



# The Douai Magazine

Quidquid agunt homines Duacenses

No 173 2011

*Cover photographs by Bernat Kaposi*

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The motto of *The Douai Magazine* has for many years been *Quidquid agunt homines Duacenses* which would suggest that the purpose of this magazine is to cover any affairs that concern people connected with Douai.

This year, we are pleased to publish an article by a past pupil of Douai School, Richard Lock-Pullan, of the University of Birmingham, on lay interpretations of the Rule of St Benedict. It is a significant phenomenon that interest in monasticism is growing worldwide. One has only to think of the television series a few years ago featuring Worth Abbey, the birth of MONOS, the centre for the Study of Monastic Culture and Spirituality, which holds its annual conferences at Douai, the new or secular monasticism which is appearing in various guises in diverse places, and, of course, the exponential growth of Benedictine oblates, worldwide since about 1980. The third international gathering of Oblates in Rome is planned for 2013. We hope that this article will make a significant contribution.

Last September saw the opening of the new library and archive building; we have written a lot about this in previous issues, so Fr Abbot's article and the various photographs complete our coverage of this important venture.

Finally a moving piece by one of our oblates, Philip Sheppard, whose narrative of dying is a powerful piece of writing and an expression of faith, which, it is hoped, will be helpful to others.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of *The Douai Magazine* and we always welcome contributions and suggestions for publication in future issues.◊

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# ‘To Live Lives of Quite Extraordinary Value’- Lay Interpretations of Benedictine Spirituality *by Richard Lock-Pullan University of Birmingham*

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**S**t Benedict (c480-547) is the father of western Christian monasticism<sup>1</sup>. The Rule that he wrote for his monastery was the dominant form of European monasticism until the Reformation. The interest generated by the TV programme *The Monastery* and the growing plethora of books on Benedictine spirituality show that a consideration of it for the laity has timely resonance<sup>2</sup>. In this article the focus is on Benedict’s Rule rather than on Benedictine monasticism *per se*, as works such as Christopher Jamison’s on the monastery being a modern sanctuary cover this<sup>3</sup>. The concern here is broader, as it seeks to realise the claim of the Benedictine Basil Hume, that “the Rule of St Benedict makes it possible for ordinary folk to live lives of quite extraordinary value.”<sup>4</sup>

It is the argument of this article that Benedictine spirituality can be followed by the laity because it is a life of prayer and virtue based on the gospel, finding God in the mundane routines of daily life. The Rule can be legitimately adapted for those who live outside the enclosed monastery that Benedict originally envisaged. Furthermore it does not require a special programme, as do the Ignatian exercises, or residence in a Benedictine monastery.

Any study of Benedictine spirituality has to acknowledge that “it is impossible to include under any single formula St Benedict’s idea, or the Essence of Benedictinism.”<sup>5</sup> One can only state various aspects of it. There is a range of ways of reading and interpreting the Rule, and these hermeneutical approaches include adapting the Rule, making selections to generate a didactic approach, to very broad interpretations of the spirit of the Rule. These approaches are the concern of this article.

To consider the Rule’s potential for the laity, this article opens by outlining key questions of definition and methodology, before examining Benedictine spirituality and the various readings that focus on: the three ‘tools’ of the Rule – the Daily Office, *lectio divina* and work-; on the three vows of obedience, stability and ‘conversion of life’ made by monks; or on the basic themes of silence, community, listening, hospitality and the virtues. It then examines various tensions and examples. Following the usual convention in Benedictine studies, Fry’s authoritative translation of the Rule, the *RB 1980*, will be used and references to the Rule are placed

within parenthesis [chapter: verse].<sup>6</sup>

## What is Spirituality?

Traditionally spirituality is understood as a tradition of prayer, progress in which leads to ever more intimate union with Christ.<sup>7</sup> However, ‘spirituality’ is now a “portmanteau term,”<sup>8</sup> as it can refer to the creative and meditative elements of life left over once technology has addressed our material needs.<sup>9</sup> The work in the hospice movement, for example, uses the term ‘spirituality’ to refer to an individual developing their own understanding of meaning, place, purpose and relationship with the beyond.<sup>10</sup> In this article the theological understanding of spirituality is used, which sees it as a way of holiness, an authentic religious practice where a person relates to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This may lead to mysticism, an unmediated experience of God, but not necessarily. Spirituality is a “particular style of approach to union with God.”<sup>11</sup> Key to spirituality is “the experience of transformation in the Divine-Human relationship as modelled by Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit,” which is then “appropriated as a lifestyle within all relationships in the broader Christian community as well as in society in general.”<sup>12</sup> Christian spirituality thus involves self-transcendence, not just self-realisation or peace-of-mind as in secular models, as the ‘depth’ within a person is seen theologically as being in God.<sup>13</sup> As Thomas Merton says, “the secret of my full identity is hidden in God.” Spirituality is a way of nurturing that perception.

Benedictine spirituality is a ‘spirituality’ because it is a ‘system of living,’ a way of living and structuring a life to generate a potentially transformative communion with God reliant on God’s grace. Like all Christian spiritualities, that “do no more than show how the Gospel can be lived,” the Benedictine approach is shaped by its priorities.<sup>14</sup> Theresa’s Missionaries of Charity, for example, stress the loving service of Christ with the poor. Benedictine spirituality is appropriate for the laity because its distinctive emphasis is a pursuit of “the ideal of listening for God in the rhythms of work and prayer throughout the day.”<sup>15</sup> Before examining this in detail it is necessary to address the question of methodology for analysing this question.

## Methodology

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In the study of spirituality there are four main approaches that are used in combination and in a multi-disciplinary manner.<sup>16</sup> The anthropological method, which focuses on a person's experience does not address the theme of this study. The historical approach is used here to avoid the dangers of 'presentism' where the text is taken out of historical context.<sup>17</sup> This article uses the historical method to stay aware of the strangeness of the Rule as a 6<sup>th</sup> Century text as it is read today. The third method is theological, where the spirituality is seen as expressing a prior theology, especially of key normative doctrines.<sup>18</sup> This article is a work in applied theology and thus focuses on how the Rule can be lived out today. On these terms the fourth, hermeneutical, method is adopted because this focuses on texts and how they are read. The hermeneutical approach borrows from the work of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur as has been pioneered in the study of spirituality by Sandra Schneiders.<sup>19</sup> The hermeneutical method requires an initial description, then analysis, leading to explanation and evaluation and finally appropriation, that is, what it means for us today.<sup>20</sup> This method deliberately aims to assist the researcher's own spiritual life, for in spirituality "the questioning involved ... is not an interrogation of the data, but its interrogation of us."<sup>21</sup> What is stressed is that the interpretations of the text are essentially performative and not passive, and sees reading the text as a life-long process of learning to be a wise reader capable of embodying that reading in life.<sup>22</sup> The narrative that is generated and lived does not provide reductionist answers but questions the reader and from this tension comes the lived life of faith. Modern hermeneutical scholars such as Gadamer and Ricoeur have brought the dimension of personal involvement in reading back in, whilst using historical-critical methodologies.<sup>23</sup> A faithful reading can once again mean more than a philologically correct one as the reader and text are both questioned by each other.

### Benedictine Spirituality

One has to ask by what authority a text questions a reader, and Benedict's Rule draws upon his own experience, scriptural authority and the leading church traditions of his day. It has been hugely influential too.

Benedict was born in c480 in Nursia in modern day Italy, a time of great political instability.<sup>24</sup> The only

certain date in Benedict's life is 542 when the Goth King Totila visited him on his way to attack Naples. After school in Rome, Benedict became a hermit for three years. Monks from a local monastery asked him to become their abbot, which he did, but after they tried to poison him he returned to his cave. His reputation for sanctity was such that locals flocked to him in such numbers that he built thirteen monasteries with approximately 12 monks in each. Jealousy eventually broke out, and his bread was poisoned, so he moved his monks to Monte Cassino. In c530 Benedict wrote his Rule, revising it over the years. Traditionally 21 March 547 is regarded as the date of Benedict's death. Monte Cassino was destroyed thirty years later, but the Rule survived.

For Benedict the monastery was a *dominici schola servitii* ,[Prologue: 45] 'a school for the Lord's service,' and the Rule draws on his experience as both a hermit and as a monk. He was a man aware of the limitations of human nature and wrote a balanced Rule so that "the strong have something to yearn for and the weak have nothing to run from." [64:19] He was countering the extreme asceticism of the Egyptian eremitical monks.<sup>25</sup> He was not a founder of a religious order in the way an Ignatius or Dominic were in later periods, as the Rule was a product of being asked to bring order to a collection of lay people, not clergy, who wished to live a faithful life. Key to this was a vow of stability to the particular community, thereby creating a family rather than a transitory body of people. [4:78] Communal prayer was central to the monastic life and was called the *opus Dei*, 'the work of God.' [43:3] Benedict also stressed that all monks should work, itself a revolutionary idea for those coming from wealthy backgrounds. [48:8]

Benedict's Rule is a substantial re-writing of an earlier rule for monks, the Rule of the Master.<sup>26</sup> Benedict's Rule is shorter, more humane and flexible and modern scholarship suggests that it is a revision of the earlier rule he wrote himself.<sup>27</sup> The key source for him is scripture, as the Rule, which is approximately 9,000 words in English, quotes or alludes to the Bible 572 times in the 73 chapters.<sup>28</sup> For Benedict the Bible was to be studied, memorised and applied to one's own life in a pre-scientific manner.<sup>29</sup>

Nowhere in the Rule is there an ordered exposition of the spiritual life, as Benedict found that in Cas-

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sian (c365-c435).<sup>30</sup> For Cassian “the Lord locates the primary good not in activity... but in the truly simple and unified contemplation of Himself.”<sup>31</sup> The influence of Cassian is seen in the idea that the objective was ‘purity of heart’, a simplicity and unity of focus of the will and desire united with the Trinity, and that the goal of the Kingdom of God could be possessed by the practice of virtue.<sup>32</sup> Benedict drew upon Evagrius’ teaching on the virtues, seeing his perception of the ‘deadly sins’ as the persistent problems we all face in leading a virtuous life.<sup>33</sup> The aim was to be free from the inner turbulence caused by these sins, and humility is key to overcoming them. For Benedict, one renounces what one is and then develops the virtues, whilst being “rooted in the routines of the daily.”<sup>34</sup>

Benedictinism was the dominant form of European monasticism, especially once Charlemagne (768-814) decreed that monasteries should have a uniform rule to Christianise (and Latinise) the population.<sup>35</sup> It later became the authoritative rule for all monasteries in France and Germany. The history of Benedictinism has been punctuated by reforms as to how the Rule is lived out; some have emphasised the development of liturgy in the office, as with the Cluniacs in 910, or a revival of manual work as the Cistercians did in 1098. Further reforms, such as the Trappists in the seventeenth century, advocated a ‘strict observance’ requiring silence and no meat. Devastated in the Reformation and French Revolution, most modern monasteries are actually a product of the nineteenth century revival.<sup>36</sup> Benedict is a patron saint of Europe and is the name taken by the current Pope.

### Interpreting Benedict’s Rule.

As Benedictine spirituality is hard to pin down, it is necessary to appreciate how the laity can approach it, before going on to examine what the main features are. The hermeneutical method enables one to outline four basic secular interpretive approaches to the Rule that can be used by the laity to ‘performatively’ read it. One is to be an Oblate, which is a person with a formal link to a particular monastery which provides a supervised reading and offers support and guidance from the monks in living out a Benedictine rule of life.<sup>37</sup> Another interpretation is to focus on the practical ‘tools’ within the Rule and turn them into a programmatic method of spirituality, such as in Jane Tomaine’s *St. Benedict’s Toolbox*, where parts of the

Rule are practiced.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, one can take the key tools or vows found in the Rule and adapt them to an individual discipline of life, as found in Brian C. Taylor’s *Spirituality for Everyday Living*.<sup>39</sup> Finally, there is the popular broadly thematic reading where the text is used to address the reader’s concerns. For example, Esther De Waal’s book *Living With Contradiction* opens by seeing one of our concerns as being about healing and showing how the Rule can nurture this.<sup>40</sup> Benedict’s Rule is inherently flexible and these approaches show the differing hermeneutical methods that can be used by the laity to performatively read the Rule and thus live Benedictine spirituality outside the monastery with varying degrees of commitment. Each interpretation places a different emphasis on the tools, the vows or the themes found in the Rule. Ultimately, however, *Pax*, peace in God, is the aim. [Prologue: 17]

### Tools.

Silence is central to the Rule and monks should “cultivate silence at all times” [42:1]. Benedict is clear that “the disciple is to be silent and listen,” [6:6] which is an act of renunciation done to avoid sinful speech, develop humility and develop the art of listening.<sup>41</sup> The three ‘tools’ Benedict provides are to enhance the monk’s ability to stand within this silence and to listen and absorb the Word and be transformed.

### The Daily Office

The key emphasis of Benedictine spirituality is prayer; “nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God,” [43:3] as he called it. The monk is obediently to drop everything to attend the divine office, whatever he is doing. [5:8] Benedict devotes twelve chapters to how the whole monastic day is to be structured by going to church to pray communally, which is an expression of the whole church as the Body of Christ at prayer. Following the Psalmist’s injunction in Psalm 118(119):164 [16:1], there were seven times of prayer (offices) a day plus Vigils, a night office of praise. Each office involves Bible readings, canticles and repetition of the Psalter.

Fundamental to this office is the Psalter, which is seen Christologically, with Christ as the singer of the psalms, and their recitation is a bringing together of the love for Christ and the monk’s ‘Work of God’.<sup>42</sup> Previously, appropriate psalms had been

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used for services but Benedict distributed the whole Psalter throughout the offices of the week, keeping some particularly apt ones for certain times, such as Psalm 94 (95) during the office of Vigils. The Psalter provides a daily rhythm of prayer that is unlike the gathered Sunday prayers of congregations. By chanting all the psalms the monk is immersed in the mystery of God, and absorbs the rhythms into their very consciousness. It is a very mundane approach avoiding the distractions of novelty. Benedictine spirituality is not revolutionary and spontaneous like that of the Franciscans, but is based on “creative monotony.”<sup>43</sup> This approach of patience and slow formation goes against the modern quest for immediate results.<sup>44</sup> The laity can replicate this daily commitment by using a breviary themselves. St John’s Abbey, Collegeville has now produced one for the laity, with all the daily offices and a weekly Psalter.<sup>45</sup> Ironically St John’s themselves have reduced their daily offices to morning, midday and evening prayers, showing the inherent flexibility of the Rule and the provision for adaptation.

The Benedictine approach to communal prayer is good psychology as it provides structure and repetition, gives a shape to each day and enables the community to function effectively. Furthermore, it is an expression of the whole church being at prayer enhancing the Body of Christ. Thomas Cranmer recognised its strengths and in *The Book of Common Prayer* condensed the offices into the services of Matins and Evensong, placing the Benedictine spirit at the heart of Anglicanism spirituality.<sup>46</sup> The huge sales of the Anglican Franciscan’s *Celebrating Common Prayer* in the 1990s confirm the popularity of generating a sense of a disparate community prayerfully gathering via a communal daily office.<sup>47</sup> This style of prayer is appropriate because it provides a deep stable rhythm which consecrates time, in a society where social forms, structures and time itself are seen as fluid and brief.<sup>48</sup>

### *Lectio divina*

Community prayer is balanced by individual *lectio divina*, divine reading, and for many this is the heart of Benedictine spirituality. It follows the Rule’s opening statement, “Listen carefully ... to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.” [Prologue: 1]. Benedict was clear about the importance of the Bible and the

books of the Fathers as being guides for life. [73:3-4]

*Lectio divina* is not study in the modern sense, but is time set aside to listen carefully and attentively to God through scripture and holy writings. It has been described as “the prayerful meditation on the text.”<sup>49</sup> Benedict outlined that this should take up about three or four hours of the monk’s day. [48] The aim is to read the text and then assimilate it through repetition, bringing the inner themes to consciousness, which leads to more recognised prayer and contemplation. It is fundamentally affective rather than cognitive as it is closer to reading poetry and generating the inner assonances and connections that this brings.<sup>50</sup> It is an embodiment of the hermeneutical method where the text interrogates the reader, creates an understanding and helps bring to birth that which is referred to in the text.<sup>51</sup> As De Waal says, the goal is to “hear keenly and sensitively that Word of God which is not only message, but event and encounter.”<sup>52</sup> It is a practice that can be easily adopted by the laity and many publications support this.<sup>53</sup>

### *Work*

The motto of the Benedictines is *Ora et Labora*. This translates as ‘prayer and work’ not ‘prayer is work’, a nineteenth century reading.<sup>54</sup> Benedictines believe that hard work is ennobling. “When they live by the labour of their hands ... then they are really monks.” [48:8] Benedict’s Rule is one of harmony and balance, and the daily pattern should involve time for work, study and prayer recognising the varying demands of body, mind and spirit in each of us.<sup>55</sup> Benedict gave approximately five hours to manual work, which was a great equaliser of all monks whatever their social station, but the increasing clericalisation of monks led to its decline.

Work is an extension of the Divine Office, a spiritual exercise and not simply necessary toil, or a filling in of time, as it is an act of charity.<sup>56</sup> It is a way of giving expression to God’s own image, likeness and love.<sup>57</sup> Benedict’s stress on manual work, and its complement leisure, is reflective of a need to live gently rather than be driven or obsessed, and is a call to be open to the present.<sup>58</sup> Overwork goes against the Rule’s emphasis on balance and moderation. [4:52] The Rule shows a way to live with contradiction, the differing demands of life,

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and how to hold them in tension so they become creative and life-enhancing<sup>59</sup> This is extremely important for lay followers to recognise, and the Rule provides a way of aiming for a balanced and creative approach to life and work.

The practical tools of the Rule are realised by the vows that monks make. Obviously the laity do not make these vows but the reasoning behind them and their aims challenge lay readers and question them and their commitments.

### Vows

In the monastery where “no-one may presume to give, receive or retain anything as his own, nothing at all” [33:2-3], poverty and chastity are taken as read, so Benedictines take the vows of obedience, stability and “fidelity to monastic life.” [58:17] These vows are not viewed separately and legalistically, because a vow in Benedict’s time was a promise to live the life proscribed by the Rule with these three key elements.<sup>60</sup>

### Obedience

Key to Benedictine spirituality is the life under the authority of the abbot and the Rule. For Benedict obedience is not a question of sanctioned authoritarianism, it is the “first step of humility,” [5:1] and it is undertaken to return one to God. [Prologue: 2]. Obedience is about transcending the self-will, renouncing the self to follow Christ. [4:10] “For love of God”, obedience is given to the abbot of the community, who formally has many powers. [7:34] The role of the abbot is to arrange and command the community as he is the spiritual guide and teacher within it. [2:4]<sup>61</sup> Benedict’s understanding of obedience is different from the vertical model of authority which is found in the ‘Rule of the Master.’<sup>62</sup> For important issues the whole community is called together and all heard, especially the young, [3: 1-3] and monks are to live in mutual obedience to each other [71: 1]. Monastic obedience is the similar to marriage, as it is a life of vowed commitment to another.<sup>63</sup> The abbot rules in a similar manner to *primus inter pares*, the first among equals.

For the laity the role of the abbot has to adapted and can be taken on by a spiritual director to whom one would be accountable and guided. Second, Benedict’s emphasis on the mutual nature of authority shows how to use authority well. Fur-

thermore, obedience can be understood in a broader manner, seeing it as an admonition to listen to others and then act upon what is heard.<sup>64</sup> In the Rule obedience is understood as a way of opening up the monk (or laity) not a suppressing them and is easily applicable both in the context of a leadership position and as a devotee of Benedict.

### Stability

Benedict’s vow of stability was his most “special and tangible” contribution to monasticism as it is a commitment to a particular monastery, not an order, creating a permanent family and community.<sup>65</sup> He wanted monks to avoid the failings of those who “spend their entire lives drifting ... and are slaves to their own wills and gross appetites.” [1:10-11] He also admonishes those that “have a character as soft as lead... Their law is what they like to do, whatever strikes their fancy.” [1:6, 8]

Benedict seems to be heavily criticising what many currently see as legitimate spiritual paths, but his emphasis on stability, obedience and humility, is a commitment to, as the Benedictine Bede Griffiths puts it, adapt “to those circumstances in which by divine providence” one is in.<sup>66</sup> Stability is a crucial vow for the laity as it can be read as a commitment to not run away, meaning that one has to live in the present and to accept one’s self, one’s brethren and God’s will.<sup>67</sup> One can draw a parallel with the commitment to the divine office where the same is met again and again and the depth is slowly revealed, transforming those involved within a broader community. Stability is part of the broader ‘creative monotony’, and a commitment to encounter God here and now, continually.

### *Conversatio morum suorum*

Where stability means staying in one community for life, the third vow is to “fidelity to monastic life.” [58:17] The original Latin is *conversatio morum suorum*, a much debated trope.<sup>68</sup> It is often translated as ‘conversion of life,’ to live as fervent monk.<sup>69</sup> It can be seen as a vow to *metanoia*, to change, to repent and turn to God’s will, requiring a basic openness to continual transformation.<sup>70</sup> De Waal’s broader reading sees in it a recognition of “God’s unpredictability, which confronts our own love of cosiness or safety.”<sup>71</sup> The laity are thus able to take this vow and be questioned by it, raising issues of how committed they are to God and the Benedictine life.

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One can see that Benedict, through the three vows, is calling for a stable life of activity whereby one, in obedience, is re-enacting Christ's submission, and through *conversatio* one continually picks oneself up and starts again.<sup>72</sup> It is fundamentally a vow to keep changing oneself whilst staying in one place, a spirituality of transformation in the conjunction of divine grace and human struggle in the everyday.<sup>73</sup> The tools provide the means to realise this aspiration.

### Themes

Fundamentally, Benedictine spirituality is a spirituality of lived community. It emphasises community because it is there that the incarnate Christ can be found and adored in others.<sup>74</sup> It does not follow recent theologians in arguing for the replication of the divine *perchoresis* found in the relationships within the Trinity, as this struggles with the creative and constructive role conflict can play in community.<sup>75</sup> Benedict is well aware of the conflicts that can take place in communities - he outlines punishments for monks caught striking another [70:6] - but for him God is found in others and so his emphasis is on listening and hospitality. A monk must "accommodate and adapt" himself to the character and intelligence of each of his fellow monks. [2:32]

Listening places us within the creativity of God, who is incarnated in others; it is a "sacred art."<sup>76</sup> Benedict opens his Rule with "listen." [Prologue: 1] For listening to God and to God in others to take place there needs to be silence, as noted above, and hospitality, and "hospitality is at the centre of what it means to be a monk."<sup>77</sup> Benedict gave clear instructions as to how guests were to be treated, in terms that today would be seen as extravagant (the whole community washing their feet). He was clear that it is in the guest that we find Christ. [53] This is a very important themes for lay followers and can be widely implemented.

Benedict combines his communal theology with basic psychology, as monks need to encourage one another. [22:8] Human frailty is borne and known in community, and we know God via understanding ourselves, so we need to rely on the help of others.<sup>78</sup> The spiritual methodology Benedict uses fits a broader development in applied theology where the community is the place where theology is made active, as the foundational Revelation in Christ, individual perception and the role of the

community are brought together by 'reading in communion'.<sup>79</sup> It is a weaving together that generates virtuous character formation through being questioned by the texts, and the practices and rituals of the community help the story of one's life to take shape.<sup>80</sup> For Benedict, even hermits have first to live for a long time in community before setting out on their own. [1:3-5]

The basic virtues of Benedictine spirituality are not radical. In Chapter Four, "The Tools for Good Works," Benedict advocates firstly loving God and your neighbour, then the Ten Commandments. After that one is to renounce oneself to follow Christ and learn to discipline oneself; the tasks of helping the poor, the naked, the sick and to bury the dead follow. The aim is to love Christ and not act in anger, nurse a grudge or practise deceit, and to bless those that curse you. Monks are called to not be proud, or given to wine or too much eating, sleeping or laziness. One must not grumble but be moderate in speech. Fundamentally he is calling for the monk not to "gratify the promptings of the flesh; but to hate the urgings of self-will." [4:59-60] He sees these virtues and tasks, amongst others, as the "tools of the spiritual craft" [4:75], the virtuous means by which character is formed and spirituality practised. It is the advocacy of these basic Christian values and the means he provides, which allows the Rule to be enacted outside the monastery.

In various places in his fundamentally practical Rule, he outlines the qualities that his spirituality is aiming for. He writes that the cellarer is to be "wise, mature in conduct, temperate, not an excessive eater, not proud, excitable, offensive, dilatory or wasteful, but God-fearing." [31:1-2] He rejects the "excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous or oversuspicious." [64:16] Benedict writes clearly of the aim of his Rule:

after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love of Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vices and sins. [7:67-70]



*Left* The opening of the Library, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams is addressing the gathering, Bishop Arnold, Titular Bishop of Lindisfarne, and Patron of the Catholic Archives Society stands below. *Photo courtesy of The Newbury Weekly News.*

*Below* The Reading Room, showing the bookshelves which have recently been installed.

*Above right* The monastery cloister can now be seen for its full length, the first time since the provisional bookshelves were installed in 1968.

*Below right* The rock garden which can be seen from the Reading Room, and also can be accessed from the library by those who wish to read outside.





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## Tensions

Though it has been hugely influential, readers of the Rule have to be aware that some see limitations in Benedictine spirituality. These are not the corruptions of the Rule that even Dante complained of in the *Divine Comedy*,<sup>81</sup> but issues of religiosity, lack of mission, abstractism and formalism. They are critiques that question the suitability of the Rule as a modern spirituality.

We live in a time of deregulated religion, where many see that they have responsibility for their own spirituality.<sup>82</sup> This picks up on the Reformation call to take personal responsibility rather than simply defer to the authority of the church (or the abbot).<sup>83</sup> However, in previous ages it would have been incomprehensible to have spirituality from its religious origins, and Benedictinism is a reaffirmation of a 'religious' approach to spirituality, both in anthropological terms with the ritual of the daily office, and in the normative authority of the broader church. Furthermore, an approach of self autonomy has problems with the theology of sin and its products, such as discipline and asceticism, which are seen as dangerously negative and world and body denying. Ironically, though Benedict was challenging the austerity of the Egyptian hermits he required a monk to recognise that "I am a worm" [7:52], and called for a daily reminder that you are to die [4:47], rather supporting the negative and life denying reading of the Rule.<sup>84</sup>

With the rise of feminist theology the criticism goes deeper as it has stressed that the self needs to be celebrated as God's creation and that the task of spirituality is self-realisation.<sup>85</sup> Grace Jantzen, for example, shows that the 'self' that self-mortification fights is a far more fluid (and less male) entity than much theology recognises.<sup>86</sup> There is a need to reorientate theology from its obsession with death to one of birth and creativity, or 'natality' as she puts it.

These are serious charges that need to be addressed, and in the context of this article four key points can be made. In the case of the laity following the Rule it is a self-chosen authority, as it is ultimately with monks. It is not absolute. Second, humility can quite legitimately be understood by the laity as a commitment to listen to others, rather than as an act of self-suppression.<sup>87</sup> Third, Christians hold that God has "prior claim" over self-realisation because there is a recognition of the

need for salvation.<sup>88</sup> Benedict's emphasis on humility is an important corrective to this. Finally, it is a question of providence, as one needs to accept where God has placed one now. In these terms, obedience is an opening up of the individual not a suppression of one, because renunciation in fact allows the channelling of energies to allow prayer, creativity and love.<sup>89</sup>

Others have criticised the lack of mission in the Rule. As the missiologist Bosch points out, Benedictines may appear to have little to do with mission but they actually have effected mission in profound ways<sup>90</sup> The theology of mission in Benedict is close to a kenotic response of love and service as the monks are a serving community building up an eschatological community whilst surrounded by a corrupted and unstable society, as was the case when Benedict was founding his monasteries during violent and unstable times. The monasteries are cultured exemplars and models for others to follow, as are individuals who follow the Rule. This 'service' model can slip into complacency, as the history of Benedictinism shows, but it is not an illegitimate model of mission historically, especially as his Rule helped to spread Christianity throughout Europe and was for so long the yeast of European values.

Some have seen the influence of Cassian and Evagrius on Benedict as making him an heir to the tradition of prayer in the head, where God is an abstract intelligence and we are trained to come into union with him.<sup>91</sup> However, Benedict's advocacy of 'work' beyond the divine office undermines this critique. He outlines a demand to live with "faith and good works," and "we will never arrive unless we run there by doing good deeds." [Prologue: 21-22] The spirituality of this is shown in the details of the monk's daily life, where the goods of daily life are sanctified and the monk "will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar." [31: 10] This is reflective of his theology of seeing the "divine presence everywhere." [19:1] Like Cassian he avoids the charge of being Pelagian because he has such a strong sense of God's redeeming grace, and the need to work in co-operation with it.<sup>92</sup> For the laity this is crucial, as this means it is a spirituality that can be placed in the heart of one's daily working life.

Finally, many have a problem with the inherent formalism of Benedictinism with its emphasis on

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‘creative monotony,’ emphasising external duties rather than spontaneous and creative acts. For someone from the charismatic tradition, for example, the daily office can be unholy as they regard the work of the Spirit as free and spontaneous.<sup>93</sup> Even taking a vow would be for some seen as taking over the freedom of the Spirit.

Part of the critical tension is due to quite legitimate differences in psychological types and liturgical needs and the concurrent favouring of extempore over formal liturgies. The difference also reflects varying priorities in the understanding of God. For supporters of the Rule the Holy Spirit is giving the gift of fidelity, with a reaffirmation of the baptismal vows and so it re-affirms the work of the Spirit.<sup>94</sup> Benedictine spirituality can bring a different dimension to the current debate when it talks about repetition and slow transformation through regular prayers and practice, as it draws ‘praise’ away from just being in the church and out into every aspect of everyday life – a deeply counter-cultural perspective.

#### Application.

The power of the Rule is found in its application rather than analysis. Individuals can make commitments to enact various readings of the Rule but Benedictine spirituality’s strength lies in communal practice. Two examples are given of people using various communal readings of the Rule, to create transforming relationships with God: the Catholic Workers and the Manquehue movement.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980), a Benedictine oblate, established the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. Her life and the movement were based on radical hospitality as she found Christ in the poor and she aimed to create a world where it is easier to be good.<sup>95</sup> She saw the task as an individual taking responsibility by doing physical acts of mercy and living a life of voluntary poverty in the community. Benedictine spirituality, with its emphasis on hospitality, manual labour (especially farming) and liturgical prayer was a great influence, without which “there is very little left in the Catholic Worker program.”<sup>96</sup> The Houses of Hospitality for the poor and destitute were rather anarchic transient communities but places where all were listened to. It is still running years after the death of the founder. The Catholic Worker worked on very monastic time as it aimed for the slow trans-

formation of people and society, by living in loose community without vows. The Catholic Worker was a key influence on Thomas Merton – himself an influential Trappist spiritual writer – becoming a Catholic.<sup>98</sup> Day is currently being considered for beatification.<sup>99</sup>

The Manquehue movement is an extended lay Benedictine community and was founded in Chile as a lay movement of all ages following the principles of Benedict’s Rule. Especially powerful for them is the personal encounter with God found in *lectio divina*, as it “is an effective response to the individualism indicative of high modernity.”<sup>100</sup> The Manquehue visit prisons, help the sick and elderly, are engaged in mission and service, and work for communities in need, especially in education. They have set up three schools.

These accounts show the resilience, flexibility and depth of the Benedictine tradition, and how it can be lived out by the laity today in community or alone with varying degrees of commitment and reliance on the tools, vows or themes. It gives substance to Basil Hume’s claim that,

The *Rule*... has been and can continue to be, that instrument which we may use to explore the mystery which God is. Understand its fundamental principles, live by its spirit and value its doctrine, and you will catch a glimpse of that glory of God which He accords from time to time to those who strive, humbly and obediently, to serve Him<sup>101</sup>

#### Conclusion

This article has shown, via a hermeneutical method, that Benedictine spirituality has a place outside the monastery walls. It has shown how the tools, the vows and themes can be read, interpreted and committed to in such a way that it is an authentic spirituality for the laity to be transformed by God through the Holy Spirit. It is an avowedly traditional religious model of spirituality, based upon scripture, and challenges secular understandings of spirituality as it aims for self-transcendence not self-realisation.<sup>102</sup> It puts basic Christian teachings into action and it avoids neo-medievalism.<sup>103</sup> It is not a universal spirituality because it appeals to certain psychological types and needs to be highly adapted to cope with the transition from the 6<sup>th</sup> century monastery. It is a spirituality that cannot be reduced to an essence but places prayer at the

centre, and emphasises humility, silence, balance, stability, moderation, openness, growth, listening and hospitality. Benedict's Rule helps us to listen, respond and grow.<sup>104</sup>

As with all great texts one is aware that in reading the Rule there is a tension between the 'open proclamation' available to all and the 'repository of secrets' open only to those who are trained.<sup>105</sup> A Benedictine monk or nun will read the Rule differently from the laity, but *pax*, peace in God, is still the aim. Benedict's Rule helps us by making us humbler and more hospitable through the tools and virtues he promotes and provides. It is a spirituality of applied theology that is not separated from lived experience, and it reminds us of this by showing us how to live.<sup>106</sup> After all, God is concerned with "our purity of heart and tears of compunction, not our many words." [20:3] In a time where there is a growing interest in monasticism but a declining numbers of monks and nuns, lay 'readings' of, and approaches to, the Rule may well be the very future of Benedictine spirituality. ♦

<sup>1</sup>The author wishes to thank Rev'd Drs Mark Chapman and Bernard Green OSB, and Fr Gervase Holdaway OSB for comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>2</sup>*The Monastery* was shown on BBC TV in 2005. eg. Dean, Eric, *Saint Benedict for the Laity*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>Jamison, Christopher, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006).

<sup>4</sup>Hume, Basil, *In Praise of Benedict*. (Leominster: Ampleforth Abbey Press/Gracewing, 1981), p 24

<sup>5</sup>Butler, Cuthbert, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule*. 2nd Ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1924), p 33

<sup>6</sup>Fry, Timothy (ed) *RB 1980 The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup>eg. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), pp 576-579 [sections 2709-2719]

<sup>8</sup>Rumbold, Bruce, "From Religion to Spirituality," in Rumbold, Bruce (ed), *Spirituality and Palliative Care: Social and Pastoral Perspectives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p 8

<sup>9</sup>Cottingham, John, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p 3

<sup>10</sup>Rumbold, "From Religion to Spirituality," p 17

<sup>11</sup>Lane, George A., *Christian Spirituality: A Historical Sketch*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1984), p viii

<sup>12</sup>Perrin, David B., *Studying Christian Spirituality*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), p 32

<sup>13</sup>Merton, Thomas, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. (London: Burns and Oates, 1961/1999), p 32

<sup>14</sup>Hume, *In Praise of Benedict*, p 79

<sup>15</sup>Downey, Michael, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p 48

<sup>16</sup>ibid., pp 115-144 and Berling, Judith A., "Christian Spirituality: Intrinsically Interdisciplinary," in Lescher, Bruce H. and Elizabeth Liebert (eds), *Exploring Christianity Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders*. (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), pp 35-52.

<sup>17</sup>Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* pp 126-7

<sup>18</sup>ibid. pp 124-5

<sup>19</sup>Lescher, Bruce H. and Elizabeth Liebert (eds), "Introduction," *Exploring Christian Spirituality*. pp 1-11

<sup>20</sup>ibid. p 5

<sup>21</sup>Williams, Rowan, *The Wounds of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), p 1

<sup>22</sup>Fowl, Stephen E., and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life*. (London: SPCK, 1991), eg. pp 84-104

<sup>23</sup>Dumm, Demetrius, *Cherish Christ Above All: The Bible in the Rule of Benedict*. (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), pp 13-15

<sup>24</sup>Butcher, Carmen Acevedo, *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict*. (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), p 130

<sup>25</sup>Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*. pp 23-32

<sup>26</sup>Fry, *RB 1980*, pp 79-83 and Appendix 7 pp 478-493.

<sup>27</sup>de Vogue, Adalbert, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), pp 9-43

<sup>28</sup>Dumm, *Cherish Christ*, p 1

<sup>29</sup>ibid. p 8-13

<sup>30</sup>Cassian, John. [trans. Jerome Bertram] *The Monastic Institutes*. (London: St Austin Press, 1999), p 64 [ch 39], and Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*, pp 46, 51

<sup>31</sup>Cassian, John. [trans. Colm Luibheid] *Conferences*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p 43

<sup>32</sup>ibid. pp 40, 48

<sup>33</sup>Vest, Norvne, *Desiring Life: Benedict on Wisdom and the Good Life*. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2000), p 68

<sup>34</sup>Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*. p 50, Vest, *Desiring Life*. p 62

<sup>35</sup>Fry, *RB 1980* p 121

<sup>36</sup>Fry, *RB 1980*

<sup>37</sup>Morris, Augustine. *Oblates: A Life with St. Benedict*. (Newbury: Elmore Abbey, 1992)

<sup>38</sup>Tomaine, Jane, *St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living*. (New York: Morehouse, 2005).

<sup>39</sup>Taylor, Brian C. *Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1989)

<sup>40</sup>De Waal, Esther, *Living With Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality*. 2nd Ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003)

<sup>41</sup>de Vogue, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, pp 113- 115

<sup>42</sup>Kleiner, Sighard. *Serving God First: Insights on the Rule of St. Benedict*. (Kalamazoo, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1985), p 231

<sup>43</sup>Casey, Michael, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict*. (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2005), pp 23-4

<sup>44</sup>Stewart, Columba, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), p 121

<sup>45</sup>Johnson, Maxwell E. (ed), *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*. (Blackrock, Co Dublin: Columba Press, 2005)

<sup>46</sup>De Waal, Esther, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999), p 7

<sup>47</sup>*Celebrating Common Prayer: A Version of The Daily Office SSF*. (London: Mowbray, 1992)

<sup>48</sup>Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) and Guiver, George. *Company of Voices: Daily Prayer and the People of God*. (London: SPCK, 1988), p 197

<sup>49</sup>Casey, Michael, "The Art of Lectio Divina," in *The Benedictine Handbook*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), p 106

<sup>50</sup>ibid. p 107

<sup>51</sup>Simms, Karl, *Paul Ricoeur*. (London: Routledge, 2003), pp 31-43

<sup>52</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. p 26

<sup>53</sup>eg. Foster, David. *Reading With God: Lectio Divina*. (London: Continuum, 2005) and Tomaine, St. Benedict's Toolbox. pp 32-42.

<sup>54</sup>Kardong, Terrence. "Work is Prayer: Not!" *Assumption Abbey Newsletter* (Richardton, ND 58652). Volume 23, Number 4 (October 1995).

<sup>55</sup>Stewart, *Prayer and Community*. p 83

<sup>56</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. p 4

<sup>57</sup>Stewart, *Prayer and Community*. p 119

<sup>58</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. p 27

<sup>59</sup>Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*. pp 23-32

<sup>60</sup>Griffiths, Bede, *The Golden String: An Autobiography*. (London: Harvill Press, 1954), p 135

<sup>61</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. pp 39-48.

<sup>62</sup>de Vogue, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. p 317

<sup>63</sup>Parry, Abbot, *The Rule of St. Benedict*. (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995), p 95

<sup>64</sup>Taylor, *Spirituality for Everyday*. p 20

<sup>65</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. p 53

<sup>66</sup>ibid. p 61

<sup>67</sup>Casey, *Strangers* p 6

<sup>68</sup>Stewart, *Prayer and Community*. p 29

<sup>69</sup>eg. Fiddes, Paul S. *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000) and cf. Chapman, Mark D. *Blair's Britain: A Christian Critique*

(London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), pp 43-58

<sup>70</sup>Kirkpatrick, Bill. *The Creativity of Listening: Being There, Reaching Out*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).

<sup>71</sup>Homan, Daniel and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*. (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2002), p ix.

<sup>72</sup>Stewart, *Prayer and Community*. p 69

<sup>73</sup>Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion*.

<sup>74</sup>Hauerwas, Stanley, "Christianity: It's Not a Religion, It's an Adventure," in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (eds), *The Hauerwas Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p 530

<sup>75</sup>Alighieri, Dante. [trans. John D. Sinclair] *The Divine Comedy III: Paradiso*. Rev. Ed. (London: Bodley Head, 1948), p 321.[Canto XXII, line 73]

<sup>76</sup>Lyon, David, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) and Rumbold, "From Religion to Spirituality," pp 5-21.

<sup>77</sup>eg. Peel, David R. *Reforming Theology: Explorations in the Theological Traditions of the United Reformed Church*. (London: United Reformed Church, 2002), pp 151-156

<sup>78</sup>Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*. p 36-45

<sup>79</sup>Hampson, Daphne. *Theology and Feminism*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

<sup>80</sup>Jantzen, Grace M., *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

<sup>81</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*. p

<sup>82</sup>Dumm, "Work of God," p 103

<sup>83</sup>Casey, *Strangers* pp 14-5

<sup>84</sup>Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), pp 236, 230-238.

<sup>85</sup>Lane, *Christian Spirituality*.

<sup>86</sup>eg. Cassian, *The Monastic Institutes*. pp xv-xviii

<sup>87</sup>Cartledge, Mark J., *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006)

<sup>88</sup>de Vogue, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. p 284

<sup>89</sup>Ellsberg, Robert (ed), *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992)

<sup>90</sup>Zwick, Mark and Louise, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins*. (New York: Paulist, 2005), p 51. See Day's "Introduction" to *Sorg, Holy Work*.

<sup>91</sup>McKanan, Dan. *The Catholic Worker After Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), pp 6-13

<sup>92</sup>Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement*. p 57

<sup>93</sup>Miller, William D., *Dorothy Day: A Biography*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982)

<sup>94</sup>Phillips, Jason. *Applying the Rule of St. Benedict in a Lay Context: The Manquehue Apostolic Movement*. Unpublished manuscript.

<sup>95</sup>Hume, *In Praise of Benedict*. p 58

<sup>96</sup>Casey, *Strangers* p 4

<sup>97</sup>Taylor, Barry. *Entertainment Theology: A New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy*.

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), pp 143-147

<sup>98</sup>De Waal, *Seeking God*, p 136

<sup>99</sup>Kermode, Frank, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p 144

<sup>100</sup>Sheldrake, Philip, "Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology," in Lescher, Bruce H. and Elizabeth Liebert (eds), *Exploring Christianity Spirituality*, pp 15-34. ♦

# The Library *by Abbot Geoffrey Scott*

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*The new monastery library and archive building was opened by Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury on the afternoon of Sunday September 12, 2010, and it was blessed by Fr Abbot, in the presence of many of those who had donated to the appeal. Ed*

**I**mmediately after the opening of the library building in September 2010 we began the long haul of transferring the books and the various collections from the temporary accommodation where they had lain since 1968, the year that Father Wilfrid Sollom OSB constructed ingenious provisional shelving in the Gibberd monastery cloister and when, about the same time, Father Leo Arkwright OSB began a comprehensive inventory of our art and coin collections. Father Oliver and his team's labours in rebuilding shelving and in moving furniture after the opening needs to be recorded.

To date (August 2011), the main working library, which is predominantly theological, has been shelved and the coin collection transferred. In place too are the archives of the English Benedictine nuns of Dunkirk and Teignmouth, the Augustinian Canonesses of Louvain and Haywards Heath, and the Anglican Benedictine monks of Nashdom and Elmore. The papers of the Benedictine nuns of Princethorpe and Fernham are due to be transferred in August 2011, and negotiations are in train with the Passionists of the English Province about the eventual deposit of their archive. Meanwhile, the archive of the Community at Douai has been shelved and roughly sorted and a start has been made on shelving the rare book collection. There was an early delay in transferring the various archives because the humidifier originally installed in the alarmed and secure archive room was unable to cope with the extreme temperatures of last winter and a new humidifier had to be procured.

The second stage in the completion of the building was to provide furnishings of a quality which would reflect the beauty of the building. Funding for these has come from generous benefactors, especially from parents of the

Catholic pupils of Winchester College, whose chaplaincy we serve. The solid Croatian oak shelving designed and made by Benchmark of Hungerford has been built into the reading room, and tables will be arriving from the same firm in August 2011. Once the furniture is installed, we shall be hanging various portraits in the principal reading room.

Meanwhile, the library committee is inspecting various types of library and archive software in order that new electronic catalogues can be compiled. This will be the third, and we hope last, item covered by the appeal.

The new library has proved a restful and comfortable place to work, warm in winter and cool in summer. Its collections are easy to access and it is provided with delightful views, to the east, the 'gothick' rockery and its pool, and to the west, by contrast, something akin to an eighteenth-century landscape garden. It has had many satisfied readers since its opening. One has been struck by the predominance of those conducting archival research who have been more numerous than those wishing to use the library as such. Researchers using the archives have come from Belgium and Holland, as well as from the United States, and we have welcomed historians of the East India Company and a Cambridge liturgist studying the library's medieval holdings. The new library is set to become an important resource for the Community and its friends, and we continue to be grateful to all those who have brought the project to fruition.

The building was given a prominent place in the general survey of religious archives in England published by the National Archives in Kew in early 2011. It has won a Civic Award principally on account of its striking relationship to its surroundings. Next year all the new monastic buildings, designed by David Richmond, will be submitted for a RIBA award. ◇

## *Conclusion of a Life's Journey by Philip Sheppard*

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*Philip Sheppard was an oblate of Douai for many years, this is an account of his terminal illness. Philip died on December 31, 2010, he wrote this while he was still able, and said we could publish it for any who would benefit from it.*

**T**his is a brief account of my recent life journey written for friends who want to know how I am getting on. It covers from September 2009 to August 2010; about 1.5% of my 76 years of life on earth so far. A lot can happen in 1.5% of a life journey.

I see life as a continuous learning process. I learn how to live in the process of living. The learning is lifelong and continues until the end. There is something unknown waiting to be discovered when the journey is complete. And so the journey of life is like a Who-Done-it? There is an unfolding mystery that is only fully revealed on the last page. Life is full of mystery until the very end.

Life is a natural process that happens all by itself. The process can be trusted; it knows what it is about. The process teaches us how life is to be lived. It is a cyclic process revealed in the cycles in nature; life ebbs and flows. The dying of the old and the rising of the new are phases in a cycle of life. Life is continually being renewed. The ups and downs, highs and lows we experience in life are part of the natural flow of life.

This account is a piece of my learning journal. I see every experience in life, whether good or bad, as a teacher sent by God to teach me a lesson. My journal is where I record what I have learned from these lessons; what God has revealed to me in the process of life. It is my personal scripture. This is another chapter.

In September 2009 I was enjoying life. Philomena and I had both just recovered from cancer. I felt well and people told me I looked well. My body still felt young; I was still doing the physical exercises I began in my 20's, albeit with less haste and more grace. I loved my life, I loved my wife, I loved my home and I loved

my friends. Then the first cloud appeared on the horizon. Philomena's scans had shown up an aortic aneurysm that seemed life threatening. She began a series of hospital tests with a view to an operation. The tests gave contradictory results. Our uncertainty began to grow.

December was a difficult month for us. Some friends died, and we went to a pilgrimage reunion at which we lit candles to friends who had died before us. We ended up with a whole tray full of lighted candles, more than there were people in the room. So December left us shell shocked with bereavements. It was also the month I discovered that there was something seriously wrong with me. I was typing on the computer one day when suddenly the characters appearing on the screen were not the ones I was typing. I looked at the keyboard and tried again but the same thing happened. I had lost control of the fingers on my right hand. I felt scared.

In January a neurologist said that it was probably motor neurone disease (MND), but he needed to be sure. I had a series of hospital tests, some unpleasant and painful, and on March 22nd, after an age of uncertainty, the diagnosis was confirmed.

MND destroys the motor neurones in the brain with the result that muscles atrophy and tendons stiffen. Fine movements become difficult, while the body feels heavy, stiff and difficult to control. MND is progressive and incurable. Once you have it things can only get worse.

In March the symptoms were mostly confined to difficulty with my right hand and arm, and to a barely perceptible slurring of speech. Now it affects my whole body. I can't speak nor eat normal food. Breathing is becoming difficult. My legs can barely support the weight of my body. If I sway slightly off balance twelve stones of soft flesh and fragile bones go crashing to the ground with potentially disastrous results. If I am in pain in the night I can't move, I just have to live with it. Handling paper and cloth is difficult and it is surprising how much paper and cloth are handled in the course of an ordinary day. Just imagine going to the toilet! I

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can see, hear and think as clearly as ever, but I am increasingly helpless to respond to what is happening around me.

As I become increasingly helpless to deal with the world “out there”, the world “in here” becomes increasingly intense. A minor frustration can trigger infantile rage. I want to strike out but am helpless to do so. And so I am forced to deal with the rage internally. I am forced to face my inner demons. Carl Jung says that my worst enemy is within me. Jesus tells me to love my enemies. If I love the enemy within – my inner demons, I love myself as God loves me, because God loves all of me.

Meanwhile, after nearly a year of tests and uncertainty we now have a date for Philomena’s operation.

The speed of these changes is turning our lives upside down. The rules of the game are changing faster than we can adapt. And in the midst of this chaos, some patterns are becoming clear. One is to do with time. I am getting a sense that there is no limit to the depth of now; no limit to the journey into the deep. We are both being drawn to live more deeply in the here and now. And as we live more deeply in the here and now, we come closer to one another, and closer to God. This is the God who is closer to me than I am to myself, who makes his home in the depths of my heart. This is the God who goes with me wherever I go. Even if I pass through the gates of hell, this God will not abandon me. To live more deeply in the here and now is to make the journey into the depths of the human heart where God is always here now, patiently waiting to welcome us home. And for some, the journey passes through hell.

Another clear pattern is to do with loving friendship. I have become amazed at the love that surrounds me. And this is not just from Philomena, nor close relations and friends, but also the health professionals who care for me, and even people I meet occasionally who remember me. And so I am becoming aware that my death is much more than the death of a solitary individual. It affects many people. It is

a disruption in a web of loving relationships. And this web is not limited to those friends who are still living; it includes those who have died before me. Recently, while I was still able to drive, I was driving down the Avenue into Southampton. Suddenly I had the sense of being surrounded by a host of friends who had died before me, who loved me, and who were waiting for me to join them. It was a subliminal glimpse, then it was gone and I was back on the road surrounded by moving cars. But it left a trace in my memory.

If my intuition is correct, then maybe, just maybe, those who have died have not gone away. They are walking among us. They cannot be seen but their love for us can be felt in the depths of our hearts. That’s how we know they are there. My mission in life is to express the love that I have in my heart. When I die, the love I have expressed does not die with me; it lives on in the hearts of those I have loved. So death is no barrier to love, love transcends death and flows from those who have died to those who are living.

This is the inheritance that is passed from one generation to the next. So love cascades down the generations, leaping from heart to heart, from deep to deep, on its way from the original lover to the final beloved; from God the lover to God the beloved, drawing us all together in love.

All love comes from God in the beginning and returns to God in the end. The love we receive from God in the beginning is our inheritance. We did not earn it and we do not deserve it. It is freely offered; it can only be freely received. But it cannot be possessed; it does not belong to us; it belongs to God. If we freely offer, it will be freely received.

So God loves God through us, and God loves us through one another. There is only one love, and that love is gathering all things into itself.

Philip Sheppard, 29 August 2010 ◇

# Monastic Community 2011

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**Abbot Geoffrey Scott** is infirmarian, librarian and archivist. He teaches Church History at Womersley Seminary and Blackfriars, Oxford, and is President of the Catholic Archives Society.

**Prior Bernard Swinhoe** is bookbinder.

**Subprior Romuald Simpson** is Cathedral Prior of Coventry and organist.

**Fr Louis O'Dwyer** is resident at the monastery, preparing to write a book on Heidegger.

**Fr Terence FitzPatrick** has the pastoral care of East Hendred and East Ilsley.

**Fr Gervase Holdaway** is oblate director, Pastoral Programme director, editor of *The Douai Magazine*, organist and gives retreats and lectures.

**Fr Nicholas Broadbridge** is a retreat giver and responsible for the Healing Workshops.

**Fr Boniface Moran** is assistant priest at Ormskirk and Sacrisbrick, Lancs.

**Fr Finbar Kealy** is Prior Administrator of Quarr Abbey and Cathedral Prior of Canterbury.

**Fr Peter Bowe** is superior of the *Maison St-Benoît* in Douai, France.

**Fr Godric Timney** is parish priest of Ormskirk and Scarisbrick, Lancs, and Episcopal Vicar for Religious in the archdiocese of Liverpool.

**Fr Austin Gurr** is priest in charge of Andover, Hants, parish.

**Fr Oliver Holt** is bursar and organiser of music concerts in the Abbey Church.

**Fr Edmund Power** is Abbot of St-Pauls-outside-the-Walls, Rome, and Procurator-in-Curia for the English Benedictines.

**Fr Alexander Austin** is parish priest of Strat-

ford-upon-Avon, Warks.

**Fr Francis Hughes** is parish priest of Kemer-ton, Glos, and a member of the marriage tribunal for the diocese of Clifton.

**Fr Dermot Tredget** is Parish Priest of Woolhampton parish, baker and jam maker.

**Fr Richard Jones** is parish priest of Alcester, Warks.

**Fr Alban Hood** is novice master, choirmaster and organist.

**Fr Paul Gunter** teaches liturgy at Collegio Sant'Anselmo, Rome, and is a consultor for the papal liturgies.

**Fr Benedict Thompson** is parish priest of Studley, Warks.

**Fr Benjamin Standish** is assistant guest master and gardener.

**Br Christopher Greener** is guest master.

**Br Simon Hill** is administrator of the Abbey Church, assistant bursar, assistant oblate director, and has responsibility for the monastery cars and is the brewer.

**Fr Hugh Somerville-Knapman** is sacristan and shepherd.

**Br Damian Banks** is assistant infirmarian, assistant librarian and is studying theology at Blackfriars, Oxford.

**Br Gabriel Wilson** is gardener and is studying theology at Blackfriars, Oxford.

**Br Anselm Strudley** is a novice and is baker.◇

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