



The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

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

A First Look at the 2016 ABA Convention

Beech Grove, Indiana

July 21-23, 2016

The theme for the next convention of the American Benedictine Academy, "Keep Death Daily Before Your Eyes," may seem like an odd or depressing one, especially for those unfamiliar with the way this concept is developed in *The Rule of St. Benedict*.

In her address at the 2014 convention, incoming president Sister Susan Quaintance introduced her chosen theme with a very personal story. Back in 1990, she had been involved in a car accident where pieces of metal from a truck had both smashed into their windshield and also sliced through their gas line. A trooper told them that they were fortunate that the gas had not exploded.

As Sister Susan explained it, "In the years since, when I've told the story or people ask about that heavy piece of metal in the corner of my room, this souvenir has struck others as awfully morbid. It has never been so for me. I'm convinced that the primary reason for this is my Benedictine-ness."

She went on to explain why she felt this could be the basis for a convention:

This idea is not a big, flashy part of our tradition, but over the last twenty-five years I've wondered about it off and on. I have a hunch that this Benedictine attitude toward death has something to offer the world, and it's this hunch I'm suggesting we explore together in 2016.

My hunch revolves around multiple reflections, not all of which are original to me. We have a tradition that looks at death from a stance of humility. Our founders and teachers encourage us not to deny death or pretend that it is something other than it is – but rather to use our realistic contemplation of death as a means to live better, right now. We have beautiful and varied communal rituals that model respect for life and death – and a faith in the more that is eternity. Many of our communities have taken the obituary to new heights of its genre – lovingly and truthfully proclaiming the narrative of a person's life in a way that leaves the reader

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President's Message

*Along with the observance of monastic discipline
and the daily charge of chanting in the church,
my delight has ever been to learn, teach, or write.*

Bede the Venerable

I read those words on the pedestal of a statue of Saint Bede on the Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary campus at the very first American Benedictine Academy meeting that I attended in August of 2000. Celebrating my silver jubilee on the Vigil of Pentecost this year has given me the opportunity to ponder all manner of things for which I am grateful, and certainly my involvement with the ABA is one. Bede's words get to the essence of this particular strand of gratitude.

When I finished my MA work at Saint John's in Collegeville, I was trepidatious. I had been so enriched by study and learning about monastic topics that I had been privileged to do, but I knew that in "real life" those opportunities would not be so readily available or even possible. A high school teacher's day left little room for Pachomius or LeClerq or Kardong.



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www.americanbenedictine.org

But I thought that joining ABA might be one way to keep one foot in that world, and when Sister Marilyn Wolfgram (a member of my community and longtime ABA member) died suddenly, then-secretary Sister Jeanne Ranek applied the dues that Marilyn had just paid to my membership. I could just settle in and start soaking up the knowledge. And I did.

In the last fifteen years I have learned so much at ABA conventions. I have notes from every single one, but some presentations stand out as "Aha" moments: the whole gestalt of "Reading the Signs from These Times," especially about the shift in membership, at Saint Meinrad's in 2000; Sister Edith Bogue's talk on family in 2006 at Lisle; Sister Colleen McGrane's reflections about communication technology in the monastery at Duluth in 2012; Kathleen Norris' thoughts on oblate life given on the Oblate Day this past summer in Conception. Each convention has been thoughtfully planned and thought-provoking. Driving home, I'm always grateful that I was there.

It isn't just the academic facets, however, that I so value at ABA. The education takes place in the context of common prayer and common table. Walking to a session, chatting in the hallways, lingering after a banquet – these occasions, too, have provided me with insights into Benedictine life and how it is to be lived. There are among our members many to whom I look for model, inspiration and sustenance. While our ABA life together doesn't have the same intimacy (or irritations, I suppose) that daily life in a community or family affords, I do count on its familiarity, ritual, and nourishment. It is a biennial marker and milestone.

So, just as I have a bucket of thank you notes to write for my celebration here at home, this President's Letter serves the same function. The American Benedictine Academy has been a tremendous gift in my religious life, and has shaped the monastic I have become. I am deeply grateful. Thank you.

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nodding and smiling, a bit richer for the experience. We have a love of cemeteries as places of natural beauty, public art, and storytelling. And at least in my experience – but I bet in yours, too – we have a practice of presence. Benedictines not only understand being present to their own sisters and brothers who are dying – but they consistently stand with those who grieve.

Sister Susan went on to note why this is so important today:

These seem, perhaps, like simple and unremarkable acts, but they are things that our culture does not do so well. The medical establishment miraculously keeps people alive longer and longer. There are billboards around Chicago which say that a child born today will likely live to be 102. There aren't any billboards which ask what the quality of these years will be, at what emotional and spiritual cost this physical longevity comes. Hospices are seeing a significant increase in the number of people who have no one to care for them as they are dying. The distaste our society has for commitments has begun to be manifested in adult children who essentially "divorce" their parents when relational or geographic distances seem insurmountable. When these parents reach the end of life, they find themselves unaccompanied, unreconciled, and deeply uneasy. I don't know if this is a sociological trend or not, but over the last ten years, I have heard of more and more people whose families want no service or ritual when their loved one dies. There is no public acknowledgment of the death – or the life – and the individuals grieve alone. The monastic tradition offers a different model.

She also feels that monastics have something to say to themselves as well as to the wider culture. She points to the diminishing numbers of men and women in monasteries, the loss of important ministries or buildings, and especially the closing of monasteries. "What can our tradition tell us about

how to live – and die – into this uncertain future?" she asks.

She closed her presentation with the following words of encouragement:

You may have heard or read about the Tikker Watch, a timepiece that, in addition to giving the wearer the correct time, displays the number of years, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds the wearer has left, based on a medical questionnaire filled out when the watch is purchased. Talk about keeping death daily before your eyes! Perhaps the inventor will be able to come talk to us in 2016! Whether he does or he doesn't, I do hope we can ponder the topic together, thoroughly and well, for the benefit of those we live with and serve. And, indeed, may we do so in order that Christ "bring us all together to everlasting life."

Although that inventor has not made it onto the speaker list, some other very stimulating speakers have. Father Terrence Kardong, OSB, of Assumption Abbey (Richardton, N.D.) is well known for his many contributions to monastic scholarship. One of these which may not be as well known as his others is his skill at obituary writing. For years he graced his community newsletters with reflections on departed brothers that were crafted with extraordinary honesty and sensitivity.

Kerry Egan, a hospice chaplain in Massachusetts, is the author of the book *Fumbling: A Pilgrimage Tale of Love, Grief, and Spiritual Renewal on the Camino de Santiago*.

Sister Chris Kean, OSB, of Mount St. Scholastica (Atchison, Kan.), is a licensed mortician and works as a funeral director in Topeka, Kan. She has encountered many dimensions of death and grieving in her work there.

In addition to the formal presentations, the convention will include section meetings, a program for oblates on one evening, and the usual opportunities for meeting others, sharing wisdom, and celebrating the monastic way.

CANON LAW COLUMN

Terminology for Religious Women

Is there any distinction between the terms “nun” and “sister”?

These two terms of “sister” and “nun” have colloquially been used interchangeably, but, technically, is there a difference? The answer is yes and no. If the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* were still in effect, there would be an unequivocal answer of, “Yes, there is a difference.” In the former code, there was a clear distinction between “solemn vows” made by “nuns” and “simple vows” made by “sisters.” Under the 1983 code, the current legislation of the Church, the difference is not as clear, but there are still some canonical differences, found chiefly in canons 667 and 668. In the present code, the distinction between solemn and simple vows was not stated, at least not directly. Rather, there is only perpetual profession of vows in the 1983 code, no longer specifically delineating solemn versus simple vows.

Nevertheless, there are some remnants of the distinction found in the 1983 code. I will focus on the two most often referenced distinctions between nuns and sisters, found in canons 667 and 668. These distinctions have to do with the nature of cloister (canon 667) and the regulation of the vow of poverty (canon 668).

There is a rather complicated history of the various types of cloister, perhaps dating back to the latter part of the 13th century when Boniface VIII issued the apostolic constitution “Periculoso,” which is beyond the scope of this simple, short column. Canon 667§1 speaks of a type of cloister, adapted to the character and mission of each institute, that is required in every house of religious, monastic or not. This canon refers to cloister as “some part of a religious house always reserved to the members alone.” Canon 667§2 directs that “a stricter discipline of cloister must be observed in monasteries ordered to contemplative life.”

The next section of the canon, Canon 667§3, mentions the requirement of “papal enclosure” or “papal cloister” in “monasteries of nuns which are ordered entirely to contemplative life.” There is a spectrum of levels of cloister, with papal enclosure being the most restricted. It must be noted that the

code only speaks of papal enclosure for “monasteries of nuns ordered entirely to contemplative life.” In the *Code of Canon Law*, there is no similar requirement of papal enclosure for male religious.

Canon 668 deals with the vow of poverty for religious (See also canon 600 for the Christological underpinning of canon 668). The last two sections of this canon, canon 668§§4 & 5, provide a difference in the nature of the poverty professed by those in religious communities who must “renounce fully his or her goods.”

Total renunciation, according to canon 668§5, means that a person who has made this total renunciation vow “loses the capacity of acquiring and possessing and therefore invalidly places acts contrary to the law of poverty.” A lengthier discussion of this may be found in the canon law column in the May 2013 issue of this newsletter entitled, “The Canonical Concept of Total Renunciation in the Monastic Tradition.”

The technical meaning of “nun” most often meant that such a person was required to make total renunciation. For most religious in the church, there is not a requirement of total renunciation. In fact, as seen in canon 668§4 in the second sentence, for religious in communities who do not have the tradition of total renunciation, there is a reference to the need for permission of the superior in order for a member to totally or even partially renounce his or her goods. However, for communities such as Benedictines who have the long-held tradition of total renunciation of ownership of property, perpetual profession is assumed to include total renunciation, even though the renunciation is made in a document separate from the document which contains the written profession of perpetual profession.

As mentioned at the top of this column, most people use the terms “nun” and “sister” interchangeably. That is not problematic, though under the former code there was much more of a canonical distinction between these terms. However, at certain times and among certain groups in the church, there has been much ado about the distinction between nuns and sisters. For example, looking at the international association

(continued on next page)

of women Benedictines now known as Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB), its predecessor organization began in 1968 when the abbot primate established two commissions of Benedictine women – one for nuns and one for sisters. It was seen as canonically prohibited at that time for sisters and nuns to belong to the same association.

It was not until 1980 that representatives of both of the commissions of nuns and sisters were invited to attend the worldwide Congress of Abbots. That was the first time that Benedictine nuns and sisters met together, though they were only observers to the Congress of Abbots at the time. It was not until 1988 that these two commissions merged into one commission of women Benedictines. It eventually came to be known as the CIB. This international association of Benedictine women continues to develop and evolve. It is a wonderful place for nuns and sisters alike to join together to deepen in their commitment to the monastic way of life according to the Rule of St. Benedict.

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

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There have been many elections in monastic communities this spring. Newly elected superiors are:

Prioress Mary Forman – St. Gertrude’s Monastery, Cottonwood, Id.

Prioress Jennifer Mechtild Horner – Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Ind.

Abbess Lucia Kuppens, OSB – Regina Laudis Abbey, Bethlehem, Pa.

Prioress Tonette Sperando – Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Ala.

Prioress Patricia Kirk – Emmanuel Monastery, Lutherville, Md.

Prioress Judith Murphy – St. Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, Ill.

Abbot Leonard Wangler, OSB – Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, Ark.

Prioress Beverly Raway – St. Scholastica Monastery, Duluth, Minn.

Re-elected to continue their service to their communities were:

Prioress Cecilia Dwyer – St. Benedict’s Monastery, Bristow, Va.

Prioress Paula Larson – Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton, N.D.

Prioress Anne Wambach – Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, Pa.

Sister Sandra Meek from Mother of God Monastery, Watertown, S.D. will be acting as administrator for Queen of Angels Monastery, Mt. Angel, Ore.

Judy Valente did an interview with Sister Joan Chittister for WGLT, the NPR affiliate in central Illinois, on Sister Joan’s latest book, *Between the Darkness and the Daylight*. The interview may be heard at <wgl.t.org/wireready/news/2015/06/09479_06-08ChittisterWEB_121558.shtml>.

Oprah Winfrey also interviewed Sister Joan on March 1 for “Super Soul Sunday” on the OWN network.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
The ABA Biennial Convention in 2016
Keep Death Daily Before Your Eyes
July 21 - 23, 2016
Hosted by Our Lady of Grace Monastery
at their
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center
Beech Grove, Indiana

In September, 2015, Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minn., will launch a new program, entitled "A School of Benedictine Spirituality," for persons seeking to learn the Benedictine way for daily living. Designed to support spiritual growth and guidance for living the gospel in a learning community, the School will focus on Benedictine values and practices that shape Benedictine spirituality.

The School provides four courses, each of which includes sixteen hours of class time. The courses to be offered and repeated in a variety of formats are: "Living Benedictine Values," "History and Spirituality of the Benedictine Tradition," "Lectio Divina," and "Prayer and Worship in the Benedictine Tradition." Three of the sixteen hours will be devoted to spiritual companionship aimed at intentional reflection and integration.

Schedules, course descriptions, instructors, and a registration form are available on the monastery's website (sbm.osb.org) under "Quick Links."

Another initiative is a collaborative program between Saint John's School of Theology and Saint Benedict's Monastery called "Spiritual Direction Guided by Benedictine Insights."

The fall course, "The Practice of Discernment in Prayer" will meet at Saint John's for five Monday evenings. The course will include an introduction to the practice of lectio divina applied to lived experience, as well as sharing of personal images of God. More info available at www.CollegevilleMN.com.

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Father Daniel McCarthy, OSB, of St. Benedict's Abbey (Atchison, Kan.), led two well-received events in the first half of 2015. "Generative Communities: Communities Generating a Vocational Way of Life in Members," was a colloquium held in Atchison on January 6-7, sponsored by St. Benedict's Abbey and hosted with Mount St. Scholastica. The ongoing discussion is intended to help people reflect on and discuss the characteristics and way of life of a community, in particular of the parish and monastic community, that is generative of new life in its members at each stage of their lives and of new life in

the surrounding society.

Participants were invited for their advanced study in the fields of the human sciences or liturgy and for their leadership in monastic and parish communities. The following papers were given: Father James Leachman, OSB (Ealing Abbey, London) - "Participating in a Collective Project: Person-centered Leadership"; Father Benjamin Tremmel, OSB (St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Ks.) - "The Parish as a Generative Community"; Abbot Martin Shipperlee, OSB (Ealing Abbey, London) - "From Faith to Trust: Some Thoughts on Monastic Conversation"; Sister Edith Bogue, OSB (St. Scholastica Monastery, Duluth, Minn.) "Generative Communities at Critical Junctures"; Sister Marcia Ziska, OSB (Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Ks.) - "Spiritual Maturation and the Challenges of Generativity Today"; Dr. Stephen Behnke, "Generativity in the Second Generation: Claiming Aspects of a Lost Leader." A critical synthesis was given by Father Ephrem Carr (St. Meinrad's Archabbey, St. Meinrad, Ind.).

A third colloquium in this series is scheduled for early January 2016, also in Atchison. Information is on the website: <http://www.liturgyhome.org/generative-communities/>.

This year's Liturgy Week, "Architecture for Liturgy" was sponsored by the two Atchison monasteries on May 26-29. It was intended for architects and diocesan officials desiring greater liturgical input for renovating or building a new church. It featured tours of the choir chapel and the St. Scholastica chapel at the Mount conducted by Sister Judith Sutera, OSB, and ten presentations by Father Daniel McCarthy. The event was coordinated also by Sister Marcia Ziska, OSB and Father Jay Kythe, OSB. This first-level week will be repeated and a second-level week is in development. Information is on the website: architectureforliturgy.com/liturgy-week-2015/.

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Saint Meinrad's Archabbey (St. Meinrad, Ind.) lost two highly esteemed members within a few days of one another. Father Aelred Cody, OSB, scripture scholar, died on May 11, 2015. Father Aelred was

the author of many books and articles and was active in various biblical studies organizations. He served a term as president of the Catholic Biblical Society, and was general editor of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, a member of the Consultative Committee of *Concilium*, and a member of the editorial board of *Biblica*.

During his ten years as a professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, he served two years also as procurator for the Swiss-American and American Cassinese congregations. He also served many years as an elected member of the Swiss-American Congregation's abbot-president's council, on his community's council, and as novice-junior master.

His death was followed on May 18th by that of Father Cyprian Davis, OSB. Father Cyprian also had extensive writing credits, including his monumental *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, a study of the American black Catholic experience from the early Spanish explorations to 1970, which is regarded as the essential study of the American black Catholic experience. He was a founding member of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, and was a contributor to such documents as the U. S. Catholic bishops' statement on racism. In addition to his work as a history professor at St. Meinrad's, he was a diligent archivist for his community, the Swiss-American Congregation and the Black Clergy Caucus.

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The Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities (ABCU) met in June at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan. The organization brings together administrators and monastic superiors from its fourteen member schools to share their experience and to foster Benedictine values in their institutions.

Although initially the participants were primarily presidents, a more recent special feature is a day-long institute in Benedictine leadership formation for other senior administrators who are not Benedictine religious.

One of the speakers for them was Sister Ephrem Hollermann, OSB (St. Benedict's Monastery, Saint Joseph, Minn.), a professor and historian who gave historical perspectives on Benedictine colleges and universities. She used Philip Gleason's work on

Catholic higher education to identify the place of Benedictine schools.

The second speaker was Sister Thomas Wilder, OSB (Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, N.D.), who spoke on Benedictine leadership. She brought to the assembly the fruits of her experience of 27 years as president of the University of Mary in Bismarck.

All of the attendees heard a presentation by Abbot John Klassen, OSB (Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.). Abbot John has written and studied significantly on his topic "Hallmarks of Benedictine Education." In addition to the presentations, there were workshop sessions and meetings of the presidents and of the abbots and prioresses, as well as of the entire group together.

Audio CD Recordings from Convention

The major presentations from both the 2014 convention and the pre-convention day for oblates are still available on audio CD at a cost of \$5.00 for each (includes shipping).

Convention

Joel Rippinger, OSB - Transmitting a Common Core of Benedictine Monasticism: A Survival Kit for the Future

Alden Bass - "Bringing it to Completion": American New Monastics and the Benedictine Tradition

Julia Upton, RSM - Profile of Benedictine Oblates: Glorifying God by Their Lives

Ephrem Hollermann, OSB - Reflections on the Conversation

Pre-Convention

Laura Dunham - Transmitting the Tradition through a School for Benedictine Spirituality

Kathleen Norris - An Oblate in the Middle of Nowhere

Greg Peters - The Rule of Benedict in the University and Parish

Judith Valente - Business as Unusual: Monastic Wisdom and the Work World

An order form may be downloaded and printed from the ABA website.

Report on the ABA Sponsored Session at the 50th International Congress of Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, May 14–17, 2015.

This was a notable meeting because it was the fiftieth, but also because it marks a period of transition with the retirement of Robert Murray as director of the Medieval Institute at WMU and of E. Rozanne Elder as director of the Cistercian and Monastic Studies program. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the congress has been the presence of Cistercians (with a specific set of sessions devoted to their heritage) and other religious at the congress. In a modest way the ABA session has called attention to the Benedictine heritage and engaged a number of Benedictine presenters. This year, unusually, none of the three presenters in the ABA session were Benedictines. The overall theme was Benedictines and Victorines.

Sister Juliet Mousseau, who teaches historical theology in the Aquinas Institute of Theology at St. Louis University, discussed the *Liber ordinis* or customary of the Abbey of St. Victor. The *Liber ordinis* has two main sections: officials (23 in all) and practices (liturgy, mandatum, chapter meeting). The striking thing about the work is that it is largely unstudied although St. Victor, at least in the first half of the twelfth century, was a strong presence among the schools of Paris. Abbot Elias Dietz, OCSO, remarked how similar the prescriptions of the *Liber* were to Cistercian practices. There is certainly more work to be done on it and its monastic sources and parallels.

Donna Hawk-Rinehart of the Institute for Worship Studies dealt with the *lectio* there and its components, a very popular theme in contemporary monastic spirituality. She compared the four steps of Guigo the Carthusian's *Ladder for Monks* with the five steps distinguished by Hugh of St. Victor. Hugh adds the step of *operatio* or performance between *oratio* and *contemplatio*. The Victorines had a very sacramental view of Christian existence in which exterior comportment and moral behavior were intertwined with interior meditation and prayer, whereas Guigo was writing for Carthusians whose emphasis was very much on interiority. The Victorines aimed at knowledge of truth and training

in virtue. In the discussion it was pointed out that later twelfth-century Victorines added a sixth and final step, whereby contemplation led to preaching and compassionate service of others.

Robert Porwoll who, like Donna Hawk-Rinehart and Juliet Mousseau, studied at St. Louis University, is currently a doctoral student in history at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He compared the educational programs of Hugh of St. Victor and Conrad of Hirsau, a Benedictine schoolmaster. Hugh liked plain, clear speech. His eloquence was not artistic but aimed at rhetorical persuasion. He was not interested in "belles lettres." He considered poetry and fable peripheral. His was a humanism of truth. Conrad, by contrast, did seek to inculcate literary appreciation. He wrote *accessus* (introductions) to twenty-one authors. He put poetry and history in the curriculum to serve ethics. However, Conrad cites Hugh of St. Victor's *On the Sacraments* and agrees that the liberal arts serve the study of the Scriptures.

A number of other scholars indicated an interest in presenting on this topic, so we plan to continue the discussion next year. The dates of the conference are May 12-15, 2016. We invite anyone interested to submit a proposal to the session organizer: Father Hugh Feiss, OSB (hughf@idahomonks.org).

Interested in learning more about the Kalamazoo congress? Even if your area of expertise is not the ABA topic for next year, there are scores of other organizations looking for presenters on a wide range of medieval topics. By July, a *Call for Papers* will be posted on the congress website < <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/> >. All proposals for next year have to be submitted by Sept. 15.

ABA Monastic Essay Competition

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

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

The purposes of the contest are:

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

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

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

Sister Marianne Burkhard OSB
srmarianne@cdop.org

Project requirements

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

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

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

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

BOOK REVIEWS

Aquinata Böckmann, OSB, *A Listening Community: A Commentary of the Prologue and Chapters 1-3 of Benedict's Rule*, trans. Matilda Handl, OSB, and Marianne Burkhard, OSB, ed. Marianne Burkhard (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2015) ISBN 978-0-8146-4922-0, 227 pp., paper, \$24.95.

Sister Aquinata continues to produce quality scholarship on St. Benedict's rule in this latest volume. In her usual style, she takes the first chapters of the rule and parses them verse by verse. The volume is full of her trademark diagrams and layouts of parallels and other literary devices so that the reader can appreciate the craftsmanship of the sentences St. Benedict uses and what is behind them. Explaining the origin and cultural context of specific words also helps the reader to get a clearer picture of Benedict's world.

This type of analysis is of great value to the serious student of classical literature, but the importance of Sister Aquinata's work is how she takes it beyond the grammar. Like all the best commentators on a text, she is clearly getting at something much deeper.

The text's long linguistic and historical passages are also punctuated by the author's simple and pointed comments about the challenges of the lived experience. Since she is dealing with the foundational prologue and chapters 1-3, she gives the reader much to ponder regarding the relationship to God, the superior and the community. While there are some hard questions and complex concepts, Sister Aquinata, like Benedict, gently encourages as she challenges. At the end of her commentary on the prologue, she has her own version of its conclusion: "In the course of life we grow in the awareness that we always lag behind the grace given us."

The more one knows about the origin, structure and language of the Rule, the richer can be the *lectio* as one strives to know the document and live Benedict's ideals. Sister Aquinata is once again a big help.

Christopher Pramuk, *At Play in Creation: Merton's Awakening to the Feminine Divine* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015) ISBN 978-0-8146-4816-2, 138 pp., paper, \$17.95.

If this book sounds vaguely familiar, it is because the author wrote another book in 2009 entitled *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*. While pursuing some of the same thought, this book is a small collection of nine very meditative retreat conferences.

They blend excerpts from Merton's writings with those of others, both theologians and poets. In fact, some of them, including a whole reflection that is based on the life of Holocaust victim Etty Hillesum, only peripherally allude to Merton.

What they all point to is the richness of the feminine divine. Anyone who loves the image of Holy Wisdom/Sophia or anyone who hasn't given it much thought will find much to savor here.

Ann Kessler, OSB, *Benedictine Men and Women of Courage*, ed. Neville Ann Kelly (Seattle: Lean Scholar Press, 2014) ISBN 978-0-9904497-0-6-52695, 479 pp., paperback.

More than thirty years ago, Sister Ann Kessler had managed to gather a monumental amount of information about Benedictine history which she hoped to turn into a definitive work. It was read and critiqued by a parade of the major and minor figures in monastic studies and, because of flaws of both content and style, no monastic or academic press chose to publish it.

It was pared down in size and privately published, but the content remained uneven and the result disappointing. Now it has reappeared with some updating and further editing, but, alas, still far from a classic.

No one can be an expert on the vastness of Benedictine history. So some of the areas in which the author is most knowledgeable, such as French monasticism and the Swiss foundations in America, are adequate. Much of the book is gathered from general sources, and seemingly a bit indiscriminately.

For example, her narrative for the coming of the first Benedictine sisters repeats the old myth that the poor sisters were not met and had to find their way to Pennsylvania by the kindness of strangers. Scholars have doubted the likelihood of this for decades. Now that it has been ably and amply debunked by the publication of the diary of the priest who

accompanied them door to door from their German monastery (and a fine time they seem to have had), it is a shame that this was not noted. To the credit of the editor, Ms. Kelly does include a footnote here that should be a key filter for the entire book. She says, “This narrative demonstrates, as in all retelling of history, Sister Ann Kessler’s particular perspective and approach.”

Her approach relies heavily on sources that are now more or less dated in the light of the decades of scholarship since her initial work. She has little distinction in the early period of how one defines “Benedictine” and who is included (very important if this is to be about Benedictine women and men), favors “sisters as victims” narratives, and has extensive detail on some periods with a race through others. For example, a section entitled “*Francis* of Rome’s Benedictine Oblates” (yes, her name really is misspelled in the heading, but spelled correctly a few lines later) consists of 18 lines giving a census of all the houses of nuns in Italy in the fifteenth century and mentioning that Frances formed an “apostolic group” of oblates, in two sentences that give little description.

Perhaps the problem here is that Sister Ann has bitten off more than anyone can chew. Philibert Schmitz’s history in French, which was an obvious source for Sister Ann, was seven volumes. It had only part of one volume regarding nuns and appeared in 1948, before the New World and Third World were much of a factor.

One cannot disagree with some of those whose testimonials appear on the cover that the world would be greatly blessed by a definitive and inclusive Benedictine history. But this is not it, insofar as it is not always reliable and the bulk of it originates in the scholarship of decades past. Perhaps it would take a group of scholars with expertise in different times and places to really do the subject justice.

So this book may be of use to someone who wants to see the broad sweep and the sketchy outlines of Benedictine history. It has an extensive bibliography of the classics in the field and other sources for learning more. But it should also be remembered that not every source she quotes reflects contemporary knowledge or generally accepted thought. The world still awaits the landmark volume this book had hoped to be.

The Benedictines in the Middle Ages, James G. Clark (Rochester, N.Y.: The Boydell Press, 2014) ISBN 978-1-84383-973-6, 374 pp., paperback, \$29.95.

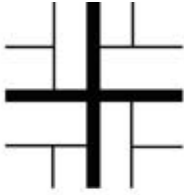
Originally published in 2011 for its series on religious orders, this book is now available in an economical paperback version. It is a vast survey of many dimensions of Benedictine history, beginning with the dawn of the Middle Ages and a chapter on “The Making of a European Order.” These first 50 pages are an excellent overview of how St. Benedict’s rule moved through the culture, how it was promulgated and adopted. It addresses the important topic of the mixed rules of the early centuries and the difficulty in defining what was a ‘Benedictine’ monastery. This summary of how something so fluid became an “order” will be valuable reading for anyone beginning the study of Benedictine history.

The author proceeds to explore not only the monasteries and their general role in society, but many of the social and political influences and implications. The chapter on “Culture,” and parts of other chapters as well, demonstrate the importance of the monasteries in education, history and the arts.

While many medieval histories concentrate mostly on the first part of the era, this book gives more than the usual attention to the later Middle Ages, countering the notion that, after the rise of the other orders, Benedictines just faded away. There is good material on the reforms and continued influence, the Black Death, and other historical matters, taking the reader all the way through the 16th century English suppression.

The book is rather Anglo-centric, with some other European countries getting much less attention. Many parts refer to both men and women and there are acknowledgements of some of the things unique to women, but even with the more limited availability of resources on women’s history, there could have been more inclusion.

In contrast to my occasional complaint about the price of Boydell books, this one is quite affordable for monastery libraries and classes. As a bonus, the company is offering a discount for AMN readers on this, as well as on the book on Cistercians and others in this series. You can receive a 25% discount through the rest of 2015 by using the code **15234** when ordering from Boydell (boydellandbrewer.com).



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