



Advent 2022

Dear friends of St. Anselm's,

Every year at the Christmas midnight Mass we hear the angelic proclamation "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." That message has been passed down from age to age to those who revere Jesus as the Prince of Peace. We are all aware that such peace has always been threatened, whether by war among nations, violence in local communities, or animosity within families. As we prepare to celebrate our Lord's birth this year, may each of us resolve to do whatever we can to be genuine peacemakers in whatever settings or situations we find ourselves.

We wish all the readers of this newsletter a blessed Christmas and New Year, even as we sincerely thank you for the many kinds of support you have given to our monastery and school during the past year.

The Monks of St. Anselm's Abbey

The Chronicler's Column

Readers of our newsletter may recall our plan to install solar panels on many places on our property. Completing this has taken longer than expected, mainly because of difficulties in getting all of the required permits, but the work has finally begun. When it is finished, we will have one of the largest solar-panel sites in the District of Columbia. In addition to the environmental benefits, we will also experience a significant savings in our electric bills. We also try in other ways to act responsibly by recycling materials after using them for the first time, convinced as we are that every person and group must do their part in protecting what is more and more seen to be our fragile planet.

On a narrower monastic topic, in August our community had as our retreat master Abbot Michael Liebl, from Mount Michael Abbey in Elkhorn, Nebraska. We were very pleased with his genial retreat conferences, the texts of which he later made available electronically to each of us for further perusal.

The following month, on September 24, we sponsored our annual Thomas Verner Moore Lecture, held in one of the courtrooms at The Catholic University of America's law school. This year's speaker was Hosna Jalil, a young Afghan woman who is a member of the Women's Peace and Security Working Group at the United Nations. Her topic was "A Struggle for Identity: Afghan Women under Taliban Rule." As Ms Jalil lived much of her earlier life in Afghanistan, she was able to give us an insider's view into what life under the Taliban means, especially for women.

As usual, we include in this column some brief remarks about the activities of members of our monastic community. Our prior, **Fr Philip Simo**,

continues to serve as chaplain at the Jeanne Jugan Residence, a nursing home conducted by the Little Sisters of the Poor over on Harewood Road, very near the Catholic University campus. Like so many other such residences, that home has faced restrictions and challenges caused by the Covid epidemic, which will apparently remain at epidemic level for some time to come before becoming endemic. Fr Philip reports that the Little Sisters welcomed a new superior in late March, Mother Margaret Regina, who succeeded Mother Mary Michael, who was completing ten years in office.

One of our indefatigably busiest monks is **Fr Joseph Jensen**, who has been working on a new book about narrative in the Old Testament now that the third edition of his textbook *God's Word to Israel* was published last year by Liturgical Press. Fr Joseph is also a very conscientious homilist, able to bring his decades of scriptural scholarship into his homilies at conventual Mass. He has also long been the monk in charge of all arrangements for the Thomas Moore Lecture series mentioned above.

After many years of devoted teaching and administration in our school, **Fr Michael Hall** has retired from the classroom, where he taught generations of students in the fields of history, government, and religion. In addition, he has long served as our archivist, master of ceremonies, and secretary for conventual chapter meetings. He was the very appropriate honoree at this year's fall gala, held in the school's lower building on October 29.

As was noted in last year's chronicle, **Fr Christopher Wyvill** has been diagnosed with colon cancer. He chose not to undergo any treatment but just let it run its course. He celebrated the completion of his 92nd year in early October. He has

had the assistance of Hospice Care for more than a year as his energy and strength have declined. Whenever he can, Fr Christopher joins his brother monks for Divine Office, for Mass, and for meals and community gatherings. He hosted Zoom meetings as long as he could for the Friday night prayer group that was originally started by Fr Daniel Kirk. Zoom allowed connecting again with those who have moved far away. He is grateful for the prayers of family and friends, who encourage him on to the goal that lies ahead, "life on high with Christ Jesus."

As a teacher in our school since the fall semester of 1968, **Fr Peter Weigand** also served as headmaster and subsequently as school president. Although no longer in school administration, he continues to teach earth science to our Form I students and electives in Native American studies or anthropology to juniors and seniors. He also traveled this past summer to visit alumni in various parts of the country, especially out west, and was accompanied on some of those trips by our new school president, Fr Anthony Giampietro, a Basilian priest who himself graduated from our school in 1978. One of Fr Peter's first loves is caring for our grounds. Our beautiful abbey courtyard owes much to his careful choice of plants in accord with the changing seasons of the year.

We have only one monk who is among those remembered daily at liturgy as being among the "absent brethren." After serving for years as the well-loved pastor of a church in the small town of Belt, Montana, **Fr Paul McKane** now lives in retirement in the city of Great Falls (in Montana, not the city of the same name across the Potomac in northern Virginia). Fr Paul spends much of his time studying the works of great philosophers and tending to the maintenance of his house and yard.

As monastery librarian and director of oblates, **Fr Boniface von Nell** has served our community not only in those two positions but also in assisting with

the decoration of the abbey church for various feasts. His expertise in iconography has provided the cover of our Christmas cards for many years and has also provided material for some of his carefully crafted monthly presentations to our oblates. Even as he faces the health challenges inevitably associated with aging, he has been a model for all of us through his fidelity to our various liturgical services.

This was a happy year for **Fr Gabriel Myers**, who writes: "In January there was the great but tragic privilege of speaking at the funeral of Johnny Miller, former Abbey boy and son of Robin, our much-loved friend and nurse. The sudden death of a wonderful young man cannot be soothed by platitudes of any sort. But it is a beautiful thing to stand by a family in their need and try to do so on an ongoing basis. At the other end of the spectrum (or maybe not?) was celebrating the February wedding of Beau and Jordan, well known to me, in Dallas, Texas. Solemn events do not get by without comedy. Mine came when all flights from Raleigh were cancelled, requiring me to drive, by rental car, 1100 miles in 48 hours to get there. The groom said, "Father, we want you to come. But it's so far. What about your *health and safety*?" A polite indication of my Medicare status, this became an unintentional dare. Driving through six states—occasionally wishing I could stop and see something—I arrived safely, had a wonderful weekend, and was rather proud of my stamina."

Able to feel at ease on several continents, **Br Dunstan Robidoux** visited Lourdes in southern France and parts of northern Spain with his friend Ed Castilla in May, returned to Europe in early September for a meeting of the Wallbank Educational Trust in London (at the very time when the British were mourning the death of Queen Elizabeth), and later the same month gave some talks at an academic conference in Seoul, South Korea. At the abbey Br Dunstan has taken over the role of guestmaster from Fr Christopher and also

continues to serve as infirmarian and sacristan.

Although no longer teaching in our school, **Br Matthew Nylund** remains an avid reader and selects Vespers readings for the feasts of various saints. He continues to serve as an editor on this newsletter, and was pleased to return to the monastery after a brief hospitalization this summer. He is thankful for the good wishes of friends and confreres.

Having been ordained deacon on May 7, **Br Ignacio González** has been ministering in several capacities since that time. In our school he is now the campus minister. He assists at masses and other liturgies at the nearby parish of St Anthony of Padua, and as he finishes his M.Div. studies at The Catholic University of America he has had regular assignments at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland as part of his pastoral ministry program.

After a hiatus caused by the Covid pandemic, the Monastic Formation Program resumed this past spring. Among the participants was our novice master, **Fr Samuel Springuel**, who joined about fifteen other monastic men and women for a three-month program held in both Rome and Assisi. Upon returning to St Anselm's in mid-June, Fr Samuel took on the position of school chaplain, a task that has him working closely with the campus minister, Br Ignacio, to plan school liturgies and class retreats. Fr Samuel is also a key member of our school's science department, for which he teaches courses in computer science and robotics.

Profiting from all that Fr Samuel learned about formation during that program in Rome, our novice

Br Cyprian Morales has been having regular classes not only with his novice master but also with some other monks so as to attain a solid foundation for life as a Benedictine monk. Br Cyprian has also been assigned various duties, regularly working with one or another monk for a couple months at a stretch so as to become familiar with the kinds of work done on our grounds or in the library, kitchen, or sacristy. His sister and brother-in-law drove up from Richmond for the ceremony of his clothing as a novice on February 3.

The author of this column, **Abbot James Wiseman**, was on the road more than usual this year. In May he officiated at the wedding of his cousin Sara Lanae Stanley and her fiancé Jeremy Wallace in Waco, Texas. Two months later, he and Fr Samuel represented St Anselm's at the quadrennial General Chapter meeting of the English Benedictine Congregation, an event treated in one of the articles in this issue of our newsletter. Following that meeting, Abbot James spent about ten days in Spain, visiting our former cook, Felicity Kreger, in Andalucía and our school's alumnus Kevin Wood in Madrid. A final trip, in November, saw him back in Texas giving the annual retreat to the Benedictine sisters and about sixty of their oblates at the Monastery of the Good Shepherd in Rio Grande City, near the Mexican border. During the school year, he teaches religion electives to Form VI students, who regularly write very thought-provoking papers in his courses on Modern Spiritual Masters and World Religions in Dialogue.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Choose Life

(This is a talk given to our oblates on August 7, 2022)

Earlier this month, guides rescued a traveler who had fallen into the crater of Italy's Mount Vesuvius volcano after trying to retrieve his phone. It was reported in several newscasts. I am quoting the one from the Smithsonian magazine's website practically verbatim.¹

The man, a 23-year-old Baltimore resident, had been hiking with several others on an unauthorized trail. The path was clearly marked as off-limits, with signs warning tourists of danger, but the hikers disregarded the signs.

When the group reached the top of the 4,000-foot volcano, famous for the deadly 79 AD eruption that blanketed Pompeii and neighboring towns in ash and rock, the man pulled out his phone to snap a selfie. But then his phone fell into the crater. Trying to retrieve it, the man slipped and fell into the crater himself. He managed to stop his fall, but at that point he was stuck.

A team of guides on the other side of the crater saw the incident through binoculars and four of them rushed to the man's aid. With the help of a long rope, one of the guides rappelled down about 50 feet into the crater to retrieve him. Gennaro Lametta, an Italian tourism official, wrote on Facebook that the man was unconscious. He was lucky. If he had kept falling, he would have dropped almost 1,000 feet into the crater.

Paramedics treated the man in an ambulance lower down on the mountain. Police took him into custody, though at the time it was not clear what charges he faced.

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/american-tourist-rescued-crater-mount-vesuvius-180980457>

What might this incident tell us? Millennia ago, the Israelites were approaching the end of their desert journey. Moses summoned the people, now the second generation of desert wanderers, to renew the covenant made at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses told them that they had to choose, choose between the path that led to life or the path that led to death:

See, I have today set before you life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I am giving you today, loving the LORD your God and walking in his ways and keeping his commandments, statutes and ordinances, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. If, however, your heart turns away and you do not obey, but are led astray and bow down to other gods and serve them, I tell you today that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:15-19)

Later, at the very beginning of the conquest of Canaan, Moses' successor Joshua gathered together the tribes at Shechem and addressed the people in words similar to those they had heard from Moses, a further call to choose the path that leads to life:

Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him completely and sincerely. Cast out the gods your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt,

and serve the LORD. If it is displeasing to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14-15)

Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law, also preached the necessity of following the right path when he said: “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few” (Matt 7:13-14). In addition, Jesus identified himself as the way to salvation when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

It is, then, our relationship to the person of Jesus that sets our feet on the road to salvation. His is the safe, the sure way. Ours is the choice. We are blessed to have the teachings of Christ and the direction of the Church. They provide the road and signposts which lead us up the mountain to the kingdom of the Father and warn us of paths that lead to danger and destruction. It is unfortunate that so many people see these teachings as legalistic limitations, encroaching on their freedom. The exact opposite is true. God’s directions are liberating because they harmonize with the deepest desires of our heart. They liberate us because they free us from the delusions of self-will and lead us to the fulfillment for which we were created. The tragedy of our culture is that we are abandoning our north star to follow our own will. Like our Baltimore friend, we ignore the signposts at our peril. As a result, we find the devastation caused by greed, lust for power, sexual immorality, narcissism, rampant materialism, arrogance, and lack of basic respect for our fellow human beings. The news media are filled with tragic stories

day in and day out. Without a doubt, we are in the middle of a war, “for our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:12).

George Holzherr summarizes the situation as follows:

As in Scripture and in the literature of the early church—for example in the Acts of the Martyrs or in the Lives of the Desert Fathers—St Benedict portrays the struggle with the evil one as wrestling, or a battle with and for Christ against the devil. To look at evil, at one’s addictions and compulsions, especially one’s own shadow, leads to healing, which is the goal of these struggles. Christ is the rock on which everything opposed to God shatters.

For early monks, the place of the battle with the evil one was the desert... Here the monk had to face the demons of immoderation, sexual self-indulgence, depression, aggressiveness, materialistic impulses, fearfulness, apathy, false excitement, and selfish arrogance. Jesus in his temptation is the prototype of this battle with the evil one. The martyrs too are prototypes... They resisted the evil one even to a bloody death... The battle with the devil no longer takes place in the stadium or before a judge but rather in the arena of the heart.²

It is the heart that needs to be centered on Christ. It is by our choices, by our actions, that we respond to Christ’s call. This call and our response were initiated in our baptism and continue throughout our life. I am preaching to the choir, I know. Your obligation and the fact that you try to live according to the Rule of St Benedict shows this. But as human beings we cannot but be influenced by the world around

² George Holzherr, *The Rule of St. Benedict: An Introduction to the Christian Life*, Kindle edition.

us. As human beings we are leaky vessels and need the grace of God to persevere on our journey; we need to be vigilant about the signs on the road and where our path is taking us. The crater of Vesuvius, the abyss of hell, is as much a reality as is heaven, where God dwells.

Our temptations are graces in themselves if we recognize in them areas that need our attention and the help of God. Even the less dramatic and obvious areas need work. I was struck recently by reading the following passage from one of the Screwtape Letters in which a senior devil, Screwtape, gives advice to a very junior devil, Wormwood:

Do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.³

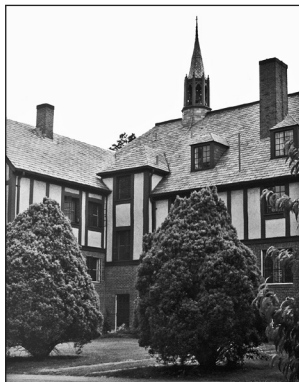
³ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, as quoted in Marc Foley, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections*, Kindle edition.

It is in the little things that make up our daily life that holiness is hidden and our choices are made, one after the other. It is our closeness to Christ and the illumination that comes from him that alerts us to the signposts that warn us of the danger ahead.

This too can be seen as a metaphor for our journey up the mountain of God. We cannot dodge the warning signs given to us by Christ and the Church without suffering the consequences and falling into the abyss. But our Baltimore friend was saved by the vigilance and courage of the guides. This too can be seen as a metaphor for the love and mercy of God, who draws us out of the abyss when we turn to him in repentance and call out to him, “Lord, save me” (cf. Matthew 14:3).

Let us then ask ourselves: What are some of the signposts I have experienced in my life that tell me that I am on the right path, the Gospel road? Have I experienced signposts in my life that have warned me of danger ahead? What insights in the Rule of St Benedict have helped me read the signposts encouraging me on my journey or warning me of trouble ahead?

BONIFACE VON NELL, OSB



We ask the friends of St Anselm's to join us in prayer for vocations to our community. We also ask you to recommend St Anselm's to young men who may be open to considering a religious life such as ours, and/or to pass on to us the names of such young men.

Director of Vocations, St Anselm's Abbey

A Cup, A Carving, and Colored Clay: Three Objects, Vessels for Life

The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects, by Deborah Lutz. I have not read the book, but I like the idea. “A Victorian literature scholar illuminates the fascinating lives of the Brontë sisters through the things they wore, stitched, and inscribed.” Few of us could compose *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*. Yet each of us writes a life, an autobiography. A tribute usually consists of words. But perhaps several well-chosen objects could accomplish the task just as well. So I think of possessions that might tell my life story. My grandpa’s wedding cufflinks? A letter I wrote? A book dedicated to me and inscribed by the author? A photograph album? (I keep my pictures the old-fashioned way: mounted with gold corners on black pages.) A picture painted by a friend? So many possibilities. Yet the challenge of limiting myself to just three. I think I know what I would choose. But I will not disclose it just yet.

I did the exercise more generally when asked to celebrate the funeral mass of Josephine, a political refugee from Cameroon, whom I never met. What a tragic and dramatic life she had. A son murdered by military police; walking a thousand miles through Central American jungle (threatened by snakes, thirst, and drug dealers); being detained at the American border. Living frugally with friends (who called themselves family but were not actually related); waiting patiently through bureaucratic procedures to be a documented immigrant. Then, so close to her goal, to be struck by stroke at age 51, and five months later to die far from her surviving children. How cruel can life be?

What could I say for Josephine? My eye lit on a mass-produced mug in our coffee room. Unclaimed,



impersonal, used for a quick sip when a favorite cup was not at hand. The cup has a sentimentally flowered border (not my style), and, facing me, the pious inscription *God is good / all the time*. On the other side

(no surprise) are the words *All the time / God is good*. As formulated, the words cannot be found in any scripture or missal. To me, they seem simplistic. Job, in his suffering, would have scorned them.

Yet they are reminiscent of a table grace taught by parents wanting their children to feel secure in God’s hands. *God is good; God is great; and we thank him.... By his hands we all are fed. Give us, Lord,....* The humble allusion to the petition in the Our Father, the hopeful wish that every child will be fed—I begin to see the subtlety of the little motto. I feel more sympathetic to those who chant the motivational phrases, verse and response, in the football huddle, to play the game well. Yes, it has potential as a simple phrase to breathe in and out like the Jesus prayer. I have to admit that the words would mean something to Josephine, whose life had not allowed more sophisticated reading, like Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. Josephine’s life lacked the leisure for that—however much she might have identified with the heroine’s fictional hardships.

Still, the cup seemed sticky-sweet to me. I thought

of cups which sent the message, *Life is wretchedly miserable, and a relief when it's finished*. This attitude is sometimes expressed in graphic terms and worn on T-shirts by cynical white Americans (not determined immigrants), the privileged who have so much more than they need, yet remain dissatisfied. I am ashamed to find myself sometimes in that category, even if I do not wear it on a T-shirt. Yet considering the unfairness of Josephine coming so close to her goal, yet falling short, makes me own the angry truth and shake my fist against the sky.

Looking for an object to express this tragic vision, I found, on the knick-knack shelves in our breakfast room, the carved head of a Native American woman. It was more than double the height of the God-is-good cup. A mass-produced item (one Josephine might have bought), it is made from synthetic material which only looks like wood. Yet it had a certain nobility which qualified for Josephine's story. The strands of hair were like Josephine's braids, and the profile captured her mood: an aristocratic nose, lips deep and wide, not grimacing but solemn. The eyes were closed, as if in death after a long, weary journey. Yes, this was closer to being an object worthy of representing an exiled asylum seeker.

But finally a better illumination came—the lightbulb moment, Aha! On a trip to Rhode Island, I enjoyed the colonial architecture and the rocky, sea-sprayed shore of the Ocean State. I visited the charming, historical town of Bristol—“the quintessential New England town,” home, since 1777, of the oldest continuously staged Independence Day parade in the United States. I wandered into a co-op store run by local artists. It was crammed with weavings, carvings, blown glass, and other decorative crafts. Intriguing objects that might, in fact, represent a life. Most of the ceramics had a clunky colonial style, in the predictable shades of cream and blue.

But tucked away on a basement shelf was a



bowl that caught my eye. The top and the depth were approximately the dimensions of the Native American woman, the bottom just a millimeter wider than the God-is-good cup. Here was my size-coordinated family of significant objects!

I was drawn to the bowl because it was exquisite, and, like a human, one-of-a-kind. Its irregularities, imperfections, and slight scars represent the vicissitudes of a life which brings trouble and pleasure at irregular intervals. The bowl was clearly “thrown” on a potter’s wheel. It reminded me of many

scriptural truths. “You are the potter; we are the clay.” The psalmist lamenting, fearing, protesting: “I am like a shattered dish, a broken bowl.” St Paul eloquently proposing that we frail mortals hold “a treasure in earthen vessels.”



But it was the bowl's glaze and colors that really enchanted me: a mossy olive green, and a soft burnt-carmine rust-red. In the bowl you see a single spiral of rust-red swirling to the bottom, on a background of botanical green. I thought of the

life-giving blood pulsing gently through a living creature (like me, like you). Inside the bowl is the animating force, peaceful yet strong. The rim of the bowl is a beautiful, slightly skewed, thin black line, framing the inner self.

On the outside, the colors are in reverse. Green is underneath, stippling through the passionate, if muted, red. The bowl suggests how interconnected are green growth and red pain. A full, rich, complete life is an almost equal mixture of both, the joy and the horror. When we say, “My cup overflows; my bowl spills past the brim,” we are actually speaking of the ecstasy in the agony.

We all know this truth; we feel it somewhere deep within. Yet we forget or deny.

But sometimes we are shocked into awareness, by a life like Josephine's. Then we see the inadequacy of our God-is-good cup. And we realize there is something beyond the tragic vision of a Native American woman's grief. We look into the uniquely shaped bowl of our uniquely fashioned lives, as into a mirror. We see the exquisite pattern and color (ours!)—and with increased awareness, we deeply drink it in.

GABRIEL MYERS, OSB

Understanding our Current Cultural Situation

In response to recent considerations that have been raised not only in our own monastic community but also in other contexts and environments about how young persons today can possibly be helped to find their way in our current cultural, moral, and political human milieu, the idea arose of finding a limited number of texts that could be easily read, works that would be accessible for persons who have not necessarily been trained in various forms of technical analysis, whether philosophical or theological. How might we provide a useful point of departure that could point our readers toward forms of analysis and inquiries that could take them further if their desire and interest has been ignited?

If we would agree, with Aristotle, that the wise person is someone who chooses a better point of departure than someone who makes another kind of choice and decision, with a certain degree of hope and for reasons that are ultimately spiritual and religious, and if we can begin with the data of modernity as this exists in our day, a fitting point of departure would be Michael Allen Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago and London, 2008). We recommend this book because our current culture is best understood from a viewpoint that takes, as its point of departure, not the 18th century Enlightenment but, instead, a number of philosophical developments that occurred in the 13th century. It was in that century that the primacy of our human acts of reasoning was replaced by an alleged primacy of our human acts of desiring and willing. For such thinkers, willing trumps understanding. If Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, articulates a distinct philosophy of the human will, Duns Scotus, later in the 13th century, begins to

speak about the actual *primacy* of our acts of human willing over and against an alleged primacy that had belonged to our human acts of understanding and judgment. From a growing emphasis on the power and scope of willing comes a different theology of God and a different anthropology, one that creates conditions that lead us toward a different focus about how we exist and ought to live as human beings.

A more readable text that could also be consulted is Rodney Stark's *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* (Wilmington, DE, 2014). Stark shows that even though some thinkers approach modernity from only a philosophical perspective, the fact that philosophical and theological reasons are closely intertwined means that a better approach will also want to examine the influence of theological causes; a mutual form of causality exists between the two.

Another major text, Harvey C. Mansfield's *A Student's Guide to Political Philosophy* (Wilmington, DE, 2001), gives a very brief account of the scope and gamut of political philosophy as a discipline and school of thought. A clear distinction is drawn between political philosophy *per se* and political science, and a second clear distinction is shown to exist between the focus of earlier political philosophy and that of a new tradition that began with Machiavelli and his emphasis on the primacy of the will to power. Instead of questions that ask about what makes for a good or ideal state, the new Machiavellian focus asks about what makes for an efficient or effective state. In conjunction with this need to understand the kind of turn that arose with Machiavelli's political philosophy, Pierre Manent's

An Intellectual History of Liberalism (Princeton, NJ, 1994) examines the significance of Machiavelli's thought. It is perhaps not without point to note that Machiavelli's political philosophy was first introduced into the English-speaking world by Thomas Cromwell (d. 1540), Henry VIII's chief minister in administering the Reformation in England from about 1530 to 1540. At this time, pragmatic considerations began to become more important and dominant.

When considering the reasons why, in the West, modern science achieved the kind of maturity it did, we recommend Toby E. Huff's *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (Cambridge, UK, 2017). This work addresses that issue and asks about the kinds of origin we must attend to if we are to understand the rise of modern science. To understand why modern science has emerged as something that is especially typical of modern western culture, Huff examines similarities and differences across a variety of different cultures and argues that a distinct set of variables can be identified. Most importantly, a grounding religious context is required. Belief in the reality of an incarnate, divine Logos (an infinite divine Word or an infinite divine Reason that is embodied or incarnate within our world) is a basic, first principle that is then joined to other principles that are foundational for the kind of ordering that exists within our acts of human reasoning.

To understand our religious world and what have been the many ramifications on different levels and planes, Brad S. Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA, 2012) argues that the Protestant reformers initiated a revolt that sought to make Christians more faithful and religious although, in the end, on the basis of their suppositions, a greater gap begins to emerge between the

things of this world and the things of God. God becomes more distant and apart from us. In the celebration of the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, God is not understood as really present in a way that is other than the way we, as individuals, are present to one another, and yet in a way that is entirely real. In the relation that exists between primary and secondary causes, to speak about God's power and omnipotence seems to take away from the dignity and the potency of all secondary causes. On the other hand, emphasizing the dignity and power of secondary causes takes away from the dignity and the power of God's causality. When primary and secondary causes are not understood in terms of how each reinforces and points to the other, the inevitable result is a further sundering of the ability of human and divine things to exist together through a form of cooperation that is truly a species of friendship. One then finds it impossible to point to the good or truth of the other. To explain these points of cleavage, Charles Morerod's "Part II: The Philosophical Presuppositions of the Reformation," in *Ecumenism and Philosophy: Philosophical Questions for a Renewal of Dialogue* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006) spells out how we need to be able to think about how the real distinction that exists between primary and secondary causes has to be understood in a way that does not assume the necessity of some kind of unconnected separation.

On a more existential note, Viktor E. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston, 1992) is an autobiographical reflection by an Austrian Jewish psychiatrist who had survived the Nazi death camps of the Second World War. His reminiscences were written two weeks after his liberation in 1945 and have been translated into many languages. As a psychiatrist, Frankl argues that the human experience of suffering is a normal part of our lives. Suffering *per se* is not to be regarded as a pathology to be avoided and

shunned at all costs but, instead, as something that is mysteriously given to us in a way that both challenges us and can serve us as a means of our coming to enjoy a greater number and a richer quality of different goods. What counts in life are experiences of meaning, and no trial or suffering is so great that some kind of meaning cannot be found in it. To find meaning in our lives is both the fundamental challenge that faces us and the means that best leads to our truest, most happy freedom.

If meaning is to function thus as a catalyst in a way that can lead us toward changes of life and attitude, philosophical and theological studies need to be pursued in ways that transcend trying to learn definitions and meanings for different words and concepts. As an introduction to philosophy as existentially initiating a new way of living for us, Pierre Hadot's *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, 2002) adopts an approach that rejects a conceptualistic type of narrative and instead proposes the kind of self-reflection we need if we are to change our attitudes about what our human life is all about. We best move toward an order of meaning that exists within the order of our human interiority. This differs from the meanings of common sense and from the kind of meaning that belongs to the cognitive ordering of scientific inquiry and theory.

We conclude our article by recommending D.C. Schindler's "Reality and the Transcendentals," an essay found in his *Love and the Postmodern Predicament: Rediscovering the Real in Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Eugene, OR, 2018). Here Schindler argues that there exists a crying need in our day for new contemplatives who can leaven the world through their witness to the order of being by the order of their very lives and thought. As if he were a kind of metaphysical ophthalmologist, Schindler tries to strengthen the philosophical and metaphysical

underpinnings of our sight so that we can see, anew, the transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth. Our milieu betrays an aversion to philosophy and metaphysics that pits us against our very natures because the human being, as "an animal with logos," cannot be such an animal without inwardly holding a metaphysical system and the general order that exists and belongs to it. The malaise of modernity is characterized by a "loss of respect for the true inwardness of things" and an attendant loss of the "lightness of being." A recovery of a rich, ontological understanding of beauty, by which we behold the whole, can help us restore our rootedness in the reality of that which exists as the real and as the truth of things. Modernity is characterizable by its habit of "lonely-mindedness," in which the self is conceived of as an isolated subjectivity that is the exclusive originator of our human willing, with no intrinsic relation to things outside of itself. Against this distortion and to transcend this distortion, a recovery of the apprehension of goodness as a property of being, a transcendental, is needed, for then we will once again understand how freedom exists as an involvement in reality and not as a power to noncommittally like something from a "safe" distance. Modernity sees knowledge as mere information, and this results in a loss of human depth and in a certain brittleness that increasingly infects our identity. When or if we should come again to see how truth exists as a transcendental, then we would be able to realize that true knowing is about our making a genuine contact with things by our taking into ourselves (in terms of intimate encounter and personal presence) the greater reality that already exists about us. This is the reality in which and by which we have always already been involved through experiences of beauty and goodness and which is still being given to us.

Hospitality: The Reception of Guests

One of the best-known lines in the Rule of St Benedict is at the beginning of its fifty-third chapter, on the reception of guests. There Benedict writes, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'" Ever since that line was written, Benedictine monasteries have emphasized the importance of hospitality. This article is merely one further reflection on this basic aspect of our way of life.

I've always been fascinated by words and how they came to be. As you might guess, the word "hospitality" comes from a Latin term, *hospes*, which is very interesting in that it can have two rather different meanings. On the one hand, it can be translated as "guest, stranger, or foreigner" and, on the other hand, as "host," that is, someone who welcomes, receives, and entertains a guest or a stranger. In fact, anyone reading a Latin text containing that word can determine only by context which of the two meanings applies in a given case. But we don't really have that problem with the English word "hospitality," for it regularly refers to the gracious welcoming of a guest or stranger.

One good place to begin reflecting on hospitality is with Scripture, specifically with the account in the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, of the three mysterious visitors to Abraham. The passage goes like this:

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord[s], if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a

little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

There is, of course, more to the account, namely, the promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a son in their old age, but for now I'll focus only on these opening verses. They are entirely in accord with the practice of hospitality that one finds regularly in Middle Eastern cultures, where it is considered a great privilege to welcome and provide for guests. The original reason for this is that this part of the world was largely nomadic, with people traveling long distances over very arid landscapes. Being able to count on hospitality was often literally a matter of life or death. In such a culture, people were especially willing to offer hospitality to strangers, just as they themselves wanted to receive it when they in turn were traveling across a deserted wilderness. The promptness with which such hospitality was offered is signaled in our text from Genesis, where we read that Abraham doesn't simply wait for the three visitors to arrive at his tent. No, he runs out to meet them and begs them to stay a while with himself and his wife. He then speaks

disparagingly about the meal that he gets prepared for them, calling it just “a little bread” (in some translations, “a morsel of bread”), when in fact it is a sumptuous feast: cakes made from choice flour, a tender and good calf, curds (that is, a kind of soft cheese or yoghurt), and milk.

One finds the same assumption of hospitality in the New Testament: Christ’s directions to the apostles to “take nothing for their journey” (Mark 6:8, etc.) presupposes that they were sure of always finding hospitality and would be able to stay at their host’s home as long as they chose. Indeed, one of the most significant signs that one is worthy of being received into the eternal kingdom is the way one treats strangers. In the well-known parable of the sheep and the goats in the 25th chapter of Matthew’s gospel, the king will say to those on his right: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me....” just as one of the most definite signs of not being worthy of the kingdom is refusal of hospitality, for those placed with the goats on the left are those to whom the Son of Man will say: “I was a stranger and you did not welcome me.”

In the days of the early Church as described by St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, we regularly find Paul on his missionary journeys receiving hospitality in many places. For example, at one point Luke writes: “... Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because [the emperor] Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they worked together” (Acts 18:1-3). Or a few chapters later, Luke writes: “When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at

Ptolemais; we greeted the believers and stayed with them. The next day we left and came to Caesarea, and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him” (Acts 21:7-8). Finally, after Paul and his companions suffered shipwreck and landed on the island of Malta, we read: “In the neighborhood of that place [where we had come ashore] were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days” (Acts 28:7). So throughout his years as a missionary, Paul was regularly able to count on the hospitality of persons he encountered on his travels, even as Jesus at times received hospitality at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

After this survey of some of the key passages in Scripture, let’s now fast forward five centuries to the time of St Benedict, who wrote his Rule at Monte Cassino around the year 540. This same emphasis on hospitality is found there. I’ve already quoted the opening sentence. St Benedict goes on to say that once a guest has been announced, “the superior and the brothers are to meet him with all the courtesy of love. First of all, they are to pray together and thus be united in peace.” The emphasis on providing food and drink for the guests that we saw in the account of Abraham is also found here in the Rule, for St Benedict says that there is even to be a special kitchen for the abbot and guests, and that each year two of the brothers who can do the work competently are to be assigned to this kitchen so that they could prepare a proper meal at whatever time guests might arrive. Note that not just any of the monks are to be assigned to this kitchen, but only those who can prepare the meals in a competent way. And note, too, that it is not just any monk who is to eat with the guests, but rather the abbot himself. There could hardly be a more telling way of noting the importance of hospitality in a monastic setting.

Let me now bring this even closer to home by recounting some things that guests have experienced here at St Anselm's. As you surely know, we regularly receive warm "thank you's" when guests get ready to leave after a few days, but occasionally their stay is much more momentous. A few years ago we received an email from a woman who had been with us a few weeks earlier. Here is what she wrote:

I'd like to express the deepest thanks to all the monks at St Anselm's. As a guest a few weeks ago, I came to the abbey deeply troubled by personal problems, unable to sleep well, and an emotional shipwreck. Tears were never far away, and it took only a slight reference to anyone's sorrow to trigger them. All of that changed the weekend I spent with you. Being able to be among you without an obligation for conversation was a relief all in itself—I didn't have to guard my words or hold up a front. You trusted me without knowing me and let me be a part of your lives without any demands. To see men live happily and so simply and to have all of their needs met showed me how little one really needs to be happy. Whereas the focus I had prior to arrival was on external things that could make me happy, I realized that weekend that all material things will eventually decay and bring sorrow—and that true joy can only be found inside, in the love of Christ himself. Your example was more powerful than a million sermons; just a few days with you showed me the way to peace. I was on tranquilizers before I came, and after I left I didn't need them any more. I could sleep, and I could meet the challenges God had in store for me with faith and courage. I pray for you daily, and I thank you for your dedication to the most honorable way of life I can think of.

Not long after that, we received another very touching letter from a former guest, who wrote the following words: "During the four days I was at St Anselm's I was able to recover my conscience. For men who had never pushed their conscience too far from them, you may not realize what a feat that recovery was. But it was not my feat. 'I' did not recover anything. It was God—working carefully and quietly through yourselves—who found me and touched my heart—rather rent it into pieces—and reconstructed it in his image." The writer of those lines has since made his Profession of Faith at a parish in the part of the country where he now lives.

My third and final example is one that I could easily have missed, for it appeared in a magazine that I do not always read. A few years ago, someone brought to my attention a remarkable article titled "The Prosecution Rests." As most people know, the issue of the detainees still being kept at Guantanamo Bay is a lingering problem. I once spoke with a lawyer who had been going there a few times each year to represent some of the prisoners. He told me what many others have said: that the way we have held some of those men for years without trial is harming our country's image in many parts of the world, something that troubles that lawyer very much. Another person who was troubled by it was Lt. Col. Darrell Vandeveld, who worked there as a prosecutor in the Office of Military Commissions and who was interviewed by Fr Luke Hansen for an issue of the magazine *America*.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Darrell Vandeveld had served in various dangerous parts of the world, including Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and had friends and comrades who were killed in action in Iraq or Afghanistan. This had angered him very much, so he had first gone to Guantanamo seeking revenge in the only way open to him: through the legal system. But the longer he was there, the more troubled he became by what

he saw, such as a boy named Mohammed Jawad, who was only 15 or 16 years old when he was captured for attacking two Americans. At Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan he was hooded and shackled, thrown down a flight of stairs, and threatened with still worse treatment. Later, at Guantanamo, he was treated in a manner that one of our Army generals called cruel and that led the young man to attempt suicide by the crude method of banging his head against the wall. Guards saw this and allowed it to continue for a period of time, and an Army psychologist, instead of seeing that Jawad got mental health treatment, said that since he was now in a vulnerable position, it was a good time to interrogate him further. Lt. Col. Vandeveld tried to convince the chief prosecutor that we should enter into a plea agreement with Jawad that would allow him to serve some additional time, receive rehabilitative services, and ultimately be repatriated to his country of origin, but this suggestion was vehemently rejected. Receiving advice from a priest to leave Guantanamo and the Army, Vandeveld was hesitant to do this since he was 47 at the time, established in his career, and with a family. What he decided to do I recount in his own words:

I went to St Anselm's Abbey in Washington, DC and stayed there for three days. In addition to praying the Liturgy of the Hours, I read three books: John Dear's *A Persistent Peace*, Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, and a collection of Martin Luther King Jr's speeches. I basically spent 72 hours in constant prayer. I barely slept. At the end of it, I felt—and this is the first time I have said this—I felt touched by the hand of God. My path became clear....

Martin Luther King said that we are sometimes faced with great moral questions, and we have the ability to act or to refuse to act. Reading these books and praying intensely worked an inner transformation. I have no idea what led me to St Anselm's Abbey, but it changed me forever.¹

Darrel Vandeveld had become convinced that if the detainees at Guantanamo are not to be tried in regular federal courts, then the only acceptable alternative would be to try them before military courts-martial, since their prolonged and indefinite detention is promoting arbitrariness and a denial of human rights. Being unable to effect any real change in the system, he resigned from the Office of Military Commissions and took a position as an assistant public defender for a county in Pennsylvania. He concluded his interview with these words:

In my work with the Public Defender's Office, I find hope every time I stand up in court and urge the judge to see the human behind the shackled, prison-clothed person in front of him or her, and to seek to do justice. This is what sustains me. Each day at work, my desire is to see God in everything and to recognize that all of us are better than the worst acts we commit. This is the beginning of my spiritual journey.²

Not nearly everyone will have that kind of life-changing experience when spending a few days at a monastery like ours, but even when such a mammoth change is not needed, the hospitality we offer can be a precious gift.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

¹ Luke Hansen, "The Prosecution Rests: Why Darrel J. Vandeveld left Guantánamo," *America*, Sept. 26, 2011, p. 16-17.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

Monastic Formators Program

When Abbot James first appointed me novice master (in the late Spring of 2020), I have to say that I was a bit surprised. I was, after all, the youngest member of the community both in terms of age and time in the habit. Surely any one of the older members of the community would know more about monastic life than I did. As the abbot was quick to point out, however, that lack of knowledge was something that was relatively easy to fix. Indeed, there was a course every two years (with the next one scheduled for March of 2021) at Sant'Anselmo for exactly that purpose: the Monastic Formators Programme (being organized by British monks, they tend to use those funny spellings).

Of course there was a pandemic raging at the time of my appointment, but surely six months would be long enough for countries to get the virus under control and allow the program (yeah, I'm really not going to bother with correcting my spell checker all the time) to take place as normal? Oh, how naive we were. As it turned out, that wasn't nearly enough time and the program had to be delayed by a year. Indeed, even with that year's delay, the pandemic created several hurdles that had to be overcome for the program to take place. Up-to-date vaccinations were a must for all participants and there was a testing requirement just before traveling (both to and from Italy) that had to be complied with. Once we got to Italy, N95 masks were required at all indoor attractions (though luckily we could shed them inside Sant'Anselmo itself) and on public transportation. Even with the heightened vigilance, however, Covid-19 did eventually get into our little group, confining half the participants to their rooms for some period of time. I ended up being in isolation for the longest, a full

ten days, being one of the first to catch the disease and probably the worst case of the bunch.

Covid difficulties aside, the MFP was a wonderful experience, bringing together a wide variety of participants. The English Benedictine Congregation did attempt something of a takeover of the program, with two of the directors, five of the participants, and three of the teachers coming from the congregation, but in the end the takeover was blessedly unsuccessful and the program's diversity was preserved. In total there were twenty-six participants: fourteen men and twelve women from around the world. Every continent except Australia was represented (and Antarctica, but since there are no monasteries there, I don't think that should count). We had representatives from both the Coptic (Egypt) and the Syro-Malabar (India) rites, giving us a chance to breathe with "both lungs of the Church." Among the nuns, there were Missionary Benedictines and Trappistines, as well as cloistered Benedictine communities represented. The men were slightly less diverse, being mostly "normal" Benedictine monks, but there were a couple of Anglican Benedictine monks, adding a bit of an ecumenical flair to the whole program.

The first seven weeks of the program were spent in Rome, with Sant'Anselmo serving as our headquarters. As the MFP used English as its common tongue and the Sant'Anselmo community uses Italian, we formed a somewhat separate community within that space, having our own offices and Masses, but we did join the larger Sant'Anselmo community for meals and some special events, giving us ample opportunity to meet and converse with those students and teachers of Sant'Anselmo who spoke English.

Outside of prayer times, most days were spent in the classroom, five hours in total, but with plenty of generous breaks during the day (there was nearly a revolt when one teacher tried to shorten one of the breaks). There were also days spent away from the classroom when we got to go on trips to see the sights of Rome and beyond. In Rome itself, the Vatican was the main destination of those visits, with six trips to various sites within it: St Peter's Basilica four times (the first to play tourist and three others for Masses: in the crypt in front of St Peter's tomb, Palm Sunday Mass with Pope Francis in the Square, and the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday with the pope inside the basilica), the Vatican Museums (including the Sistine Chapel), and the Vatican Gardens (a place most people never get to go). We also had visits to the catacombs (well, one of them), St Paul's Outside the Walls, St Clement's, and a variety of other historic sites. I also made time to do the Seven Church Walk (on the day after Easter, instead of the Wednesday before, due to schedule constraints), walking from Sant'Anselmo to St Peter's, then to St Paul's, St Sebastian's Outside the Walls, St John Lateran (with a quick stop at Quo Vadis along the way), Holy Cross in Jerusalem, St Lawrence's Outside the Walls, and St Mary Major. All told it was a distance of about twenty miles, and I prayed one hour of the Divine Office in each of the major basilicas (except for Holy Cross and St Lawrence's, both of which were closed for a two-hour lunch break when I got to them; I had to settle for praying just outside the doors in both cases).

Of course, no trip to Italy for Benedictines would be complete without visiting the sites of St Benedict's life, and it was from Rome that we made three of the four excursions to complete this list of sites. The first trip was to Subiaco (where St Benedict's hermit's cave was, as well as the first thirteen monasteries that he founded) and Vicovaro (the location

of the community that first asked Benedict to be their abbot and then tried to poison him when they found him too strict for their liking). The second trip was to Monte Cassino, and the third stayed in Rome proper to visit Chiesa di San Benedetto in Piscinula (the church on the site of the family home that Benedict would have stayed in during his aborted studies in Rome). Actually, that last church is right on the route from Sant'Anselmo to the Vatican, so we ended up passing it several times before we finally went there for a mass.

For the last five weeks of the program, the entire group decamped to Assisi, where life was considerably more relaxed than in fast-paced Rome. Unfortunately, this move coincided with our Covid outbreak, so my first view of Assisi was ten days spent in my fairly tiny room. At least I had a marvelous view of the sunset over Assisi out my window.

Classes continued in Assisi as they had in Rome (with a bit of technological assistance for those of us stuck in isolation), but because of Covid there were several disruptions to our planned schedule of outings. We did get to Norcia (Benedict's birthplace), which still showed significant signs of the damage suffered in the earthquake of 2016 (you can still round corners and find yourself staring at someone's kitchen floor, but the rest of the house is gone), thereby completing the list of significant sites in Benedict's life.

While the various trips to see different things were the obvious highlights of the entire three month stay in Italy, the meat of the program was of course the classes. As I indicated before, most days involved five hours of class: three in the morning and two in the afternoon. This was the schedule for six days each week: Monday to Saturday. While the trips broke up the marathon-like nature of this schedule, the fact that most of them involved some degree of traveling meant that Sunday was the only day that we could

reliably count on for real downtime. It was downtime that I found myself sorely needing at times.

Classes covered a wide variety of topics, everything a new (or renewed) formator might need to further their own monastic vocation and ready them to pass on the traditions to the next generation. We covered the life of St Benedict, his Rule, monastic history more broadly, community life and communication, human formation, spiritual formation, and methods for teaching all of the above. Most of these topics were tackled from multiple vantage points by different instructors, emphasizing the importance of each topic as well as the varieties of ways in which it could be incorporated into a formation program. Beyond the formal instruction, there was also plenty of opportunity to discuss both what we were learning and the existing practices back in our home monasteries with the other participants. More than anything I was struck by the sheer amount of information that was made available to us through all of these channels. While I had always known that being a novice master was a lot of work (Canon Law even requires that novice masters “are not burdened with other tasks, so that they may discharge their office fruitfully and in a stable fashion”), experiencing the incredible volume of information that we received during those three months in Italy drove home the fact that I really need to make sure I’m spending a significant portion of my time each week on my novice master duties. The list of resources that I could possibly use but had never heard of before was easily longer than my arm, setting me up with plenty of reading material for the near future.

Absorbing all of that material in the course of three months was actually impossible. I took plenty of notes and collected many resources that will take me months to read and years to truly integrate into my teaching. Some things, though, have had a

fairly immediate impact. Fr Mauritius Wilde’s take on the Life of St Benedict was a real eye-opener to me. I have to say that prior to his classes, I had dismissed St Gregory’s Second Dialogue as typical of hagiographic literature, which is to say light on facts and with piety so thick that it would choke the average reader. Fr Mauritius, however, introduced a new (to me) way of reading the Dialogue that allows one to get past those surface features and really spend some time considering Benedict the person, as opposed to the saint. This allowed for new insights that really struck me and which I wanted to share almost immediately with our own novice, Br Cyprian.

Having been back in DC for several months now, school has started back up and I find myself busier than ever with all my duties around the monastery and school. My time in Italy, however, still forms a reference point for my year, and almost every day I do something related to the material I was exposed to over there. It has become the storehouse from which I pull out what is old and what is new at the proper time and likely will be doing so for years to come in my role as novice master.



Summer in Italy can be hard on the feet.

SAMUEL SPRINGUEL, OSB

The General Chapter of the English Benedictine Congregation, July 2022

The major legislative body of any Benedictine congregation is its general chapter meeting. For the English Benedictine Congregation to which St Anselm's belongs, these meetings are normally held every four years, but this time the Covid epidemic led to a gap of five years between the previous chapter and the one held this year from July 11-21.



Buckfast Abbey

The venue was Buckfast Abbey, located along the Dart River in the county of Devonshire in south-west England. The facilities there were ideal for the thirty-seven monks and nuns in attendance: the abbot president of the congregation, the superiors of the various EBC monasteries, each community's elected delegate, four officials (bursar, canonist,

formation director, and procurator general), two facilitators, and two secretaries. The use of facilitators was an innovation, but they so expertly kept the entire group on schedule with the crowded agenda that such assistance may now become a regular part of chapter meetings.

One of the major decisions was to accept three communities of nuns into the EBC. Several years ago the Vatican decreed that communities of nuns that were totally independent would have to join some congregation or federation for mutual support, so three such communities applied to our congregation: Kylemore Abbey in Ireland, Mariavall Abbey in Sweden, and Jamberoo Abbey in Australia. The approval of their applications means that the EBC is now more international than ever, with houses outside of England approximating the number of those in the home country. Of the three new communities, Kylemore is geographically closest to England; Jamberoo is by far the most distant but with EBC connections going back to 1849, when an English monk founded that house, which has been visited by English nuns from Stanbrook a number of times in recent years; and the Swedish abbey at Mariavall has several nuns who speak English very well, including their abbess and delegate. Having approved all three applications, the chapter members subsequently passed a resolution establishing a commission to oversee the integration of the three new communities and to encourage ways of fostering the international dimension of the congregation, which includes dependent priories in Peru and Zimbabwe.

The chapter also spent considerable time on matters of formation, a term that has often been understood as concerning only postulants, novices, and the temporarily professed but is now taken to apply to every monk and nun, regardless of how many years they have been professed. The members agreed to have the EBC's Continuing Formation Commission continue its work, with a certain priority given to human formation inasmuch as monastic life aims to transform the whole person and thereby enhance the human dynamics of any community. This was one of the emphases of a document with the somewhat formidable title *Ratio Institutionis*, with sections on initial and lifelong formation, on required philosophical and theological studies, and on various canonical procedures and regulations. This document was approved for all EBC houses of monks for use *ad experimentum* as the basis of their formation programs until the next general chapter.

The chapter also confirmed a second document, the *Vocation Directors' Handbook*, and strongly recommended it to all houses as the basis for their reception of new members. In addition, it was agreed that there should be a shared period of formation for novices. A commission will be appointed to make proposals for its implementation in January, 2024. This time of shared formation will allow novices from the various houses to be together in one or another of our monasteries for a period of about three months, thereby allowing them to become familiar with those at the same stage of initial formation.

In addition to days spent on the kinds of business common to all general chapters, such as modifying the nature of congregational publications and enhancing the formative elements of the quadrennial visitations that the abbot president makes to



Chapter delegates assembled in Buckfast conference room

each community, the chapter also devoted one full day to the topic of safeguarding. This was a time of healing and prayer concerning the impact of child abuse. The program included talks by Ms Dani Wardman, chief executive of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service, and Dr Catherine Sexton, who is on the staff of Durham University's "Breaking Boundaries" project.

The concluding day of the chapter saw the reelection of Abbot Christopher Jamison as abbot president and the election of congregational officials and members of the Abbot President's Council, whose membership will be expanded so as better to reflect the congregation as a whole. The overall satisfaction felt by members of chapter was summed up by one participant who said it was like a family reunion, a chance to meet again with some monks and nuns whom he had not seen for several years. While the next meeting of the chapter will not take place until 2026, there will probably be an in-person formation conference held at one of the abbeys two years before then.

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ST ANSELM'S ABBEY

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