.

I think two of the most telling sentences of this book are: “The liturgy was a pervasive aspect of monastic life. The seasons directed the cycles of scriptural readings that grounded the Mass and the Night Office” (p. 118). In the cloister, then as now, each day, each season has its proper monastic context and the liturgy is grounded in the day to day simplicity and the dramatic importance of pivotal liturgical celebrations.

“...[T]he modern scholarly and early medieval monastic cultures are doing different things for different purposes” (p. 120). “...what insights can modern readers of the New Testament gain from the text of Matthew by engaging early monastic readers on their own terms?” (p.121).

Ælfric demonstrates not only that he is highly knowledgeable in things monastic but also is thoughtful and adept in packaging liturgical and scriptural truths in ways that the burdened diocesan clergy of his day can benefit from his clarity and

insight, while not being put off by the well-crafted if authoritarian text. Ælfric is erudite and well grounded, knows scripture well and theology too. He understands the human mind, the way humans react and what motivates human beings, etc.; in other words he is a sensible monastic. Dr. Olsen has done a service not only to our understanding of the interpretation of scripture but utilized early monastic writings to help our interpretation and understanding of Matthew’s gospel. His book speaks to modern monastic life through the interpretation of the gospel of Matthew.

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FEATURE REVIEW

The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality by Greg Peters (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2015). ISBN 978-0-8010-4891-3, 278 pp., paper, \$22.99.

What Greg Peters is up to in this book is captured by the title. Greg does retrieve the history of monasticism (though not just as an ancient tradition) and calls attention to its contributions to our spiritual lives today, as individuals and as communities. He does this intentionally for two audiences: those who know something about the ancient tradition and those who know nothing about it. He resonates with both audiences because he who once knew next to nothing about the tradition now knows much about the tradition.

The book is divided chronologically into four sections, with beginning and ending points demarcated by significant individuals: Antony to Benedict to Bernard to Luther to Merton.

Keeping in mind those who unfamiliar with the tradition (especially in Protestant wings) Greg eases us into the history with a concept that is foundational to monasticism, but also nonthreatening to the neophyte: the “calling” of biblical characters to an active and contemplative life. (Most Protestants are typically good with the former, but not as good with the latter, as he notes. In that context he returns to

this binary theme in the chapter on “Regular Canons, Hospitallers, and the Military Orders.”) He continues with the biblical links (essential if he is going to get a hearing from the likes of, e.g., the Southern Baptists who shaped him early on), demonstrating Scriptural precedent for communal living, vows, and hours of prayer. He argues that corporate discernment is needed to determine if one is to pursue a vocation that is primarily contemplative. (Of course, Greg’s knowledgeable audience will know that some monastic traditions are more active than others and that Benedictines themselves debate whether they are “contemplatives.”)

As for the second element in the book’s title, that is “for contemporary spirituality,” Greg introduces us to the concept of *ressourcement* – recapturing the tradition for its present significance in our lives. He does this with chapter-ending discussions, such as reflections on anger (after introducing us to Evagrius and the desert monks), on humility (as highlighted in the rule of Benedict), on liturgical renewal (after tracing medieval monastic reform movements). By this means Greg effectively translates the monastic tradition to church life, especially for the non-monastic reader.

To say that, for its purposes, this book is very well researched is an understatement. Yet it is written in a style that will be appreciated by an educated lay person, while still appealing to the academic who has an interest in the topic. The book covers a wide swath without compromising detail, beginning with pre-Christian monasticism and ending with modern Protestant movements, such as Bonhoeffer’s community at Finkenwalde (ref. *Life Together*) and “New Monasticism” as described in the works of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, as well as influential Roman Catholic examples such as Merton. These closing illustrations of the tradition’s enduring life nicely serve Greg’s argument for *ressourcement* and his final plea for the vital role monasticism must continue to play in the church’s life.

I was surprised that Greg never mentioned the role that Kathleen Norris has played in the *ressourcement* of monasticism in Protestantism, let alone in some Roman Catholic circles. It is conceivable that movements such as “New Monasticism” owe much of their impetus to the publications of *Dakota* and *Cloister Walk*. And a few in the tradition go unnoticed, such as Charles de Foucauld, a significant figure in

monasticism given the present situation of Arab influence in North Africa. But it could be argued that these are the prerogatives of an author who must treat a diverse and wide subject matter in a relatively short space.

Academics might also find a debatable point here and there, but not such that would detract from the book’s agenda and value. In fact, they are perhaps fodder for what many would consider irrelevant and pretentious scholarly discussions. So succumbing to irrelevance and pretention, I found myself taking issue with a discussion at the beginning of chapter eleven, but that was overruled by what turned out to be a fascinating discussion of the relation between monasticism and the larger culture in late medieval and Renaissance society.

To illustrate other commendable features of Greg’s treatment of the tradition, he wisely avoids the simplistic historical analysis that pits institution over against impulse or vice-versa. He begins the historical journey noting that both were present from the start, even before the Christian era. The Christian church has always had a monastic presence, so Greg wisely describes Antony not as the founder of monasticism (as is popularly said), but as one who forms a significant turning point in the history of monasticism.

Again, his discussion of the Rules of Basil, Augustine, and The Master is judicious and illuminating, followed by an explanation of the relation between an indispensable “rule” (even if it is personal and unwritten) and Scripture. This chapter and the one that traces the “flowering of Benedictine monasticism” are good examples of a feature that runs throughout the book: what is essential is written with good stewardship of words.

And along the way the neophyte and the initiated will discover many tidbits of monastic history that are often not mentioned in histories of this moderate size (such as Greg’s discussion of Byzantine reform and *charistike/epidosis*).

This is a valuable resource that can be used for personal study, as a classroom textbook, and perhaps even for some oblate groups that want to join in a study of the history and enduring value of monasticism.

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