

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-TWO

Brendan Freeman, OCSO

Come and See

The Monastic Way for Today

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES
Patrick Hart, ocsso, General Editor

Advisory Board

Michael Casey, ocsso	Terrence Kardong, OSB
Lawrence S. Cunningham	Kathleen Norris
Bonnie Thurston	Miriam Pollard, ocsso

- MW1 Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition
Thomas Merton, ocsso
- MW2 Secret of the Heart: Spiritual Being
Jean-Marie Howe, ocsso
- MW3 Inside the Psalms: Reflections for Novices
Maureen F. McCabe, ocsso
- MW4 Thomas Merton: Prophet of Renewal
John Eudes Bamberger, ocsso
- MW5 Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession
Augustine Roberts, ocsso
- MW6 Passing from Self to God: A Cistercian Retreat
Robert Thomas, ocsso
- MW7 Dom Gabriel Sortais: An Amazing Abbot in Turbulent Times
Guy Oury, OSB
- MW8 A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century:
Where Do We Go from Here?
Patrick Hart, ocsso, editor
- MW9 Pre-Benedictine Monasticism:
Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 2
Thomas Merton, ocsso
- MW10 Charles Dumont Monk-Poet: A Spiritual Biography
Elizabeth Connor, ocsso
- MW11 The Way of Humility
André Louf, ocsso
- MW12 Four Ways of Holiness for the Universal Church:
Drawn from the Monastic Tradition
Francis Kline, ocsso
- MW13 An Introduction to Christian Mysticism:
Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 3
Thomas Merton, ocsso
- MW14 God Alone: A Spiritual Biography of Blessed Rafael Arnáiz Barón
Gonzalo Maria Fernández, ocsso
- MW15 Singing for the Kingdom: The Last of the Homilies
Matthew Kilty, ocsso
- MW16 Partnership with Christ: A Cistercian Retreat
Eugene Boylan, ocsso
- MW17 Survival or Prophecy?
The Correspondence of Jean Leclercq and Thomas Merton
Patrick Hart, ocsso, editor
- MW18 Light for My Path: Spiritual Accompaniment
Bernardo Olivera, ocsso
- MW19 The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 4
Thomas Merton, ocsso
- MW20 Inside the School of Charity: Lessons from the Monastery
Trisha Day
- MW21 Words for the Journey: A Monastic Vocabulary
Edith Scholl, ocsso

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-TWO

Come and See

The Monastic Way for Today

by

Brendan Freeman, ocsso

Foreword by

Michael Casey, ocsso



Cistercian Publications
www.cistercianpublications.org

LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota
www.litpress.org

A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press

Cistercian Publications
Editorial Offices
Abbey of Gethsemani
3642 Monks Road
Trappist, Kentucky 40051
www.cistercianpublications.org

© 2010 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Freeman, Brendan.

Come and see : the monastic way for today / by Brendan Freeman ;
foreword by Michael Casey.

p. cm. — (Monastic wisdom series ; no. 22)

ISBN 978-0-87907-022-9 — ISBN 978-0-87907-954-3 (e-book)

1. Monastic and religious life—Congresses. 2. Cistercians—Spiritual
life—Congresses. 3. Benedict, Saint, Abbot of Monte Cassino.

Regula—Congresses. I. Title. II. Series.

BX2435.F735 2010

255'.12—dc22

2009045359

CONTENTS

FOREWORD by Michael Casey, ocsa ix

INTRODUCTION xv

1. TRACING OUR ROOTS 1

- St. Benedict, Father of Western Monasticism 4
 - Basic Rule: Service in Love Flows from the Eucharist* 4
 - Monastery as the School for the Lord's Service* 6
- Founders of the Cistercian Order (Citeaux) 8
 - The Call to Renunciation and Detachment* 8
 - Living a Life of Obedience and Humiliations* 10
- St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Pillar of the Order 12
 - Close Relationship between Body and Soul* 12
 - Knowing Much of the Love of Christ* 13
 - Contemplating Christ* 15
- Understanding Cistercian Tradition 16
 - The Cistercian Charism* 16
 - Values of Cistercian Reform* 20
 - Elements of Cistercian Formation* 23
 - Modern Economy and Ancient Ideals* 26
 - Monasteries Helping Each Other* 28
 - Visitation at Tautra Mariakloster, Norway* 30
 - The Fjords of Tautra Give Praise and Welcome* 32

2. CELEBRATIONS OF MONASTIC LIFE 36

- Reception of the Novice's Habit 36

- Fulfilling the Law of Christ* 37
The Deifying Light 38
- Solemn Profession of Vows 40
Professing Love to the God of Love 41
Community—the Word of Salvation 44
Love Never Ends 47
- Transfer of Stability 49
The Cowl as the Garment of Salvation 50
Continuing Journey to Union with Christ 52
Stability Means Home Where God-Is-With-Us 54
- Golden Jubilee 56
A Great Life Spent in Humility and Hiddenness 56
*Immaculate Conception and Fifty Years of Hidden Life
in God* 59
- 3. CELEBRATIONS IN COMMUNITY LIFE** 62
- The Gift of Community Life 63
Living in Community 63
Unifying Power of the Eucharist 65
Gospel Lessons on Brotherly Love 68
St. Benedict's Gift: Teaching on Friendship 72
Friendship in the Monastic Life 73
Status Quo Evolving 76
- Thanksgiving Day Reflections 78
Thanksgiving as a Faith Event 78
Constant Gratefulness to God 80
Christ at the Heart of Unity in Community 82
- 4. TREASURES OF MONASTIC VALUES** 85
- Silence, Solitude, and Enclosure 86
The Monastic Value of Silence 86
Paradise of Solitude 87
On Solitude and Enclosure 91

<i>Hiddenness of the Contemplative Life</i>	95
<i>Search for the Hidden God</i>	98
<i>Ordinary, Obscure, and Laborious Life</i>	102
<i>Enclosure as Formative Tool toward Wisdom</i>	106
Interior Silence and Formation	108
<i>Formation of the Heart</i>	108
<i>Solitude of the Heart</i>	111
<i>Obedience “with a Good Soul”</i>	113
<i>Patience Leads to Self-Transformation</i>	115
<i>Opportunities to Exercise Patience</i>	118
Obstacles to Overcome	121
<i>Beware of “Acedia”</i>	121
<i>Fighting the Evil in Our Thoughts</i>	125
Humility and Exaltation in Christ	128
<i>Compunction and Compassion</i>	128
<i>Striving for the Selfless Love</i>	131
<i>Holding up the Ideal before You</i>	135
<i>Call to Perfection</i>	139
<i>Dispossession Is to Live by the Lord’s Strength</i>	142
<i>Quest for Union with God</i>	145
<i>Presence and Recognition of Christ</i>	147
<i>Jesus Living through Us</i>	149
Inspirations from the Life of Mary	152
<i>Christ’s Redemptive Grace and Immaculate Conception</i>	152
<i>Mother of All Living by Faith</i>	154
<i>Spending the Fullness of Time with Mary</i>	155
<i>Mary’s Yes to God Planted in the Heart of Her Child</i>	157
<i>Mary’s Assumption: After-Death, Key to Life</i>	158
<i>Queen and Mother of Mercy</i>	161
<i>The Many Faces of Mary</i>	164
<i>Call on Mary, She Forms Our Hearts</i>	166

Inspiration from the Saints	170
<i>Saints: Gifted with Persevering Faith</i>	170
<i>Aspire to Become Saints</i>	172
5. THE DIVINE OFFICE AS THE PRAYER OF CHRIST	175
<i>The Liturgy of the Hours</i>	176
<i>Celebrating the Divine Office as Sacrament</i>	191
<i>Intense Attention at the Liturgy</i>	194
CONCLUSION: NIGHT AND THE MONK	198

FOREWORD

St. Benedict describes the functioning of the abbot's authority in a monastery with three verbs: *docere, constituere, iubere* (RB 2:4). He is to teach, to establish policy, and to give orders. This is a view of authority that is far more comprehensive than what is commonly held today. More often than not we think of authority merely in terms of giving instructions and policing their observance. For St. Benedict, however, the giving of necessary commands is only the visible part of the iceberg. Before arriving at the point of issuing instructions, the abbot is expected first of all to create a climate of meaning in the monastery, patiently inculcating the beliefs and values according to which monastic life makes sense. This is his task of teaching. The practical task of establishing policy follows. The beliefs and values variously communicated by word and example must be incarnated in structures which bring about a culture that facilitates their observance. It is within the context of a shared philosophy of life that orders are given and needful corrections made.

To an outsider a well-ordered monastery seems to function like a military organization: a defined command structure, conformity and uniformity in action, and an insistence on absolute and immediate obedience. The comparison, however, is deceptive. The perfect monastery, if there were one, would be a community that virtually runs itself without the necessity for multiplying overt interventions of authority. A group of persons who have internalized the essential beliefs and values and are safeguarded by suitable structures will not need close or constant supervision but merely organizational adjustments to suit changing circumstances. Even for less-than-perfect communities

St. Benedict's system works well. He builds into his prescriptions a degree of flexibility which enables accommodation to be made for individual weaknesses, foibles, and particular talents. And there is provision made to bring back into the fold the wandering and even the recalcitrant. Micromanagement was never part of Benedict's plan. In modern terms, the abbot's primary task is leadership; the bulk of managerial functions can be diverted to deans and other officials.

The foundation of this low-intervention approach to the exercise of authority is the abbatial obligation of teaching. An abbot speaking to his monks in the chapter room is not engaging in academic or intellectual discourse. It is to be hoped that there is a sound basis in theology and exegesis but, at this time and in this place, his objective goes beyond the level of the cognitive. His aim is to hold up a mirror before the eyes of his monks so that they may become more fully aware of what they already believe and cherish, and more conscious of the call to incarnate these principles in behavior. The abbot addresses his remarks especially to their hearts and their consciences, reminding them of who they are, who they are called to become, and by what means they can fulfill the purpose for which they left everything to take up life in the monastery.

The abbot's teaching may be considered as ongoing and corporate spiritual formation. If it is well done, when the community comes together to give their counsel on important practical matters (RB 3:1), the options expressed will all fall within the limits of near consensus on the key values by which the community lives. Policy can be established which, although not immutable, endures and is transmitted from one generation of monks to the next. It is within the context of fundamental monastic principles that appointments are made and the management of daily affairs takes place. Likewise, the communal acceptance of the essential components of monastic *conversatio* provides a basis by which errant brethren can be invited to rejoin community practice. This is what St. Benedict terms *correctio*, bringing the wanderer back to the common path, as distinct from

correptio, rebuking and punishing the deviant to safeguard the common good.

Benedict places a curious limitation on the various levels of abbatial authority: *nihil extra praeceptum Domini* (RB 2:4). The abbot's authority is not his own but is borrowed from Christ. This means that his doctrine cannot be purely his own preferred philosophy of life but must be the fruit of lifelong meditation on Christ's teaching in the Gospel. In the sermons of the Cistercian Fathers of the twelfth century, it is often hard to separate their own words from those of the Scriptures. Such a fusion of horizons was achieved that the Scriptures came alive; no wonder the hearts of their disciples burned.

As can be seen by the example of St. Benedict himself, the content of the abbot's teaching is the transmitted wisdom of monastic tradition. But it is not enough merely to mouth the ancient words; first they need to be internalized and then reexpressed in the context of contemporary monastic experience and the situation of the particular community. This, no doubt, is what Benedict meant when he wrote that the abbot should be sufficiently well trained in the divine law that he has the resources "to bring forth new things and old" (RB 64:9). It is a question not of the dull recycling of tired teaching but of the exposition of a living tradition in a manner that makes that tradition livable.

It is not only by his formal discourses that the abbot teaches: he also instructs and leads by his example. As Benedict says, "let [the abbot] demonstrate good and holy things by deed more than by words" (RB 2:12). I cannot believe that this means the abbot is to limit his verbal teaching to his own performance. If this were done most abbots would scarcely have anything to say at all. It seems to me that what the expression means is that the abbot is to be personally engaged with the content of his preaching; it is more a matter of a goal toward which he strives than a victory already achieved. The abbot draws his conferences from his own struggles with the theological and moral virtues. The insights he communicates are the fruit of personal toil more than the results of study. Curiously, it is by publicly reflecting on his own experience that

he attains a greater clarity of moral vision and his own behavior is slowly improved. "When he helps others to amend by his admonitions, his own vices find amendment" (RB 2:40).

Of course, none of this desired improvement in himself or in his community happens very quickly. The abbot might take comfort in the example of the desert elder who instructed his disciple to measure his progress by the rate at which water wears away rock. Instant conversions are rare in a monastery; the most that can be hoped for is a gradual shift in perception. In monastic life, where the laws of cause and effect are suspended, nothing happens very quickly. Patience and perseverance need to be constant companions. On one occasion St. John Chrysostom was asked why he bothered with such elaborate sermons since few people were improved by them; they all went on sinning. His reply was concise: "Yes, they continue to sin, but they sin less boldly."

The office of preaching is always a demanding task and not only because of the soul-searching it provokes. Much more preparation is required than is apparent to the listeners, and sometimes the performance seems to go badly. For example, it is very difficult to find something inspiring to share when one is enduring a more or less prolonged period of spiritual sterility or is wearied by insistent temptation. Speaking to virtually the same group of men in the same place at the same feasts and on the same themes year after year leads many to wonder if they have anything new to offer. This is not because they are confident that anybody remembers what they said last time. Monastic prayer is a low-impact exercise; brilliant flashes of insight are uncommon. Even one who is very faithful to regular prayer will often find himself staring at a blank wall when the time comes to prepare a homily or sermon.

It is in the moments when the feeling of emptiness is most acute that the one called to proclaim the Good News can expect his words to have the greatest power. Preaching is fundamentally a work of faith—on the part of the preacher as well as in the hearts of those who listen. The task is particularly hard in a monastic setting because feedback rarely comes from the commu-

nity: too often the abbot's remarks seem to be addressed to the uninterested and the somnolent, and instances of passive aggression are not unknown. At times like this he may draw courage from the New Testament admonition, "*Proclaim the word: give yourself to it in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, encourage*" (2 Tim 4:2). He may even learn to shrug off the less-than-enthusiastic reception with the thought that it is his function only to sow the seed or to water it; the growth and fruitfulness come from God.

The communal teaching embodied in abbatial conferences is an essential part of the monastic way of life, and its genre is unique. It is familiar discourse: this is to say the teaching is expressed using insider language, and it concerns issues that are of particular relevance to this particular group. There is no room for pomposity or self-exaltation. There is, however, an insistent need for a keen awareness of individual sensitivities and the avoidance of trenchant criticism or innuendo which, once uttered, may be remembered and resented by the target for a lifetime.

The great Cistercian authors of the twelfth century, especially Bernard, Aelred, and Gueric, are wonderful examples of monastic preachers. Their finest works are the literary versions of the talks they gave to their monks, commenting on the Rule of St. Benedict, marking the various liturgical celebrations, and addressing the practical issues that arise in community life. These discourses are rich in their theological and biblical understanding, yet their most outstanding characteristic is that they are so accessible because they are based on experience. This is not abstract doctrine but a teaching that is concerned with daily life and the practical implementation of the Gospel. Furthermore, without ever losing sight of the moral imperatives that Christian discipleship generates, these eminent preachers strove, above all, to instill in their hearers a strong confidence in the power of Christ's work in the soul.

My first reading of this collection of conferences given to the community of New Melleray by Abbot Brendan Freeman impressed me as being in strong continuity with the long monastic

tradition of abbatial teaching. These are friendly reflections on the deep truths of faith and life, drawn from the Scriptures, the liturgy and monastic tradition but inserted very firmly into the particular community to which they are addressed.

Fr Brendan has been a monk of New Melleray for more than fifty years, about half of them as abbot, having been elected for five six-year terms. He has been a source of great stability for the community after a long period of change and is held in great affection by his monks. He brings to his task a wide experience of monastic life and of the Cistercian Order and a refreshing down-to-earth style. His love for his own community and for its particular history shines through on many pages. Moreover, it is clear from these conferences that he has kept up his reading and reflection during this prolonged period of abbatial service.

These pages will give the non-monastic reader a good idea of the way monks think about their life, of some of the issues that they face in community living, and the hope that grounds their confidence and makes possible their perseverance. I am happy that Fr. Brendan has undertaken the labor of making these conferences available to a wider readership and I predict that you, the reader, will find them both enjoyable and helpful.

Fr. Michael Casey, ocsa
Tarrawarra Abbey
Victoria, Australia

INTRODUCTION

When Jesus turned around and noticed the two disciples of John following Him, He asked them, "What are you looking for?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), where do you live?" "Come and see," he answered, so they went to see where he lived, and stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour (4 P.M.). (John 1:37-39)

"They stayed with him that day," and for the rest of their lives. Like the disciples, we too have been touched by Jesus. When someone enters the monastery, he is asked the same question Jesus asked the two disciples, "What are you looking for?" Our answer is the same as theirs, we want to see where you live and stay with you.

Jesus never really had a place to live. He was a wandering teacher who had "nowhere to lay his head." Even during his time on earth, he was not identified with a place, a home. He was on the road, moving from village to village, up in the hills, crossing the lake, setting his face toward Jerusalem. He was everywhere. It is the same now. We do not have to go to the Holy Land to see where Jesus lived. He lives everywhere. He lives in us. Our life is a journey with Jesus to the New Jerusalem.

Even though monks take a vow of stability, they are still spiritual pilgrims. The monastery is the place where they stay with Jesus, all day, every day. This book is an invitation to "come and see" how we live in a monastery. The words recorded here were never meant to be published. They were written for a monastic community, with no thought of a wider audience. Perhaps that is good.

Some of the best photographs are taken when people are unaware of being photographed. Once the camera is seen, spontaneity is gone. The primary audience for these talks were the monks of New Melleray Abbey. There was no other audience in mind. Every Sunday the community comes together in the chapter room, and the abbot gives a spiritual conference. Knowing monks as I do, I know these talks have to be brief. There is an old saying that the three most useless things in the world are the moon shining in the day, rain falling on the ocean, and preaching to monks!

Be that as it may, the abbot still has the obligation to preach to his monks. What I have tried to do is to articulate some essential elements of the monastic experience. This is not easy, since we are so close to our own experience. It is hard to stand aside and put into words what you are feeling. This is especially difficult when what you are experiencing is the experience of faith. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of realities unseen," we read in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:1). If we hope for it, we do not possess it; if we cannot see it, how do we know it? Just that, how do we know it? We know it by faith, and that brings us back to the beginning to start the circle over. The monastic life is, above all, a life lived in faith. It is faith seeking understanding. I can have a firm faith and not be able to articulate it or really understand it. St. Hilary used to say, "I have a firm grasp of something I do not understand." Ideally, we should never speak without having experienced the reality we are talking about. How can you speak of love if you never experienced love in your life; how can you speak of honesty if you have not been honest, or patience if you are impatient? Still we do it all the time, because we are all a mixture of love and hate, honesty and dishonesty, patience and impatience. Even those who walked beside Jesus and stayed with him were a mixture of belief and disbelief—even after his resurrection. We all have a bit of the apostle Thomas in us: "Unless I put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe" (John 20:25). Thank you, blessed Thomas, for saying that, because it elicited from the Risen Lord the consol-

ing words, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29). That is us. I cannot see what I so ardently believe in, what I stake my whole life on. It is this ardent desire to see and to experience that drives me on. There is great consolation in knowing that we would never desire if we had never experienced something of what we desire. Desire itself is an experience. To desire God is to experience God.

This is why the ancient monks in the desert reacted so strongly against the vice of *acedia*—sloth is the usual English translation of this word, but it seems too weak. Extreme laziness, dullness, or utter boredom might better convey what the early monks meant by *acedia*. *Acedia* is the spiritual illness that cuts desire right out of our heart. From the outside looking in, the life of a monk can look monotonous: doing the same thing day after day, no television, no radio, and no vacation. But from the inside, from the heart of a monk, it is an ardent life, filled with longing and love, filled with desire. If a monk is afflicted with dullness of spirit or *acedia* (sloth), he has no place to go. He loses his focus and wanders helpless in the desert. The monastery is meant to reproduce some elements of the desert, the vast silence, the solitude, the lack of distraction. The great emptiness of the desert mirrors the emptiness of a monk’s heart emptied of everything but the desire for God. When the desire for God is gone, what is left? The desert can be a place of emptiness or a place of fullness, depending on how you experience it.

Jesus could have said to the two disciples, “Come and see. I live in the desert.” In fact he did say that once: “Come aside into a deserted place and rest awhile with me” (Mark 6:31).

So, here we are in this deserted place experiencing the fullness of life and the emptiness of life, experiencing God’s presence and his absence.

I hope these talks give you a better understanding of what keeps a monk going, why he lives the way he lives and what it is he is seeking. After all, we are all on the same path. None of us is on this earth forever; we are all moving toward the end, the end that is a beginning. The secret to a happy journey is the realization

that you are not alone. Imprinted in you is the reality you are looking for. Come and see and stay in that place which is your own, the place where the mirror of your soul reflects God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, three relationships that make you who you are. You are on a journey to yourself, the image of God.

In what is called The Last Supper Discourse in John's Gospel, Jesus says to his followers, to us, "I go and prepare a place for you. I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be" (John 14:1). The usual interpretation of these words is that after we die, we will have a place in heaven, for Jesus said, "in my Father's house there are many mansions." But could we not just as well think that even now Jesus wants us to be with him where he is? In his glorified body, Jesus has returned to the Father and has brought our human nature into the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. He wants us there even now, and the way there is through prayer. We have the image of the Trinity within us and prayer opens the door to this place, to the center of our being, where Jesus is always praying and interceding for us to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is there also, coming to our aid and praying for us, crying out, "Abba, Father."

My hope is that these reflections will help you find your true home, your true self. As I mentioned, these talks were written for monks, but the reality is that there is a *monk's desire* in each of us. It is a universal archetype: it is a universal human experience, to long for God. There is a place in our hearts that cannot be shared with anyone, no matter how close and intimate the relationship. This can be experienced as a great emptiness that no human can fill. Thomas Merton calls it a point of nothingness, untouched by sin or illusion. Monks dedicate their whole lives to finding this treasure at the center of their being, because exactly here in this emptiness is where we find God pouring his life into our emptiness so that we are filled with the fullness of God. St. Benedict has one question about those seeking entry into the monastic life, "are they truly seeking God?" If the answer is yes, nothing else need be said. The quest is lifelong, and eventually

the emptiness will be filled. Benedict promises that our hearts will expand, and we will run with the unspeakable sweetness of love in the ways of the Lord (RB Prol.). Monastic spirituality appeals to all who are truly seeking God in the depths of their heart.

I begin this book with a presentation of the origins of our Benedictine/Cistercian Order by tracing our roots to our founder, St. Benedict, then some thoughts on Sts. Robert, Alberic, and Stephen, the founders of the Cistercian branch of the Benedictine tree. Since St. Bernard of Clairvaux is *the* theologian of Cistercian spirituality, he too is included in chapter one.

Chapter two covers the special events in the monastic journey. Just as there are special moments that mark important turning points in the life of an individual, such as birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries, so too there are special moments in the life of a monk: the reception of the monastic habit, first profession, solemn profession, and jubilees. The abbot is called upon to address the monk on these special occasions. St. Benedict tells us not to give easy entry to someone who knocks on the monastery door wanting to be a monk. *Test their spirits and see if they are from God.* At New Melleray, we have a six-week observership followed by a month away from the monastery. If the desire to join the monastery persists the observer is invited back to begin another trial period of six months, called a postulancy. Formal steps to full membership, however, only begin with the reception of the novice's habit. After a two-year novitiate, the novice makes first profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, and conversion of manners. The period of simple vows can last from three to nine years. The Profession of Solemn Vows ends the period of initial formation and marks the beginning of ongoing formation. St. Benedict tells us that he wrote his rule for beginners. The wise monk knows he is just a beginner no matter how long he has been in the monastery. This second chapter contains some homilies preached on the occasion of monks reaching their golden jubilees. Ask them; they will tell you they are just beginners.

Cenobitic or community life is a gift from God and is the heart of Cistercian contemplative life. Living in a community is a gift, a support, and an inspiration to live one's call from the Lord. The monastery is a little church within the larger Church. What goes on here has an influence on the whole body of Christ. None of us operates on a global scale; it is in our family circle, with our friends and the people we work with, that we live out our lives and become who we truly are meant to be. Living in community is difficult. I was going to say it can be difficult but, why leave room for exceptions; it *is* difficult for everyone, without exception. Living with other people is a skill, and it begins by learning to live with oneself. I describe this in chapter three, on the matters of community life.

In chapters four and five, I present some essential values of our monastic life, such as silence and solitude, and the hidden dimension of contemplative life. Living the liturgical life of the Church in the cycles of year, week, and day is the framework of the monastic life. The liturgy is how we experience the life of the Church. The Desert Fathers spoke of three liturgies: the heavenly, the earthly, and the liturgy of the heart, which is the community liturgy continued in the interior cell of the monk's heart. These two chapters comprise the focus of the book, as they highlight the key monastic values for understanding our specific calling and Christian life in general.

We love our Cistercian traditions, but inevitably, we have to face to the challenges of the times, particularly the challenge of expressing our monastic vocation in a modern idiom that responds to the deepest needs of modern people. The ancient monks liked to see themselves as sentinels watching out for the spiritual goods of the populace, comparable to the sentinels stationed on the city walls, warning those inside of any dangers approaching. In our times there is certainly the danger of losing our spirits, our souls. The life of a monk in its incompleteness reminds everyone who has eyes to see that we are not in our permanent home; we are just sojourners on earth, looking for our true and everlasting homeland. If you find your soul, your spirit,

your heart, your deepest self, you have found the road to heaven in this life. You are home already.

We journey together into the future, like the rest of the ecclesial communities, while living up to our own charism as contemplative cenobites under the direction of the Rule of St. Benedict.

“Come and see” through this book where we as Cistercian monks live, and how we live our calling from the Lord. St. Benedict calls the monastery a “school for the Lord’s service” (RB Prol. 45). This school requires not just individuals living side by side but a community where the principles of the Gospel are put into practice every day—a community of brothers (or sisters) whose talents, resources, and energies contribute to help one another in responding with love to the Lord. This book is likewise the fruit of cooperative efforts of many minds and hearts too numerous to mention here. Fr. Tom Yalung, however, must be mentioned by name, as he is the one who typed these chapter talks and homilies and encouraged me to submit them to Cistercian Publications for printing. I extend my sincere thanks to Br. Patrick Hart, ocsso, of Gethsemani Abbey, managing editor of the Cistercian Publications Monastic Wisdom Series, for his encouragement and acceptance of these materials for publication and wider distribution. Furthermore, I sincerely thank Fr. Michael Casey, ocsso, for honoring this work by his Foreword. My heartfelt thanks go also to the countless sources and inspirations, mentioned and presumed, that have flowed naturally and unnoticed into this book. Thank you too, dear reader, for sharing your time with me as we all strive to listen to the Lord and follow his call—actively in our state of life with a solid contemplative footing.

To paraphrase St. Anselm, we have been created to see God, and we have yet to do what we have been created to do. It is time to wake up from our slumber and begin to do what we are created to do.

Chapter One

TRACING OUR ROOTS

One of the first things a novice learns in the novitiate is the origin of monastic life. The class is not taught at a scholarly level; oftentimes it is not even an organized class. He hears it in refectory readings, chapter talks, and feast day homilies. He learns at the heart level, even though it is basically historical data he is presented. Facts tell only part of the story. It is the bloodline we are after, the connection between the founders of monastic life and the novice's vocation. History has changed dramatically over the almost two thousand years of monastic life. Yet there is a continuity of grace. The impulse that moved St. Anthony to sell all and go into the desert is the same impulse that moves a person to join a Trappist monastery. It is the desire for God alone.

"God alone" is a hallowed phrase in monastic parlance. For centuries, men and women have heard the call of Abraham, to "go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house" (Gen 12:1), to live for God alone in a monastery. In this regard, St. Anthony, the Father of Monks; St. Benedict, Father of Western Monasticism; and St. Bernard, the twelfth-century Cistercian, are our contemporaries. They sought what we are seeking. Each one of them has something to tell us about our search. They speak to us through their writings, but more importantly, they speak to us by the way we live; in our monastery, we follow the same basic pattern or style of living they established. Their wisdom is contained in the monastic practices they handed down to us. The practice of silence, the life of prayer, how to live alone with oneself, the proper way to live in community, and the art

of loving are all skills that have been handed down from generation to generation through the long history of monastic life.

Cistercian monks from the beginning were lovers of the place and of the brethren. The place means, of course, the locale (if you have ever seen the settings of the seventeen U.S. Cistercian monasteries, you know what beautiful scenic places they are), but it means something more as well; it means the spirit which the place shelters. Monks have been living for 160 years at New Melleray Abbey here in Iowa. The fields planted by the founders are still being planted; the path they walked is still being walked. Their roots are our roots; they are our family.

Here are a few words about the most illustrious members of this family. St. Anthony is called the Father of Monks. He lived in Egypt in the mid-third century and had no intention of starting a worldwide movement. Hearing the Gospel of Matthew being proclaimed in his parish church one Sunday in the Coptic town of Koman in Upper Egypt, he was so moved by the words, "Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor and come follow me" (Matt 19:21), that he did it. He sold what he had and followed Christ into the desert, which is where Jesus begins his public ministry in Mark's Gospel. Anthony is called the first monk, and he used to teach his disciples that the one who sits in solitude and is quiet has won three battles: hearing, speaking, and seeing. Yet against one thing shall he continue to battle—his own heart.

St. Benedict (480–547) was born in Nursia, Italy. He left school as a young man and attempted to live in the hills around Subiaco, much as St. Anthony lived in the wastelands of the Egyptian desert. Like many holy men before him, his reputation grew to such an extent that he came away from his cave and founded a community of men who eventually became the monks of Monte Cassino in central Italy.

Benedict wrote a Rule for Monasteries that has become one of the classics of Western spirituality. To this day, Benedictine and Cistercian monks make their vows "according to the Rule of St. Benedict." His Rule opens with the word *Listen*. This word forms a whole way of living in the world, a contemplative way

to live. Monks take a vow of obedience. The Latin word *ob-audire* is a composite and means to listen to. Monks are to listen to God, to their abbot, to their brethren, to the environment in which they live, and above all, to listen to themselves, their true selves. It was said of St. Benedict that he dwelt with himself *habitare secum*. To dwell peacefully with one's self is a skill taught in the monastery. The first lesson is *Listen*.

Sts. Robert, Alberic, and Stephen are the first three abbots of the reformed Abbey of Citeaux. They began their monastic life as Benedictines at Molesme Abbey in Burgundy, France. In 1098, along with eighteen other monks of Molesme, they set out on a new monastic venture. They desired a more radical form of monastic life, one that was more simple and austere, more authentic and silent, than they were experiencing at Molesme. Citeaux, close to Dijon, France, is still the motherhouse of all Cistercian/Trappist monks. The way of life established by these founders is still being lived today all over the world.

At the age of twenty-one, St. Bernard (1090–1153) was the first outsider to join the new community of Citeaux. He came with a company of friends and relatives, and quickly became the shining light of Cistercian life. St. Bernard is truly one of the great charismatic figures of the Middle Ages. A leader, writer, mystic, preacher, and counselor to popes, a saint and doctor of the Church, his legacy is still a source of inspiration and guidance to all who drink from the fountain of his wisdom. His eighty-seven sermons on the Canticle of Canticles are among the Church's great treasures. The marriage bond of Christ and the soul is his theme: “. . . if she [the soul] loves with her whole being, nothing is lacking where everything is given. To love so ardently then is to share the marriage bond; she cannot love so much and not be totally loved, and it is in the perfect union of two hearts that complete and perfect marriage consists.”¹

1. *Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs*, vol. 4, sermon 83:6 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

The “perfect union of two hearts” is the goal of every marriage and is the goal also of monastic life.

ST. BENEDICT, FATHER OF WESTERN MONASTICISM

Basic Rule: Service in Love Flows from the Eucharist

“. . . Who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely. Yet here am I among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:27)

It is easy to see how this passage from Luke’s Gospel inspired St. Benedict in his Rule. St. Benedict structures his whole Rule around service. He even calls the monastery a school of the Lord’s service. But if we look at the context out of which this passage is taken, we see it is Luke’s account of the institution of the Eucharist. This leads to the question: what is the connection between the institution narrative and St. Benedict?

Unlike Matthew and Mark, who place Jesus’ teaching about service in different places in their Gospels, Luke connects it with the Eucharist. Why? Scholars say he did this to relate it to controversies in the early eucharistic assemblies. Right from the beginning, there were problems. Paul had to correct the Corinthians from overindulging at the eucharistic meal. The Hellenists complained their widows were neglected at the daily distribution of food, and James complained that in the assembly, distinctions were made on the basis of wealth. To show the proper order of things, Luke presents his teaching on service right after the institution narrative at the Last Supper. Jesus is among us as one who serves, not as one who sits at table waiting to be served. It appears to me that Jesus is telling us there is an intimate connection between the Eucharist and humble service to our brothers and sisters, a connection between liturgy and life. The Eucharist teaches us about life, about what is important in life. I do not know of any culture or civilization from time eternal that does

not acknowledge the difference between those who serve the table and those who sit at the table. There must be something more than a sociological reversal at work here.

The Eucharist is a mystery and as such cannot be fully understood by reason alone; faith must supplement our reason. But there has to be something we understand about it, something to hold onto and practice. I believe that by washing his disciple's feet, Jesus is telling us something about the mystery of the Eucharist, something easily understood, something as easily understood as, who is more privileged? The one who serves the table? Or the one who sits at the table and is served? What does this tell us about the Eucharist? In the Eucharist, Jesus hands over his body and pours out his blood for us. Jesus' words are repeated every day at the consecration: "This is the cup of my blood . . . it will be shed for you and for all. Do this in memory of me." We know that our blood is our life force, our life. When someone says, "I offer you a cup of my blood," they are saying very graphically that they are offering themselves, their very existence to us. Now, we cannot offer actual blood, but we can serve each other and in this way pour out our blood for the other. St. Benedict calls the monastery a school of the Lord's service. As such, it is a eucharistic school, a place where we connect liturgy and life. However, you do not have to be in a monastery to be in this school. The message is so simple: serve each other and you will fulfill the law of Christ who came among us to serve and not to be served.

St. Benedict was quick to take this key teaching of Jesus and weave it throughout his Rule for monks. He begins chapter 35 on the community meals with the words, "The brothers should serve one another." A few lines later, he repeats it, "serve one another in love." Can you think of a better way to sum up community life? Let the brothers serve one another in love.

St. Benedict reminds us often that in serving one another, we are serving Christ. Although the abbot is warned not to show favoritism in the monastery, St Benedict is careful to point out that there are groupings of monks who need special attention. "Care of the sick," he says, "must rank above and before all else,

so that they may truly be served as Christ" (RB 36:1). "Guests are to be received as Christ" (RB 53:1). "Monks are to respect each other out of love for Christ" (cf. RB 72:8).

Benedict has a very clear vision about community life. It is a school where we learn how to live the Gospel teachings. It is a house of God where we learn how to live as Christ lived.

Monastery as the School for the Lord's Service

St. Benedict had several names for the monastery. He called it a "school for the Lord's service," as we saw above. In this school we learn, for example, how to put into practice the teaching of the Gospel where Jesus says, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). Another name is "the House of God." Benedict writes, "No one should be troubled in the house of God." Another one is the "workshop" where the monk toils over the instruments of good works. There are seventy-two of them to keep us occupied.

No matter what name he uses for the monastery, there is one thing for certain: Benedict wanted the monastery to be a place of peace. Monasteries are traditionally constructed in out-of-the-way places, away from the business of the city. Harmony based on right relationships with others, self, and God is the basis of monastic peace. The passage from Ephesians about "supporting each other in love" (Eph 4:2) is one of our ideals of how community life is to be lived. The pace of the monastery is calm and measured. The rhythm of day and night is determined by the liturgical hours of prayer.

Some of the ills of our modern society should not find their way into the monastery. These include things such as stress, pressure, rushing about, and busy-ness. Ambition, power struggles, and control over others have no place here. From this description, one would think that monks glide along on a cloud of peace with no cause for anxiety or concern. Would that it was true. Living in community has its own stress. Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche community in France, knows a lot about

living in community. Here are some of his insights that come from experience:

Community is the place where are revealed all the darkness and anger, jealousies and rivalry hidden in our hearts. Community is a place of pain, because it is a place of loss, a place of conflict and a place of death. But it is also a place of resurrection.²

Within the Rule there is another theme that is not antithetical to peace but one we do not usually couple with stillness and recollection. St. Benedict strikes this minor chord right at the beginning of his Rule. In the prologue, the word “run” occurs four times. In one case we are running away so darkness does not overcome us. In the three other cases we are running toward something: the tent of the Lord, good works, and finally, eternal life. A sense of urgency is conveyed. We are not just to be sitting around enjoying contemplative leisure. Of course, the strongest word in the prologue is “battle.” The monks are “armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord” (RB Prol. 3).

You might conclude from this that monks are in a state of war, and maybe we are. This is not far-fetched. Look around. Our society is in a state of war too. We use the concept all the time. We read about the war against crime, the war against drugs, and the war against terrorism, which is even more real after the attack on 9/11 in New York, the London subway bombings, and the Spanish train system attack. We speak about the war against poverty, and the war against injustice and abuse. We battle abortion and euthanasia. If our society does not battle against all these things, they will overcome us, and we all will become enslaved. But the evils just enumerated—crime, drugs, terrorism, poverty, injustice, and abuse—are really symptoms of a deeper battle. And this is the battle the monks are directed to engage in by the

2. Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 29.

rule of life set down by St. Benedict. He tells us that his Rule is meant only for those who are willing to give up their own will and embrace obedience. It is the battle of the self. We are taught to eschew such things as selfishness, self-promotion, self-indulgence, self-centeredness, and looking after our own self-interest. Benedict writes explicitly, "No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else" (RB 72:7).

This way of living goes against the grain, thus the battle. The model Benedict sets before us is the one we see in the Gospel: mutual service. This is the real field of battle. Our innate instincts are to get our own way at all cost. It is the survival of the fittest. The antidote to this illness is putting the other person's interest before your own.

We have a beautiful synthesis of our life in what Jesus says about himself: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). In our daily Eucharist we are invited to share in the act whereby Jesus pours out his life and hands over his spirit to the Father. The Eucharist makes present the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. We prove the sincerity of our sharing in this mystery by putting into practice Benedict's injunction: "the brothers are to serve one another" (RB 35:1).

FOUNDERS OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER (CITEAUX)

The Call to Renunciation and Detachment

We celebrate the feast of our three founders, Sts. Robert, Alberic, and Stephen, but in reality there were twenty-one founders. It is common to mention only the first three abbots of the new foundation. The Rule of St. Benedict gives a lot of power to the abbot, and one of the reasons the twenty-one monks left the Benedictine monastery of Molesme to settle in a place called Citeaux in Burgundy was for a stricter interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict. But it takes more than an abbot to make a monastery.

Our founders, all twenty-one of them, left one monastery to found another based on certain ideals they had about how the monastic life should be lived. It was not a smooth transition. The first abbot, Robert, was ordered back to his original monastery. No one joined the new group for years. They were on the verge of giving up when St. Bernard arrived and joined with a large group of relatives and friends. After a lot of trouble, they were eventually able to live out their dream.

Now, almost a thousand years later, we are celebrating their memory. It is a good occasion to look at our own calling, our own dream. The Scripture readings chosen for this celebration give us a way of evaluating how we are doing.

The first reading speaks of the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-4a), a call from God to leave his country and his relationship with his father's house. Each of us is free to interpret what that means for us. The early desert monks thought of Abraham's call as three great renunciations or detachments: "Country" meant all the wealth and riches of the world. "To leave your kindred and relationships" meant the sin and vice that cling to us and become like kindred to us. "To leave our father's house" meant the whole visible world, as opposed to the invisible world of the Spirit.

These are radical renunciations just as are those in the Gospel (Matt 19:27-29), "we have given up everything to follow you," and even more so the ones Paul speaks of: leave your own wisdom and justice, even your own holiness (1 Cor 1:26-31).

What does all this renunciation and detachment mean? It means that each of us is called to go out of ourselves, to go beyond ourselves. It is to take the journey to a new and unknown place. In the letter to the Hebrews, we read that our ancestors set out on the journey not knowing where they were going. They were living on a promise, and they died before the promise was fulfilled.

We too live on a promise. We can demand nothing. Monks have been accused of being Pelagians, making things happen by their own effort. One may think that if we fast or wake at 3:00 A.M., we will become spiritual men. Life is not like that. Life is a

great teacher of detachment. We do not set our program, and then watch it being fulfilled. We live our life, and then come to understand it in the light of Scripture. Life is a call to move out of ourselves. As youth gives way to middle age, we are challenged to detach from perceived ideals. As middle age gives way to old age, we are forced to give up false ambition and pretenses. As old age progresses, we are made to detach from physical health itself, from our body. The world we wanted to create is slowly taken from us, and something unfamiliar and new replaces it. It slowly dawns on us that God is calling us and leading us on, no matter how dark it seems or how unfamiliar the road. The new self made in the image of Christ is replacing the old self. We leave ourselves to find ourselves again. Are we good monks? Are we following our founders? Are we good Christians? Who are we to judge? Life is teaching us. Let us put ourselves in the hands of the Lord of Life.

Living a Life of Obedience and Humiliations

As mentioned above, twenty-one monks left the monastery of Molesme in France in 1098 to go to Citeaux, and with this move we have the beginning of the Cistercian Order. The first three abbots, Robert, Alberic, and Stephen, are considered our founders. But the other eighteen, lost to history, live on in us through their humble lives. They have a lesson to teach us about the hidden life. We ask the question: What does their monastic life teach us? Then we ask further: What are we willing to learn? How much are we willing to invest? How open are we to what might be called the hard sayings in the Rule?

St. Benedict tells us we can judge the seriousness of an aspirant by his eagerness for obedience and humiliations. *Opprobra* is the Latin term for trials or humiliations. For moderns, humiliation is too close to shame. They should not be equated, but still why would anyone be eager for humiliations?

Our Scripture readings present us with the answer as we look at the life led by our founders. In the letter to the Hebrews,

they are compared to the patriarchs who lived by faith — setting out on a journey not knowing where they were going. All these “died before receiving any of the things that had been promised” (Heb 11:13). In line with the Gospel, they are identified with those who leave all things to follow Christ (Mark 10:24-30).

Setting out on a journey without a clear goal—dying before you gain anything or leaving all without knowing what you will receive in return—is, at the very least, a risky way to live, if not downright humiliating. Is it not a humiliation for us to live a demanding way of life, giving ourselves to it totally, without seeing the results, without being able to point to something we have acquired, something we have achieved?

To live in the dark this way is an insult to our natural drive to succeed. Our society instills in us a strong competitive sense. We are taught to make things happen by our ingenuity and will-power. To bind our will, to put our ingenuity on temporary hold, is a humiliation. The monastery directs us in another way. The common life dictates that we not stand out, that we blend in with the community, and that we get our sense of worth from God, not from some personal achievement.

We must admit this is a path strewn with humiliations. Leaving all things is not a once-and-for-all decision. It is not even about just material wealth. It also means to leave behind all our defenses, and this opens us to being vulnerable. Pride and vanity die slowly and painfully. Is it not a personal humiliation to let others see our failings, to witness an uncontrollable jealousy or envy at another’s success? Is it not an insult to our ego not to be able to contain our anger or our stress or irritability? In the common life of the monastery many things we would like to keep hidden are all too public. It is humiliating!

If we follow the path of the patriarchs, if we leave all and follow Christ, our life will be marked with certain unsteadiness and insecurity. We will be between leaving and finding. We will die without receiving any of the things that had been promised. We will die like Jesus, in the dark. Life “in between” is a humbling experience. The goal is always just ahead; we have a little more

to leave behind, always just a little more. We have our eyes fixed on the goal in the distance.

For now, we know “that our life is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ [our] life is revealed, we too will be revealed with him in glory” (Col 3:3-4).

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, PILLAR OF THE ORDER

Close Relationship between Body and Soul

As the feast of St. Bernard was approaching, I opened the life of St. Bernard, called the *Vita Prima*, at random and my eyes fell on the words: “On this matter they (the monks) began to be a little suspicious of the sermons in chapter addressed to them by their abbot.”

Even as far back as the twelfth century, monks were questioning the abbot’s chapter talks! I find this encouraging. But why were Bernard’s monks suspicious? They certainly were a fervent group. I read more about how they lived in great poverty and then these words: “their bread was produced by the toil of the brethren from the almost barren earth of that desert place and it seemed to be made more of grit than of grain and, as with all the other food they ate, it had almost no flavor.”³ So this is why they were upset. These men were so fervent that they believed “anything that was a pleasure to eat was a poison to their souls.”⁴ They were upset with Abbot Bernard because “he seemed to give more consideration to the body than to the soul.” They were so upset that they waited for a visit from their bishop, and a delegation of monks brought this complaint to him. The bishop set them straight by telling them that to refuse the gifts of God, such as decent food, is to resist the Holy Spirit. End of story.

3. *Vita Prima*, First Life of St. Bernard, trans. Webb and Walker (Maryland: Newman Press, 1960), 61.

4. *Ibid.*, 60.

There are a lot of things we could say about this story. One in particular speaks to me about Cistercian spirituality. It is this: there is a close connection between body and soul in our monastic life. Architecturally, even the church and the refectory are joined by the cloister. We process from the church to the refectory each day at noon. We listen to a reading just as we do in church. We are nourished in both places.

St. Paul tells us that our bodies are being transformed and molded into a glorified body of Christ (Phil 3:17–4:1). He speaks of our earthly body and our heavenly body. As our earthly body diminishes and grows weak, the spiritual body expands and grows strong. There is a descending movement in our natural body and an ascending movement in our heavenly body. Death is where these two movements meet. Death has been described as the place of our total presence to the world, where our soul has access to our body for the first time, where we share in the glorified body of Christ. Prayer is the element in monastic life that anticipates death. It is referred to in the *Vita Prima*: “The way of life itself helps to establish an inner solitude in the depths of the heart.”⁵ This inner solitude is the place of prayer, the place where Jesus reveals the Father to us.

Knowing Much of the Love of Christ

Sometimes when speaking to groups in the guesthouse, I am asked the question: “What is the difference between the Benedictines and the Cistercians?” I usually answer that we belong to the same family, but the Cistercians do not have an active apostolate, whereas the Benedictines have schools and seminaries. This usually satisfies them. I do not go into the running battle St. Bernard had with the Cluniac monks or the more recent accusations hurled at the Trappists that they are anti-intellectual. Anti-intellectual is a phrase that is still current in our houses. I am not sure how it started; perhaps it comes from de Rance’s

5. *Ibid.*, 60.

reform.⁶ But it certainly cannot be used against St. Bernard and our early Fathers.

The virtues enumerated in the book of Sirach (Sir 39:8-14) are applied to St. Bernard as a teacher renowned for learning and wisdom. It is true Cistercians do not focus on academic degrees, the type that can puff up a person, but there is a fullness of learning we all pursue, and Bernard is our guide. *Plenitudo* is a word that comes up frequently in his writings; it means "fullness, abundance, copious."

In the passage from Sirach, we hear the teacher say, "I am filled like the moon at the full, listen to me and bud like a rose growing by a stream of water" (Sir 39:12-13). Bernard is a rose by a stream of water, and he encourages us to read out of the book of our own experience. He tells us what to look for in that book. The rose is our union with Christ, and the stream, the words of Scripture. Bernard is always telling his monks to drink deeply from the water of the Sacred Scriptures. This will nourish the flower of love in their hearts.

Everyone who reads Bernard is astounded at his ability to weave passages of Sacred Scripture into his discourse. His memory was extraordinary. But there is something more vital here that needs recall. The stream of Sacred Scripture flows like an underground river through Bernard's inner life. There is a hidden source of knowledge that Bernard is attentive to, a type of knowledge found only in the school of love. Love itself is a form of knowing. Love was the source of Bernard's reputation as a teacher. It was not his memory or his towering intellect, it was love. Perhaps Origen said it the best: "No one can understand [John's] Gospel unless he has leaned against the breast of Jesus and taken Mary as his Mother."⁷ The text from St. John's Gospel used for his feast hints at the source of his great learning. Jesus is speaking to the Father in prayer: "I made known to them your

6. Armand Jean de Rance, 1626–1700, Abbot reformer of La Trappe Monastery in France.

7. As quoted in *RB 80* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 360–361.

name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them" (John 17:26).

Bernard speaks out of this fullness of love. One morning Bernard began his chapter talk with the words, "Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience. You must, therefore, turn your attention inward, each must take note of his own particular awareness."⁸

Contemplating Christ

The word "wisdom" as it appears in the Bible is not easily defined. It has a wide range of meanings. In the Old Testament it can mean professional skill, political sense, discernment, astuteness, knowing how to live in society, and even magic arts. Recently I read a helpful distinction between wisdom and knowledge. The object of wisdom is eternal and unchangeable reality; the object of knowledge is changeable and temporal.

The saints would fall in line with this distinction. The Doctors of the Church are so called not because they were the most intelligent people of their generation. No, it was because they taught the way of the Spirit. They shared the wisdom whose object is unchangeable and eternal. St. Bernard was a doctor in this mode. This is why he is so important to us.

By reading his writings, we can drink in some of his spirit. We do not need to be experts on St. Bernard. What we are looking for is to share in his spirit, in his graces. His writings can make devotion and affection grow in our hearts for him and for the object of his wisdom, the eternal God.

Wisdom and knowledge are both necessary in our life. Bernard once said that zeal without knowledge is unbearable. Where there is violent stirring, discretion is most necessary. For him, this is the ordering of charity. Without it, virtue becomes vice, affections run wild, and there can be no harmony in the Church.

8. *On the Song of Songs*, sermon 3 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971).

Knowledge and wisdom help us to order all the loves in our life: the love of God and the love of neighbor.

From the perspective of the book of Sirach (Sir 39:8-14), Bernard is seen as a man of wisdom. However, the Gospel (John 17:20-26) tells us he is a man of love. Love is a source of wisdom—*the* source of wisdom.

Contemplation has been defined as “a long look of love.” Looking at something or someone is a source of knowledge. Through our eyes we become one with the object; we bring it into our life. When we look with love, the object reveals itself to us in a new way. It discloses its full truth to us. We bring it into our heart.

Bernard had his eyes fixed on one object—the same object as his wisdom—the unchangeable and eternal, but now expressed in the person of Jesus. He is the one who wants the love of the Father to be in us as he is in us.

To contemplate the words of the Gospel is to take the words into our heart, there to become real in us. The words are expressions of a mystery beyond words. Experience what the words say. Experience the love of the Father for Jesus taking place in our heart’s deepest core. This is what Bernard teaches.

It is the perfection of our baptism—nothing more, nothing less.

UNDERSTANDING CISTERCIAN TRADITION

The Cistercian Charism

We use the phrase “the Cistercian Charism” or “our Cistercian Charism” often, but what does it mean? Right after the Second Vatican Council, we used the phrase a lot because the council mandated a renewal of religious life when it said: “The appropriate renewal of religious life involves two simultaneous processes: (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life, and to the original inspiration behind a given community, and (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed condition of the

times.”⁹ Implementing the renewal mandated by the council took a lot of our time and energy, and the process of adjustment is still going on. To go back to the original inspiration of our founders, who lived a thousand years ago, is somewhat difficult. It seems much easier to return to the inspiration or charism of more modern founders, such as Catherine McCauley, Nano Nagle, and Mary Frances Clarke. All these women lived around the same period in Dublin, Ireland. At the time, Dublin had one of the worst slums in Europe. Separately these three women went into the slums to help the poor. Two started schools; Catherine McCauley helped the sick. None of these women set out to found a new congregation. They saw a need and tried to meet it. They were given the grace, the charism to do this. Eventually Catherine McCauley became known as the founder of the Sisters of Mercy; Nano Nagle, of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and Mary Francis Clarke, of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The sisters in these congregations today can reconstruct the early days of their founders. They know exactly what they were about, in educating the poor or in helping the sick, and so forth.

The founders of Citeaux were in an entirely different situation. They were already monks and there were three founders, or more accurately twenty-one, because twenty-one members left Molesmes to go to Citeaux. Michael Casey affirms it was more of a community event rather than an inspiration coming to a particular individual, like St. Francis of Assisi. The twenty-one monks left Molesmes for one primary reason: they wanted to live the Rule of St. Benedict in a more pure form. A lot of accretions had come into the monastic life from the time of St. Benedict to the time of our founders in 1098. They wanted to return to a more primitive living of the Rule. The word *literal* would not fit their desire. The word they use is *pure*. They introduced some new things into the monastic life, such as the lay brother, a Charter of

9. Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, no. 2, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter Abbott, SJ (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

Charity, and a General Chapter. None of the things were in the Rule. To describe what they were doing, Michael Casey uses the term *creative fidelity* to express their interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict.

In 1995, our Abbot General, Dom Bernardo Olivera, wrote a letter on Charismatic Associations, which includes the lay associate programs that many of our monasteries sponsor. He begins by quoting Pope John Paul II in his address to the Synod of Bishops on the religious life: "Extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which have, directly or indirectly, an ecclesial usefulness, for the edification of the Church, for the good of human persons and for the needs of the world" (*Christifidelis*, no. 24). A charism is a grace of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Body of Christ.

Dom Bernardo then says, "The Cistercian charism has its origin in that monastic tradition of evangelical life found expressed in the Rule of St. Benedict. The Founders of Citeaux gave this tradition a particular form, certain aspects of which were strongly defended by the monasteries of the Strict Observance" (Charismatic Associations). Our Constitutions, above all the first part, the Patrimony, are a good presentation of our charism.

In January 1995, the Abbot General wrote his annual circular letter to the Order, this time on the Constitutions. In this letter he connects the Constitutions to our charism. He says:

Before everything and first of all, we can say that the Constitutions are the concrete expression of our particular way of following Christ according to the Gospel and the Rule of St. Benedict. Because they have been approved by the Church, they are guaranteed to be an expression of the Gospel message.

He concludes:

Consequently, our Cistercian charism can be considered as a form of exegesis of the Gospel. It brings out and reveals certain aspects of the Gospel. Because of this, the Constitutions as medium and incarnation of our charism are an in-

strument of evangelical interpretation; they clarify our reading of the Gospel as Cistercian. (Circular Letter 1995)

One clear example of this interpretation is in Matthew 19:12-22, a foundational text for all religious life. It speaks of the parable of the rich young man and Christ's invitation to him to sell all he possessed and follow him. Certain parts of our Constitutions lay out for us how to leave all to follow Christ. The sections on poverty, simplicity, obedience, and silence are all ways for us to leave all. They do not apply to anyone but Cistercians. Our Constitutions are a Cistercian reading of the text of Matthew.

Finally, Dom Bernardo says, "The Constitutions are the lasting expression of our Cistercian charism of the Strict Observance. They express the consciousness that the Order has of itself in this moment in its history. They are, therefore, our letter or our card of ecclesial identification" (ibid).

Dom Bernardo's ideas are truly satisfying. They clearly present the question on the Cistercian charism. When we are asked about what led to the foundation of the Cistercian Order, we can only say that our founders did not want anything new. All they wanted was to return to the observance of the Rule of St. Benedict. In so doing, they created something new. Most authors say the newness was the way they found or refound the balance in the Rule. It lies in the way they emphasized certain aspects of the Rule and the way they took into account the body, mind, and spirit of the individual monks. They extended this insight of balance, harmony, and simplicity even to their buildings. A whole new architecture grew out of the Cistercian reforms. There is evidently no clear one-word answer to what is our charism. It is a multitude of answers.

*Values of Cistercian Reform*¹⁰

In 1998, Michael Casey, ocso, gave a conference at Clairvaux in France to a group of lay associates affiliated with the Abbey

10. From the chapter talk given on November 7, 2004.

of Citeaux. In it, he mentions five areas that represent the values of the Cistercian reform that are worth developing and transmitting to the future.

Let me quote Fr. Casey at length to clarify the essence of our Cistercian charism. He writes:

The first Cistercians began a manner of living which has through the ages attracted, sustained and brought to a happy conclusion the lives of tens of thousands of monastic men and women. The Cistercian Patrimony is not a matter of lifeless stones, but a living reality incarnate in the lives and labors of innumerable brothers and sisters and expressed explicitly by a substantial body of doctrine developed by Cistercian authors of all centuries. We inherit from the past not only buildings and artifacts, not only a lifestyle that many romantically believe has changed little from the Middle Ages, but a tradition of life communicated in a thousand humble ways from one generation to the next. Beneath the Cistercian reality lays a network of beliefs, values and core practices that embody the energy of the charism. The heart of the Cistercian Patrimony is a philosophy of life as validly applied to the twenty-first century as to the twelfth.¹¹

Fr. Michael's five values of the Cistercian reform are: (1) creative fidelity vis-à-vis the Rule of St. Benedict; (2) austerity, that is, frugality and simplicity; (3) experience; (4) affectivity, the school of love; and (5) mysticism. I would like to look at two values, experience and mysticism.

On experience, Fr. Casey writes that twelfth-century monastic life moved away from the idea that the monk's task was the performance of certain duties or services to concentrate more on the quality of his experience. From the consideration of human beings as created in the divine image and likeness, the Cistercians developed a spirituality based on the desire for God.

11. Michael Casey, "Toward the Cistercian Millennium," *Tjurunga* 54 (May 1998): 58.

At our solemn profession, three times we sing the phrase, "Receive me, O Lord, according to your word; do not disappoint me in my hope." This says a lot about the expectation we have when we come to the monastery. Everyone hopes for a full life, a rich life, a life where you are really, truly happy and basically satisfied. I know from experience that this can happen in the monastery. It comes from doing something else, not by setting out to be fulfilled, but by setting out to be a monk and living according to some goal beyond ourselves.

Miguel Martinez explains it like this: "At its depths, monasticism constitutes a structural opportunity of being human. The monastic dimension is an anthropological dimension, i.e., universal dimension. Every man and woman carries a monastic dimension within. To profess monastic life within the Order is a way of expressing and channeling the monastic aspect of a human being."¹² We can say, then, that the search for God was understood to coincide with the deepest aspiration of the heart, that is, "human fulfillment and not alienation" (Casey).

This brings us to the second value, mysticism. Fr. Casey writes: "Spiritual experience with a strong affective component is the engine that drove the first Cistercians forward. Mysticism is the unseen concomitant of external lifestyle." He continues: "The mystical teaching of the Cistercians was always biblical; it flowed from an interpretation of scriptural text and strictly maintained itself within their limits. It was not concerned with the extraordinary."¹³

I understand this to mean that as we live in the monastery and follow the common life, practicing the observances, something will happen. We will begin to experience the hidden meaning of what we are doing. We will understand and even taste, in the sense of wisdom, the meaning of this life. No one could persevere

12. Quoted by Enrique Mirones Diez, "Nomads or Settlers," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 4, no.36 (2001): 516.

13. Michael Casey, "Toward the Cistercian Millennium," *Tjurunga* 54 (May 1998): 58.

to the end without this inner experience. We might not be able to articulate it or explain it but we can recognize it when we hear it in a reading or come across it while reading our Cistercian Fathers. Our life is a beautiful blending of the mystical and the mundane, the human and the divine. They are not in opposition to each other, but one being found in the other.

The monastic life is a structural opportunity to be human, and in seeking God we touch the deepest desire of our heart. This is not a new theory. St. Augustine said that we seek one mystery, God, with another mystery, ourselves, because God's mystery is in us. Our mind cannot be understood even by itself, because it is made in God's image.

St. Bernard had this in mind when he placed self-knowledge as the first thing a young monk has to gain. Self-knowledge has many levels. We seek the mystery of God with or by means of another mystery, ourselves. Coming to the realization that the mystery of God is within us does not confound us but leads us deeper into ourselves, deeper into our true self, deeper into a place where God's life and our life are one, where they are joined, united, and wed. The image of the union of bride and bridegroom was popular with our Cistercian Fathers.

The reading from St. Gregory of Nazianzen at Lauds serves as a fitting conclusion to our reflection. He writes: "What is this new mystery surrounding me? I am both small and great, both lowly and exalted, mortal and immortal, earthly and heavenly. I am to be buried with Christ and to rise again with him, to become a coheir with him, a son of God, and indeed God himself" (Office of Readings, Friday, Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time).

*Elements of Cistercian Formation*¹⁴

Since we have so many guests with us this morning, here for the Vocation Discernment Retreat, I think it is appropriate to explain some basic terms you will hear while you are with us.

14. Chapter talk given on September 5, 2004, at which the participants of the Vocation Discernment Weekend Retreat were present.

The abbot gives what is known as a chapter talk to the community every Sunday. It is an ancient tradition. The word “chapter” has a few different meanings. We speak of the conventual chapter to refer to the gathering of all the solemnly professed members of the community. In this sense, a chapter is a group of people with an entitlement of belonging. In our case, only the solemnly professed have the right to vote on important community decisions, such as the vote to admit someone to solemn vows or to elect an abbot. In New Melleray, we meet every six years for the election of an abbot.

The more common meaning of the word “chapter” refers to the chapters of the Rule of St. Benedict. In previous times, the community would meet every morning in the chapter room and read a small passage of the Rule of St. Benedict, then the abbot would give a commentary on it; hence, the name “chapter talk.” In our day, the abbot gives a talk every Sunday on a spiritual topic. It is a more general talk and not restricted to the Rule.

With the presence of our guests for the Vocation Retreat, it is timely for me to share some pointers on the elements of an authentic Cistercian formation. This is the fruit of our meeting at Assumption Abbey in Ava, Missouri, with the abbot’s extended council. By way of brainstorming, the group at Ava came up with twelve characteristics of authentic formation. The list does not necessarily refer to the order of importance. Some items are self-evident, but we still noted them.

1. A novice director. This is evident, but for some of our smaller houses, it is not that easy to provide a capable monk to be novice master. At New Melleray, we are blessed with not only a good novice master but with two or three others who could fulfill the role. In other monasteries, at times the abbot had to function also as novice director for a few years until someone else could take over.
2. A group of monks capable of teaching those in formation.
3. Common work. This does not mean working together all the time, but some kind of work in which the newer members

feel they are contributing to the monastery and not just being employed in meaningless work.

4. A good library. This is a good point which we take for granted. It takes years and years to build up a good library. Dom Eamon Fitzgerald, the abbot of Mt. Melleray in Ireland and our Father Immediate, mentioned to me that it was tempting for him to take his three-month sabbatical at New Melleray because of our library. He was impressed with it.
5. A leader for the community, called an abbot. One of the roles of the abbot is to ensure that the community provides the best possible formation it can give. Good leadership is essential. Communities who have a new superior every three or four years have a hard time giving people in formation a sense of stability.

The next five items concern the community itself. We know that after the Holy Spirit, the community is the most important factor in forming new people into monks. So there are several things a community should have to be a formative community.

6. First, the community should be open to receiving new members. This is not as easy as it sounds. To be open means to be a welcoming community. It is a place of hospitality. If you are open to new members, it means you are open to changes. Everyone going through the stages of formation and eventually becoming a solemnly professed monk changes the face of the community. St. Benedict reminds us that there are a variety of characters in any community. We do not restrict admittance to only those who think like us. We have liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats in the community. We have unity within diversity.
7. But there are boundaries, and this brings us to the seventh point: a strong community identity. Every community that opens its doors to new members and welcomes diversity has

to have a strong sense of its own identity. We have to have unity of purpose and a common vision of the monastic life.

8. A healthy community will have good communication between its members. There will be a certain affectivity and warm personal relationships. Problems will be addressed and not just left to fester.
9. A community with healthy relationships fosters growth, both human and spiritual growth.
10. As we would expect, such community is capable of generativity, the passing on of life and the fostering of life. If the community is self-centered, there is no generativity. At one time or another, we may go through a self-centered stage. This is reflected in statements like "I do not get anything out of the liturgy" or "What is in it for me?" Our liturgy is a participation in the prayer of Christ to the Father. The monastic liturgy especially appeals to the Spirit praying within us, not to a lot of externals to catch our attention.
11. A community that is centered on God instead of self is capable of leading a novice into a life of prayer. We are not here for ourselves. We are called together in the name of Jesus. We are a praying community whose practice and example leads the novice deeper into the prayer of his own heart. The monastery is a school where we learn how to pray and serve one another.
12. A community that supports its abbot. An overly critical attitude in a community is a breeding ground for distrust and is divisive.

Because the monastery is a school of love in the Lord's service, formation of a novice or a prospective member is a significant factor in the Cistercian life. Actually, formation is an ongoing aspect of our monastic life.

*Modern Economy and Ancient Ideals*¹⁵

During the past week, we had our annual business council meeting to draw up a budget for this coming year. With the increased demands of our casket business and of the farm, there was also a large capital expenditure requirement. Soon we were thinking of additional products, such as raising cattle and selling organic beef. Our lay managers for the casket business and the farm are indeed a great help for us in running our industries. But then it also made me think about our situation ten years from now. Will we be any different from the large European monasteries with their industries run entirely by hired help?

Where do we stand in relationship to the ideal we have of our founders? How do we relate to them in conjunction with our newly proposed infirmary, our planned expansion on the casket plant, and a proposed organic meat business? Will these be mostly staffed and directed by lay people? Is this the direction to go, or do we have to reverse our plans?

In the late 1960s a group of five monks saw how big we were getting; they experienced all the hustle and bustle of 150 young monks. We were busy operating a new alfalfa dehydration plant and adding new wings to an already large monastery. This group desired to go back to the original ideals of poverty and simplicity. They received use of a farm from the bishop of Belleville, Illinois, and started the "ideal" monastic life. They grew wheat and made their own bread. They set their life up with the best intentions in the world. But the experiment only lasted five to six years and then collapsed. I am not sure of the reason for the closure; perhaps it was impossible to re-create the twelfth century. Be that as it may, here we are in the twenty-first century celebrating the feast of our founders and reflecting on our monastic expressions of Cistercian life.

Constance Berman, in her book *The Cistercian Evolution*, claims that most of our early documents were written forty or

15. From the chapter talk of January 26, 2003, the Solemn Feast of the Founders of Citeaux.

fifty years after the events they describe. For her, they are idealized accounts, not historical accounts. Most scholars do not accept her arguments, but they would all agree that the beginnings and ideals of Cîteaux were more complicated than we generally think.

However, the question still remains: how do we stand in relationship to our founders? Are we more like Cluny at Molesme or like Cîteaux? One argument could be along the lines that Cîteaux always had lay brothers to do the bulk of the work, so the choir monks could chant the Office and study. After all, in our golden age, we had tremendous authors and highly educated men. The case could be made that our hired people are allowing us to have the time necessary to live the Cistercian life. Given our economic situation in modern America, it is impossible to support ourselves and still have everyone attending all the Hours of Prayer. Many monasteries, in fact, do not have Terce and None in choir. This idea of the lay people doing our productive work might be necessary, but it does not appeal to me. I am still struggling with the comparison of the life in the 1960s and the life now. In the 60s we might have had one or two hired hands on the farm or in the alfalfa plant, but in minor roles. We truly supported ourselves by the labor of our hands. We followed the norm given in our present Constitutions which says: "Fidelity to our Cistercian traditions requires that the community's regular income be mainly the fruit of its own work" (no. 41).

This is our ideal, but what do you do when it becomes nearly impossible to fulfill? What if you do not have the monks to do the work? You do the best you can and entrust the rest to God. After all, God is in charge. There is a reason why the evolution of our community and religious life in general is going the way it is. No doubt, there are many superficial answers based on sociological and even theological reasons for lack of vocation to the priesthood and religious life, but ultimately, it is a mystery. A monastic vocation is a mysterious grace given to some and not to others. Monasteries close because of the lack of vocations, and somewhere else in the world new monasteries open and are full

of vocations. But if you happen to be in one that is struggling to survive, one where the community has to adapt the ideals of the life to fit the reality of the situation, then you have to look around for some reasons or explanations that help you understand what is happening.

Circumstances require us, if not to give up our ideals of supporting ourselves by manual labor, at least to alter them. We are being called to give up, in a sense, one of our children. After all, our ideals can be as close to us as giving birth to a child. We give birth and nurture our ideals. But we are asked to make a painful separation, a renunciation for a greater good, when we have to make a choice of leaving an ideal aside, or at least not being able to live it as we think we should. The greater good is the surrender to God's will manifested to us by the events of the times we live in. The mystery of God's providence hidden in history, the history of the Church, say, in the last forty years, calls forth our faith and trust.

This situation is an opportunity to grow in renunciation. It is a time of surrender. God made a promise to Abraham that his renunciation would be small compared to his future. Jesus promised that those who leave all to follow him will receive more in return. We live on this promise, struggling to leave all during each season of our life.

Monasteries Helping Each Other

In the Cistercian Order, when a monastery becomes so large that it is difficult to receive new members, a foundation is proposed. New Melleray is a foundation of Mt. Melleray in Ireland. This system is known as the Mother House–Daughter House filiation. The abbot of the Mother House makes an official visitation of the Daughter House every two years. On June 8, 2005, we had a visitation from Dom Eamon Fitzgerald of Mt. Melleray in Ireland.

The abbot of the Mother House in relation to the Daughter House is called the "Father Immediate." We have three daughter

houses: Assumption Abbey (Missouri), Mt. St. Bernard (England), and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey (Dubuque). Every monastery of nuns has a monks' monastery as their Father Immediate.

Our Father Immediate, Dom Eamon of Mt. Melleray, has seven daughter houses, five of monks and two of nuns. These houses are on four different continents. So Dom Eamon is gone a lot. In 2003, he could not make his visitation to us because he had just returned from Africa. He delegated our visitation to an abbot of our choice.

Several years ago the General Chapter produced a new statute on the regular visitation. It states the purpose of the regular visitation as: "To motivate the brothers to lead the Cistercian life with renewed spiritual vigilance and to strengthen, supplement and when needed, correct the pastoral action of the local abbot" (no. 2).

It also says that a "shared understanding between the Visitor, the Community to be visited, and the superior is crucial for the abiding fruitfulness of the Visitation" (no. 6). The statute has four small paragraphs on preparation for a visitation. The first is prayer to the Holy Spirit asking for divine guidance. The second is for the local superior to give a talk or two on the upcoming visitation and to encourage all to be open and honest. The community should not feel any restraint and should be totally free to say what they want. Then the community examines itself concerning its needs at this moment in history. The text suggests the possibility of a community dialog to identify a few major themes for the visitor to address. Finally, the visitor must inform himself as best he can on everything concerning the community he will visit (no. 15).

Different areas of community life could be brought up during the visitation. Fourteen items are listed, such as the level of charity, the spirit and celebration of the liturgy, the balance between *lectio*, prayer, and work, silence and enclosure, hospitality, relations with the Order and the local Church, and even the physical health of the community. This suggested list of items

helps to identify areas that can be brought up in the private interviews with the visitor. Writing a paragraph or two on the state of the community as we see it also helps the visitor to understand us. The visitor may not be able to solve our problems, but it will help him to know what we think, our strong points and weak points, where we are succeeding and where we are failing.

Visitation at Tautra Mariakloster, Norway

I made the visitation as the Father Immediate of our Trappistine foundation on Tautra Island, Norway, on June 1–14, 2004. Tautra, as it is known, was founded from Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey in Dubuque in 1999.

There are eight sisters in the community. The main issue at this point was to petition the next General Chapter in October 2005 to become a simple priory. True enough, in that chapter the foundation's petition was accepted.

This is the first step in a series that goes like this: from a foundation, the new community becomes a simple priory, then a major priory, and finally, an abbey. The only difference between a simple priory and a major priory is that a simple priory has a right to receive personnel and financial help from the founding house. It is a big step to become a priory. A foundation is still part of the founding house, and so the abbess is still the superior of the foundation. Once a foundation becomes a priory, they are autonomous, and the founding abbess has no more authority over it. She does have the obligation of personnel and financial assistance, however, until it becomes a major priory.

To qualify as a simple priory the foundation must: (1) have six professed nuns ready to change stability and some novices coming to the end of their formation, (2) have sufficient buildings to make the regular life possible, and (3) have sufficient income to cover the important parts of the community's needs. All these requirements had been fulfilled, so it was easy for the General Chapter to promote Tautra Mariakloster to a simple priory. One significant issue in the visitation was their progress in incultura-

tion, which included the community learning to speak Norwegian. The Sisters had a teacher who came, and the government paid for four hundred hours of class time. The course was completed, they can all read Norwegian, and most can carry on a conversation and read and write it. What they want to do now is use it more when they travel outside the monastery for shopping and so on. The liturgy is mostly in Norwegian, but the chapter talks and refectory readings three or four days a week are in English. They would like to start using Norwegian more, but it is difficult. Everyone in the country knows English very well, especially the young people. They start English classes in the third grade. I was talking to a college-age girl at the bus depot, and she said in high school and college they learn English from American TV shows, movies, and music. The sisters have a hard time sticking to Norwegian because if they get stuck over a word in a conversation with a Norwegian, the person goes into English right away.

One of the hardest things to get used to at Tautra was almost twenty-four hours of daylight in the summer time. The sun sets about 1:30 AM and rises at 3:00 AM and in between it is a period of twilight. It never really gets dark. The sun rises in the north and sets in the north, since this part of Norway is close to the Arctic Circle. So summers are all light and winters are all dark.

The architect chosen to design the new monastery was from Oslo, and he had built a few churches there. He liked to have little gardens brought into the building. There were about five to ten such gardens in the plan. One little wall section of the church, for example, is glass that overlooks a water garden. By the soap department, there is an herb garden. Outside the refectory is a vegetable garden. These gardens are enclosed by four walls but open to the sky. The whole monastery is about one hundred feet from the fjord.

The first chaplain of Tautra was recently elected abbot at Mellifont Abbey in Ireland. Presently, Fr. Anthony O'Brien, who hails from Kerry and joined Roscrea Monastery, serves as the nuns' chaplain. By way of geographical proximity, Tautra falls under the region of the Isles.

On March 25, 2006, the Tautra Mariakloster moved from the status of a foundation to a simple priory, and Mother Rosemary was elected the first prioress. In this way, it attains its independence of governance from the motherhouse, Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey in Dubuque, although Mississippi Abbey continues to maintain some financial dependence as the need arises. Through the generosity of many benefactors, a complete monastery was constructed and was finished in August 2006.

*The Fjords of Tautra Give Praise and Welcome*¹⁶

Sometime in the 1100s St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a letter to Henry Murdock in which he says, "Believe me who has experience, you will find more laboring amongst the woods than you ever will amongst books. Woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any master" (Letter 107). Yesterday, sitting looking out at the fjord, I wondered if we could say the same about water. Does it teach like the woods and stones? What would the fjord tell us if it could speak?

Perhaps it would say to the sisters:

We have been waiting for you. Welcome. We are here to care for you. We will heat your house in the winter and cool it in the summer. We will refresh you when you are thirsty and cleanse you at the end of the day. Nothing grows on the island without us. We are the nurturing springs from deep in the earth bringing healing waters, refreshing waters, and cleansing waters. But listen, we go back to the beginning. We watered the Garden of Eden. It is not even recorded when we were created. The land itself rose out of us. We covered the earth and receded at the command of the Creator.

We remember the angel gliding over us on the Sea of Galilee on his mission to Nazareth. Then we knew why the psalmist

16. Homily given to the sisters' community at Tautra, Norway, on the occasion of the blessing and foundation of the new priory on March 25, 2006, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

called upon all of us, the waters of the deep, the waters above the heavens, all streams and water courses, to praise the Lord. It was the moment he took a body from the Virgin. We loved St. Bernard's use of the words, "and the Virgin's name was Mary." We whisper these words to you as you go by, "and the Virgin's name was Mary." Listen to us softly murmur this to you day and night. We never sleep. Just as Mary conceived him on this day, you conceived him in your spirit in baptism.

We were the water poured over you. From that moment your heart never sleeps either. For deep in the core of your being our Savior prays unceasingly like a hidden river within you saying: "Come to the Father."

We received the body of the Lord in the Jordan and were made holy that very day. The Lord uses us to bless you at the end of each day. We were even used today to bless the walls of your church and in a few minutes a drop of our water will be added to the chalice as a sign of the mingling of the human and divine at the Eucharist. Blood and water flowed from his side on the cross and out of this stream the Church was born.

We are so happy you are finally here. The Lord chose you for this place by our side from all creation. We are your elder sisters here to help you live the mystery of Jesus once again. We are "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning" ("Spring," Gerard Manley Hopkins). We speak with many voices, listen to us.

Well, sisters, if the Creator uses water to come to us in so many ways, how much more will he use your new community, the very body of his Son Jesus? What a historic day for Norway! Your words of prayer will express the deep soul of all Norwegians, whether they are aware of it or not. For at the core of each person's being is the thirst for God. Your vocation is to represent this thirst by thirsting yourselves. You are to experience the words of Jesus on the cross: "I thirst." He is thirsting for our love. "If anyone thirst let him come to me; let him drink who believes in

me . . . from within him rivers of water shall flow" (John 7:37-38). "Whoever drinks the water I give him . . . shall have a fountain within leaping up to provide eternal life" (John 4:14). St. Bernard used to love to repeat to his monks the words from Proverbs: "Be the first to drink from your own well."

Sisters, you know and have tasted this river of living water within you, this fountain leaping up to eternal life. You have followed it to the source of your very being and there have come face-to-face with your Creator, though it be night. I love the words of St. Anselm: "I have been created to see God but I have yet to do what I have been created to do." And even more the words of St. Hilary: "I have a firm grasp on something I do not understand." Your monastic life, your monastery, is a mystery. No one fully understands it, but you have drunk deeply at the spring within you. You know the depths of love at the core of your life. You have sacrificed all for this one precious pearl found only in the deepest waters of your soul. In this way you reveal the essence of the human heart so that others may know that the love of God is in their heart too. You carry everyone in your heart. You may never see the fruits of your labor because we live by faith, not by sight. But you are a mother and a sister to all humanity. You are the voice for those who do not know their own voice. You are the cry going up from the ends of the earth to the Father.

We call the ceremony about to be enacted a transfer of your vow of stability. Sounds rather distant and abstract, does it not? What it really means is that you are transferring your heart to this place, to this safe island, to this monastery, to the people of Norway. For the last seven years you have known the love of the Norwegian people for you. Their presence here today means they will not let you down. They will care for your heart and support you.

My nephew, who recently became a father, sent me an insightful quote that says, "Having a child . . . is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." This community is your child, needing your care. Your heart is in it.

Jesus is the heart of the invisible God. His heart is in this community too. Together you form one person, Jesus in you and you in him.

Dear sisters, all the voices of the island are speaking to you today—the living and the dead, the monks who have gone before you, the good Christians who have lived here for centuries, the birds of the sky, the fish in the water, the community of all God's creatures sing the glad song of redemption: "With joy you will draw waters from the wells of salvation."