

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-ONE

Edith Scholl, ocsa

Words for the Journey

A Monastic Vocabulary

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by

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Foreword by

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FOREWORD

David N. Bell

*Lung.pa re.re skad.lugs re/
bLama re.re chos.lugs re//*

It is perhaps unusual to begin the preface to a book dealing with Cistercian theology, spirituality, and practice with a quotation in Tibetan, much less one that is not translated. Yet there is a method to my madness, and those who have tried to pronounce or mispronounce the sentences (Tibetan pronunciation is as wicked as English) may be interested to learn that it is—or used to be—a well-known Tibetan proverb. It means “To each region its own dialect; to each monk (*lama*¹) his own doctrine.” Two important points arise from this. First, that unless one knows the language, it is impossible to translate the saying. And secondly, that the *chos.lugs*—pronounced something like *chö-luk*²—of any monk or lama is essentially his, or, in the case of Tibetan nuns, her own. The reason why it is his or her own is simple: language. The Tibetan Buddhist Canon was, to a large extent, translated from Sanskrit, and the technical terms in both languages are replete with multiple layers of meaning. Sometimes those meanings are not the same in both languages, and one person will interpret a term in one way, another person in another.

We have just the same problem in English. According to the Christian Scriptures, one of the key commandments is to love

1. The initial *b* of the Tibetan word *bLama* is not pronounced.
2. The *k* at the end is hardly pronounced.

one's neighbor. But what does this mean? The only word on which one might agree is "your," but when we come to "love" and "neighbor" we are in deep trouble. What is love, and who is my neighbor? If the injunction bids us leap the fence between my house and that of, let us say, an attractive woman who lives next door, pounce on her unsuspectingly, and rape her on the spot, then I clearly have a problem. If, on the other hand, it means that I first check to see that my neighbors are good Christians, and then wave to them and wish them well on a Sunday morning on their way to church, I also have a problem. "Love" and "neighbor" are terms of unqualified richness, and we must remember that when Jesus of Nazareth was asked by a certain lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" he cheated. He did not answer the lawyer directly, but spoke a parable (Luke 10:25-37), and parables are subject to even more levels of interpretation than the terms we are investigating. On the other hand, the saving grace of the commandment comes in the two words at the end. It does not enjoin us simply to love our neighbor, but to love our neighbor *as ourself* (Matt 19:19 and parallels). But that, alas!, simply makes the commandment even more problematical. How and in what way and to what extent should we "love"—whatever that means—ourself? A reader might be more at home in Tibetan.

Other terms are just as difficult. "*What is Truth*, said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer."³ Personally, I do not think he was jesting, but wanted a clear and straightforward response. If he had asked Jesus of Nazareth "What are facts?" Jesus would have had little problem in replying. That St John's is the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador is a fact. That a hundred cents make a dollar is a fact. But truth and facts, though overlapping, are not the same thing, any more than *veritas* and *factum* (or, indeed, *res*) are synonyms in Latin.

Those who wish to study non-Christian religions are faced with just the same problem. All religions, without exception, are

3. Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsells Civill and Morall* (1625), Essay I, the first sentence.

replete with technical terms which, if they can be translated into English at all, can be translated only in a gravely limited way. Three examples will suffice: *dharma* in Hinduism and Buddhism, *dao* in Confucianism and Daoism, and *fanā* in Muslim mysticism. It is perfectly possible to translate these terms as “rule,” “way,” and “annihilation,” but in all cases one barely scratches the surface of what the term really signifies. Indeed, the scratching of the surface itself can sometimes be grossly misleading.

To come closer to home, the same is true of a huge number of words in the Christian Scriptures. Saint John tells us that in the beginning was the Word (John 1:1). But “the Word”—*ho Logos* in Greek—had a richness of connotation, Jewish, Stoic, and Platonic, which is lost in translation and lost to most of us today. The same is true when Saint Paul speaks of “faith”—*pistis* in Greek—or when Saint John, once again, tells us that God is light (1 John 1:5). What sort of light? Does he mean sunlight, electric light, glow-worm light, the light of a candle, all of these, or something quite different? Does he mean, perhaps, *uncreated* Light, different entirely in quality from any created Light, and—as uncreated—participating in the very nature of God himself? Those Eastern Christian mystics known as hesychasts certainly thought so, and their entire spiritual technique was centered upon experiencing in their own soul the uncreated light of God,⁴ which, when all was said and done, was a direct participation in the nature of God himself. They did not experience the *essence* of God—God as He is in himself, *sicuti est* (1 John 3:2)—but they did experience God in his manifestations, his *energies*; and just as my little finger is truly part of me, yet not all of me, so the Light of God is part of God, a true experience of God, though not an experience of all of God, which is more than our mortal natures can bear.

It follows, therefore, that in matters of religion and spirituality—and spirituality is no more than religion in practice—the

4. The matter is explained in more detail in David N. Bell, *Many Mansions: An Introduction to the Development and Diversity of Medieval Theology, West and East*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Spencer, 1996), chap. IX, 173–91.

simplest phrases can be the most misleading. Or, if not misleading, misunderstood. There is no doubt that this is true of the Cistercian tradition, which is the especial subject of this book. Take, for example, a saying which few who read these words will appreciate, since it comes from one whom most Cistercians love to hate, and who, among many Cistercians, is known only by means of a doctrine of ignorance. I mean Armand-Jean de Rancé, abbot of la Trappe from 1664 to his death in 1700. In a quite wonderful letter, Rancé, speaking of penitence or penance—the same word in French—says that discernment, when free from all laxity and every fleshly indulgence, is a greater virtue than penitence.⁵ This is not what many would expect from the abbot of la Trappe, especially those who have never read his works and who, therefore, are better qualified than those who have to express an opinion. Indeed, they might expect him to say that penance or penitence is more important than anything at all. But the key to the statement consists of five technical terms in seventeenth-century French: *discrétion*, *relâchement*, *condescendance charnelle*, *vertu*, and *pénitence*. Without a clear and deep understanding of these terms, we can gain but a clouded and shallow understanding of what Rancé is actually saying. It is not for nothing that discernment—*discretio* in Latin—was called “the mother of the virtues,” and those who wish for proof of this point may read it for themselves in Chapter Two of this present book. In this matter, Rancé, as in so many things, is at one with Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.

The same is true of the technical vocabulary of the earlier Cistercian Fathers, those writing in Latin and not the vernacular. Indeed, there are single terms on which whole books have been written, and two examples alone must suffice. What do we mean, and how do we poor unfortunates, we harmless drudges,⁶ who try to translate their works, render into English *affectus* and *caritas*?

5. Armand-Jean de Rancé, Letter 75/2; *Abbé de Rancé: Correspondance*, ed. Alban J. Krailsheimer, vol. 1 (Paris, 1993), 664.

6. See Samuel Johnson's definition of a “Lexicographer” in his famous dictionary.

And just to make things worse, what on earth do we do with *affectus caritatis*? Just a few years ago, in 2005, Damien Boquet wrote an excellent study, almost four hundred pages long, on *L'Ordre de l'affect au Moyen Âge*,⁷ and he was primarily concerned with only one writer, Aelred of Rievaulx. And if we were to begin listing the books on *caritas*, we would be here for as long as *caritas* itself.

It is precisely here that Sr. Edith Scholl has come to our rescue. That it is but a partial rescue is clear, for her investigations into word after word can have no end, and some of the words will not be fully understood until we have passed beyond the narrow confines of this world and stand upon a wider shore. Yet in this invaluable compilation, we find discussion of *voluntas*, *discretio*, *meditatio*, *quies*, *misericordia*, *devotio*, *pietas*, *sponte*, the spiritual senses, *dulcedo*, *excessus mentis* and *raptus*, and—a fitting ending—*fruitio Dei*. All these terms can be translated into English simply and misleadingly by one or two words. But if *pietas* is no more the “piety,” in the way that we use the word today, then we have not even begun to scratch the surface of the richness of the term in twelfth-century Cistercian writers, or, indeed, of those in seventeenth-century France, who spoke of *piété* in a way utterly alien to most of us in a twenty-first-century Anglophone or Francophone world.

What the studies of Sr. Edith make clear is that, when we try to read the writings of the great Cistercian *spirituels*, what we read is a sort of spiritual shorthand. Or, if one prefers, they are written in a language whose apparent meaning may sometimes appear obvious, but whose depths go on forever. After all, if we are talking about finding God, whether in himself or ourselves, then we are talking about finding a being who is infinite. The mortal mind, however, is decidedly finite, and our knowledge of God can never, therefore, have an end. “Veil after veil will lift—but there must be / Veil upon veil behind.”⁸ Indeed, even

7. Damien Boquet, *L'Ordre de l'affect au Moyen Âge. Autour de l'anthropologie affective d'Aelred de Rievaulx* (Caën, 2005).

8. Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, first published 1879, Book VIII.

the most profound mystical experience can only be a progress, an investigation, not a conclusion, and much the same is true of the writings of the great Cistercian spiritual teachers—or, indeed, of the great spiritual teachers of every tradition. As Sherlock Holmes said, “There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world.”⁹

Sister Edith restricts herself to the Cistercian authors of the twelfth century, but there is more to the Cistercian tradition than that. There is as much sense in Rancé as in Bernard, and perhaps an even greater knowledge of the world. Some would say that Bernard transcends his times as Rancé does not, but that is arguable. Both were very much men of their age, and much that has been written of Bernard in recent years is no more than a caricature of the real man. Personally, I would argue that Rancé, who knew and loved Bernard’s writings,¹⁰ understood his character better and more accurately than many scholars and devotees of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is all a matter of perspective. We must know where we are, whence we come, and whither we go, and how we perceive a person or an event, and how we express that perception, can only be affected by our time and our place. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*

The experience of such perspective is the purpose, or, at least, one of the purposes of *lectio divina*, “spiritual reading.” When a monk or nun reads the Scriptures or the writings of any enlightened being, he or she does not read for information, but for transformation. This is the meaning of *ruminatio*, as Sr. Edith makes clear in her third chapter. But she is discreet, she is delicate, she bows her head to our modern sensibilities. What is the real essence of *ruminatio*? Only if we become like bipedal cows can we appreciate it. When it comes to the Word, we should chew it thoroughly and then gulp it down; regurgitate it, chew it over

9. Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Case of Identity,” the last sentence. Hafiz is the Persian poet and mystic Muḥammad Shamsuddīn Ḥāfīz, who died in 1389.

10. See David N. Bell, *Understanding Rancé: The Spirituality of the Abbot of La Trappe in Context* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 133–36.

again (this is the nasty bit), and gulp it down again; regurgitate it yet again, and again, and again; and only when we have absorbed the entire essence of it can we pass the dross out of our backsides. The spiritual path is harder to follow than a lifetime of back-breaking physical labor. Any Christian worth his or her salt must be a stumbling-block to the Jews and a folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23), but no one ever said that Christianity was an easy path to follow.

So how do we follow this path? Sister Edith's guidebook provides us with some invaluable keys. She offers us "Words for the Journey." We are *curva* and must become *recta*. We must subsume our *voluntas propria* in *voluntas communis*. If we are images of God, we are flawed images, and our likeness to our Creator (but not the image) has been lost. How do we regain the lost likeness? By using *discretio* which, as we have seen, is the mother of the virtues, and by showing *miser cordia* to all who need it. And let us not forget that God will forgive us our trespasses only if we forgive those who trespass against us. It is an awesome responsibility. And what do we have to guide us? *Meditatio* on the word of God, which was not revealed to Christians alone, much less to Cistercians alone, but to all those who, knowing or unknowing, hear the word of the Father in Heaven and keep it (Luke 11:28). But to hear God's word, in whatever language, we must cultivate *quies*—the Orthodox East has much more to say on this than the West—and we must learn to respond *spon te* to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

But listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit is a most dangerous undertaking. Long ago, in the fourth century, a certain council, the first Ecumenical Council held at Nicaea (now Iznik in Turkey) in 325, condemned a certain theological idea. This idea, which had a long previous history, maintained that the Trinity was a hierarchy: the Father was at the top of the Trinitarian tree, the Son was subordinate to the Father, and the Holy Spirit subordinate to the Son. The heresy was linked with the ideas of a fourth-century presbyter of Alexandria called Arius, and is therefore known as Arianism. The Council was right to condemn it,

and rightly condemned it has remained for some seventeen centuries. Yet Arianism is, in fact, alive and well, especially with regard to the person of the Holy Spirit. Even those who are prepared to admit that Father and Son are equal in all things are sometimes in doubt as to the Holy Spirit. What, after all, do we have here? Fathers and sons are well known—we have only to look around us to see too many of them—but who or what is the Holy Spirit, and in what way does he, she, or it come into being? For some churches, the power of the Holy Spirit enables them to dominate serpents; for others, it demands that they speak in tongues. But the Holy Spirit is more than this. If we are to believe the doctrines set forth at the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople held in 381, the Holy Spirit is wholly God. To be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, therefore, is to be indwelt by him who created the worlds from nothing, in whose hands the Big Bang was but the flicker of a firefly's tail, whose ministers are flaming fire, and at whose breath the worlds crumble. For too many of us, the presence of the Holy Spirit is no more than a nice hot-water bottle on a cold night, a comfortable electric blanket, but the reality, alas, is very different. The Holy Spirit is a consuming fire, the whirlwind of the will of God, a tidal wave of transformation, containing within itself the serried ranks of the angels, and the whole power and terror of the tremendous Trinity. If you listen to *this* voice, you may never be the same again.

But let us go back to the words we quoted earlier: *curva*, *recta*, *voluntas propria*, *voluntas communis*, *discretio*, *miseriordia*, and so on. Some who read this may feel they are indeed reading Tibetan: the words are not here translated and their meaning is obscure. If we are *curva*, it is simply the consequence of osteoarthritis, and to become *recta* we need only take the appropriate drugs. This is not quite the case, and Sr. Edith's studies will show us why it is not quite the case. In this book we find the essence, or part of the essence, of many of the key terms of Cistercian spirituality; and since all spiritualities share certain basic fundamentals—it cannot be otherwise, given our nature as human beings—what she says is often generally as well as specifically

applicable. But this leads us to an important point. There is not just one Cistercian spirituality; there are many. That they overlap is not in doubt, but the fact remains that the spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux was not the spirituality of William of Saint-Thierry; and the spirituality of William of Saint-Thierry was not the spirituality of Aelred of Rievaulx; and the spirituality of Ælred of Rievaulx was certainly not the spirituality of that neglected master, Isaac of Stella. Four lamas, four doctrines (*chos lugs*). And, if we may take it a stage further, the spirituality of the twelfth-century Cistercians was not the spirituality of such thirteenth-century scholastics as Jean de Mirecourt, Guy de l'Aumône, Jean de Limoges (well worth reading), Jean de Weerde, Humbert de Prully, and Jacques Fournier, who would become Pope Benedict XII. And the spirituality of Jean de Mirecourt was certainly not that of Armand-Jean de Rancé. There are some temptations, says Jean de Mirecourt, which are so great that only a miracle can enable us to overcome them; and if that miracle does not occur, and if we succumb, then we are not in sin. Rancé would not agree.

Yet just as we can take a dozen building blocks and make out of them either a mosque or a monastery, so the basic building blocks remain constant. Our will (*voluntas*) remains our will. Stillness (*quies*) remains stillness, whether we call it *quies* or, in Greek, *hesychia*. Rumination (*ruminatio*)—chewing things over, again and again—remains rumination; and so on. The pages which follow well describe these building blocks, and what use we make of them is up to us. But where do they lead? Here we must be a little cautious.

Sister Edith ends her series of studies with *excessus mentis* and *fruitio Dei*: ecstasy and our fulfillment in God. That Bernard of Clairvaux experienced ecstatic rapture is not in doubt. So did others. William of Saint-Thierry, that Carthusian *manqué*, certainly did, and wrote about it at length, especially in the pages of the *Letter to the Brethren of Mont-Dieu* (the *Golden Letter*)—a work, it must be remembered, not addressed to Cistercians. But we hear little about it in the writings of Jean de Mirecourt and his

thirteenth-century confrères, and less in the works of the Great Reformer, the abbot of la Trappe. In a biography of Rancé published in 1814, Charles Butler observed, justly, that prayer at la Trappe

was both continual and fervent; but it never savoured of refinement, and, in all the agiography [*sic*] of La Trappe, a single instance of mystical excess, or even of mystical prayer, is not recorded.¹¹ . . . Far from endeavouring to penetrate the cloud with Moses, or to be admitted into the cellar of the Great King (such are the expressions of mystical writers), the monk of La Trappe aimed at no more, than to offer his prayer with the humble publican in the lowest part of the temple, or to fall, with the prodigal, at the feet of his offended but merciful father.¹²

Butler is perfectly correct. Nowhere in his great work, *De la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique*, first published in 1683, does Rancé expostulate on mystical rapture. Not at all. The work of the monk or nun is simple and straightforward: to follow Christ. Indeed, for any Christian *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ, is the beginning and end of the path, and, for a Christian, to imitate Christ is to imitate God himself.

What place, then, does the monastic way hold in this everlasting quest? The answer is simple. The monastery is the equivalent of total immersion when learning a language. Tibetan, with which we began this chapter, can be learned in two ways: from books (and for those interested, there are, these days, many useful guides), or by being parachuted into a monoglot Tibetan village near Lhasa (if such still exists, given Chinese incursions) and expected to fend for oneself. There is no doubt that total immersion was the view

11. This is not quite true. There are one or two very rare examples, and Rancé both recognized and acknowledged the reality of extraordinary graces.

12. Charles Butler, *The Lives of Dom Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé, Abbot Regular and Reformer of the Monastery of La Trappe; and of Thomas Kempis, the Reputed Author of 'The Imitation of Christ'.* With Some Account of the Principal Religious and Military Orders of the Roman Catholic Church (London, 1814), 63–64.

of Bernard of Clairvaux, and there is no doubt that it was also the view of the abbot of la Trappe. Nowadays, admittedly, the situation is a little different—the monks and nuns of the twenty-first century are not the monks and nuns of twelfth- or seventeenth-century France, and things have changed. Yet the essence remains. The monastery is no more and no less than an intensification of everyday life. It is truly a microcosm, and in a microcosm things are concentrated, consolidated, and condensed.

Few are clearer on this point than Baldwin of Forde, later archbishop of Canterbury, a twelfth-century spiritual guide whose solid commonsense and down-to-earth spirituality does not always endear him to modern-day seekers. Baldwin has virtually nothing to say about *excessus mentis*, hardly any words about *raptus*, but he has a very great deal to say about loving one's God and loving one's neighbor, and if one thing is eminently clear, it is that one cannot love the former without loving the latter. Since God himself needs nothing, Baldwin tells us, he has put in his place our brothers and sisters and neighbors who *do* have needs. It is they—images of God—who stand in the place of God. If, then, we do not love our neighbor whom we do see, who stands in God's place, how shall we love God whom we do not see, who does not reveal his presence to us, and who has no needs?

How else can we offer benefits to God, except by offering them to those in whom God does have a need, who in himself needs nothing? It is God who, in his members, asks and receives; [it is He] who is loved and despised. In the love of our neighbour, therefore, as in the link of love and the bond of peace, we maintain and preserve in ourselves the love (*caritas*) of God and unity of spirit.¹³

But what does it mean to love one's neighbor? We have already mentioned some of the problems, but here we may look for aid to John Henry Cardinal Newman, though we must, of course, make allowance for his Victorian English:

13. Baldwin of Forde, *Sermo* 15.65-66; *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 99 (1991), 245.

It is obviously impossible to love all men in any strict and true sense. What is meant by loving all men, is, to feel well-disposed to all men, to be ready to assist them, and to act towards those who come in our way, as if we loved them. We cannot love those about whom we know nothing; except indeed we view them in Christ, as the objects of His Atonement, that is, rather in faith than in love. And love, besides, is a habit, and cannot be obtained without actual *practice*, which on so large a scale is impossible.¹⁴

Love, therefore, or, more precisely, that love which is *caritas*, begins at home, with our friends, our fellows, our coworkers, our sisters and brothers in the monastery, our cats, dogs, birds, fish, trees, flowers, and stones. For let us make no bones about it, when God gave this world into our care and keeping, he did not restrict that care and keeping to bipedal hominids. Newman could not have been more correct when he said that love depended on *practice* (his italics), and, save, perhaps, in the greatest of the saints, a lifetime of practice will not suffice for us to love God and our neighbor as God has loved us. So let us not be too hasty to step forth into that “unknown region, where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow.”¹⁵ Our business is more down to earth.

The monastery is no more and no less than a unique school of love, a *schola caritatis*—the phrase is that of William of Saint-Thierry¹⁶—and so too is the world. The only difference is that the monastery is a school of total immersion where there is no hiding-place, no concealment. The world, a wondrous miracle of its divine Creator, offers all the same opportunities, yet they are there more scattered, more diffused, more dispersed, and much easier to avoid.

The chapters of Sister Edith’s collection show us where we need to go. Where else to start but with the will? With no will,

14. John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, ii.54-55, quoted in Erich Przywara, *A Newman Synthesis* (New York, 1945), 248–49.

15. Walt Whitman, “Darest Thou Now, O Soul.”

16. William of Saint-Thierry, *De natura et dignitate amoris*, §26.

there is no way; and without a way, we are wandering in the dark. And when we say will, we mean free will. Our will might have been warped and deformed by the first sin, however it be interpreted, but it did not lose its freedom altogether. Augustine of Hippo was quite wrong when he condemned the entire human race as *una massa peccati*, “one lump of sin.”¹⁷ We are not, and on this matter, as on others, Saint Augustine was talking nonsense. That we have made a hideous hash of things is not in doubt, but we are not one hundred percent corrupt, and we do not inherit Original Guilt. Augustine has much to answer for. But the use of our human free-will, that sure reflection of our creation in the image of God (few perceived that better than Bernard of Clairvaux), must be tempered with discernment, and only by the use of that discernment can we ponder the word and God, and the Word of God, and not be entirely led astray. And how do we ponder that word?

First, we must learn to quiet our agitated minds—go to the hesychasts for guidance here—and if we cannot do that, then let us ask for help. “Prayer,” said Newman, “is the very essence of all religion,”¹⁸ and if he was not quite correct in this matter (and he was not), then his statement remains true for the Christian tradition at least. Indeed, it is the greatest blasphemy to think that we can make our way through this life without divine assistance. It is also stupid. God is there to help us. As the Qur’an tells us, again and again, he is *ar-Rahmān, ar-Rahīm*, “the Merciful, the Compassionate,” and if he offers us his mercy, which is inseparable from his help, then we are fools not to take advantage of his offer. He will not leave us comfortless. And so it goes on. From mercy to devotion, from devotion to the experience of God, and, in the fullness of time, from the experience of God here on earth to the enjoyment of God in a different state and another plane of being.

17. Augustine of Hippo, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, I, *quaest. 2 argumentum*, and §16.

18. John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching Considered*, ii.68, in Przywara, 242.

Whether we are granted an *excessus mentis* on the path is irrelevant. Indeed, it is none of our business. If God decides to grant it, he will; if he does not, he will not, and that is all there is to it. Bernard might have been what we may call a “natural mystic,” and the same is true of Simeon the New Theologian and a few others. It was not true of Rancé, and it is not true of most of us. But the Cistercian way is not a quest for spiritual “highs,” or altered states of consciousness. When the lawyer asked Jesus of Nazareth what he should do to attain eternal life, Jesus did not tell him to sit cross-legged on the floor, contemplate his navel, and seek to rise above himself into that pseudo-Dionysian dazzling darkness which so beguiles so many of us today. On the contrary. What was his reply? “Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). It is enough.

Sister Edith’s book, therefore, may be of interest or it may be of use. If it is of interest, it will be rather like reading a “Teach Yourself How to Drive,” while sitting in an armchair and lacking a car. Entertaining, perhaps, but unproductive. The armchair does not go anywhere, and by the end of the book one is still sitting in exactly the same place as one was at the beginning. If the book is to be of use, it demands work, effort, stubborn bloody-mindedness, dedication, blood, tears, toil, and sweat. Saint John of the Ladder, echoing Saint James, put the matter in a nutshell: “Reading must lead you to action, for you are a doer.”¹⁹

That, indeed, is what is taught and what is offered by all great spiritual teachers, though they may use strange vehicles for their teaching. When the great ninth-century Muslim mystic, Abū’l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad an-Nūrī, was asked by one of his pupils where he learned the secret of his absolute *quies*, his utter stillness in meditation, he replied: “I learned it from a cat at a mouse-hole: yet he was more still than I.”²⁰ All creation is God’s

19. John of the Ladder (John Climacus), *Klimax (Scala Paradisi)*, 27.78, echoing James 1.22.

20. Farīdu’-d-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *The Tadhkiratu’l-Awliya of Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Farīdu’-d-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* (London, 1907), vol. 2, 52 (in Persian).

handiwork, and we would do well to heed Saint Bernard when he tells us that we will find more in woods than in books, and that trees and stones will teach us what we cannot learn from professors.²¹ The trees and stones are also words for the journey.

Sister Edith, however, has provided us with a book, and a very sensible book it is. The words she offers us to experience are truly words for the journey, though like any journey, they are not without risk. Offering our human will to God is an extraordinarily risky business, for we may rest assured that our prayers will be answered. The problem (for us) is that what we will receive will not be what we want, but what we need, and the two are often utterly dissimilar. As we have seen, invoking the Holy Spirit is a risky business, for he, she, or it, may come as a consuming fire, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). Aslan, after all, is not a *tame* lion. And as for heeding the injunction of all the great spiritual teachers, viz., to know ourselves,²² that may be the most risky thing of all. To know ourselves, as William of Saint-Thierry and so many others make perfectly clear, is to know both our God-given grandeur and our utter misery. It is to know what we could be, and what we could make of this world (of which we are stewards), and what we have actually made of ourselves and the world in which we live. But all I can say to that is to quote the words of the tenth-century Muslim mystic, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdi’l-Jabbār al-Niffārī: “In taking a risk, there is part of salvation.”²³

21. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ep.* 106.2.

22. See Pierre P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même: de Socrate à saint Bernard* (Paris, 1974) (three volumes).

23. *The Mawāqif and Mukhātabāt of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdi’l-Jabbār al-Niffārī*, ed. and trans. Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1935; repr. 1978), 7, of the Arabic text, the sixth *mawqif*. “Salvation” (*najāh*) can also be translated as rescue, deliverance, redemption, or safety.

INTRODUCTION

In the fifty-eighth chapter of his *Rule*, Saint Benedict directs that newcomers to the monastic life be told all the rugged and arduous ways by which the journey to God is made. The first Cistercian authors—Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint-Thierry, Ælred of Rievaulx, Gueric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, Gilbert of Hoyland, John and Baldwin of Forde, Gertrud of Helfta—knew these ways well, as well as the dangers and pitfalls of the journey, but they also knew the joys scattered along the way. They knew too that the journey is not only *to* God, but *with* God, in and through the Christ who called himself the Way (John 14:6). Above all, they never lost sight of the journey's goal: eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. For it was a journey they themselves were making. They had been taught by those who had made the journey before them, and in their writings they transmitted this knowledge, enriched by their own experience, to future generations.

When I started reading and studying these authors years ago, I was struck by their rich vocabulary of Latin words, more or less technical terms, words rich with resonances from Scripture, the liturgy, and patristic and earlier monastic authors: words for which no exact equivalents exist in English.¹ It seemed to me that these words could be a key to a deeper understanding of their message. So gradually I began to dream an impossible dream: a work that would do for these words something of what

1. Interestingly, in recent years, the Latin term *lectio divina* has become current, and “affect,” a transcription of *affectus*, is also widely used.

Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* does for biblical terms, giving each word a range of definitions and sources, observing its development up to the time of Cîteaux, and then, preeminently, its meaning and use in the works of the early Cistercians. Such a work, I hoped, could serve as a companion to the translations being published in the Cistercian Fathers Series, enabling non-specialists to read those translations with greater understanding and appreciation. In fact, it might prove a fruitful source for approaching the whole monastic ethos.

My original list ran to over three hundred words.² I soon realized that this was overly ambitious! However, over the ensuing years, I have researched a number of words, and completed twelve articles, eleven of which have been published in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, and one in *American Benedictine Review*. From time to time, readers have told me that these articles are helpful. Although I have not given up my research, and hope to produce further studies in the years ahead, it seemed to me that there was enough material already to be assembled in one volume.

Although each article is complete in itself, it does seem that they may be arranged in some sort of sequence, regarding them as stages on the journey to God that, as the Cistercians see it, is a reforming of our original uprightness and likeness to God. The journey begins with turning our wills from our own self-centeredness to God's loving will (*A Will and Two Ways*). A basic virtue, needed at all stages of the journey, but perhaps especially in the beginning, is discretion (*The Mother of Virtues*). Meditation (*Pondering the Word*) and *Stillness* are means to grow in the knowledge and love of God, and most necessary is a deep awareness of both our misery and God's mercy (*Mercy within Mercy*). As we make progress, we act less from constraint and more from *devotio*. It becomes almost second nature to consent to whatever God asks (*Consensus*); our wills spontaneously embrace his (*Spontaneity*). Our spiritual senses develop (*Sensing God; The Sweetness of*

2. See CSQ 27:1, 90–92.

the Lord) and we are taken beyond ourselves (*Going beyond One-self*); we find our *Delight in the Lord*.

I am grateful to everyone who has encouraged me to pursue this project, and in a special way to Dr. Marsha Dutton and Dr. David Bell, without whose support and practical advice it would never have gotten off the ground. The successive editors of *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* have been most helpful. Above all, I want to thank Mother Agnes Day, my abbess for twenty-two years, and my community for their unfailing love all along my own journey, and for allowing me time for research and writing.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latinum</i>
CF	Cistercian Fathers Series
<i>Conf</i>	<i>Confessions of Saint Augustine</i> , trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997)
CS	Cistercian Studies Series
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
DSp	<i>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
Gray	<i>The Homilies of Saint Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezechiel</i> , tr. Theodosia Gray (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990)
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Saint Bernard</i> , trans. Bruno Scott James (London: Burns Oates, 1953)
Luddy	<i>Saint Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons and Principal Festivals of the Year</i> , trans. Ailbe Luddy, 3 volumes (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, 1923)
NPF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
<i>Psalms</i>	<i>Expositions on the Psalms</i> , Saint Augustine, trans. Maria Boulding, 6 volumes (Hyde Park NY: New City, 2000–4)
Ramsey	<i>The Conferences of Cassian</i> , trans. Boniface Ramsey (NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1997)
<i>Sermons</i>	<i>Sermons of Saint Augustine</i> , trans. Edmund Hill, 11 volumes (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–7)

Chapter 1

A WILL AND TWO WAYS

*Voluntas Propria, Voluntas Communis*¹

Where there's a will, the saying goes, there's a way. Christian tradition would rather say that where there is a will, the human faculty of free choice, there is the possibility of two diametrically opposed ways, two contradictory modes of directing one's will—and that the way one chooses to go is of crucial importance. Since it is the wrong way, *voluntas propria*, that receives the most attention in the tradition, we will look at it first.

When used in the pejorative sense, *voluntas propria* is not an easy term to translate or to explain. It is often translated “self-will,” but this translation is apt to be misleading. It comes closer to what Gerald May calls “willfulness” and describes as “the setting of oneself apart from the fundamental essence of life in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence.”² This description is not so different from Saint Bernard's: “By self-will I mean a will that is not common to us with God and our fellow human beings, but exclusively our own: when we will whatever we will, not for the glory of God or the profit of our neighbor, but solely for our own sake.”³

Having a will of one's own is certainly a good thing, a necessary part of being human. As Saint Augustine points out, the precepts of the law would not be given to us unless we possessed

1. Many of the references for this article were supplied by Irénée Rigolot of the Abbey of N.-D. de Timadeuc, to whom I wish to express my gratitude. See Coll 54 (1993): 356.

2. Gerald May, *Will and Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 6.

3. Res 3.3; Luddy 2:201-2.

wills of our own whereby to obey God's commandments.⁴ "It is certainly the freedom of the will that is being cited whenever someone is told, 'Be not overcome by evil' (Rom 12:21). For to be willing or unwilling has to do with each one's will."⁵ Grace does not deprive us of our free will.⁶ "Indeed, when one does [an act] of one's own free will, then it deserves to be called a good work and one for which we are to expect a reward."⁷ Saint Bernard declares: "A person's will alone would not be capable of gaining him salvation, but he would never stand a chance of gaining it without his will."⁸ It is the will that is saved.

Yet the will is created with the possibility of opposing itself to God's will, with disastrous results, as Augustine emphasizes. "Nothing enslaves the spirit to passion except *propria voluntas* and free will."⁹ Sin is to be imputed to the *voluntas propria* of the one who commits the fault.¹⁰

The experience of evil, Augustine teaches, takes place when one prefers one's own will to the divine will and suffers the consequences of that choice:

It is impossible for the will of a person not to come tumbling down on him with a thunderous and devastating crash if he so exalts it as to prefer it to that of the One who is his superior.¹¹

For Saint Gregory the Great as well, sin is an effect of the misuse of *voluntas propria*.¹² Elsewhere, he speaks of *appetitus*

4. Grat et lib arb 4.8; FC 59:259.

5. Grat et lib arb 3.5; FC 59:257.

6. Grat et lib arb 5.2; FC 59:264.

7. Grat et lib arb 2.4, FC 59:255; Gen ad litt 11:21, ACW 42:153.

8. Gra 9; SBOp 3:191; CF 19:92.

9. Augustine, Grat et lib arb 1, 11, 21. (My translation.)

10. Augustine, Gen ad litt 8.14; ACW 42:53.

11. Gen ad litt 8.14; ACW 42:53.

12. Gregory the Great, Mo 9.21.10, CCSL 143:479-80; Mo 15.26.17; CCSL 143A: 767-8.

proprius,¹³ *amor proprius*,¹⁴ *arbitrum proprium*.¹⁵ Bernard, for his part, says that “when we are bad we are rightly punished, since we have become so of our own free choice.”¹⁶

It is especially in the monastic tradition that *voluntas propria* becomes a technical term, and the renunciation of it, the fundamental ascetical practice. Some of the sayings of the Desert Fathers illustrate their teaching:

Abba Poemen said: “The will of man is a brazen wall between him and God and a stone of stumbling. When a man renounces it, he is also saying to himself, ‘By my God, I can leap over the wall’ (Ps 17:29). If a man’s will is in line with what is right, then he can really labor.”¹⁷

The demons do not fight against us as long as we are doing our own will. Our own wills become the devils, and it is these that attack us in order that we may fulfill them.¹⁸

To throw yourself before God, not to measure your progress, to leave behind all self-will, these are the instruments for the work of the soul.¹⁹

No saying better illustrates the Desert Fathers’ attitude towards *voluntas propria* than this quotation: “If you see a young monk climbing up to heaven by his own will, catch him by the foot and pull him down to earth: it is not good for him.”²⁰

John Cassian expands on the advantages to be gained by renouncing one’s will; for one thing, no quarrels arise between

13. Reg past 1.7; ACW 11:34.

14. Reg past 2.8; ACW 11:74.

15. Ir 6.35; CCSL 144:570-1.

16. Gra 18; CF 19:74.

17. CS 59:146.

18. *Western Asceticism*, ed. and trans. Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 118.

19. Abba Poemen; CS 59:145.

20. PL 73:932.

those who follow not their own will.²¹ He may have had in mind that delightful story from the desert:

There were two old men living together in one cell, and never had there risen even the paltriest contention between them. So the one said to the other, "Let us have one quarrel the way other men do." But the other said, "I do not know how one makes a quarrel." The first said, "Look, I set a tile between us and say, 'That is mine,' and do thou say, 'It is not thine, it is mine.'" And thence arises contention and squabble." So they set a tile between them, and the first one said, "That is mine," and the second made reply, "I hope that is mine." And the first said, "It is not thine: it is mine." To which the second made answer, "If it is thine, take it." After which they could find no way of quarreling.²²

"What effort, or what hard command," Cassian asks, "Can disturb the peace of one who has no will of his own?"²³ Those who withdraw from their own likes and desires, and whose will depends on the will of the abbot, practice the best kind of mortification, a "glorious and valuable violence," and take the kingdom of heaven by force (Matt 11:12).²⁴

Voluntas propria is often linked to *concupiscentia*, "the unruly corporal appetite that stands in opposition to the law of God and in which sin reigns."²⁵ This connection is based on Sirach 18:30: "Go not after your lusts, but turn away from your own will," and Galatians 5:16-18: "Walk in the spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh . . . [The spirit and the flesh] are contrary to one another, so that you do not the thing that you would." Cassian, as he describes the life of the Egyptian monks, gives this explanation of why the elder's "anxiety and the chief part of his

21. Conl 16.6.4-5; Ramsey 561.

22. *De vitis patrum* 3.96; *The Desert Fathers*, trans. Helen Waddell (1936: Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1957), 142.

23. Conl 24.23; Ramsey 843.

24. Conl 24.26.12; Ramsey 850.

25. Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Rule of the Master*, trans. Luke Eberle, CS 6:43.

instruction . . . will be to teach [the novice] first to conquer his own wishes"; a monk "cannot bridle the desire of his concupiscence unless he has first learnt by obedience to mortify his wishes."²⁶ Both the Master and Saint Benedict join these two admonitions: "Do not gratify the promptings of the flesh; hate the urgings of self-will" (RM 3.65-66; RB 4.59-60).

The Master comes close to identifying *voluntas proprium* and *concupiscentia*:

Because all self-will is carnal and issues from the body, its seductiveness leads us to commit what is wrong, and during the short span of this life it seems to the flesh sweet through its desires, only to be more bitter than gall afterwards and forever. Therefore it is right that our tongue should be under compulsion to cry out daily to the Lord: "Your will be done" (Matt 6:10).²⁷

Yet the Master also mentions the good results of renouncing self-will:

Whatever harm the persuasion of the ancient serpent has done us is removed, if we so will, for the will of the Lord heals us. As the apostle says: "You do not always carry out your good intentions" (Gal 5:17) We therefore pray that the will of the Lord will be done in us. If this his will is always done in us, on the day of judgment there will be no self-will to be condemned.²⁸

[Here on earth] the Lord . . . gives his grace without delay to those who ask for it, shows himself to those who seek him, opens to those who knock. These three gifts granted by the Lord are deserved by those who desire to do God's will, not their own.²⁹ And those who follow the Lord now will say in the other world, "'We have passed through fire

26. *Institutes* 4.8; NPF 11:221.

27. RM 90.51-54; CS 6:263-4.

28. RM Thp 26-30; CS 6:97.

29. RM 1.74-80; CS 6:110.

and water, and you have led us into a place of rest' (Ps 65:12), that is, 'We have passed through the bitter thwarting of our own will, and by serving in holy obedience we have come to the refreshment of your fatherly love.'"³⁰

Saint Benedict manifests a profound understanding of *voluntas propria* when, at the beginning of his *Rule*, he addresses himself to those who are renouncing their own wills (RB Prol. 3). The word he uses, *abrenuntians*, is not in the Vulgate (Luke 14:33 uses *renuntiat*). It is likely that Benedict is alluding to Cassian's third conference, *De tribus abrenuntiationibus*, "On the Three Renunciations." The first of these is the exterior renunciation of home, family, and property. The second is the renunciation of all the tendencies within us that are opposed to love as Saint Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13: anger, jealousy, self-seeking. All these Benedict sums up in the one expression *propriis voluntatibus*.³¹ He expects his monks to put aside immediately their own concerns and abandon their own wills at the call of obedience (RB 5.7; 7.31). No one in the monastery is to follow his own heart's desire (RB 3.8), for monks are not permitted to have even their own bodies or wills at their disposal (RB 33.4). On the other hand, during Lent Benedict invites them to offer to God of their own will—*propria voluntate*—something above their assigned measure (RB 49.6).

Following one's own will may seem to promise happiness; Ælred ironically comments: "To those attached to their own wills no food tastes better to the mind, none is relished more, none so delights and cheers the spirit."³² In reality, however, *voluntas propria* is diametrically opposed to our true good. Saint Peter Damian exclaims: "What tyrant is more cruel, what power more violent to a person than his own will? . . . The more obediently

30. RM 90.41-43; CS 6:263.

31. By the plural form, Benedict suggests not so much the will itself as its particular promptings and suggestions. See Timothy Fry, ed., *Rule of Saint Benedict 1980* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, Press, 1980), 157.

32. Quad 1; Ser Ined 56.

he obeys it, the more cruelly he is bound by its chains."³³ Gyrovagues are enslaved to their own wills (RB 1.11). "Within us," says Saint Bernard, "we have a castle that is opposed to us: that is our own will."³⁴ Elsewhere, he explains: "It is proper to God's eternally just law that he who does not want to accept its sweet rule will be the slave of his own will as a penance . . . and will have to bear unwillingly the unbearable burden of his own will."³⁵ Self-will "corrupts the heart and blinds the eyes of reason."³⁶ Seeking one's own will is tantamount to seeking one's own glory.³⁷ Ultimately, self-will leads to idolatry; it is "at enmity with God and wages a most relentless war against God As far as depends on it, it annihilates the Lord of Glory."³⁸

* * *

From the foregoing consideration of *voluntas propria*, we are in a better position to appreciate its opposite. It seems to have been Saint Bernard who first coined the term *voluntas communis*³⁹—common, that is, between God and ourselves. The accord of our will with God's is at the heart of the prayer Jesus gave his disciples: "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10) and at the heart of his own prayer, most explicitly at the time of his passion (Matt 26:42). Indeed, it was at the very heart of his mission and person: "I came not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me" (John 6:38).⁴⁰

33. S for Saint Benedict.

34. Sent 3.12; CF 55:198.

35. Dil 13.36; CF 13:128. Compare SC 82.5; CF 40:175.

36. Bernard, Res 2.8; Luddy 2:193.

37. Bernard, SC 4.3, CF 4:22; SC 24.8, CF 7:49; SC 19.7, CF 4:145.

38. Res 3.3; Luddy 2:202-3.

39. Res 2.8; Luddy 2:193.

40. Hans Urs von Balthasar brings out the profound implications of this idea in *Theo-Drama, Volume 2* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), especially 183 ff. Jesus "is not in charge of himself; he has handed himself over to Another."

Even more simply, the opposite of *voluntas propria* is love,⁴¹ the love that does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5) but rather the good of others; the love to which Saint Paul exhorts the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:24) and the Philippians (Phil 2:4) and which he also practiced (1 Cor 13:33). It is this love that made the early Christian community one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32), the love that manifested itself in the sharing of possessions: "Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own; but all things were common to all" (Acts 4:35).

These texts are constantly quoted and expanded on by subsequent writers. The apostolic fathers emphasize the aspect of community by using words with the prefix *syn*:

"Attend the common meetings (*synerkomenoi*), and join in discussing (*synzeteite*) what contributes to the common good (*koiné sympherontos*)."⁴²

"Toil together, wrestle together, run together, suffer together, rise together" (all *syn*- words).⁴³

Saint Gregory the Great commends those who leave their own interests, *propria*, to occupy themselves with the common good, *communio*.⁴⁴ He values the common good⁴⁵ and the common life⁴⁶ precisely because they are associated with love (*caritas*).

Writers on monastic life frequently refer to the text from Acts quoted above. For Cassian and for the whole tradition after him, as we shall see, it is in the primitive church of Jerusalem that the cenobitic life came into being:⁴⁷ "Monks alone maintain a lasting union in intimacy and possess all things in common, as they hold

41. Bernard equates *voluntas communis* with love: see Res 2.8; Luddy 2:193.

42. *Letter of Barnabas* 5.10; ACW 6:42.

43. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp* 6.1; ACW 1:98.

44. Ir 4.99.1886; CCSL 144:344.

45. Ir 6.29.647, CCSL 144:565-6; Mo 5.27.27; CCSL 143:251-2.

46. Ir 6.29.643; CCSL 144:564.

47. Conl 18.5.1; Ramsey 637.

that everything that belongs to their brethren is their own, and that everything that is their own is their brethren's."⁴⁸

Saint Augustine sums up his ideal of Christian community life in the lovely phrase "one mind and one heart in God."⁴⁹ In a letter to the young Lætus he develops his thought: monks renounce what is their own (*propria*) to facilitate achieving "our common treasure, which will last forever (*mansura communia*)." Those who renounce private affection gain "that union and sense of sharing of which it was said, 'They had but one soul and heart toward God.' Thus, your soul is not your own but is shared by all the brethren whose souls are also yours, or rather, whose souls form with yours not souls but one soul, the single soul of Christ."⁵⁰ Similarly, in his *Rule*, Augustine directs: "Make sure that no one is working for his own benefit, but that everything you do is for the common good, with more zeal and promptness than if each one of you were working for himself. For love, of which it is written that it is not self-seeking (1 Cor 13:5) must be understood as putting the common good before private interests, and not the other way round."⁵¹

Although Saint Benedict does not use the phrase *voluntas communis*, the ideal of a common will underlies his *Regula monasteriorum*. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that all its prescriptions are designed both to foster and to express the common will. It is specifically written for cenobites (RB 1.2, 13), by definition those who live a common life. Worship (RB 8-19), sleep (RB 22), meals (RB 24) are all in common; all the goods of the monastery are to be the common possession of all (RB 33.6, quoting Acts 4:32). The whole community is involved in decision making (RB 3); to be excluded from the community to a greater or lesser degree is considered a severe punishment (RB 23-27).

48. Conl 24.26.3; Ramsey 848.

49. C Faust Manich 5. See Adolar Zumkeller, *Augustine's Ideal of the Religious Life* (New York: Fordham UP, 1986) [hereafter *Ideal*] 323.

50. Ep 243.3-4; FC 32:220-1.

51. Reg 5.2; *Ideal* 293.

Obedience is an effective way to conform to the Lord's saying: "I came not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me" (John 6:38). Doing only what is endorsed by the common rule of the monastery is the eighth step of humility. The ideals of mutual service (RB 35) and mutual obedience (RB 71), ideals that are present throughout the *Rule*, reach their culmination in chapter 72: "No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else" (RB 72.7, echoing 1 Cor 10:24, 33; Phil 2:4; Rom 12:10).

* * *

Desiring to live Saint Benedict's *Rule* in its fullness and steeped in its spirit, the early Cistercians had a strong sense of community. Saint Robert and the other founders, united "by common counsel [*communi consilio*] and common consent [*communi assensu*] strove to bring to perfection what they had conceived with one spirit," as the *Exordium Cistercii* tells us. Later, the "one rule and similar usages" imposed by the *Carta Caritatis* were meant to further the one love binding together all the daughters of the New Monastery, Cîteaux.

The unity and unanimity achieved by renouncing *voluntas propria* were frequently enjoined and extolled: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory?" (1 Thess 2:19) asks Saint Bernard of his monks. "What indeed but your unity and unanimity."⁵² Speaking to them on Christmas Eve, he tells them: "The third night watch is zeal for the preservation of concord and unity. You keep this when, in the community, you give the will of each of your brothers preference over your own."⁵³

Idung of Prüfening also extols unity:

Unity, whose mother is charity, makes of many hearts one heart and of many souls one soul. The first monks in the church were the early church herself, that is, those of whom

52. Mich 2.1; Luddy 3:325.

53. Vig Nat 3.6; Luddy 1:336.

it is written: "They were all of one heart and one soul." Their unanimity made them monks, and all monks their imitators. Hence it is that an expounder of the psalms, in commenting on that verse in which occur the words "He who makes them live in unanimity in the house" substitutes *monks* for *unanimity* and said, "He who makes monks live in the house."⁵⁴

Saint Ælred's formula for communion of wills is *singula sunt omnium, omnia singulorum*: "Each of you, brothers, before entering the monastery, had a soul that was your own. And now, since you have been converted, the Holy Spirit has made, of all your hearts, one heart and one soul. This soul, our community, has all the virtues, and above all that unity and concord thanks to which all that belongs to each one in particular belongs to all, and what belongs to all belongs to each one."⁵⁵ This unity reaches its perfection in heaven.⁵⁶

William of Saint-Thierry is more inclined to the eremitical than to community life, but he does commend the common observance of the monastery (*communis institutionis*), pointing out that by following it, the monk is freed from trouble and anxiety.⁵⁷ Thus, little by little, the monk learns "to take charge of himself, to plan his life, to set his behavior in order."⁵⁸

"What singularity cannot embrace," says Gilbert of Hoyland, "community and charity do embrace. Let us seek then, in union of hearts, and we shall seek in unity of action."⁵⁹ Not only shall we seek, adds Isaac of Stella, "we shall all enjoy one and the same Good, that is, God, in common—this good, which is distributed to them, as appropriate to each one, by the One himself."⁶⁰

54. *Cistercians and Cluniacs*, trans. Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan and others, CF 33:84. Idung is here quoting Augustine; see En in Ps 132.1-3; *Psalms* III/20:175-7.

55. OS 2, PL 195:347-8; see also Ben 3, PL 195:249; Spec car 2.17.43, CF 17:194.

56. Anima 3.47; CF 22:255.

57. Ep frat 1.19.75-76; CF 12:37.

58. Ep frat 1.28.107; CF 12:47.

59. Quer; CF 34:16.

60. S 50.20; Sch 339:194.

When we give up our own will, Bernard teaches, “we lose nothing; on the contrary, we gain a great deal, because our wills are not destroyed, but only changed for the better, so that what was *propria* becomes *communis*.”⁶¹ The perfection of union between God and the soul consists of “communion of wills and agreement in charity, *communio voluntatum et consensus in caritate*.”⁶² In fact, “*voluntas communis* is nothing but love.”⁶³ Hence, whenever Bernard and the other Cistercians speak about love—and they do so constantly—*voluntas communis* is implied. If, as William says, “Love is nothing else than the will ardently fixed on the good,”⁶⁴ then when the will is freed from its *propria*, it “is now something more than a will”; it “reaches the stage at which it becomes love.”⁶⁵

None of the Cistercians, and perhaps no other medieval author, has written more eloquently or profoundly on *communis* than Baldwin of Forde, in his fifteenth tractate. Like his predecessors, he sees the common life of monks derived from the life of the early churches as described in the Acts, but he sees it more sublimely as “instituted by celestial models, brought down from heaven and adopted by us from the heavenly way of life of the holy angels,”⁶⁶ where “all want the same things and all are averse to the same things; what pleases one is displeasing to none, and what one wants, they all want. There is one purpose and one will for all; all feel the same thing, and all sense the same thingWhat is proper to each is common to all.”⁶⁷ Yet there is a still more sublime exemplar of common life, that of God himself, the life of the blessed Trinity, where “just as [the three persons] have one common essence and one common nature, so they have one common life.”⁶⁸

61. Res 2.8; Luddy 2:183.

62. SC 71:10; CF 40:56.

63. Res 2.8; Luddy 2:193.

64. Nat am 4; CF 30:56.

65. Ep frat 2.14-15; CF 12:92-94.

66. S 15.3; T 15, CF 41:157.

67. S 15.23-4; T 15; CF 41:164-5.

68. S 15.5, T 15; CF 41:158.

Baldwin distinguishes three kinds of sharing, *communio*: those of nature, grace, and glory.⁶⁹ Love of neighbor is based on the nature we have in common; if we do not love our neighbor, we do not truly love ourselves either.⁷⁰ Something more, however, is needed for the common life of a monastic community: a communion of grace: "From the fellowship (*communicatio*) of the Holy Spirit comes that communion that is essential to those who live communally."⁷¹ Baldwin goes on to describe the ideal of cenobitic life in a passage full of allusions to the *Rule* of Saint Benedict:

Since they have but one heart and one soul (Ac 4:32) and all things in common, there is concord and unanimity (*concordia et unanimitas*) throughout, and they always put the general profit and the common good before their own individual convenience. They so far renounce themselves and what is theirs that none of them, if indeed he is [truly] one of them, whether in [making] decisions or in [giving] advice, presumes to make a stubborn defense of his own opinion, nor to strive hard after his own will and the desires of his own heart, nor to have the least thing that could be called his own. Instead, as servants of God, they humble themselves for the sake of God under the hand of one of their fellow-servants, and in him all power is vested. His judgment alone determines the decisions, regulates the will, and governs the needs of all. He alone can want something or refuse it, for the others have renounced their own power and freedom [of will]. Thus, they are not permitted to want

69. S 15.26, T 15; CF 41:165.

70. S 15.30, T 15; CF 41:167.

71. S 15.51, T 15; CF 41:174. In another place, Baldwin relates this *communicatio* to the Eucharist:

"The chalice of benediction that we bless, is it not a sharing [*communicatio*] in the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16)?" It is a sharing, because it is given and received in common; a communion (*communio*), because it is possessed in common. It can also be called communion for another reason: the blood effects in us that charity by which all things become common, and what belongs to each becomes common to all. (Sac alt 2.4; Sch 94:358)

what they want, nor to be able [to do] what they are able [to do], nor to feel what they feel, nor to be what they are, nor to live by their own spirit, but by the Spirit of God. It is he who leads them to be sons of God (Rm 8:14), and it is he who is their love, their bond, and their communion. The greater their love, the stronger is their bond and the more perfect is their communion: and conversely, the greater their communion, the stronger is their bond and the more perfect is their love.⁷²

Baldwin poses a problem. If, according to Acts 4:32, “they had everything in common,” how can this assertion be reconciled with the following verse: “Distribution was made to each one according to his need”? The solution is that “by its judgment, charity knows how to convert individual ownership by making individual ownership serve a common end (*ut proprietates ad communionem conducant*).”⁷³

This, therefore, is the law of the common life: unity of spirit in the charity of God, the bond of peace in the mutual unflinching charity of all the brethren, the sharing of all the good that should be shared, and the total rejection of any idea of personal ownership in the way of life of holy religion.⁷⁴

This communion and sharing extend to all the members of the Church, on earth and in heaven; this communion of saints, and it is on their merits that Baldwin relies to make good his own sufficiency:

We need not be distressed in our heart; we need not be confined by the boundaries and limits of our insignificant righteousness. Charity extends our hope to the communion of the saints, and we can, therefore, share with them their

72. S 15.44, T 15; CF 41:171.

73. S 15.67-69, T 15; CF 41:181-2.

74. S 15.51, T 15; CF 41:177. This passage is quoted in the new *Constitutions* of the monks and nuns of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance (Rome, 1990); see Cst 13.1.

merits [in this present time] and their rewards in the time to come, sharing in the glory that shall be revealed to us It is then that God shall wipe away all the tears from the eyes of his saints (Rv 21:4). It is then that all the saints will be as one heart and one soul, and they will have all things in common when God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).⁷⁵

Étienne Gilson gives a lucid explanation of the teaching of the Cistercians, indeed of the whole tradition, on *voluntas propria* and *voluntas communis*:

What is the object of the Cistercian ascesis? Progressively to eliminate the *proprium* in order to install charity in its place. What is this *proprium*? Unlikeness—in virtue of which [the human being] will be different from God. But what, on the other hand, is [the human being]? A divine likeness. It is, therefore, perfectly clear that in such a doctrine there is a coincidence between the loss of “proper will” and the restoration of our true nature. To eliminate from self all that stands in the way of being really oneself, that is not to lose, but to find oneself once more.⁷⁶

When this is accomplished:

instead of willing a thing out of fear of another, or of willing a thing out of covetousness for something else, [the will] is now enabled, having chosen the sole object that can be willed for itself, to tend toward it with a direct and simple movement, in short with a “spontaneous” movement. . . . Love, making the will spontaneous, also makes it voluntary (in French, *volonté, volontiers*), restores it to itself, makes it become once more a will.⁷⁷

75. S 15.89-90, T 15; CF 41:191.

76. ET: Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, CS 120:128.

77. Gilson 90.