

“This is a marvelous and creative collection of essays designed to honor Michael Casey for his pivotal contributions to monastic thinking in our time. The essays help us to know Michael’s thought better in two different ways. Some engage him directly and dialogue with him. Others take their inspiration from themes that he himself has opened up and explored. So many of us are grateful for Michael, and I am grateful for this book which does him honor.”

—Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB  
Mount Angel Abbey

“This book exceeded my expectations. I expected to cherish Michael Casey, but I found this book to quicken my own ‘love of learning and desire for God.’”

—Mary Margaret Funk, OSB

“This volume is a ringing testimony to the return to the sources of Benedictine monasticism stimulated by the renewal of Vatican II, and also to the remarkable contribution to that effort by Australia, which provides over half the authors for this collection. No one will question the expression of gratitude to Michael Casey, who has been at the heart of this movement both worldwide and locally. With these essays readers will be able to catch up on research of recent years and also to share the excitement of new investigations. The book is clear evidence that the renewal in Benedictine studies is far from over.”

—Fr. Jerome Kodell, OSB  
Subiaco Abbey, Arkansas

“Through the years, monastic men and women have been treated to the writings of Father Michael Casey. With an intellectual undercurrent, he has been able to communicate to us some of the important spiritual and pastoral elements of life under the Rule of Saint Benedict in a manner that is consistently inviting, useful, and inspiring. That same spirit pervades the series of articles that rightly honor his contribution to monastic literature these recent decades.”

—Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, OSB  
Sant’Anselmo, Rome



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Essays on Benedictine History and Spirituality  
In Honor of Michael Casey, OCSO

Edited by Carmel Posa, SGS



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# Abbreviations

ABR	<i>American Benedictine Review</i>
ASOC	<i>Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis</i>
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CF	Cistercian Fathers series
Conf	Cassian's <i>Conferences</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies Series
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
GCS	<i>Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i>
ICEL	International Commission for English in the Liturgy
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historiae</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne
RB	Rule of Saint Benedict
RBen	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
RBS	<i>Regulae Benedicti Studia</i>
SBOp	Sancti Bernardi Opera, Editiones Cistercienses, Rome
SCh	Sources Chrêtiennes, Éditiones du Cerf, Paris
SRM	<i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
TJ	<i>Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review</i>





## Introduction

Michael Casey's book, provocatively titled *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality*,<sup>1</sup> is a gathering of talks and articles that Michael had published earlier in various journals. In many ways, it represents a broad sweep of Michael's extraordinary contribution to monastic history and spirituality over the past forty or so years. Michael explains the nuance of his use of *unexciting*, employing his inimitable and playful talent as a wordsmith: "Exterior dullness is a condition for inner excitement. To describe this happy state I coined the phrase 'creative monotony.'"<sup>2</sup>

This Festschrift to honor Michael's unstinting service to the Cistercian and Benedictine world in particular, and the Christian community in general, deliberately reverses the title he gave to his volume of collected essays so as to read *A Not-So-Unexciting Life*. As his former abbot notes in the biography to follow, Michael's own life can "hardly be described as 'an unexciting life.'" Indeed, I hope that what is offered here imitates a little of his own passion and depth of scholarship in the areas of monastic history and spirituality so as to excite in the reader the deep "love of learning and desire for God" that marks Michael's own life.

Contributors to this collection, both monastic and non-monastic, span the globe and include Michael's colleagues, those inspired and influenced by his wisdom, and those with whom

<sup>1</sup>Michael Casey, *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality* (Petersham, MA: St Bede's Publications, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Casey, *An Unexciting Life*, 14.

he has developed deep personal and professional friendships over many years. The authors were not assigned any specific theme on which to focus, and there was no specific organizational plan for the volume. Nevertheless, many chapters have emerged that voice Michael's method of communicating the fruits of his communal life, his prayer and study—that of “existential hermeneutics”—where experience comes to the fore and profoundly resonates with the reader because, as Michael himself insists, “it is just common sense.”<sup>3</sup>

There are also chapters that demonstrate Michael's solid academic adherence to “firsthand contact with the texts of tradition,” as well as his careful analysis of context, “watching history bring to the surface elements of the tradition that were partially concealed even from those who were its expositors,” and, finally, what he calls the obvious third step in the process: “seeing ourselves as continuators” of tradition, bringing forth the old in order to both understand and help shape the present and the future.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the contributors clearly indicate that Michael's work has influenced their own thinking; they draw from his extensive body of work in formulating their own reflections and deepening their research. Others have taken up his focus on monastic history, while some have chosen to concentrate on their own specialty without there being any apparent connection to Michael's investigations, yet they honor him in their attention to text and context.

Although the resulting structure of the volume was not intended, it falls neatly into four clearly defined areas: the initial chapters take us into the primacy of the Word in monastic spirituality, exploring topics that include *lectio divina*, hospitality, community, and ritual. These chapters have a distinctly experiential focus. In this regard, Benedict's Rule is

<sup>3</sup>Casey, *An Unexciting Life*, viii.

<sup>4</sup>Casey, *An Unexciting Life*, viii.

renowned for its overall balanced approach to the spiritual life. Helen Lombard presents this distinctive wisdom through three aspects of work that are discernible in the Rule: the work of seeking God, the work of cenobitic living, and the work of hospitality and service. She challenges the reader to consider this “balanced lifestyle” in terms of its transformative end through her provocative questioning of our deepest desires.

The characteristically monastic practice of reading, *lectio divina*, draws us into a desire to question all aspects of our life and toward the God who draws us ever deeper into mystery. Without questions we live a truly “unexciting life,” and the God of mystery eludes us, and we are led into a stagnant humanity incapable of moving beyond ourselves into the inexpressible delight of God. Manuela Scheiba revitalizes this concept of questioning in the practice of *lectio divina*, placing the activity of the questioning reader at the center of the Rule of Saint Benedict and drawing us away from dangerous ideological positions that are likely to stifle the authentic experience of mystery.

Experience of the Word in liturgy and *lectio divina* shapes our monastic lives. Over a lifetime it forms us into words spoken by the Word itself. Both David Barry and Mary Collins draw on their experience of the Word in order to lay bare the profound way in which the Word works at shaping monastic life. David reveals an intimate glimpse into his long monastic journey with the Word. His own “personal statement of understanding” weaves its way through this account of a lifetime of “humbly welcoming the Word.” In the context of Generativity, Mary shares her experience of the place ritual plays as monastic communities face difficult journeys into the future, journeys of continuity and of termination.

The second section of the volume pays homage to Michael’s achievement in historical study and engagement with the Rule of Saint Benedict, particularly in terms of its relevance to the spiritual life today. In this volume monastic history and spirituality are approached through a broad lens. Brendan Thomas’s

essay, for instance, takes the lives and writings of Saint Benedict of Nursia and Saint Francis of Assisi in order to lead the reader into a fascinating journey that parallels their characters, motives, and visions with those of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. It seems that wholeness in our world today can only be achieved through a combination of both approaches to the spiritual life.

Michael's scholarly journey began with his own engagement with the works of Bernard of Clairvaux. His contribution to this field of study, in both translation and commentary, has been outstanding. Bernard's intimate encounter with the love of God in his commentary on the Song of Songs is the focus of Constant Mews's exploration of Bernard's "pursuit of ecstasy" and its influence on Richard of Saint Victor's more systematic approach to this highly experiential spirituality. Constant masterfully draws the reader, not just into the rise of scholastic theology of the time, but also into the dazzling array of sources from which Bernard and Richard drew in order to formulate a language that was capable of speaking about their longing for God.

The role of the abbot in the Rule of Saint Benedict presents a model of leadership that clearly indicates Benedict's own experiential struggle with coming to terms with the humanity of those desiring to travel along the spiritual road. The hard lessons of community living softened Benedict's understanding of leadership considerably from chapter 2 through to his writing of chapter 64 of his little Rule. Elias Dietz's study, which also pays homage to Michael's work on Saint Bernard, takes us back to the beginning of Bernard's life as a young abbot. Here he uncovers a zealous, yet perhaps naïve, Bernard, who also learns the hard lessons of experience as he struggles to understand the meaning of monastic leadership.

The realities that one faces as the leader of a monastic community can be overwhelming and can leave one feeling totally inadequate for the task. These struggles and demands of leader-

ship are beautifully and humbly set forth in Aelred of Rievaulx's *Pastoral Prayer*. Bernardo Bonowitz artfully weaves the model of Benedict himself through Aelred's struggle with his own sense of unworthiness and his deep and abiding love for the community. It is, in the end, an unwavering trust in God's grace and mercy, indeed, trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit, that enables monastic leaders to be sustained in their vocation.

Though the impact of women in monastic history is often downplayed, particularly in textbooks on monastic history, even to this day, Michael has himself explored this field through his study of the mystical writings of Beatrice of Nazareth. Terrence Kardong and Elizabeth Freeman add further to the recovery of women's significance in monastic history. Terrence engages the reader by making a sustained and entertaining argument for the feminine authorship of the seventh-century Rule of Walbert. Elizabeth's study of extant manuscripts of the Rule of Saint Benedict focuses on the medieval English nuns of Wintney Priory, an "unexceptional and poor nunnery." Here she shows the reader a remarkable and continuous desire to engage with the wisdom of feminized versions of Benedict's little Rule, a desire that sustained the tradition of their spiritual and liturgical lives over several centuries.

Ecumenical dialogue continues to be emphasized within the monastic endeavor of the modern world and particularly as it moves into the future. The English church has always held fast to its monastic roots, particularly in its forms of prayer and worship, throughout its long and sometimes turbulent history. Austin Cooper traces this influence throughout the centuries since the Reformation through to the nineteenth-century Romantic movement. He gives a taste of the prayers, poems, hymns, and writings of many English writers from George Herbert to John Henry Newman. This vibrant and continuous tradition led to the development of a unique Anglican spirituality built on the sure foundation of the Benedictine legacy. This tradition remains alive and flourishing in the church today.

One of Michael's enduring legacies to the monastic world is his contribution to understanding the spirituality of the Rule of Saint Benedict. His most recent publications focus on particular chapters of the Rule, drawing from each verse wisdom for living the Christian life deeply even in the most ordinary and mundane of circumstances. Both Katharine Massam and Margaret Malone also engage the study of the Rule of Saint Benedict in their contributions to this volume, yet in very different ways. Katharine uncovers the paradox inherent in Benedict's cloister: a physical and defining space for contemplative encounter, yet also "a liminal boundary" reflecting monastic identity beyond itself with its values of hospitality, reconciliation, and discipleship. Margaret focuses on the monastic spirituality of tranquility of heart as expressed throughout Benedict's Rule. The phrase *aequo animo*—with a quiet mind—aptly sums up this spirituality. In dialogue with the Quaker tradition of stillness, she explores the Rule's pervasive insistence that calming the restless heart is both essential in one who desires encounter with God and also the resultant gift from that encounter.

The third section of the book delves into new directions and the future of monastic life in our changing and often resistant world. The perceived crisis of religious life during our times is only too obvious. Bernhard Eckerstorfer discusses what he terms the "transitory nature of monastic life today." In a challenging overview, he dares us to draw our focus away from the negative aspects of this position, so as to question the "normative status" of the past in relation to our reenvisioning of the future of monastic life with its powerful message of hope for the broken lives of people today.

Columba Stewart offers a fascinating and personal analysis of the study of monasticism through the ages and its profound influence on the developing charism of monasticism. In this postmodern era of uncertainty and individualism, with its correspondingly deep hunger for authenticity and communion, he

identifies a unique “monastic moment” whereby the “natural role” of monastics is “as guardians of memory and sustainers of community.”

Finally, we are given a glimpse into the eclectic personality of Michael himself. The transcript of Francisco Rafael de Pascual’s interview with Michael and Bishop Graeme Rutherford’s afterword tribute stamp a more personal note on the Michael we are honoring in this volume.

I am particularly grateful to *The New Norcia Institute for Benedictine Studies*, which has been the context out of which this Festschrift has come to fruition, and for the support and encouragement I have received from Jill O’Brien, SGS, whose advice has been invaluable as I have gathered and edited each chapter. Finally, we are all grateful to Michael Casey, who with his open and direct Australian style and wit has been for many of us a generous spiritual and inspirational wisdom figure, mentor, director, and guide, as well as friend and colleague.

May God lead us all together to everlasting life.

Carmel M. Posa, SGS

## Chapter 5

# Ritualizing Endings for the Sake of New Beginnings

*Mary Collins, OSB*

Michael Casey devoted a chapter to “Generativity” in his 2005 essay collection *Strangers to the City*.<sup>1</sup> He speaks there at some length about the intergenerational monastic work of mentoring and nurturing, the task of fostering newer members to “full adult maturity.” At the beginning stages, he observes, the senior monastics accept the younger monastic colleague as an “apprentice” in learning the monastic life. The mentoring relationship eventually comes to an end when the maturing monastic finds his own way forward, first becoming “productive,” then exercising some creativity in the tasks with which he has been charged, and then becoming an actor in the “recycling succession of moments” that maintain the subculture of the place for each new generation.

Monastic *conversatio* involves more than simple mentoring, however, according to Casey. It requires nurturing. Intergenerational engagement in the daily life of a monastic community means learning together what continued fidelity to the monastic profession demands in real life. Certainly the newcomer

<sup>1</sup>Michael Casey, “Generativity,” in *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005), 124–41.



learns to temper a beginner's zeal for learning the "rules," on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to let go of the assumption that "good enough" will satisfy. But that is only the start of lifelong learning. Saint Benedict's chapter 72 on the good zeal of the monks reminds us—if the commentators on the Rule are to be believed—that the beloved abbot required his own lifelong learning in order to come to the fullness of his vision. What was the outcome for Benedict of Nursia of a lifetime living the wisdom of the Prologue and the other seventy-one chapters of the Rule of Benedict? It is nothing less than love and mercy in our dealings with one another—"supporting with the greatest patience one another's weakness of body or behavior" and "pursuing what [she or he] judges better for someone else"—beyond the self (RB 72.7).

Casey's positive essay on intergenerational *conversatio* may well depict the reality of a vital monastic culture of the equatorial South, especially of the Asian-Pacific world and also of the African continent. In these places there is much mentoring and nurturing to be done. For example, Benedictine houses of women in Korea report scores of candidates for monastic profession each year; the numbers are similar in the Philippines. So also in both East and West Africa. In men's monasteries in both these regions the numbers are fewer but still proportionately substantial in both Cistercian and Benedictine houses. Unfortunately the steady increase in new candidates for monastic profession is no longer true in the North American church, nor in fact in the North Atlantic region. In places where monasteries once flourished, few or none come to receive the gift. Casey writes, in sum, "The continuance of the monastic charism is one of the prime functions of a monastic community; that is why when there is no one to receive the gift, communities often lose vitality to the point of seeming dead."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Casey, "Generativity," 133.

In this essay on monastic generativity, I intend to address the real complexity of “seeming dead” in monasteries that have few or none to receive the gift. I begin with an extended reflection on what might be further said about the apparent dying of monasticism in the North Atlantic Church at the onset of the twenty-first century. Here the focus will be on monasteries of Benedictine women primarily in North America, specifically on steps taken within the Federation of St. Scholastica to address its present and its future, both positively and realistically. Next I will look at a set of case studies in which ritualizing endings and new beginnings to mark the dissolution of a particular monastery has been an uncommon act of vitality, a strange form of generativity. Handing on the monastic charism seems to elude our human control, yet that is because it always has been and will be a mysterious work of God.

The challenge of welcoming and mentoring new members confronts monastic life in the entire North Atlantic region, both in Western Europe and in North America. The once famous English monastery of contemplative nuns at Stanbrook Abbey recently made a difficult decision about their present and their future, despite objections from many of their public. They knew numbers were steadily declining, and new candidates for profession were few. The abbey, established in eighteenth-century England, sent into exile in France, and then returned in the nineteenth century, had been a powerhouse for creative and learned Benedictine nuns for more than a century. Yet like every other place in the North Atlantic region, it was vulnerable to the times. While the news media focused on the disposition of their Victorian buildings designed by the famous architect August Pugin, the real danger was to the household of Benedictine nuns themselves. They took a celebrated risk—an expression of their vitality—to relocate and to build a smaller monastic compound, a twenty-first-century “green” building. There they are living into their unknown future.

On the British Isle of Wight the Benedictine abbey of Quarr, founded earlier from the French Abbey of Solesmes and heir to the early nineteenth-century restoration of European Benedictine life, has been placed under an administrator. The dozen monks wonder and await their future. Unfortunately these two stories of dealing with decline are not exceptional cases but simply illustrations of what is occurring. Because I am a professed Benedictine sister in the US Midwest, I will focus briefly on what I know best, speaking on the varied strategies being explored for a hopeful future for monasteries without new members. Only then will I consider the role of ritualizing at the time of endings and new beginnings for those for whom options have run out.

There are solid reasons for the decline in newer vocations beyond the control of monastic houses themselves.<sup>3</sup> Monasteries tend to be local, drawing their membership and making their impact primarily where they reside.<sup>4</sup> They implant themselves from the beginning as evangelizing communities, living the life of the Gospel according to the Rule and under a local abbot. Most of the Midwestern monasteries founded 150 to 175 years ago were in rural communities, the place where most German and Irish immigrants made their new homes on the land. Some entrants were escaping military conscription, others famine and its aftermath; all were hoping for better lives. Most of these immigrants were carrying with them the European Catholic faith of their forebears and were eager to hand it on to their children.

<sup>3</sup> See Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Fadica Report, "Understanding U.S. Catholic Sisters Today," December 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/document/292793672/Understanding-U-S-Catholic-Sisters-Today>, for a comparison of entrance rates at the outset of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The mid-twentieth-century numbers are the anomaly.

<sup>4</sup> See Joel Rippinger, "Transmitting a Common Core for Monasticism: A Survival Kit for the Future," *ABR* 66, no. 4 (2015): 367–68, for his discussion on "Locality."

Farm families were large: three daughters, even three sons, making monastic profession from a single family was not an uncommon reality in the Midwest abbeys and monasteries throughout most of those early decades. Rural life, farming, and the size of rural families have all changed dramatically. Just as significantly, the missionary work of evangelizing and catechizing the settled Midwestern families is completed. The great granddaughters and grandsons of the original settlers, still living in rural communities but many fewer in number, still come within the orbit of the monastery but now as benefactors or as local college students earning double degrees in business administration and pastoral ministry, to the delight of their parents. The increasing scarcity of ordained priests means that the rural church, already flourishing under the lay-led leadership of the parental generation, will continue the work of maintaining the faith begun earlier by once-large numbers of Benedictine sisters and monks.

This does not mean no new people in the Midwest are waiting to be evangelized and catechized, but they are not living close by our monasteries or joining us. New generations of immigrants are seldom drawn to small Midwestern towns that are now being depopulated. Vietnamese, Mexican, and Central Americans are living and worshiping in urban and suburban ethnic enclaves of the Midwest, often in churches borrowed from earlier immigrant populations. Some young people are generous in their impulse to aid their own immigrant communities as men and women religious. But their lives are often a difficult fit within the established monastic communities founded in an earlier century. The residual German and Irish cultures of the North American monasteries are European and so foreign to them. Language difference is only the surface challenge. Most features of monastic culture itself are also alien in the postmodern American society into which they were born. Who will aspire to be the next generation of monastics, if we are to continue to be intergenerational monastic communities?

Midwestern American monastic leaders have been reflecting deeply on this dilemma; it is the agenda of countless discussions. Terrence Kardong, editor of the *American Benedictine Review* and an opinion maker among American monastics, has judged that simply trying harder to recruit is useless. Doing the same kind of recruiting now as in the past has already been found wanting. He argues that it is not time to give up on the monastic life but rather to devote ourselves to living with integrity the commitment we ourselves have made.<sup>5</sup> Dare we believe this? Can it be fruitful, or is it irresponsible, to leave the future of Midwestern monastic life to God and to let go of our impulse to intergenerational generativity? Kardong's is virtually a solitary voice at this time. Most opinion makers are not yet ready to abandon all efforts to interpret and to shape their futures through renewed strategies for newer membership.

Another voice speaking about the present lack of new membership is that of Sandra Marie Schneiders, an Immaculate Heart of Mary sister from the upper Midwest, who had earlier written a three-volume history and spirituality of religious life, earning her credentials as a reliable observer of past, present, and future. More recently she caught people's attention through an address in 2014 to CORI, the Conference of Religious of Ireland, where she recommended that women's communities simply accept their present situation as an opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Like other aging North Atlantic sisters, the Irish are dealing with smaller numbers and fewer new members, whether as an outcome of the scandal of their sisters' involvement in the earlier abuse of young women or because of general decline in commitment to

<sup>5</sup>Terrence Kardong, "Hope without Illusions: Coping with the Vocation Crisis," address to the 2013 biennial meeting of North American Association of Oblate Directors. Retrieved from [naabod.org/Hope-without-Illusions-Kardong.pdf](http://naabod.org/Hope-without-Illusions-Kardong.pdf), acc. July 12, 2016.

<sup>6</sup>Sandra Marie Schneiders, "The Ongoing Challenge of Renewal in Contemporary Religious Life," [www.cori.ie/sandra-schneiders-paper-delivered-at-cori-conference-25th-april-2014](http://www.cori.ie/sandra-schneiders-paper-delivered-at-cori-conference-25th-april-2014), acc. Dec. 31, 2015.

the Church. This is now the “new normal” says Schneiders, and communities must move on to fulfill their mission to evangelize and catechize, to spread the Gospel of Mercy with what they have. Some of what Schneiders had to say resonated in the United States with members of the active religious orders, the population similar to the one she was actually addressing in Ireland. Some Benedictines, too, began to try on the concept of the new normal. What might have resonated?

Monastic women in the United States, like apostolic sisters, are living healthy lives well into their nineties. Some laywomen who have pursued careers and raised families have found themselves at age fifty wondering what to do with the rest of their equally long lives. Might they be interested and encouraged to enter monastic life? Professionally educated and already multi-competent, they are looking for new challenges. Sometimes the challenge is to live their faith more deeply.

Michael Casey’s account of generativity in an intergenerational monastic community would have to take on a new shape in the setting of this “new normal.” Yet the process of generativity would focus on the same reality. How might a community nurture mature adults into an embrace of the monastic charism? How should they be introduced to the culture of the ever-changing local monastic community and the works of the monastery? How, in short order, to make them productive in good works and evoke their creativity as monastic people as they begin life in an aging community admittedly suspicious of too much change? While they may be late starters in the monastic journey, Schneiders suggests that once communities embrace the “new normal,” healthy newcomers at age seventy can be mentored for creative community leadership in a variety of offices, and they can exercise these roles often into their eighties. A generative community of the middle-aged, upper-middle-aged, and mature-old-aged is possible. There has never been retirement from commitment to the monastic way of life, no matter at what age it begins.

Not everyone is ready to accept a future for their monasteries by wagering on Schneiders's "new normal." Alternate approaches can be found among communities that are struggling with the challenges of depleted membership. Some have wondered about forming new relationships with oblates, a group growing in large numbers as candidates for monastic profession decrease. But this is problematic. "Oblation is a different vocation than monastic profession—not lesser but different," Julia Upton observes in a recent report of her study of North American oblates.<sup>7</sup> Yet when a community of twenty members finds itself with more than one hundred oblates, it may see in them the promise of a possible future for the monastery. Will something like a "new monasticism" flourish as an older generation that learned to "hold fast" now learns to "let go"?

Meanwhile existential situations need to be addressed, specifically the difficult situation of monasteries that seem "dead." In her address to a Federation of St. Scholastica chapter at the end of her twelve years of service, Benedictine sister Esther Fangman spoke of the challenges of her pastoral service to the twenty-plus federated monasteries to which she had ministered.<sup>8</sup> Fangman reflected on troubled monasteries in a federation whose houses were loosely knit because most of them had been founded as daughter houses of monasteries themselves founded almost a century earlier. She noted telltale signs that a monastic chapter needed to begin early planning for what she called "restructuring." It was not numbers alone that concerned her. The real issue, as she saw it, was adequate leadership in the monasteries. When leaders no longer had energy or the competence suited to the role of prioress, when

<sup>7</sup>Julia Upton, "Benedictine Oblates, Profile and Analysis: Glorifying God by Their Lives," *ABR* 66, no. 4 (2015): 373–90, here 389.

<sup>8</sup>Esther Fangman, "Listening Turns the Soul to God," *Benedictines* 63, no. 2 (2010): 7–16.

monastic communities no longer had vitality, she judged it was time for the communities to think about restructuring.

Until recently the obvious solution to an internal problem had been to ask authorities to designate an administrator to give the monastic community time to discern their situation. The assumption was that the monastery's troubles were temporary and that time under good appointed leadership would lead to an election. But if that could not be assumed, what other options existed? Fangman noted that communities had a history of opening their doors to individual monastics looking for a new monastic home when that need arose. But it did not necessarily speak to a situation where the entire community wanted or needed something more.

The times called for new alternatives when whole communities were under stress. Fangman and her federation council dared to meet the challenge. With good planning, new ideas and new possibilities could be explored. For example, what would it take for a dying community to stay in place, with members living out their years in their own monastery under the canonical protection of a more secure monastery? Working with particular cases and lawyers, canonical and civil, they discovered how and under what conditions this and other solutions could be undertaken.

Alternately, what would it take for a whole community to make its transition to another monastery precisely as a group? Could a smaller, tightly knit monastic community unanimously choose to let itself be absorbed by a house that showed promise of competent leadership, vitality, and so longevity? The canonical suppression of a monastery when it no longer had members was possible, and such suppression had been done.

Some aging communities with no expectation of new members, but with suitable leadership and adequate financial resources, had already addressed their immediate futures by building smaller monastery facilities more suited to their present and projected needs. In North America many nineteenth-century and even mid-twentieth-century buildings existed that had housed



both the monastic community and facilities for its ministries under a single large roof. Some chapters made arrangements for the sale of their older property to local schools, colleges, and universities, or even to social service agencies. Monastic communities that were able to follow the route of rebuilding took pride in their new sites and twenty-first-century monasteries.

Nevertheless, Fangman's larger point in addressing the question "what next for troubled monasteries?" was her focus on the impact on individual monastics of such an identity shift or identity loss. It is axiomatic that most people face major change with difficulty. What happens to a whole group that has solved its problem but whose individual members are nevertheless dealing with irreparable personal loss?<sup>9</sup> This question had been mine since the 1980s, when I led a special federation visitation requested by a single, isolated community facing a major internal problem. With only the familiar road map of naming an administrator and postponing an election, and early in the business of dealing with dying communities, it was easy for everyone to accept the importance of buying time for the community to prepare for a future election, but not of planning for dissolution and the inevitable scattering of its members.

What does any of this have to do with Michael Casey's reflection on "Generativity" with which I began this essay? At least this: it looks at the reality of monastic life today in the twenty-first-century United States when continued effort to invite new members into our monasteries fails to produce results. What can be done when there are no next-generation newcomers ready to accept the gift of the monastic charism? What happens to individual members when the dissolution of a monastery seems inevitable, for reasons beyond anyone's control?

The first monastery closing I was present for came after two earlier interventions by federation-designated leaders. A special

<sup>9</sup>Fangman, "Listening," 11.

canonical visitation led to the judgment that the small community was seriously divided after two earlier close elections. No third election would heal the breach, for sides had been drawn. Healing would have to precede any future discernment of leadership. A recently retired prioress from a nearby community accepted the role of administrator, with a specific three-year plan of pastoral care. At the end of that time the community would return to formal discernment. However, within eighteen to twenty months it was clear that dissolution was inevitable. The chapter voted to close. Each sister was personally advised about her canonical situation. She could arrange for transfer to another Benedictine house or, since the monastery in which she had professed stability would no longer exist, she could freely leave monastic life.

Most upper-middle-aged and older sisters chose to take up residence in other Benedictine houses of their federation. The monasteries were profoundly welcoming to the women, who were simultaneously relieved and troubled. Some went alone to their new homes; most departed in twos and threes. Those who left religious life, primarily younger women, were taken in by friends or families of origin until they could establish themselves. Their departures were arranged over a period of many months, based on the reciprocal readiness of the sister and those who would host her.

There were no closing rituals, no recognition of the major rupture the group was facing. This was unfortunate, since as Benedictine monastics, the group members enjoyed what the late Catherine Bell called "ritual mastery." In her study *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* she wrote of a "ritualized social body," that is, a corporate body with the ability to "deploy in wider social contexts the schemes internalized in the ritual social environment."<sup>10</sup> Over years of daily liturgical life and the daily

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 107.

social rituals of monastic life, these women were indeed a social body that had come to possess a “cultural sense of ritual.” Yet this resource was not on anyone’s mind as the sisters coped with “practical” matters. Because ritualization of the dissolution was not pursued, the group simply scattered without addressing the rupture of relationships.

It was more than a decade later, under Esther Fangman’s guidance, that another troubled Benedictine community had time to plan their future together. In the process, they contacted three neighboring monasteries to see whether a group move would be possible and under what conditions. With extended visiting among members of the monasteries and after continuing discernment, this monastic community found a fit for itself in a larger group with a comparable monastic culture. One member chose to depart from religious life during the process, but ten were ready to make the major shift in their identity. To make the move they had to arrange for buyers of the property, empty their quarters, transport belongings and furnishings, and attend to myriad details. Then, by mutual agreement, it was time to plan the ritual dimension of the move away from their monastic home and into a welcoming host monastery. Relationships required attention.

Both the receiving and the moving monastic communities enjoyed what Bell called “ritual mastery.” I personally had the privilege of speaking with them about what the transition required of them and what my own receiving monastery required. The work of ritually negotiating old and new relationships would take place in our monastic chapel and in the refectory. Only at the end of a two-day process was the canonical decree dissolving the small monastery officially proclaimed. With the dissolution, their incorporation within a new community was completed. But some ritual work had to be done first.

The ritual process, mutually arranged, began on a Saturday at evening prayer. After the reading of the Sunday gospel, the prioress of the incoming group exercised her final act of

## Chapter 16

# Musings of a (Post)Modern Monastic Historian

*Columba Stewart, OSB*

**M**y aim is to suggest that the study of monasticism can serve as a mirror of both the movement it examines and the one examining it. I will do so by sketching the evolution of monastic historiography, speaking about my own development as a student of monasticism, and then describing the present moment with its advantages for the study of monasticism and for the renewal of the monastic charism itself. It is a pleasure to write in honor of Michael Casey, who though not a historian has brought to all of his work a deeply historical consciousness and sensitivity.

### **Monastic Historiography**

Until the modern era there was no such thing as academic study of monasticism considered as a historical or religious phenomenon. There were always monastic hagiographies and chronicles, but these were internally generated accounts of significant events and figures in the life of particular communities or congregations, intended primarily to edify adherents. Occasionally there were also intra-monastic dialogues, whether in self-justification, such as those undertaken by Benedictines and Cistercians in the early period of that reform, or more directly polemical, such as the seventeenth-century dispute between the founder of the Trappist Cistercians, Armand Jean de Rancé (1626–1700), and the learned Maurist Jean Mabillon

(1632–1707) about the balance between manual and intellectual labors in monastic life.<sup>1</sup>

The birth of external critique came with the Renaissance, whether from the inside-outsider Erasmus's satire *Stultitiae Laus* (1509, published 1511) or Martin Luther's critique of monasticism as a non-evangelical distortion of Christian discipleship when based on the assumption that vows were meritorious works earning salvation, which he pursued in *De votis monasticis* (1521).<sup>2</sup> Thanks to David Hume (1711–1776) and Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), in the Anglophone-Protestant world, monasticism, by then long gone in the British Isles, became synonymous with degeneracy and ignorant fanaticism. Hume dismissed monasticism for its lack of social utility.<sup>3</sup> Gibbon wrote, "these unhappy exiles from social life were impelled by the dark and implacable genius of superstition. . . . The operation of these religious motives was variously determined by the temper and situation of mankind. . . . They acted most forcibly on the infirm minds of children and females."<sup>4</sup> Antiquarians such as William Dugdale (1605–1686), whose *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655 and 1661) was

<sup>1</sup> Started by De Rancé's *De la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* (Paris: François Muguet, 1683), to which Mabillon responded in his justly famous *Traité des études monastiques* (Paris: Ch. Robustel, 1691). Their dispute continued in other publications.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Book of Concord*, Article 26:1–12, and the *Smalcald Articles* III.15.

<sup>3</sup> "Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose, neither to advance a man's fortune in the world; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices." From David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), chap. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1781), vol. 3, chap. 37.

based on the research of Roger Dodsworth (1585–1654), gathered evidence for monasteries and monuments, but with little interest in their religious life or spiritual practice.

On the continent, wherever monasticism survived the Reformation it tended to focus on internal reforms, playing little role in ecclesiastical affairs or theological matters. In the intellectual sphere there was the outstanding exception of the Maurists, who expressed the deep humanism of Benedictine life using the tools and critical spirit of the early modern era as they searched for, edited, and published the essential texts and documents of the Christian and monastic tradition.<sup>5</sup> They established the precedent for later, non-monastic projects of vast scope that brought together and published the sources needed for the scientific study of Latin ecclesiastical and monastic history (and, in some cases, the Greek sources as well). The launch of the *Acta Ordinis Sancti Benedicti* by Luc d'Achery (1609–1685), finished by Jean Mabillon, harnessed monastic interest in ancient texts to modern scholarly technologies. Mabillon also laid the foundations of scientific Latin paleography and diplomatics,<sup>6</sup> extended by Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741) to Greek texts.<sup>7</sup> The Maurists undertook ambitious “voyages littéraires” to find manuscripts scattered in monasteries and churches across Europe. Their editions of patristic and medieval texts made possible the wholesale plagiarism of the abbé Jacques-Paul Migne (1800–1875) in his astonishing *Patrologiae cursus completus* (1844–1858).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See the still-compelling overview of their work in David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London and New York: Nelson, 1964), 32–62.

<sup>6</sup> *De re diplomatica* (Paris: L. Billaine, 1681).

<sup>7</sup> Bernard de Montfaucon, Joannes Komnenos, and Jean Bouhier, *Palæographia græca* (Paris: apud Ludovicum Guerin [etc.], 1708).

<sup>8</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

The Maurists had been preceded, and perhaps inspired, by the Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde (1569–1629), whose compendium of Latin translations of early monastic texts, *De vita et verbis seniorum* (1615), sits on my desk as I write this essay. It was Rosweyde who began the *Acta Sanctorum*, a great compendium of lives of the saints arranged by feast days, published in sixty-eight volumes over almost three hundred years (1643–1940), and continued by his successor Jean Bolland (1596–1665), founder of the “Bollandists.”<sup>9</sup> In the Roman Catholic world, the study of monasticism and hagiography was of great interest to members of the newer orders, who were often active in the formal academic world in a manner untypical of the Benedictines and Cistercians.<sup>10</sup>

With abundant, if not complete, sources now available, the scientific study of monasticism could begin. As a result, the nineteenth century proved to be a watershed for the study of monasticism as for so many other things, with serious efforts to examine the literature and a growing willingness to contextualize it, even if religious affiliations and controversies still shaped interpretations. In this modern study of monasticism and its literature one can observe a demarcation of interests between those scholars who focused on monastic *spirituality* and the explication of monastic texts that acquired canonical status (usually monks or religious) and those who employed a historical or phenomenological approach, often sustained by a wider scope of interests. The latter were typified by the great German historians of the Classical and Early Christian periods, beginning with Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) and

<sup>9</sup> See Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises*, 2–32.

<sup>10</sup> In the Prussian Protestant world one can find a project of even greater magnitude, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (1826–), whose title must be understood in the broadest sense, encompassing historical texts from 500–1500 across much of Europe, a reminder of the Germanic cast of the Frankish and later Carolingian Empire. See Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises*, 64–97.

the towering Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), both in Berlin. The latter, particularly, absorbed the historical-critical method of contemporary German biblical scholarship and applied it to the full range of early Christian literature. His penetrating analysis of the development of monasticism,<sup>11</sup> which concludes in a manner revealing of his Lutheran formation, is still essential reading for those interested in monastic historiography.

Harnack's insistence on free inquiry inspired his contemporaries and later followers, many of whom were more sympathetic than he to monasticism, despite their Protestant affiliation. This was true of the historians influenced by the so-called History of Religions School (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), with their sensitivity to spiritual motivations allied to a comparative method that recognized and explored the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, Gnosticism, and other movements on the development of Christian asceticism and monasticism. Richard Reitzenstein (1861–1931) wrote analyses of the *Life of Antony*<sup>12</sup> as well as of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and of Palladius's *Lausiac History*, placing them in their classical literary and philosophical contexts.<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920) published the first major study of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (1923).<sup>14</sup> Both attempted to describe a pre-Christian

<sup>11</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Monasticism: Its Ideals and History, and the Confessions of St. Augustine: Two Lectures by Adolf Harnack*, trans. E. E. Kellett and F. H. Marseille (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901).

<sup>12</sup> *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius: ein philologischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des Mönchtums*, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Jahrg. 1914, 8. Abhandlung (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1914).

<sup>13</sup> *Historia Monachorum und Historia Lausiaca: Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Mönchtums und der frühchristlichen Begriffe Gnostiker und Pneumatiker*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 24 (n. f. 7) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1916).

<sup>14</sup> *Apophthegmata: Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1923).



“Gnostic” movement that found varied expression in early Christianity such as in the Johannine movement and in monasticism. Their effort—continued by numerous others up to the present—is now considered mistaken in its assumption that “Gnosticism” as such can be used as a meaningful category for comparative study and the tracing of intellectual influence.<sup>15</sup> The importance of their work, however, apart from the enduring value of their philological and textual analysis, was its demonstration that the *Sitz im Leben* of Christian monasticism was not one of isolation but of intellectual and cultural engagement, as was obviously true of early Christianity as a whole. By the same token, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (“The Birth of Monasticism,” 1936), the study of monastic beginnings by *religionsgeschichtliche* scholar Karl Heussi, acknowledged the Christian inspiration of monasticism while recognizing the elements borrowed from Hellenistic philosophy and culture. As a result of the work of these scholars, what had been received within the ecclesiastical tradition as a canon of authoritative monastic texts was now viewed as part of an array of unbundled sources available for historical assessment undertaken in dialogue with philosophical and other non-Christian writings.

Such academic rigor—shaped as it inevitably was by the explicit affiliations of these scholars—in turn affected writers within the Roman Catholic intellectual world as well. The tools of historical criticism had become normative, even if the agenda were different. This was notably the case among French Catholic scholars, who comfortably acknowledged the influence of philosophy on Christianity in general and monasticism in particular and were as comfortable as their German counterparts in moving between non-Christian Greek philosophical

<sup>15</sup> See most recently the balanced critique in Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

and Christian theological literature. It was they who laid the groundwork for much monastic scholarship in the twentieth century. The important point to note is that once again the Benedictines did not take the lead. It was work such as that of the great Alsatian Jesuit Irénée Hausherr (1891–1978), at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, that was vitally important for the study of monastic spirituality. In addition to recovering a full view of the writings and profound influence of Evagrius Ponticus, an achievement that required mastery of several ancient languages, Hausherr contributed many articles to the Oriental Institute's journal, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, and its monograph series, *Orientalia Christiana* (along with its successor *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*). It was again the Jesuits—this time in Toulouse—who launched the monumental *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire* in 1928. This initiative required sixty-three years and nine thousand articles to survey the field (with volumes appearing from 1932 till 1995).

Hausherr's Dominican contemporary, André-Jean Festugière (1898–1982), worked with both philosophical and Christian ascetic texts and wrote an enduringly valuable work on the religious world of Antioch at the time of John Chrysostom and Libanius.<sup>16</sup> As a young friar he was exposed to the archeological awareness cultivated at the École Biblique in Jerusalem, whose venerable founder, Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855–1938), wrote the foreword to his first book. Festugière had the unusual ability to work both philosophically/theologically and historically, as is evidenced by his publications on the Hermetic corpus, translations of monastic texts (*Moines d'Orient*), and editions of the ecclesiastical historians Sozomen and Evagrius Scholasticus.

<sup>16</sup> André Marie Jean Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne; Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, fasc. 194 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1959).

For the most part, monastic scholars tended to work either entirely within the tradition or from the inside out, starting with the core texts and then seeking links to cognate texts or practices in philosophy. Their interest went more explicitly to deepening familiarity with and appreciation of the received literature, and to more fully understanding its implications for actual monastic life. This time French and Belgian Benedictines led the way, with the *Revue Bénédictine* (1894–), published by the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, as the flagship journal for research on the Rule, related texts, and later history. The standard view of Benedictine history from this tradition was expressed in the *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît* of Philibert Schmitz (1888–1963), published by Maredsous in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> The Cistercians established their own review, the *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, founded by the general chapter in 1933. For many years monastic history was a largely French enterprise. From that tradition came the prolific Adalbert de Vogüé (1924–2011) of La Pierre-qui-Vire in France and Jean Leclercq (1911–1993) of Clervaux in Luxembourg, both of whom worked with the traditional canon of monastic literature—the former concerned with Late Antique and Early Medieval texts, the latter with a range of medieval topics.

The small English Benedictine Congregation produced two notable scholars important for Anglophone monasticism throughout the world. Cuthbert Butler (1858–1934), abbot of Downside for many years, published three significant works: the *Lausiac History of Palladius* (1898), *Benedictine Monachism* (1919), and *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of SS Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative*

<sup>17</sup> Published in seven volumes between 1942 and 1956, with the final volume devoted to the history of Benedictine women. He also published a handy edition of MS Sangallensis 914, the best manuscript of the Rule: *Regula Monachorum: Textus critico-practicus sec. cod. Sangall. 914, Editio altera emendata* (Maredsous: Abbaye, 1955).

*Life* (1922), as well as a remarkably useful pocket-sized edition of the Rule<sup>18</sup> with important sources not simply cited but fully quoted in the footnotes. David Knowles (1896–1974) was a historian of medieval English monasticism who ended up spending most of his monastic life in Cambridge, ironically because of disagreement with his Congregation’s orientation toward teaching and running schools. Although famous for his works on medieval English religious life,<sup>19</sup> he wrote more popularly with a wider historical scope. The small paperback *Christian Monasticism* (1969) featured the first photograph of the Saint John’s Abbey Church that I ever saw. His remarks about American Benedictine life were not very complimentary, but I remembered that photograph.

### **Here I Join the Narrative**

My immersion in monastic history began in 1980, when I spent a summer at Saint John’s Abbey. I was there to grind through German grammar to satisfy a requirement for my doctoral program at Yale. Providentially it was the sesquimillennial celebration of the birth of Benedict (and of Scholastica, who was regularly invoked, especially when sisters were present). Saint John’s hosted a symposium featuring Cardinal Basil Hume, the abbot primate (then Victor Dammertz), prominent scholars, and hundreds of monks and nuns. It was the zenith of post-Vatican II optimism about the renewal of religious life, the liturgy, ecumenism, and engagement with the modern world.

<sup>18</sup> *Sancti Benedicti Regula Monachorum*, Friburgi Brisgoviae (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1912); subsequent editions (1927, 1935) appeared under the title *Sancti Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum*.

<sup>19</sup> *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943–1216* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940; 2nd ed., 1963); and David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

It was still possible to think and dream big. Relegated for the summer to a sleepy corner of the monastery, I spent much of my time with the summer-school students, at that time consisting mostly of teaching sisters from various congregations working on an MA in theology, as well as several seminarians and priests pursuing degrees in liturgy or Scripture. I didn't know much about Benedictine monasticism at that point. I had a cursory familiarity with the Rule and had plowed through Jean Leclercq's classic *The Love of Learning and Desire for God* at the suggestion of an Irish priest at Yale (who, in the way of the far-flung but small Benedictine network, had baptized a good friend from Glenstal Abbey, a fact discovered only twenty-five years later). I had a wonderful time. I loved the architecture (that photograph!), the liturgical style, and the natural setting of the abbey. But most of all I loved the monks: in a community filled with such intelligent and generous men I could imagine a monastic future for myself.

Before that summer, my experiential familiarity with religious life had been with the Anglican brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist at their houses in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in Cowley, a suburb of Oxford. I had written my Harvard AB thesis on their founder, a representative of the nineteenth-century Catholic renewal of the Church of England. Although they tended to avoid calling themselves monks, they really were. With them I first prayed the Office, ate in monastic silence, and experienced a reverent and contemplative celebration of the Eucharist.

As much as I liked them (and still do), I wasn't an Anglican and had no interest in becoming one. My research about nineteenth-century English church history, however, was leading me to the early Christian centuries so important for John Henry Newman and the other Tractarians. Their view of Catholicism owed little to that medieval era that had been so influential for the monastic revival in Europe and for the various Gothic revival movements in art and architecture in Great Britain. The

turn to the early period had also introduced me to the study of liturgy, which required expanding my view of the Christian world to encompass the Christian East, first in its Byzantine form and then, some years later, the Syriac. As it happened, the first serious study of liturgy I read was the classic *The Shape of the Liturgy* by the Anglican Benedictine monk Gregory Dix. His historical theories are now largely discounted, but his moving final chapter on the spirit of the liturgy can still move one to tears. Dix was feeding me a monastic view of liturgical continuity and practice, though I did not realize it at the time.

My entry into monastic life at Saint John's in 1981 coincided with the dawn of a new era of interest in pre-Benedictine monastic history and its shaping of the Benedictine Rule and tradition. The Cistercian Studies series had begun to publish translations of early monastic texts, notably for me those about the Egyptian desert monks, the works of Evagrius, and the Pachomian literature translated by Armand Veilleux. The Liturgical Press at Saint John's had just released *RB 1980*,<sup>20</sup> which brought the critical edition and analysis of the Latin textual tradition published by Adalbert de Vogüé and Jean de Neufville<sup>21</sup> to a much wider audience, accompanied by a fresh English translation, abundant notes, excellent introductory essays and appendices, and useful indices. Butler's emphasis on the sources of the Rule was evident in the textual apparatus, augmented by further detection of parallel and source texts. The dust of earlier twentieth-century controversies over the relationship between the Rule of the Master and Rule of Benedict and the lesser concern about which form of the Latin text to prefer—whether the common *Ausculpta* or the more original but less widely disseminated *Obsculpta* tradition—had settled.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, SCh 181–83 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971). The remaining volumes were Vogüé's commentary on the Rule.

## End Note

# Michael Casey A Poet of the Logos

*Bishop Graeme Rutherford*

The opening paragraph of Michael Casey's editorial "Ex Cathedra," in *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review*, May 2006, reads as follows: "Rereading the Epistle of James recently I was struck by the phrase usually translated 'doers of the word.' In Greek it is *poetai logou*, which might be rendered a little more imaginatively as 'poets of the logos.' This translation suggests that James is admonishing us to become not merely deferential doers of the word but its creative and exuberant proclaimers, welcoming it with meekness and transmitting it to others with intelligence and verve."<sup>1</sup> I can think of no more apt description to sum up Michael's own contribution to monasticism and to the broader ecumenical community than to employ the way in which he has suggested that phrase in James might be translated.

Michael's lectures, homilies, and books are all characterized by an elegant, intelligent, and imaginative use of language. In his contemplative monastic vocation, Michael has served others as a "poet of the logos." He once suggested that there are three different approaches to doing theology. *Orthodoxy* is concerned with right teaching (or literally, with right worship). On its own, it can easily lead to barren intellectualism.

<sup>1</sup>"Ex Cathedra," TJ 70 (2006): 3.

*Orthopraxy* is concerned with correct behavior. But again, this can lead to sterile moral activism. Truth involves deeds as well as creeds. Michael has suggested the need for a third level of truth. For this he coined the word *orthomorphy*. What he had in mind is theology that is characterized by beauty as well as cognitive truth and embodied action. I recall Michael once saying, "Theology is not necessarily dull, feeling-less, and irrelevant to godly living. If it has become so, then let us strive to make of it not only something true and practical, but also 'something beautiful for God.'"

Discovering the superlative value of the Kingdom is the discovery of something of such surpassing worth that the joy of it is irresistible. As our Lord put it, *Where our treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matt 6:21). Benedict expected his monks to be obsessed with Christ. He says, "Prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (RB 72.11). It is out of the appreciation of the love and beauty of Jesus that Christian joy and peace flow. The heart of Benedictine spirituality is a value judgment concerning Jesus. The hymns of the book of Revelation resound with the words "You are worthy." This is the language of valuation.

As a young scholarly monk, Michael enthusiastically embraced the call of the Second Vatican Council for Religious Communities to return to their original charism. The Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* has always required that monks immerse themselves in the Scriptures. In this respect, Benedictine spirituality has generated commitments and enthusiasms across historic confessional lines. The Evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer reflects this Benedictine spirituality when he writes, "Any theology that is not a response to revelation is, strictly speaking, *irresponsible*, in the sense that it is not a response to God's own self-presentation."<sup>2</sup> Michael's many

<sup>2</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 469.



books reflect an appreciation of the continuing relevance of the ancient, precritical approach to the Bible. He also clearly writes with an awareness of the insights of recent biblical scholarship, even if at times he is not backward in advising the young novice simply to turn the page of a biblical commentary if he discerns that it is only intended to show how erudite the author is!

No doubt Michael's concern for *orthomorphy* has been shaped by the poetic and mystical biblical writers themselves. John of Patmos struggled to capture in words something of what he saw when he was given a peep through an open door into heaven. His symbolic language is marked by restraint, particularly when it comes to depicting God. Repeatedly he finds himself resorting to the use of qualifying words and phrases. In writing about his opening vision of the risen Lord, he says, "his face was *like* the sun" (Rev 1:16). He employs suggestion rather than description to convey the dazzling, staggering majesty, and "unfathomableness" of God. The one seated on the throne "*looks like* jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that *looks like* an emerald" (Rev 4:3). This is language showing the weight it bears, the weight of a Word from outside ordinary categories. John's vision is full of exclamations. He is utterly overwhelmed by the experience of God. As one commentator on Revelation puts it, "it is a great mistake to read this fiery, passionate and poetic spirit as though he were composing a pedantic piece of scientific prose. He is painting vivid pictures and it does not matter in the slightest that the details do not harmonize readily."<sup>3</sup> Revelation is a book that offends human rationality. But what is upsetting to the theologian concerned simply about *orthodoxy* is thrilling to the contemplative who is also concerned about *orthomorphy*.

What is true of the biblical seers can also be said of the psalmists. The psalms are the heartbeat of the monastic Offices.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Morris, *Revelation* (London: Tyndale Press, 1969), 123.

Michael has often said that in order to appreciate these ancient poets we must “befriend” them. Such befriending involves recognizing, in the first place, that the psalms belong to the overall category of poetry, and they contain the nonrational components that are typical of poetry, such as strong imagery, exaggeration, exuberance, repetition, and frequent divergence from the canons of rational thought. Artistic involvement and intuition are associated with the nondominant right side of the brain, whereas the left hemisphere specializes in analytic, sequential, and logical thought. Poetry helps us to relate to God as whole persons, with the right hemisphere as well as the left hemisphere of the brain.

Michael further suggests that “befriending” these ancient poets can be aided by an appreciation of more recent Old Testament scholarship that classifies the psalms into recognizable categories such as songs of praise, laments, thanksgivings, or wisdom psalms. In this way, he maintains, the psalter becomes a less impenetrable mass of confused and confusing elements. To have this kind of understanding in advance helps the reader to latch onto the wavelength of a particular psalm so that it becomes a stepping-stone to prayer rather than a stumbling block. The psalms touch the whole spectrum of human emotions. There is no human experience that cannot be turned back to God in prayer. Even the words of imprecation or cursing, such as those at the end of Psalm 137 that describe what the Babylonians did to the Hebrew children can be used in this way: *O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!* (Ps 137:8-9). These words need not be read as a call to violent action—to put someone to death. When they are “befriended” the words can be used for turning the very real human hurt of the Hebrew mothers whose children had been bashed to death back to God in prayer. The psalms, as the heartbeat of the monastic

horarium, provide the means whereby diverse human experience can be offered to God.<sup>4</sup>

Appreciation of the beauty and existential dimension of the Scriptures is aided by reading aloud. Michael somewhere points out that Peter the Venerable had not read his Bible for some days because he had laryngitis! Ruminating on the Scriptures was primarily an oral function. In a similar way, Saint Augustine highlighted the values of chanting the psalms when he said, “whoever sings, prays twice.” In order for the words to affect the soul, they need music. Music integrates the soul, uniting reason, beauty, and passion.

In his doctoral studies, Michael immersed himself in the mystical writing of Bernard of Clairvaux. As a result, he has frequently drawn attention to the way in which Bernard’s homilies are characterized by beauty. An example of this can be seen in the *Ode to Eternal Day* within one of Bernard’s sermons on the Song of Songs, in which he depicts heaven in terms of the sights and seasons familiar to him in the valleys around his monastery in Clairvaux, France. In one of his many sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard waxes elegant: “O true noontide, fullness of warmth and light, trysting place of the sun; noontide that blots out shadows, that dries up marshes, that banishes evil odors! O perpetual solstice, day that will never decline to evening! O noontide light, with your springtime freshness, your summer-like gracefulness, your autumnal fruitfulness and . . . your winter of quiescence and leisure.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Casey, *The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation* (Petersham, MA: St Bede’s Publications, 1994), 79–94.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard, SC 33:6; SBOp 1:237; *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, CF 7 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 149. For Michael’s translation of this passage, see *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, CS 77 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 222.

Commenting on this passage, Michael, with his own inimitable wit, draws attention to the fact that the valleys around Citeaux were full of stagnant swamps that would give off a foul odor. Only the warmth of the sun could disperse the stench. Likewise, only the warmth of divine love could disperse the stench of human sin. Moreover, Michael added, heaven, like Melbourne, contains all four seasons in one, each a facet of overall beauty!

Michael often makes truth attractive by punctuating his lectures and writing with a wry sense of humor. It may be just a brief aside, as for instance when he quotes a few words in Latin in the midst of a lecture and then warns his listeners, "I charge more for Latin!" or makes reference in a lecture on the Benedictine vow of stability to the fact that his view of heaven is the view of the monastery in the *rearview* mirror of the car! He also has an eye for an amusing illustration in the writings of the Fathers. He tells us that Saint Bernard often likened prayer to a belch, *ructus*: "A person ate his bread, devoured God's word and allowed it to percolate through his whole being, assimilating it through the process of rumination. When he had made God's word fully his own a response builds up within him and finally bursts forth; this is prayer. *Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum*; my heart belched out a good word."<sup>6</sup>

In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, Michael has taken the charism of the founder of his Order to heart. Bernard, he tells us, wrote that a likely candidate for contemplation must be one who "has not only lived for Christ, but has done so for a long time." May Fr. Michael continue to persevere as a *poet of the logos* for many more years for the sake of the "spiritual ecumenism" that his lectures and publications have encouraged.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Casey, "The Pilgrim's Lament," TJ 13 (1977): 352.

## Contributors

**D**avid Barry, OSB, has been a monk of Trinity Abbey, New Norcia, in Western Australia since 1955. He studied at Sant'Anselmo in Rome, gaining the licence in theology. He has worked as a monastic formator and retreat director for many years. He earned his BA (Hons) in classics at the University of Western Australia in 1975, and later a Dip. Ed. from Murdoch University. He spent 1997 teaching English in China and 2002 doing archival research in Europe, scanning or photocopying letters and other documents written by or about New Norcia's founders, Dom Serra and Dom Salvado. His publications include the translations of Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel's *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, CS 212 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), and Smaragdus's *The Crown of Monks*, CS 245 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2013).

Bernardo Bonowitz, OCSO, became a Roman Catholic in 1968. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1973 and transferred to the Cistercians at Saint Joseph's Abbey, Massachusetts, in 1982. He served as novice director until his election as superior of the monastery of Novo Mundo in Brazil in 1996. He has written several books in Portuguese, and his book *Saint Bernard's Three-Course Banquet* was published by Cistercian Publications (MW 39) in 2013.

Mary Collins, OSB, has been a member of the Benedictine community of Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Kansas, since 1957.

She earned her PhD in sacramental and liturgical studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where she later became a full professor and has served as professor emerita in the School of Theology and Religious Studies since 1999. She has also taught on the faculties of Benedictine College, Atchison, and the University of Kansas at Lawrence. From 1999 to 2005, she served as prioress of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison. Mary has been a pioneer in the liturgical renewal in the United States since Vatican II. She has written or edited some fourteen books and written numerous articles and essays in collected works and in journals both scholarly and pastoral. She also served on the advisory commission of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and directed its Psalter project. She is one of North America's premier liturgical theologians.

Austin Cooper, OMI, has been a priest with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate since 1956. He holds a master of arts from The Catholic University of America and a doctorate of philosophy from Monash University. He was the first master of Catholic Theological College in Victoria, Australia, and also president of the Melbourne College of Divinity (now the University of Divinity). He has taught Reformation History and Christian Spirituality at Monash University, and English Spirituality at Trinity College in the University of Melbourne and at the Centre for Christian Spirituality, Randwick, New South Wales. He is presently the senior fellow of Catholic Theological College and member of the Departments of Church History and of Pastoral and General Studies. His main academic interests are the Oxford Movement and the English tradition of spirituality. He has published works on Julian of Norwich and *The Cloud of Unknowing* and many articles on modern history and the history of English spirituality. His most recent publication is a book entitled *John Henry Newman: A Developing Spirituality* (St Pauls Publications, 2012). In 2004 he was made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to theological education.

Elias Dietz, OCSO, has been a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani since 1988. He has published studies on early Cistercian authors in various journals, including *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, of which he was editor from 2003 to 2007. Since 2008 he has served as abbot of his community.

Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, OSB, is a monk of Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria. He studied theology and geography in Salzburg, Vienna, and the United States. He earned an MTS at Mount Angel Seminary College, Oregon, with a thesis on Benedictine missionaries on Vancouver Island and a *Magister theologiae* degree at Salzburg University. For his doctoral dissertation on American theology (Salzburg, 1999) he studied at the Universities of Duke and Yale. He is the author of *Kirche in der postmodernen Welt. Der Beitrag George Lindbecks zu einer neuen Verhältnisbestimmung* (Innsbruck/Vienna: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2001), S. 403, and *Unterwegs im Geist des Konzils, Mit einem Vorwort von Bischof Maximilian Aichern* (Pettenbach: Micha-Verlag, 2014), S. 132. Dom Bernhard serves his monastery as director of vocations, novice master, and formation director. His lectures and articles focus on how the Church and monastic life can both fulfill their mission in the postmodern world.

Elizabeth Freeman is senior lecturer in Medieval European History at the University of Tasmania. Her research focus is the medieval Cistercian monastic order, especially the Cistercians in England. Her earlier work examined Cistercian historical writing, while her more recent work examines Cistercian nuns in their own right as well as the interactions—both institutional and personal—between the male and female expressions of the medieval Cistercian Order. She is the author of *Narratives of a New Order: Cistercian Historical Writing in England 1150–1220*, and she has published articles in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* and *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*. She has published recent chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order*,

ed. Mette Birkedal Bruun (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), and in *The Cistercian Arts: From the 12th to the 21st Century*, ed. Terryl N. Kinder and Roberto Cassanelli (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

Terrence Kardong, OSB, has been a monk of Assumption Abbey in Richardton, North Dakota, since 1956. Since 1982, he has served as editor of the *American Benedictine Review*. His many books include *Pillars of Community: Four Rules of Pre-Benedictine Monastic Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) and *Day by Day with Saint Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005). He has also produced highly regarded translations and commentaries of the Rule of Saint Benedict and Saint Gregory the Great's *Life of Saint Benedict*.

Helen Lombard, SGS, entered the Good Samaritan Sisters in 1961. In 1978 she was appointed to facilitate community renewal, and during this time, together with Cistercian monks from Tarrawarra Abbey, she developed and administered study programs on the Rule of Saint Benedict and its sources, now published by Michael Casey and David Tomlins as *Introducing Benedict's Rule: A Program of Formation* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2006). She was superior of her congregation from 1981 until 1993. During this time, she served as president of the Major Superiors of Australia and was involved in the establishment of the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* (CIB). Helen was provost at Notre Dame University in Western Australia from 1994 to 1998 and taught and developed programs for the study on the Rule and its sources for both the sisters of her congregation and the monks of New Norcia. She was sought after as a speaker both in Australia and overseas. Tragically, Helen died in a car accident in 2000.

Margaret Malone, SGS, is a member of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict. She has been a lec-



turer at Australian Catholic University, where she taught sacraments, liturgy, and social justice. In 1980–1981 she studied at Catholic University of America, completing an MA with a specialization in spirituality. She completed her doctoral studies at Australian National University in 2000 with a thesis titled “Things Both Old and New—A Study of Authority in the Rule of Benedict.” Her main work now is in teaching the Rule of Saint Benedict throughout her Order and at the Benedictine Community of New Norcia. She also gives retreats and workshops both internationally and nationally.

Katharine Massam is coordinator of Studies in Church History and associate professor at the University of Divinity, Melbourne. Her research explores intersections between Christian tradition and wider culture in postcolonial settler societies, including Australia. She writes on the history of Christian spirituality (especially Benedictine traditions), cross-cultural encounter in the Australian mission context, and the dynamics of work and leisure. She is especially interested in methodologies that open up neglected sources and experience. Her publications include *Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia* (UNSW Press, 1996), a range of refereed articles, and a forthcoming monograph: *Between: Benedictine Missionary Women in Australia*. Katharine is an oblate of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia. She brings twenty years of experience in offering workshops and retreats on Benedictine themes to community groups.

Constant J. Mews is professor within the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Monash University, where he is also director of the Centre for Religious Studies. He has published widely on medieval thought, ethics, and religious culture, with particular reference to the writings of Abelard, Heloise, Hildegard of Bingen, and their contemporaries, including *Abelard and Heloise* (New York: Oxford University

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Francisco Rafael de Pascual, OCSO, is a monk of the Abbey of Viaceli, Cantabria, Spain. He is lecturer and professor on the Monastic Formation Program in Spain. His writings about Cistercian life, history, and spirituality are well known in Spain, and he has been the editor of *Cistercium: Revista Monástica Cisterciense* since 1992. His research interest focuses on the life and works of Thomas Merton, a number of whose works he has translated. He also coordinates a number of “Thomas Merton Encounters” in Spain.

Carmel Posa, SGS, has been a sister of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict since 1989. She completed a master of arts in theology in 1996, from Saint John’s University, Collegeville, Minnesota, majoring in monastic studies, and was awarded a doctorate from the Melbourne College of Divinity in 2009. She has been a senior lecturer in theology at Notre Dame University of Australia, and is a founding dean of the New Norcia Institute for Benedictine Studies and coeditor of *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review*.

Graeme Rutherford was the assistant bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle in NSW, Australia. While in that role, he was the Anglican cochair of the Australian Anglican and Roman Catholic Conversations (AustARC) and the chair of the Advisory Council for Anglican Religious Life. He has been a regular visitor to Tarrawarra Abbey for over fifty years. He qualified as a Scholar in Theology with the Australian College of Theology and holds an MA in theology from Durham Uni-

versity, UK. He is the author of a number of books, including one in which he shares his love of Tarrawarra Abbey: *Watchers in the Morning: A Spirituality for Contemporary Christians* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994). He has written two short biblical commentaries: *The Heart of Christianity: Romans 1 to 8*, and *The Uniqueness of Jesus: Hebrews 1 to 13*. *The Potter God* was written as a Lenten Study for the Australian Anglican Church. With his son Jonathan, he coauthored *Beloved Father, Beloved Son: A Conversation about Faith between a Bishop and his Atheist Son*. His most recent book is entitled *A Little Book about a Big Story: God's Grand Plan from Creation to New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

Manuela Scheiba, OSB, has been a member of the Benedictine abbey at Alexanderdorf, Germany, since 1988. From 1996 to 1999 she studied theology and monastic studies at Sant'Anselmo, the Benedictine university in Rome, and completed her doctoral thesis, on twentieth-century commentaries on the Rule of Saint Benedict dealing with the topic of obedience to the superior in 2007, under the direction of Aquinata Böckmann, OSB. Manuela teaches monastic studies at Sant'Anselmo and gives workshops and lectures on the Rule of Saint Benedict throughout the Benedictine world. She is also presently undertaking postgraduate studies in Eastern Monasticism at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

Columba Stewart, OSB, has been a monk of Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, since 1981. He completed his doctoral studies at Oxford in 1989. He is currently teaching monastic studies at Saint John's School of Theology Seminary and is executive director of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library. Fr. Columba's publications include *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).

Brendan Thomas, OSB, is a monk of Belmont Abbey, England, where he is currently novice master. Since 2002, he has been the director of the Monastic Formators' Programme, a three-month international course for Benedictines and Cistercians held in Rome and Assisi. He regularly gives retreats in various places around the world.

David Tomlins, OCSO, was North Queensland born and bred. He was destined, or doomed, to be a Cistercian, as his parents married on the feast of Saint Benedict, and he received his early education in Ayr from the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict. He entered Tarrawarra Abbey an hour before Michael Casey, and so, according to the Rule, has always been his senior! David studied for his STL in spirituality at the Gregorian University, Rome (1969–1971), has taught in the Tarrawarra formation program for many years, and was abbot of his community (1988–2012). He has now adopted the title of “Feather Duster” and rejoices in caring for the community's infirm and elderly.