Benedictine Aggiornamento

by Alberic Stacpoole, O.S.B.

The modern urge to dig up one's roots to inspect their state of health has not escaped the Benedictines, and the spirited winds of the Vatican Council no less than of the September 1966 Rome Council of Abbots have given the urge an added impetus. The issues are broad and ontological, ranging from liturgical adaptation to the question 'what is a monk?'. But no issue exercises theorists and practitioners alike so vehemently as that of the tension, as old as the ages of man, between Mary and Martha, between the contemplative and the active vocation. Both schools of thought agree that *nihil opere Dei praeponatur* (RB XLIII); but where the contemplative school believes that *laborare et orare*[1] embraces the essential Benedictine life, the active school insists on the wider formula *orare et laborare et praedicare*. The latter believes as a corollory that something of *orare* which the contemplatives allot to *lectio divina* (essentially a preparation for prayer, if not an indirect mode of prayer itself), should be allotted in part to the necessary preparation *praedicare* – i.e. that prayer and apostolic work feed on one another and are mutually supporting in the monk's proper pursuit of the *unum necessarium*.

Both schools are returning to the *fontes* of monasticism, to Pachomius[2], Basil[3], Cassian, the Regula Magistri, the Regula Benedicti, S. Gregory's Dialogues, in order to test and substantiate their case for the form of monastic life they favour. Invoking the pristine state (not necessarily, if we remember the Essay on Development, the 'purest' state) the contemplative school, currently led by Dom Adalbert de Vogüé of the Subiaco Congregation[4], has managed to present the stronger case. The active school rests its case most heavily on these texts:

Dialogues II.8 Benedict 'preached continually to the people of the vicinity (of Cassino), summoning them to the Christian faith.'

[1]Not *Laborare EST orare*, a persistent error which Prof. Knowles has many times refuted in print, even making it the subject of a letter to The Tablet.
[2]discussed in Sec. I of the book under review.
[3]S. Basil's teaching in his two Rules, five 'ascetical sermons' and ten epistles is prosleptic in support of later active monachism. He declared against even the theoretical superiority of the eremitical life over the ceonobitic, and the fully contemplative over the partially active. To bring the apostolic life within reach of his monks, he built in or near towns, and undertook work concerned with orphanages (for girls as for boys), hospices, hospitals and education.
[4]notably with his article, 'The Rule of S. Benedict and the Contemplative Life' in Cistercian Studies I.54-73 (1966).

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Dialogues II.19 Benedict 'used frequently to send his monks to a village not far from the monastery for the spiritual benefit (of those there converted, among them nuns) . . . the monk who was sent having delivered his sermon . . .'

Regula Benedicti IV 'The Tools of Good Works . . . to relieve the poor, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to bury the dead, to help the afflicted, to console the sorrowing.'

Regula Benedicti XLVIII 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul . . . then are they truly monks when they live by the labour of their hands, like our fathers and the apostles.' (cf. I Cor 4.12).

Be that as it may, the true weight of the case of the active school lies, as Dom David Knowles has shown succinctly in the 1965 Sarum Lectures[5], in the development of monasticism subsequent to S. Benedict's death. When secular society, recovering from the lacerations of the Dark Ages, turned to monastic houses to provide royal administrators, centres of social welfare and havens of culture, then did the active vocation begin to flourish, then did monks begin to preach to the world from within and from outside their monasteries. S. Gregory's venture in sending Augustine to England was an act before its time, a harbinger of new development in monachism.

S. Benedict was soon enough superseded by the diversification of medieval monasticism. What began as a purely religious force embodying a school of spirituality, soon became a socio-economic phenomenon as part of the medieval scene, since monks became major producers, farmers, capitalists and consumers. Equally they became the outstanding agency in transmitting the legacy of the past, as a fundamental factor in the higher education of both the Ninth and Twelfth Century Renaissances. They became great church -builders and therefore patrons of architecture, with its sculptural concomitants. In calligraphy and illumination they enjoyed a virtual monopoly. In the field of government and the development of political institutions, as the Sarum Lectures have shown, monastic and religious constitutional structure contributed in every generation up to the Reformation, and most notably at the stage when the secular state was evolving principles which have lastingly stood the proof of time: it was a stage most fertile also in monastic constitutional evolution. Ceonobium and polis, each provoked the other to further advances. Cluny proved the answer to feudalism, a network of order in a sea of barbarism. Citeaux reflected the encroachment of reason on faith, 'the new capacity of adolescent Europe to rationalise problems and organise on a wide scale', by her system of General Chapters and her economic weapon, the lay brother. When society fragmented into national and civic groups with the growth of boroughs, the Orders responded with the friars, both to teach gown and to preach town. This constant diversification of activity and continuous response to the times – most drama-

[5]'From Pachomius to Ignatius: a Study in the Constitutional History of the Religious Orders', The Sarum Lectures 1964–5 Clarendon, Oxford.

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tically illustrated in the monk-warriors, who turned to S. Bernard for their constitution and prompted his *de Laude Novae Militiae* – left the simple vision of S. Benedict's self-sufficient monastery, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgotten' intact as an ideal but inadequate as a total expression. Benedict had himself marvellously progressed (as Dom de Vogüé has recently shown[6])from his first eremitical experience, to the dozen RM-type twelve-monk communities of Subiaco through Cassian's monastic individualism to an abbey as broad based and communally interdependent as Montecassino. He had even founded a daughter house at Terracina and written a Rule ('from that short document, quite literally, as from a seed, the whole organisation grew') which was more generic than specific and suggested a widening horizon which left room for the congregational system as we have it today. He moved far in his own life, and it was to be expected that his heirs would move far further in the same direction, first by sanctifying the profane by bringing them into the cloister (as with Cluny's confraternities, or with the *conversi* movement of Vallombrosa, Citeaux, etc.); and secondly by going out into the profane world to sanctify it (as *per exemplum* in the person of Lanfranc, monk, scholar, legislator, premier baron and archbishop, who transformed the Church in England and set a model of Church-State relations which has never been rivalled).

The long process of monastic constitutional evolution has never been reviewed, astonishing to relate. Individual constitutions have been studied and teutonic teamwork (notably today under Dom Kassius Hallinger) has interlinked these studies: but there still remains a full-dress evolutionary study to be written. Professor Knowles has broken the ice with a brilliant – and one must add, courageous – essay of not a hundred pages in true English genre (Germans carve monuments, Englishmen sketch essays), which shows the power of constructive innovation of the Religious Orders down the ringing grooves of change. 'The great constitutional development', he tells us, 'took place within a little more than two hundred years, from the abbacy of S. Odilo of Cluny, which began in 994, to the death of S. Dominic in 1221', a leap forward only parallelled by Benedict's own after two and a half centuries of monasticism before him. It is incidentally interesting to see this very great monastic scholar turn his mind to institutional growth, an aspect he had tended to shy off in the past. Professor Southern, reviewing Religious Orders II[7], remarked that the institutional aspect of the subject appeared to interest the author far less than the historical, which in turn attracted most interest in the personal, the intellectual and the devotional aspect – and so the heart of his book lay across fine personal portraits of monks and friars,

[6]Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique LXI No. I 'La Règle du Maître et les Dialogues de S. Grégoire' Louvain 1966.
[7]R. W. Southern, review of 'The Religious Orders in England II, the End of the Middle Ages' *Journal of Theological Studies* NS. VIII.190–4 (1957).

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descriptions of theological controversy, and analyses of the spiritual life of the age. Though the great abbeys had made their choice between being great social institutions and being schools of spiritual leadership and innovation, Professor Knowles himself preferred the reverse choice, setting Mount Grace near his centre and S. Albans at his circumference: the human splendour and complexity of the great houses are reflected only fitfully. 'At bottom', concluded Professor Southern, 'it is as institutions that their history must be written.'

It might be well to examine the *sitz im leben* of the Benedictine Order in the world today, to see how it reflects, how it has resolved in this generation the tension between the calling of Martha and of Mary –, or the calling of S. Albans and the calling of Mount Grace. The Order (a loose term implying a minimum degree of centralised standardisation or control) comprises sixteen congregations and half a dozen independent houses, spread over every continent of the Christian world, from Prague to Portugal, from the Philippines to Morocco, from Hungary to Tanganyika, from Chile to Brazil to Venezuela[8]. The Order is composed of some 12,070 religious vowed to 225 houses, with traditions going back some a few years, some several centuries. The congregation given first precedence, *honoris causa*, is the Cassinese: the second, resting on historical claims, is the English: the seventh, with its eighteen houses (eight more than the first two), is Solesmes, the home of chant: Subiaco, with its thirty-five houses and world-wide coverage, is despite its historic name tenth. This congregation and the American Cassinese (nineteen houses in North America) are each composed of about two thousand religious, more than double any other congregation except the Ottilian with its thirteen hundred religious. Paradoxically the smallest congregation is the Cassinese, with its great abbeys of Montecassino (40), S. Paul's Rome (37), Cava Naples (34), etc., far below their capacity. Admittedly, in the words of Guy Crouchback's father, 'in spirituality, quantitative judgments do not apply': nevertheless it is the active congregations, led by the Americans and the missionary houses, which are the most thriving and which attract the most novices. The reason is clear enough in part, that their work provides them with a built-in recruiting ground, whereas the contemplative houses must rely for their novices upon 'the still small voice of God'. We remember S. Albans and Mount Grace.

The fully contemplative monasteries, having no parishes, nor seminaries, nor schools, nor missionary work, nor distant (i.e. pioneering) dependent priories to supply, are indeed few in number, some 43 out of a total 204 (for 21 of the overall total 225 are strictly dependencies): of these 15 are Solesmes, 8 are Subiaco and 7 are of the Olivetan Congregation. All of these congregations do run both parishes and schools to some extent: of the Olivetans, for example, a total of 21 monasteries, 9 of them serve parishes (Mt. Oliveto itself has

[8]Details are taken from a study of the CATALOGUS O.S.B., 1965; they do not pretend to a scholar's level of accuracy.

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the care of 7), and 8 of them administer schools.

Monasteries pursuing the active Benedictine vocation are certainly predominant. 115 houses are involved in parish work, several of them with as many as 30 parishes in their charge (in the English Congregation, the largest is Ampleforth with 23), 100 houses are concerned with the running of schools (this is almost half of the full total of abbeys), some of these schools as small as 30 alumni strong, and others as large as 800 (in the English Congregation the largest is Ampleforth with 750). The Benedictines control 48 major and/or minor seminaries, notably Collegeville (American Cassinese) with its 1150 senior and its 365 junior seminarians, and the Swiss American houses of S. Meinrad's, Conception, New Orleans and Mt. Angel Oregon. The 204 monasteries are responsible for a further 88 dependencies, a single house sometimes providing for two to five dependent priories at once. They are also responsible for 81 missions, both indigenous and colonial; and for giving assistance to 76 convents. Of those houses taken up in pilgrim work, Monserrat is outstanding in that it handles more than three-quarters of a million pilgrims per year, and still has energy remaining to run two small schools and to produce *Studia Monastica.* By the same token, Maredsous, the principal house of the Belgian Congregation, which might be counted a 'fully contemplative' house but for its dependent priory in Rwanda, yet has a huge library distinguished by the number of its periodicals, an international traffic in scholarship, and the responsibility for the production of the Revue Bénédictine, a task considerably more exacting than that of the Downside Review. Another such abbey, Steenbrugge, a third of the size of Maredsous, not 40 monks strong, has for its work besides a parish and some school religious instruction, the editing of the *Corpus Christianorum* (now with its *Continuatio Medievalis*). Other work undertaken by the Order includes retreat houses, sodalities, scholasticates, lycea, chaplains to immigrants, control of secular-served parishes, farm managing, leper colonies, running hospitals, hospices and orphanages.

So diverse is the Benedictine life that it may be asked whether there remains any principle of unity, of universal identity or likeness by which such a kaleidoscope of heterogeneous activity can be called an Order. Where the last of the Religious Orders dealt with by the Sarum Lecturer under the chapter heading 'Transition to the Modern World' is described as, 'in its formal, constitutional aspect . . . the most carefully centralised and disciplined non-military body that has ever existed', the Benedictines could only ever be described as a loose league of independent estates governed not by a General for the exploitation of the individual (Jesuit) in the interest of the Papacy; but by a father (Abba) for the sake and service of each separate community as a self-sufficient entity. By virtue of this intrinsic characteristic of Benedictine houses, has their activity not become too heterogeneous? Has the seamless robe not become a coat of many colours? The answer is, fundamentally no. For the monk, in 'the chamber of his mind' (to

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quote S. Anselm's phrase), his work is whatever comes to hand under the blessing of his abbot and the Church, done with his utmost endeavour for the pursuit of Christ and his Way. For the monastery it must be a little more exact, since it is here under the abbot's guidance (and nowhere else, either higher or lower) that the nature of the monastic life for any house is determined. Almost invariably it is this: a self-contained work and life within a community apart from the society of universal intercourse, a life lived under an abbot and the Rule. Such a definition embraces the principles of stability; or ceonobium and the corporate work of God; of common ownership and poverty; of *fuga mundi* and the need of separation; of obedience both constitutional and personal – in short, the essence of Benedictinism. But men are not slaves to systems and every principle, honoured as it will be, is subject to interpretation. Stability is moral, not geographical, and so venerable European abbeys like S. André in Belgium can found dependent priories in California, India and the heart of Africa. Community transcends bricks and mortar, and the corporate spirit of a single house is not lost in a dispersal as wide as Peramiho in Tanzania (Ottilian Congregation) with its 40 mission stations, its major and minor seminary, its two leper colonies, its 23 medical stations, and its plethora of various kinds of schools from industrial to catechetical. Poverty allows a computer for the scholar, a car for the missioner, and personal comfort, independence, proprietorship or material prestige for no monk: what is owned pertains to the office, not to the person, and it is owned always below the level of abundance. It does occur that poor monks, like those of Melk or Montecassino, find themselves living in rich palaces fit for the cortege of monarchs: but this neither mars their personal or corporate exercise of poverty (a witness to Christ's call, 'sell all and follow'), nor does it make their life one whit the easier – both palaces are capable of holding 300 monks, and both communities are down to 40, rattling like peas in a drum. Obedience here requires nothing to be said: it is the virtue not in fashion in our age of self-expression rather than of self-sacrifice, of rights not duties. For the monk it remains unaltered, developing over the centuries in its operation but essentially unaltered. Separation, the degree of a community's apartness from the affairs of the world, is the heart of the matter we have glanced at. *Praedicare*, the apostolic mission, provides that prime tension in the Benedictine life in our generation, and to this we must finally return. These then constitute the seamless robe of Benedictinism: Stability, Community, Poverty, Obedience, Separation. In differing measure all are present in what would otherwise indeed become a coat of many colours.

Concerning Obedience (with Prayer, one of the two pillars of the monastic Temple), the aspect of development requires more to be said; and indeed it is the subject of the final ninth section of the Sarum Lectures (virtually new material since the Lectures were delivered in the North Schools at Oxford in Hilary Term 1965). The topic has

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seldom ever been examined historically as a whole before. It begins with the individual ascetic, strong in the clarity of his vocation, proved by years of experience under God his sole tutor, retiring to seek the Light Inaccessible in total solitude, only to be surrounded by a group of disciples seeking *lumen de Lumine* – then is the science or art of ascetical and spiritual theology born. There necessarily follows common life, diversity of function, division of skills, discipline, and soon enough the exaltation of obedience as an ascetical act. Since God works through men, and we are men among men, the inspiration at the centre soon becomes the *pater communitatis*, *Abba*, *vices Christi in monasterio*, and God's will is revealed in his commands: social obedience becomes Holy Obedience. The abbot is answerable to God for his subjects, as a shepherd for his flock: his Rule is his servant, his subjects are all equal before God and himself. Then the inspiration dies, irreplaceably, and can only be replaced in large measure by convention. The rule of the inspired becomes the inspired Rule, enthroned above the new abbot (RB III.ii *Abbas cum timore Dei et observatione Regulae omnia faciat*). Then it may be that an uncritical obedience sets in, a passive response to the *districtio ordinis* (cf. Damian and Anselm on this), an easy acceptance of the *pondus diei et aestus*, where the individual effort to ascertain and accomplish God's will is a value lost in a slagheap of indolent subservience. Then the light of personal interplay fades, and, as Dom David Knowles puts it, 'the threefold intertwining cord of Rule-abbot-example of revered elders has lost one of its strands'.

To prevent or circumvent this zealless Laodicean obedience, one of two courses can be pursued – either to blow cold or to blow hot. Blowing cold we may take as the term for the exaltation of absolute, unreflecting, immediate obedience, enshrined in S. Francis's metaphor of the corpse-like friar, who allowed himself to be shifted about unmurmuring, evincing neither pain nor pride nor pleasure. S. Ignatius took it up in a justly classic passage:

> 'Let each one persuade himself that those who live under obedience must allow themselves to be carried along and guided by divine providence by means of their superiors, just as if they were a corpse, which allows itself to be borne in any direction and handled in any way; or like a staff, which serves the one who carries it in his hand wherever and for whatever purpose he may wish to use it.'

This is an extreme order of obedience, involving absolute submission of mind, and absolute silence of individual judgment. It places total responsibility in the hands of superiors. *Perinde ac cadaver* as a maxim forces a man to surrender his inner conscience to an outer authority, which may involve a mental act close upon *suppressio veri* in the subject's own lights, what Professor Knowles describes as 'a positive effort of self-persuasion'. Where then does sovereignty of soul or responsibility to God as unique Creator of unique vocation, yet remain? Where would More or Jäggerstätter have ended under such an

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obedience? Yet it has sanctified many men and will continue to do so. The Sarum Lecturer remarks, however, that it has regressive elements in that it returns man to the relationship of the pristine community (inspirer and trusting inspired) in circumstances far more complex that this relationship will bear. Baring this nerve, he then lays down his pen.

Benedictines today would overwhelmingly underwrite the other face of obedience, 'blowing hot' so to speak, the exaltation of personal responsibility for every separate act of submission to the will of another. S. Francis offset his rigid obedience (which was more like blind loyalty) with a caveat leaving every friar the task of pursuing the light of his calling, refusing ever to surrender the immediate jewel of his soul: 'brethren shall obey in everything not contrary to their consciences and our rule'. This of course is the conclusion of a profounder thinker, friar Aquinas. But it had long been the conclusion of the monks, who found their most eloquent voice in Bernard. In his treatise on obedience to the monks of Chartres, S. Bernard set as his climax an ideal which rendered obedience superfluous: *perfecta obedientia legem nescit.* Unknowingly he was baptising Aristotle's belief that perfect man is necessarily above the law, in that by his nature he pursues only the highest good. 'Who takes vows is neither to be driven beyond the law of obedience, nor is he to be stopped short of it . . . authority may not increase my vow without my consent, nor diminish it except through clear necessity'; the monk remains sovereign of his soul and answerable to God.[9] In the context of the late Middle Ages, this doctrine went hand in hand with Occamist nominalism to undermine established authority and raise up a new voice which has been described as 'the morning star of the Reformation', the voice of personal response and personal interpretation even of so hallowed a font as Scripture itself.[10] Today however Trent and Vatican I are past, and a new spirit of responsibility is afoot which honours conscience, holds uniqueness of personality precious, believes in individual vocation, and renders

[9]Aristotle, *Politics* III.13.14 (1284a), 'For men of preeminent virtue there is no law: they are themselves the law.'

S. Bernard, *de Praecepto et Dispensatione*, PL 182.867: *vota mea nec augeat* (*praelatus*) *sine mea voluntate nec minuat sine certa necessitate.* Sarum Lec 78n2 requires correction to PL 182.868a. It echoes a medieval tag, *necessitas legem non habet*, which Bernard has been toying with earlier in the passage.

[10]Western medieval political theory, moulded by churchmen, was an amalgam of Platonism, Paulinism and Roman jurisprudence. Its central concept was *plenitudo potestatis* exercised as *superioritas* emanating from the *altitudo* or *maiestas*. The monarch was king by the grace of God with all its overtones of *noli tangere christos meos*, from which flowed the doctrine, 'no writ runs against the king' or *rex a nemine judicetur*. When this regnal sacerdotalism was sapped and replaced by the contrary doctrine of the sovereignty of the citizen people (in the hands of Marsilio and his successors), a concept developed alongside that of the sovereignty of the individual in his private conscience, then great blood-baths of egalité et fraternité loomed on the horizon. Where these changes were effected by evolution, it was richly educative to society; where by revolution, it was destructive. These twin concepts of sovereignty and obedience evolved together, with the same attendant dangers from each. cf. Professor W. Ullmann, Inaugural Address, 8 March, 1966, 'The Relevance of Medieval Ecclesiastical History.'

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Bernard's teaching suddenly deeply relevant. Nevertheless the monk or religious may never forget, as Newman ceaselessly warns us today, that the essence of all religion is authority and obedience; that while the supremacy of conscience is the essence of natural religion, the supremacy of Apostle and Church is the essence of revealed; that the first is the fallible inwardness of the single inexperienced voice, while the second is the infallible outwardness of the weather-tried edifice of Christ built for all time; that disobedience to the Church blinds the conscience, while obedience makes it keen-sighted and sensitive; that even obedience to conscience, supposing even that it is ill-informed, tends to improve our moral nature and ultimately our knowledge; and that obedience to our ecclesiastical superiors may subserve our growth in illumination and sanctity, although perhaps they may command what is extreme or inexpedient (cf. Reg. Ben.LXVIII) or teach what is external to their legitimate province.[11]

We must return to *fuga mundi*, separation from the world. It provides a far more potent and constant tension than any interpretation of the nature of obedience or of the role of an abbot as *vox Christi* and *magister doctrinae ecclesiae* in his monastery. *Praedicare*, the apostolic mission, and *fuga mundi*, the need for separation – both as a setting for contemplative life and as a witness to the 'otherness' of Christ's kingdom – provide the prime tension in the present Benedictine aggiornamento. It is right that it should be so, for it has been the central tension of spiritual life down the centuries: S. Augustine on Holy Leisure is evidence enough of that.[12] There are naturally two streams of interpretation, and Dom David Knowles would find himself among that school of thought which sees the monastic life as a penitential and praying profession rather than an apostolic vocation, 'an ark in a world of tempest'. This

[11]Newman, Essay on Development 86–7; New Ark ed. 63–4; The Heart of Newman 69–70. Recent events have made the dichotomy between the doctrines of Anglican Conscience and Catholic Authority more poignant. Authority exists at several levels; and Newman here, with his remark about the teaching of what is external to a superior's legitimate province, touches the problem. Like *plenior sensus sacrae scripturae*, Authority is analogous. At the summit is Christ obeying the Father's mandate, 'doing the will of Him who sent me', and in turn ordering his priests to 'go make disciples of all races in the name of the Trinity' in virtue of the fact that 'all power in heaven and earth is given to me'. From this stems the *magisterium* of the *ecclesia docens* and the *imperium* of the *ecclesia regnans*. These are transmuted into the divine-human organisation, which has a directly inspired ecumenical council at one end of its scale of authority and the petty bureaucracy of curial officials at the other. In turn, this divinely ordained official function of the Church (for example, the episcopal power) is realised in the particular activities of 'this bishop, our Bishop' – who is able to exercise both his official *magisterium et imperium* and his personal (purely natural) *potestas*, as a man of consequence in a hierarchial society, possessed of strong gifts of personality. This last is the area open to so much abuse, where a man may 'teach what is external to his legitimate province'; this is the area in which no man should ever offer unquestioning obedience. 'Call no man Father.'

[12]*de Civitate Dei* XIX.19 'Holy leisure is longed for by love of truth; but it is the necessity of love to undertake requisite business. If no one imposes this burden upon us, we are free to sift and contemplate truth. But if it is laid upon us, we are obliged for the sake of love to undertake it. And yet not even in this case are we obliged wholly to relinquish the sweets of contemplation; for were these to be withdrawn, the burden might prove more than we could bear.'

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school, if driven to it, would exclude apostolic work from the essence of monasticism. For it, the vital condition of the flowering of a monk's life is solitude, remoteness from the flux of the madding crowd, a conscious refusal to share the temporal interests, comforts and leisures of the 'world'. Pastoral and other apostolic work is seen to be good, but not specifically monastic: bishops, scholars, teachers and parish priests may also be monks, but they are not being monks precisely in their missionary work. For this more rigorous school of definition, a monk's daily work should be found in the monastic grounds, and should always be utterly subordinated to the exigencies of his prayer life, both corporate and private. The goal is the purity of evangelical perfection and the total dedication to the following of Christ.

There is however an opposite school of thought, whose supporters have ringing in their ears the words of Christ-Risen, 'go, teach all men'; and of the Ethiopian, 'how can I know, unless some man show me?' They are ever aware that monasticism is an intrinsic part of the society of the Church, and must be in it and of it, contributively. For them, there lurks the constant danger of irrelevance, for which English monks had paid dearly before. About the twilight that gathered round English monasticism in the century leading up to the Dissolution, he who has longest reflected on the matter wrote thus: 'the tide of English social and economic life was running very strongly out to the new and the unknown, whilst the monasteries, like hulks embedded in the mud far up among the meadows in a creek of the Tamar or Fal, whither the spring tides had borne them so long ago, saw the ebb falling past them without a thought that they were losing any hope they might have had of riding the flood across the bar and out to sea.' This was then, and the monasteries, having become irrelevant to the Christian society in which they should have been citadels of urgent spiritual power, unwittingly courted their own dissolution. The problem of relevance remains today, and is reflected in the pressing vocational crisis: it is bound up with the kind and extent of apostolic work undertaken by each house in its own sphere of influence. If the balance between contemplative withdrawal and apostolic activity is resolved – differently in every individual monastic setting – then a new current will be seen to be flowing; then 'while the tired waves, vainly breaking, seem here no painful inch to gain; far back through creeks and inlets making, comes silent, flowing in, the main'.

Underlying all Benedictine structures of life is prayer. It has not appeared so far only because it is the ground of a monk's life: it is that foundation, those piles which are driven deep into the earth to support the mass of activity above. It is the profoundest act of created man and no prerogative of the monk, except in his perseverance, extension and intensity. Without prayer, the rest is straw. Prayer belongs not to monasticism, but to that Christian life which is more generic, the life of the soul seeking the face of God, sharing the Cross and the sufferings

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of Christ. Prior Wilfrid Tunink[13] has amply demonstrated the place of prayer in the balanced life of a monk – his five-point balance gave three points to prayer. It is this: the public worship of the liturgy, the private worship of silent prayer, the prayerful meditation of *lectio divina*, the physical duty of manual labour, the exercise of charity in apostolic work.

The last of these five alone remains a matter of dispute. On the one hand, the apartness, the withdrawal of a community of monks must be so sufficient that it is real and visible. On the other, every monk-priest hears the words of Paul, 'How shall they call on his Name, of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How preach unless they be sent?'; and again, the words of Christ 'What you hear of me in dark secret preach in light upon the rooftops'.

[13]'Purity of Heart and the Modern Monk' *American Benedictine Review*, Sep/Dec 1959. Dec 1961.

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Dr Dominian is a consultant psychiatrist and Catholic Marriage Advisory Council lecturer. His book is the result of fifteen years of deliberation on the subject of sexuality and marriage, and their relationship to Christianity. It is in two parts: an historical survey, and an existential examination for which Dr Dominian draws on recent advances in psychological medicine. **35s**

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