



From the Four Quarters:



Notes & Musings of the St. Benet Biscop Chapter
of the Benedictine Oblates of St. John's Abbey

✠ ✠ **Lenten Embertide 2017** ✠ ✠

In this Issue:

◆ Editorial: Ears, Knees, Lips, Hands, and Hearts in Lent	1
<i>Clinton A. Brand</i>	
◆ A Life-giving Way	4
<i>Nathaniel Marshall</i>	
◆ Auditio Divina and Listening With the Ear of the Heart: Part II	6
<i>Brother John-Bede Pauley, O.S.B.</i>	
◆ Benedictine Life and the Poetic Mode of Knowledge	14
<i>Father Francis Bethel, O.S.B.</i>	
◆ The Psalms - Good, Honest, Prayer	30
<i>Father Michael Peterson, O.S.B.</i>	
◆ Inaugural Oblations of the St. Benet Biscop Chapter	31

Ears, Knees, Lips, Hands, and Hearts in Lent

Clinton A. Brand

AT first glance the various articles that make up this Lenten issue of *From the Four Quarters* would seem to have no obvious connection to the season of their publication. But upon examination, we might appreciate how the pieces in this newsletter all speak, with a special Benedictine accent, to concerns with perennial, year-round significance, to be sure, but which have a particular resonance and application in this holy season of repentance, this quarter of the Church Year in which we walk with our incarnate Lord the way to Golgotha and thence to rise with Him to new life and to His and our bodily resurrection. Two such themes stand out in this Lenten installment of *From the Four Quarters*:

first, the importance of a faith which is as *receptive* as *expressive* and, second, the ways in which this receptive faith demands and issues not in abstract programs but in vital, growing *embodiment*.

In the first piece, Nathaniel Marshall launches what we hope will be a series of reflections by oblate-candidates on the Rule of St. Benedict, and he does so, fortuitously, by sounding the key notes of this issue at the beginning and at the end of his meditation. Nathaniel starts with the emphatic imperative verb that opens the Rule—"Listen"—and he closes with the harvest of his own receptive listening: "The goal of St. Benedict is the love of Christ before all, and this takes the form of an incarnate, enfleshed, lived-out faith."

The Rule bids us to listen, as sons, and to attend and receive the master's instructions "with the ear of your heart" (*inclina aurem cordis tui*). This memorable figure of speech, firmly grounded in a biblical and patristic anthropology, already poses a challenge to modern sensibilities: the external organ of hearing (the ear) is attached to the interior organ that sends blood coursing through our bodies (the heart) for a kind of listening that reaches to a place different from, and deeper than, the mind's cognition. We are called to listen with the heart, not the brain! As Joseph Ratzinger wrote, "In biblical language, the 'heart' indicates the center of human life, the point where reason, will, temperament and sensitivity converge, where the person finds his unity and his interior orientation" (*The Message of Fatima*, CDF, 2000).

This season of Lent, this time of turning and being turned to re-orient and unify our scattered, wayward lives, reminds us that the heart has not only ears but also knees. In the Prayer of Manasseh, used as the Lenten canticle *Kyrie Pantokrator*, the enactment of repentance is both a physical and an interior posture: "Now therefore I bow the knee of my heart" (*Et nunc flecto genua cordis mei*). We began the season kneeling and marked with ashes, "Remember that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return," and thereby were put in mind of mortality, the weakness and contingency of the flesh, in order to quiet our bodies with prayer, feed our hearts with fasting, and to learn anew how to show forth gratitude to God, in the words of the General Thanksgiving, "not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up our selves to thy service."

If the heart has ears and knees, it has lips too and mouths for singing, and if our lives are called to the service of self-sacrifice they are surely called also to the service of music, making and receiving the sounds of both praise and penitence. In the second article in this newsletter, Brother John-Bede Pauley continues his series on *auditio divina* as a characteristically Benedictine and Anglican approach to the receptive hearing of sacred music, particularly those compositions in the English choral tradition which most capably turn, tune, and touch "the ear of the heart." This time, Brother-John Bede discusses Henry Purcell and the music of the Baroque, both characterized by a kind of sensuous

expressiveness, to make the point that neither the composer nor the period exhibit much humility or reserve in setting sacred texts. Such music, though it often soars brilliantly, would not seem conducive to attentive, receptive Lenten meditation. Even yet, argues Brother John-Bede, two of Purcell's anthems, "Rejoice in the Lord Alway" and "Hear My Prayer, O Lord," successfully embody musical forms that move through feverish exaltation to the serene peace of God (in the first) and that capture the real anguish of penitential supplication (in the second). These, at least, suggests Brother John-Bede, are fit food for Lent in music carried to the heart.

In the next and longest article, we print the text of Father Francis Bethel's talk for oblates at Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma, given as a lecture on "Benedictine Life and the Poetic Mode of Knowledge." Father Francis develops Blessed John Henry Newman's insight that the Benedictine charism is specially associated with a "poetic" sensibility (in contrast to the intellectual emphasis of Dominicans and the practicality of Jesuits). He reminds us of Pascal's conviction that "The heart has its reasons that reason does not know" (*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*). This poetic mode of knowing, explains Father Francis, is "connatural," intuitive, rooted in the senses and the body's responsiveness to beauty; it is singularly open to transcendence and wonder in the face of mystery; and it is different from both abstract rationality and instrumental, utilitarian thinking. It is particularly attuned to nature and to what Gerard Manley Hopkins called in "God's Grandeur" the heart's apprehension of "the dearest freshness deep down things." But it needs emphasizing that for Father Francis and for the Benedictine tradition he describes, "poetry," thus understood, is not sentimental self-indulgence nor mere verbal ingenuity, neither yet disengaged spiritual contemplation; it is rather a kind of receptive knowing that proceeds from and returns to *embodiment*. The word "poetry" comes from the Greek word for "making" or "crafting" (*poiein*), and thus Father Francis emphasizes how Benedictine life issues in the incarnational "crafts" of monastic prayer and work, liturgy and study, singing and reading, together with all the productive labor of building and keeping a well ordered, hence beautiful, household of faith.

If the heart has ears and knees and lips, the heart has hands too, hands called to discipline and skill in the making of a holy life. Perhaps we layfolk can take heart and encouragement from this sketch of Benedictine asceticism—training for embodied sanctity—and find in the monk's year-round service a welcome challenge to our own Lenten resolution better to receive, embody, and body forth the gifts of God.

Finally, in the fourth article of *From the Four Quarters*, our oblate director Father Michael Peterson offers a brief meditation on the Psalms as "Good, Honest, Prayer." As the staple and daily bread of Benedictine worship, the Psalter uniquely figures forth the poetic mode of knowing and

living. Father Michael reminds us that the Psalms are good honest prayer precisely because they so powerfully, so viscerally, speak to the heart and from the heart. And in this season of Lent, it is the Psalms that most especially search and sound our own hearts; in the words of the Coverdale translation, we beseech God, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try out my reins and my heart” (Ps. 26:2). Father Michael draws particular attention to the question marks in the Psalms, as if to suggest that we can receive as much or more from the interrogative mood of such questions than from expressive exclamation. Certainly, during Lent, it is question marks that punctuate the season’s emphasis on self-examination—questioning God to question ourselves. At a time when we feel with the psalmist that “my spirit [is] vexed within me, and my heart within me is desolate” (Ps.143:4), we most aptly call out in questions: “Wilt thou be displeased at us for ever? and wilt thou stretch out thy wrath from one generation to another? Wilt thou not turn again, and quicken us, that thy people may rejoice in thee?” (Ps. 85:5-6).

In such a mood, in this time of fasting, we might take the Psalms (and—much more humbly—these articles) as food for Lent, food for life, nutrition perhaps for ears, knees, lips, hands, and hearts. What we receive by listening may we live out by incarnation, putting flesh on our words and giving a body, indeed our own bodies, to the Word who gave His body for us that we may dwell in Christ and He in us.

A holy and blessed Lent to all our readers and to all the company of the St. Benet Biscop Chapter of Oblates!



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A Life-Giving Way

Nathaniel Marshall

I. Life as Schooling – The Rule of St. Benedict: Prologue and Chapter 1

LISTEN.” God is speaking, but are we listening? In my former, fundamentalist understanding of Christianity, I used to think that this was a command to listen for God’s voice-made-audible in the

Scriptures. “God is not going to speak to me audibly (more than likely) and the only reliable record of God speaking to us is documented for us in the Bible, so that is where I go to hear from Him,” were my thoughts. Not wrong, but as I’m coming to find, incomplete. God spoke to the Eastern star-gazers through the stars; to the shepherds as they tended their sheep; and even to Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus. If I will listen—not only with my ears, but with my heart, made sensitive and discerning in obedience—I will hear God speaking to me through the rhythms and circumstances of my life, and as I practice this spiritual listening I will learn to discern what God’s Spirit is saying.

II. *The Abbot and Other Superiors - RB: Chapters 2, 3, 21, 31, 56, 64-66*

I am not an abbot, nor do I suspect I ever will be, but the responsibilities of an abbot are similar to those I’m discovering in fatherhood. “Equal love,” “discretion,” being so familiar with the personalities and tendencies of my daughters that I can reward and discipline in the most effective way—it’s all quite similar. Perhaps parenting is not quite as democratic as the monastery (Ch. 3), although what St Benedict said is true, that “the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger.” I never want to shut off the possibility of hearing from God through those who are under my care. If ever I am in a position of leadership, it is not that I am made the sole channel of God’s wisdom and instruction; rather, I am in the position of “first servant,” and it actually becomes my duty to listen even *more* carefully to discern the voice of God when others speak, that I might (if possible) point it out, make God’s voice in others voices clear, and clearly articulate what He is saying. In all, what I gathered from the second month’s reading is this: everything ought to run smoothly and in good order. This depends first and foremost on the character of those given authority (abbot, prior, dean, cellarer, porter), but disorganized virtue doesn’t benefit anyone. The administrative framework set out by St. Benedict, made to bring order, is the forge in which the character of each brother is molded, tested, and proven.

III. *The Tools of the Community, Temporal and Spiritual - RB: Chapters 4, 32*

I love the beautiful comparison between chapters 4 and 32: “the tools of the spiritual craft” and “the goods of the monastery.” Two halves of the same whole. I love the trade-language that St. Benedict employs to talk about “the spiritual craft.” He paints a picture of us being apprentices, studying and laboring under journeymen and masters in the trade, learning to skillfully ply our craft day-in and day-out. And this is not separate from, but rather embodied by, the use of “the goods of the monastery.” It is the nature of virtue that it is hidden, unseen, and only knowable through action. I

cannot be merciful unless I actually have mercy on another; I cannot be peaceful unless I am in circumstances that are chaotic; my love is only known through service to others. The stewardship of the goods of the monastery and the relationships built between the brothers provide the context in which virtue and vice are revealed and either fostered or cut off, the raw materials on which “the tools of the spiritual craft” are used to measure and shape them. In my own life, the monastery is my marriage, my home, my parish, my work; the same spiritual tools are mine to use; the life of Christ-love is my aim and the Reality which I am seeking to embody. And these tools help to form me, not simply that virtue might be *in me*, but that by my virtue others may benefit and live. The goal of St. Benedict is the love of Christ before all, and this takes the form of an incarnate, enfleshed, lived-out faith. Indeed, it can be no other way. 

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***Auditio Divina* and Listening With the Ear of the Heart. Part II: Henry Purcell, “Rejoice in the Lord Alway” and “Hear My Prayer, O Lord”**

Brother John-Bede Pauley, O.S.B., Ph.D.

Composer: Henry Purcell (ca. 1659 to 1695)
Stylistic period: Baroque

Work: “Hear My Prayer, O Lord” Z 15.

Year of Composition: 1680-2

Text: “Hear my prayer, O Lord: And let my crying come unto thee.” (Psalm 102:1)

Liturgical Season or Feast: Lent

Link to a performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8E0dt0soWc>
(Or go to Youtube.com and type: Purcell Hear 16)

Work: “Rejoice in the Lord Alway” Z 49.

Year of Composition: ca. 1684-5

Text: “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

Liturgical Season or Feast: General, Feasts

Link to a performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFJ8uxRkeA4>
(Or go to Youtube.com and type: Purcell Rejoice “St. John’s Cambridge”)

BRILLIANT though Henry Purcell’s church music is, it poses challenges for liturgical use, especially if one hopes to listen to music in worship through the more reflective perspective of what I have referred to as *auditio divina*.¹ Before considering those challenges, however, a list of church-music genres in which Purcell wrote is called for.

Purcell composed only a few services (settings of some or most of the Morning Prayer and Evensong canticles and the ordinary of the Communion Service). Most of his church-music *oeuvre* comprises anthems. Purcell’s generation inherited from the Tudor period both the full anthem, written for the entire choir, and the verse anthem, written with sections that alternate between the full choir and soloists (who sing “verses” as soloists or in smaller ensembles). But whereas Elizabethan/Jacobean verse anthems generally distribute the contrasting sections equally between full chorus and soloists,² the Baroque verse anthem, because it reflects the Baroque aesthetic of prizing solo declamation for the sake of freer expression of feeling, employs the full chorus in a more limited role. The full chorus in most of Purcell’s anthems sings only at the end of an anthem or perhaps “to mark a notional ‘halfway’ point” and then at the end.³ This general distinction can be diagrammed as follows, “s” indicating soloists and “f” the full chorus.

Elizabethan/Jacobean:	s f s f s f
English Baroque:	s---- f or
	s---- f s---- f

Purcell’s verse anthems can be further sub-divided into three types. Full-with-verse anthems (also referred to as “full+verse”) were written for full choir, organ, and soloists as were verse anthems. The difference between the two is that the *continuo* accompaniment merely doubles the lowest voice in the full-with-verse anthem and in the verse anthem is separate and thus “indispensable to the musical syntax.”⁴ The symphony anthem is a full-with-verse or a verse anthem to which a three- or four-part string ensemble is added to play, usually, an introductory “symphony” and instrumental interludes

¹ John-Bede Pauley, “*Auditio Divina* and Listening With the Ear of the Heart. Part I: William Byrd’s *Civitas Sancti Tui*,” *From the Four Quarters* (Advent Embertide, 2016).

² Eric Van Tassel, “Music for the Church,” in *The Purcell Companion*, ed. M. Burden, 101-199 (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 116.

³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

(*ritornellos*), and possibly to accompany the voices.⁵ Symphony anthems were performed only in the Chapel Royal, though some of them were transcribed for organ and performed elsewhere.

With the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 came a musical restoration as well. Though the Puritans were not as opposed to music as is often assumed, Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth had imposed a cultural winter on English church music by suppressing the Church of England and thus the liturgical choral foundations. In spite of this musical bleakness, musical training in some circles had continued. Musical masters such as Pelham Humfrey and John Blow were therefore on hand to train the young Henry Purcell, born in 1659, only a year before the Restoration. Purcell's talent developed quickly so that he was able to contribute as a composer to the Church of England's musical restoration by his late teens.

This Anglican musical restoration took place within an aesthetic tension. During the years of England's Civil War and the Commonwealth, the aesthetic sensibilities of the Baroque had flourished on the continent while they influenced English cultural life as, at best, a thin trickle under the un-Baroque Puritans. At the Restoration, then, English composers had only to follow the lead of their continental colleagues to return English music to the European mainstream. Moreover, since England's new king, who had been raised at the French court, imported the Baroque to his own court, he left no question as to how his tastes – in this age of absolute monarchies – were meant to influence the cultural standards of England.

But England did not fully embrace the Baroque. Certainly the years of the Commonwealth had played a role in this situation. But there was resistance to the Baroque – including resistance by English composers of church music⁶ – even before Cromwell came to power. The ethos not of Puritans but of Anglicanism as a whole contributed to this resistance. The expressive tone of *The Book of Common Prayer* – which was welcomed back with renewed fervor at the Restoration – differs significantly from the Baroque aesthetic. The prose of *The Book of Common Prayer*, though stately and magnificent, expresses those characteristics in a somber and restrained tone,⁷ not given to extravagant passion.

Too, the Benedictine ethos, which was more foundational to English identity than even the Henrician dissolvers of monasteries realized, prizes moderation in all things (e.g., *omnia mensurate*

⁵ Peter Holman and Robert Thompson, "Henry Purcell (ii)," *Grove Music Online* at <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/> – accessed 14 February 2017; Van Tassel, 103-104.

⁶ Nicholas Temperley, "Anglican and Episcopalian Church Music," *Grove Music Online*: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/> – accessed November 15, 2006.

⁷ Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 61.

faciat, RB 31:12). The general aesthetic of the Baroque, on the other hand, is about extravagant, impassioned expression.

The Baroque aesthetic also poses a problem to the central Christian virtue of humility. Among the un-restrained emotions prized by the Baroque aesthetic is that of triumphant joy. Because of the patronage of royal and aristocratic benefactors, however, who were still the primary patrons of the arts in Europe, music's and architecture's expressions of triumphant joy often associated that triumph with triumphant claims of political might. Christianity also triumphs but only through the paradox of humility: the Creator born in poverty; the triumph of the Cross, an instrument not only of execution but of a particularly shameful execution; the triumph of the *Magnificat*, possible only because of the lowliness of the handmaiden of the Lord; and so on. The Baroque aesthetic has produced gloriously triumphant settings of such texts as the *Te Deum* and the *Gloria* (and achingly sorrowful settings of such texts as the *Kryjie* and the penitential Psalms). But humility as a day-to-day way of living is not one of the colors in the Baroque's emotional palette.

It is not surprising, then, that, as the Church of England was re-established and as questions about its character in a post-Commonwealth England inevitably arose, decisions were made that consciously connected the Church of England with its sixteenth-century and medieval past, not with contemporary musical fashions or religious spiritualities from the continent.⁸ For example, the language of the Prayer Book was not updated; the 1534 translation of the psalms was chosen as the authorized translation; and Gothic traditions in Anglican church building were consciously maintained.⁹ This period also regarded the Tudor era as the golden age of church music.¹⁰ Thomas Tudway, member of Charles II's newly re-established choir of the Chapel Royal, did not entirely conceal a note of disdain in his observation that Charles II was a "brisk, and Airy Prince," who, because he admired the *Vingt-quatre violons du Roy Louis XIV*, was soon "tyr'd w[i]th the grave and Solemn way, And Order'd the Composers of his Chappell, to add Symphonys &c w[i]th instruments to their Anthems."¹¹

Purcell admired what was happening musically in Italy and France. But the Italian expression of the musical Baroque stood higher in his estimation than the "levity, and balladry of our [French]

⁸ John-Bede Pauley, O.S.B., "The Anglican Choral Heritage and *Lectio Divina*," *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 19:2 (2015), 200.

⁹ Temperley.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Thomas Tudway, quoted Holman and Thompson, "Henry Purcell (ii)."

neighbors,"¹² which suggests Purcell literally played along with Charles II, since the king paid the pipers, but maintained his own element of English reserve about the Baroque. None of Purcell's admiration for the Baroque "should be allowed to disguise the importance of the indigenous musical tradition [on Purcell and his] reverence for the older English traditions."¹³ Herbert Howells made the similar observation that Purcell and John Blow were compelled to find a "dignified compromise" by which to defend the Anglican musical heritage against Charles's "frivolous instrumental hand."¹⁴

Whether it overstates the case to characterize instrumental introductions and *ritornellos* of the symphony anthems as frivolous, these passages cannot generally foster *auditio divina* since they do not set texts. As such, they point away from church or chapel and towards the concert hall. The sprightly, triple-meter dance rhythms, often with dotted figures if influenced by the French Baroque, and regardless of whether they are written for instruments or voices, are another characteristic of Purcell's anthems that reflects instrumental origins. They were favored by Charles II because they gave him "something to keep time to."¹⁵ Purcell's brilliance enabled him to turn these "tripla" to a more meditative effect if he wanted. In the penultimate section of "O Lord God of Hosts" Z 37, for example, he uses a triple meter to convey a sense of divine intimacy.¹⁶ But the dance-like meter, "utterly new to church music in the 1660s, [was] virtually obsolete by the end of the century."¹⁷ Charles II's "frivolous instrumental hand" did not prevail in the end.

Another aspect of some of Purcell's anthems that points away from liturgy and towards the concert hall is duration. Some anthems are so long they are *de facto* cantatas. They were meant to replace "major portions of the prescribed service."¹⁸

Purcell's brilliance shines not in the instrumental passages and gestures but in his settings of texts.¹⁹ This, one might think, would be the aspect of Purcell's anthems that provides a wealth of music

¹² Jonathan P. Wainwright, "Purcell and the English Baroque," in *The Purcell Companion*, ed. M. Burden, 21-37 (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Thames Publishing, 1992), 397.

¹⁵ Van Tassel, 123.

¹⁶ Approximately 2:18 in the performance at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXxTUfC6PsA> (Or go to Youtube.com and type: Purcell "O Lord God of Hosts")

¹⁷ Van Tassel, 147.

¹⁸ John W. Hill, *Baroque Music: Music in Western Europe, 1580-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 359.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

supportive of *auditio divina*. But the settings of the texts are often too busy with musical text painting. There is “so much to say, so little time or room in which to say it. [The] racing current of musical events [is] more varied, and perhaps more energetic and colourful, than in the church music of any other era.”²⁰

It might seem churlish to criticize Purcell’s anthems first for paying too much attention to instrumental forms and then for being too clever in setting texts. But the fact that a serene equipoise between music and text was more difficult to come by in church music of the Baroque—whether Purcell’s or anyone else’s—is indeed consonant with that era’s love of extravagance.

The busyness of Purcell’s text settings is also due to another Baroque sensibility: the love of rhetoric, the “art of communication, the techniques of persuasion, [practiced by] writers, ... preachers,”²¹ and, of course, composers. The public in Restoration London delighted in sermons. They would move “from church to church on Sundays ... sampling the preachers and [critiquing] whatever music happened to be on offer.”²²

Purcell’s activity as a composer occurred several decades before John Wesley inspired an emphasis on preaching in Anglicanism and then in Methodism. So it would be anachronistic to identify Purcell as a Low Churchman in the Evangelical sense. (He seems to have been a solidly establishment Anglican, neither a “late-flowering Puritan” nor a “closet Papist.”²³) But one of the distinctions between Low Churchmanship and High is that the former emphasizes preaching, the latter the sacraments and thus the liturgical rites. In this sense, then, Purcell leaned to the Low Church perspective. Though Purcell drew from the same texts—Scripture and the Prayer Book—when he wrote his anthems and services, his creative focus was on his anthems. His small number of settings of texts for service music, on the other hand, is “of no great importance” musically.²⁴ What this reveals is that Purcell was inspired by texts read from a logocentric perspective. Apparently foreign to him—and to many of his contemporaries—would have been reading texts as expressions of apophatic reserve, as the

²⁰ Ibid., 169, 174.

²¹ Hill, 15.

²² Jonathan Keates, *Purcell: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 21.

²³ Ibid., 104-105.

²⁴ Edmund H. Fellowes, *English Cathedral Music: From Edward VI to Edward VII* (London: Methuen & Co., 1941), 170. Van Tassel’s descriptions of the few works that comprise Purcell’s service music in terms such as “utilitarian” and “hardly ... an unqualified success” support Fellowes’s assessment. Van Tassel, 189-93.

admission of distance between the worshiper and the transcendent,²⁵ which is a disposition to which one is open in doing *lectio divina*. For this reason, liturgical texts, which do not aim to persuade or move, as do sermons, and which can even include a degree of obscurity and ritual repetition, appear to have elicited no sense of wonder in Purcell.

The case against the aptness of Purcell's church music for *auditio divina* nonetheless runs up against the twenty-first-century situation. Certainly, symphony anthems and all anthems long enough to be *de facto* cantatas will not form part of the repertoire of most church choirs today,²⁶ even if such works are proposed as the anthem at Morning Prayer or Evensong, when there is a sense that the liturgy can pause for musically substantial choral works. And attentive listeners will find many of Purcell's anthems to be as logocentric now as they were when first performed. But it is unlikely that Baroque music's intentionally histrionic gestures have as potent an effect now as they did in the seventeenth century or that the "tripla" connotes dance and royal ceremony as it did when Charles II reigned.

To make a few comments on actual examples of Purcell's craftsmanship as it relates to fostering *auditio divina*, I have selected two frequently-performed works from Purcell's *oeuvre*,²⁷ one, "Rejoice in the Lord Always," from the symphony anthem genre, the other, "Hear My Prayer, O Lord," from the full anthem genre.

As noted above, *auditio divina* is not supported by instrumental passages of significant length since they say nothing about liturgical or scriptural texts. The "symphony" that opens "Rejoice in the Lord Alway," however, is an exception since it communicates the meaning of the very text that opens the anthem. The British Museum manuscript of the anthem indicates it "was originally call'd ye Bell Anthem."²⁸ This name is due to the peal-like, change-ringing figure in the bass. Change ringing, which had begun in the early seventeenth century, communicates rejoicing in the Lord, whether coming to church to do so or going forth from church to bring that rejoicing into the world.

As for Purcell's masterfully expressive setting of the text, one example is a shift from polyphony to homophony. Unlike the polyphony-to-homophony shift discussed in the analysis of Byrd's *Civitas*

²⁵ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 178.

²⁶ John Patton, *A Century of Cathedral Music 1898-1998: A Comparison with Previous Music Surveys* [Winchester: John Patton, 2000], 88, indicates the symphony anthem "Rejoice in the Lord Alway" is an exception. Though its frequency of performance has diminished over time, it remains one of the most popular among Purcell's anthems.

²⁷ Patton, 88.

²⁸ Franklin B. Zimmerman, *Henry Purcell 1659-1695: An Analytical Catalogue of His Music* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1963), 47.

Sancti Tui,²⁹ this shift conveys not anguish but peace. Before approximately 5:25, the alto-tenor-bass trio has sung “in everything ... let your requests be made known unto God” in a texture of polyphony and broken homophony. At 5:25, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” is in straightforward homophony. Also, the instruments suddenly fall silent at 5:25, as divine peace is introduced, and the meter shifts from triple meter to quadruple. Since Purcell brushes Charles II’s instrumental “tripla”s aside as an indication of divine peace, perhaps he found the king’s tastes a tad “frivolous”³⁰ after all.

The entire anthem is an “overarching metaphor” of constant rejoicing in which Purcell has the musicians “act out the words ‘again I say ...’ repeatedly, almost obsessively,”³¹ which is consonant with the Baroque love of extravagance. Nonetheless, Purcell’s artistic impulse is basically no different from that of the anonymous composers who wrote the extended melismas (many notes for one syllable) that adorn the “alleluias” of medieval plainchant. In the original Hebrew, “alleluia” seems to be more an allusion than an explanation. It is an abbreviation of the Tetragrammaton YHWH, the name of the Lord, with the idea of an imperative (a command).³² A composer’s response to this “alleluia” imperative is naturally to allow music itself—whatever the stylistic idiom happens to be—to take up where language falls short.

To the extent that “Rejoice in the Lord Alway” is the epitome of Purcell’s Baroque idiom in its reliance on instrumental writing and solo declamation, “Hear My Prayer, O Lord” is at the opposite end of the spectrum. It is *a cappella*³³ and, as a full anthem, involves no soloist/small-ensemble passages. In its expressiveness, however, it is fully Baroque. Purcell builds relentless dissonance upon dissonance to convey the anguish of a penitential soul (and of Sion, to read Psalm 102 in its entirety) seeking God’s mercy.

One of the compositional techniques is that of the false relation, the “simultaneous or adjacent appearance in different voices of two modally conflicting notes with the same letter name.”³⁴ An

²⁹ Pauley, “*Auditio Divina*. Part I: William Byrd.”

³⁰ Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Centenary Celebration*, 397.

³¹ Van Tassel, 139.

³² The “praise the Lord” of Psalm 146:1 (“Praise the Lord ... while I live”) is the “alleluia” imperative as is the same phrase in Psalm 150:6 (“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord”).

³³ Compelling evidence indicates the anthem is incomplete since it was meant to be part of a longer anthem (Zimmermann, 14). Its complete version might well have included at least a *continuo* part doubling the second bass line, which was the fashion in the Baroque.

³⁴ Arnold Whittall, “False Relation,” *Grove Music Online*: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/> – accessed February 24, 2017.

example is heard at circa 0:43 between the first sopranos singing an E flat on “O” of “O Lord” and the first altos in the next measure singing an E natural on — appropriately — the word “crying.”

Perhaps twenty-first-century ears do not experience the full effect of this Baroque *frisson*. But so relentlessly does Purcell state the dissonances that it is impossible to miss the effect entirely. Added to this is the fact that the gradual rise in range of all the voices depicts prayers rising “unto” God.³⁵

Acknowledging that the restrained quality of the Prayer Book’s language has not always and everywhere been echoed in actual worship, it nonetheless characterizes what many regard as the classic ethos of Anglicanism. Scripture, however, which is at the core of Anglican liturgy, is not always restrained in tone. Scripture can thus provide moments of intense contrast with the overall liturgical tone. Though the “racing current of musical events”³⁶ in Purcell’s anthems tends not to support a more reflective attitude supportive of *auditio divina*, perhaps even the moments of Baroque extravagance can be regarded as providing moments of contrast that — if after the performance more often than during — can foster deeper reflection on the texts. ✿

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Benedictine Life and the Poetic Mode of Knowledge

Text of a talk for Oblate Day at Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey

October 29, 2016

Father Francis Bethel, O.S.B.

Introduction: Newman’s text

I HOPE I didn’t scare too many people with my title. Nevertheless, Blessed John Henry Newman wrote in his essay, *The Mission of St. Benedict*, “To St. Benedict ... let me assign, for his discriminating badge, the element of poetry.” He too warned his reader that he was not thinking of monks as mushy

³⁵ Jennifer More Glagov, Program Notes to Music of the Baroque Chorus, *Hear My Prayer—Great Purcell Anthems* (April 24, 2016): <https://www.baroque.org/Seasons/2015-2016/hear-my-prayer-great-purcell-anthems> -- accessed February 24, 2017.

³⁶ Van Tassel, 169.

romantics. "The monks," he explained, "were not dreamy sentimentalists, to fall in love with melancholy winds and purling rills, and waterfalls and nodding groves; their poetry was the poetry of hard work and hard fare, unselfish hearts and charitable hands."

When Newman spoke of poetry concerning the Benedictines, he was referring to the spiritual life, as we see by the effects of the monastic poetry that he set forth. "We are told," he says, "to be like little children; and where will we find a more striking instance than is here [in the Benedictine life] afforded us of that union of simplicity and reverence, that clear perception of the unseen, yet recognition of the mysterious, which is the characteristic of the first years of human existence." Let's hold onto these poetic notes of the Benedictine life, according to Newman: childhood, simplicity, reverence, perception of the unseen, recognition of the mysterious. We will come to back to them.

In his essay, Newman was comparing a poetic, spiritual childhood to the more scholarly approach to Christ and then also to the more practical perspective. For spiritual childhood, he chose the Benedictines as representative of monks and even of the faithful of the early Christian centuries. For scholarship and youthful, medieval spirituality, he used the Dominicans. For the mature, practical, modern man of modern times organized strategy to conquer souls for Christ, he chose the Jesuits. In this little talk, I want to take up Newman's contrast between the Benedictine and the Dominican, between the poetic mode and scientific mode, in order to discern what the poetic habit is and how it does indeed correspond to Benedictine life.

I. The Scientific Mode of Knowledge

Here is how Newman in his essay on St. Benedict characterized the method and the goal of science: "Reason investigates," he wrote, "analyses, numbers, weighs, measures, ascertains, locates the objects of its contemplation and thus gains a scientific knowledge of them ... The aim of science is to get a hold of things, to grasp them, to handle them, to comprehend them; that is ..., to *master* them, to be superior to them."

Problems

Scientific analysis and reasoning, then, aim at bringing out into the clear what can be distinctly conceived. One can say that it deals with problems, that is, something that can be resolved, as when one finds a solution for an algebra equation, or why we had a drought this year. Something is at first hidden, and then the argument brings it out into the open. One has found the solution--the explanation--and the problem no longer exists.

Mystery

But one cannot reduce all knowledge to clear ideas and overcoming problems; there is more in

this universe than what reason can fully comprehend--for example, why someone enjoys accomplishing sacrifices for the beloved, why a soldier gives his life for his friends, why the beauty of the stars moves us so deeply. One can call mystery these aspects or depths of reality that cannot be explained, clearly understood, closed up in a finite idea.

Science and mystery

A certain knowledge precedes scientific quest. One must first recognize that the rainbow is beautiful; only then can one ask how it is beautiful. St. Thomas' definition of beauty, as "what when seen pleases," means nothing to us unless we have had the experience of some direct recognition of the beauty of a rainbow. The scientific mode must accept some sort of intuition, some knowledge of another mode, before it operates on its level to resolve problems.

Robert Frost in his poem "Choose something like a star" evokes on one hand scientific information and then on the other a more mysterious type of knowledge: Speaking to a star, he says,

Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade,
Use language we can comprehend,
Tell us what elements you blend.

Then he comments,

It gives us strangely aid,
But does say something in the end.
And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here.
It asks of us a certain height.

II. The Poetic Mode of Knowledge

This other mode of knowledge, that Newman calls poetic, doesn't reason through to a conclusion, doesn't abstract, doesn't even necessarily have clear ideas. Philosophers explain that the poetic mode of knowledge comes to a recognition of its object by certain sense, an instinct, that one has either by nature--as a baby recognizes a loving face, or as we all recognize beauty when we see a rainbow--or by some acquired habit, as the horse trainer has a feel of his horses. This knowledge is connatural, they say. Affection often enters into play here, because it attunes us to the other, in such a way that we know the other from the inside, as it were; we have a sympathetic knowledge of the other, we feel like the other as if he were ourselves. A boy knows his dog and a girl her horse in ways others cannot. A woman sees possibilities in her man that escape everyone else.

Recognition of mystery

Newman in his essay spoke of the poetic mode as an attitude more appropriate than the

analytic and dominating scientific perspective for gazing toward mysteries, towards things higher and greater than oneself, because it does not try to close up the object in a limited idea it can master. He wrote,

[Poetry] demands, as its primary condition, that we should not put ourselves above the objects in which it resides, but at their feet; that we should feel them to be above and beyond us, that we should look up to them and that, instead of fancying that we can comprehend them, we should take for granted that we are surrounded and comprehended by them ourselves ... It implies that we understand them to be vast, immeasurable, impenetrable, inscrutable, mysterious.

We might now ask how can we know what is inscrutable, above and beyond us. Let me just say here that a human being can have a connatural knowledge of mysteries because he is an incarnate spirit, is created in the image of God. He is on a level with spiritual things and although he works through the visible world, he goes beyond it both in thought and desire. When he sees this world, he thinks of its cause. When he sees something good, it evokes a desire of something more perfect, even of an absolute, pure good. Beauty especially wakes his soul up to something beyond the humdrum rat-race. Man is a contemplative, an animal who wonders.

For this knowledge of mysteries, we need especially the connaturality that comes from love. Love unites us even to what is above us, lifts us up to the beloved. You don't really know the good and true unless you recognize their superiority, unless you love them, serve them. If you try to use them as means for your own ends, you don't really know them. That is why uncultivated but upright folk often have a more authentic sense of great truths than many scholars do. Their habitual response to the primal call of truth, goodness and beauty has attuned them to deep values. A chaste person, says St. Thomas, even if he has made no study of moral theology, can judge by instinct the appropriate chaste action in a particular case.

Poetic mode, beginning, support, and end of science

The poetic sense of the depth of things should be the foundation of all knowledge so that we realize that we must listen with reverence and humble docility in order to learn. Even in experimental sciences dealing with material objects, the poetic gaze gives us the capacity to be aware of the importance of underlying dimensions, and thus to situate the limited object we are directly studying. Father Bouyer wrote,

Far from being some sentimental musing, poetic intuition and imagination should be considered not as irrational but as a higher form of reason. It is an intuitive grasp of the deeper meaning of things and of existence that opens the way to a truly human existence. Only this poetic intuition can make us sense the organic even spiritual unity which man in the world feels and makes his own through his primal, constant and renewed experience.

He who studies biology should first wonder at life, the mathematician at numbers, if they are going to aspire to a deep, human knowledge of their subject.

The poetic mode is then a dynamic principle of knowing and supports the entire process. It is also in a way the goal of other types of knowledge. The philosopher himself who considers mysteries, must eventually look above problems, to something higher than ideas. He must come to a sort of poetic gaze.

In fact, Plato regularly after a meditation where he rose, for example, from the beauty of this or that thing to strive to consider beauty in itself, at one point could go no further philosophically and would point toward the mystery by a story. Other philosophers tell us that at the summit of their effort they must turn to poetry, to art, in order to evoke the transcendent object, what words cannot directly say, that concepts cannot enclose. So, then, let's say a word on art and poetry, how they serve the poetic gaze.

Art and mystery

Science works through universal ideas to explain things, whereas the artist is someone who knows how to use pictures, metaphors, or some form of imitation to lead others to a connaturality with the object, for an experiential, intuitive recognition. John Senior compared the two types of knowledge and expression: "The distinction between art and science is chiefly the difference between thinking about experience and having the experience itself. It is the business of the poet to communicate 'experience' to the reader--to present things as they are, not as they can be explained. The scientist talks about a tree in terms of the function of its parts; he can describe, but he cannot present directly. The poet, by instigating the imagination of the reader can present the tree itself, as it were, in all its palpable, living growing, green being."

Science draws its ideas, its problems out of experience, but leaves intact the mystery, we said. The philosopher asks what is beauty, why is this beautiful; whereas poetry and art plunge you deeper into the perception of beauty. Through art one knows the mystery better, but one is not any better able to explain it. Dennis Quinn wrote, "The poet is always telling us to look again—take a fresh view, see with new eyes. Hence the poem often leaves us in ... greater wonder than when we started." There is more mystery, more darkness than ever!

Now that we have set out the two modes, we need to turn more to our subject—the importance of the poetic mode for our spiritual life.

III. The Supernatural Order

Faith itself is rather of the poetic mode. We indeed find here the characteristics of poetic

knowledge. First, faith is intuitive--not that we see God, but the gaze of faith goes directly toward its object. Reasoning helps arrive at faith, but the virtue of faith is not a product of reasoning. It is an infused habit, a gift from God, that becomes a first principle, like a connaturality in the supernatural order. Indeed, the adhesion to something so high and obscure requires affection; we must be drawn to the object, connaturalized with it. Third, faith is even experiential to the extent that it has as its object not an abstract universal but a singular, a Person, which we need to know in other ways than by general ideas, with whom we need a contact, an experience in order to really know Him.

The poetic character of faith is especially true when faith blossoms into contemplation, the simple, fixed, loving gaze on God and His mysteries. St. Thomas, in fact, used the term connatural especially in reference to the intuitive though obscure knowledge of divine things gained from charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As one grows in faith and charity, one becomes more attuned to God, and the original participation in the divine life by grace develops into an experience, an awareness of this life. One enters the luminous cloud of God's presence in the depths of the soul.

We practice for this by all our recollection, our meditation, where by grace the gaze gradually simplifies; we rise little by little to a poetic, contemplative gaze focusing on Jesus and on the person. Thus, when we pray the Rosary for example, we usually don't follow the details of the words of the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary*. We have meditated those words, we can take their meaning up with us in a simple gaze towards the person, our Heavenly Father, the Virgin, and towards the mystery involved in that decade.

Now the most systematic way of putting thoughts together about Christ is theology. We could ask what might be the relation between theology and the poetic mode, this poetic gaze.

Theology and the poetic mode

Theology, or at least speculative theology, as they say sometimes, operates in the scientific mode. The theologian brings out abstract ideas, reasons, argues, makes deductions, explains what he can in precise terms. Theology deals directly with problems--how it is possible that there are three divine persons in the one divine nature; how in Christ there are two natures in one divine person; how we are moved by grace and yet have free will; how Christ can be present in the Eucharist; how He saved us on the Cross; etc.

Here also there is some sort of obscure, poetic, more direct knowledge of the things of faith, upon which theology depends. There was a true, deep perception of the Incarnation long before the dogma was defined. It took centuries of laborious effort to bring out clearly in philosophical terms some of what the faithful knew from the beginning in an intuitive, poetic way.

And to be living and fruitful, theology's scientific, abstract analysis must be directly supported

on the experiential level by such a poetic knowledge, a faithful and loving contact with Christian realities. Cardinal Ratzinger wrote about beauty as a poetic perception:

The beautiful is knowledge but in a superior way, since it arouses man to the real greatness of truth ... Being struck and overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction... Of course we must not underrate the importance of theological reflection, of exact and precise theological thought—it remains absolutely necessary—but to move from there to disdain or reject the impact produced by the repose of the heart in the encounter with beauty as a true form of knowledge would impoverish us and dry up our faith and our theology.

A stanza from the *Spiritual Canticle* of St. John of the Cross speaks of theological knowledge and then the underlying poetic participation:

O spring like crystal!
if only, on your silvered-over face,
you would suddenly form
the eyes I have desired,
which I bear sketched deep within my heart.

The silver face of the fountain reflecting the light, St. John commented, represents ideas we can formulate about God. These ideas at once point to and cover the substance of the water, that is, the divine realities. Without the intuitive, obscure awareness of the Divine Face sketched in our hearts, there is a danger of placing all our attention on clear determinations expressing the divine reality—on formulas, arguing and logic—while forgetting that reality. Inside the living and poetic habit of those spiritual realities, we can patiently, humbly and fruitfully proceed to analyze this or that aspect of the mystery,

The poetic mode is also the end, the goal of theology, at least in what concerns our personal spiritual life. Theology with its quest of clear, precise ideas, of syllogisms, working out of problems, can only go so far. The object of our faith is always greater than our theology. We know that God is good, but he is more good than we can conceive. The light of faith is ordered to the Beatific Vision of God in Three Persons. It aims beyond our limited ideas, into the dark.

All the reasons we accumulate in theology help our aim, nurture, orientate and purify our gaze. A theologian wrote,

All the accumulated knowledge in theology permits little by little the recognition of the value of the object of faith, like the study of the different colors show the riches of the sun. The mystery tends to stand out, as we go beyond one after other concepts that are always insufficient. We glimpse a little better the transcendence of the divine object.

Theology only brings out into the clear what it can. We all know how St. Thomas, when he reflected over the value of his work, compared to what he knew by contemplative insight, said, “All

that is only straw.”

We, like St. Thomas, want to enter into relationship with Jesus Himself, and with Mary. We want to know God in His intimacy. Another contemporary theologian wrote about the very high mystical experience of the three divine persons and shows how it corresponds to an experiential, nonscientific poetic knowledge:

This knowledge shaped through experience is the grasp of the divine person in his presence and action, through the gifts of wisdom and love that assimilate us to the divine persons and allow an authentic enjoyment of them. This fruition is an experiential knowledge that is not speculative or conceptual but rather a testing out of the already existing communion with the divine person. Love occupies a key position in this because it is what unites us most deeply to God.

Now we might ask what about art in this domain? Can Christian art take over where theology leaves off, at least to help our gaze?

Art and the supernatural

Perhaps indeed, since art doesn't work directly through ideas, but through images, it can orientate our gaze toward what can't be precisely expressed. And since it uses the sensible, it can help our connaturality with the mystery. Especially since it works with our imagination and emotions, it can stimulate our love and so attune us to what is beyond us.

For example, the following poem by George Herbert says much more than concepts can, gives a sort of experiential knowledge of Christ's delicate, attentive, merciful, tender love—in fact a famous Jewish woman, Simone Weil, while simply reciting this poem as a something humanly beautiful, discovered Christ:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.
“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here.”
 Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look upon thee.”
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 “Who made the eyes but I?”
“Truth, Lord, but I have marred them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
 “My dear, then I will serve.”
“Now you must sit,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
 So I did sit and eat.

In any case, for proof of the value of the poetry in the supernatural order we have the fact that God Himself uses it—and abundantly. Scripture is largely poetic, rather than scientific or philosophical. God gave us stories in the call of Abraham, in the Exodus from Egypt, in the journey to the Promised Land, the Exile, stories in which we participate, where we see our own story lived. And the prophets, Jesus Himself used parables, and figurative language; the Bible is full of songs. The Cantic of Canticles gives an expression of Christ's love for the soul far beyond what Herbert was able to do:

As the lily among brambles, so is my love among the maidens. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come. The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise my love, my fair one, and come away. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride.

And the Church in her liturgy, that special, central means for nourishing faith and the supernatural life, also uses the sensible and the beautiful rather than philosophy to lift our hearts toward the invisible. Holy Mass in particular is not first of all catechism but a work of art in which mysteries are re-enacted so that we enter into them and live them. The texts are almost all poetic, drawn from the psalms, which of course are made to be sung. An author wrote about sacred chant: "Great thought can only find full expression in song. He who loves more than he can say, sings." In a High Mass one sings everything, even the Epistle and the Gospel, which shows that they are not just to be taken as instructions, but as something poetic, contemplative, pointing towards mystery.

Now we are ready to consider the poetic mode in the Benedictine life.

IV. Benedictines

We said at the beginning that Newman contrasted the Benedictine's poetic mode with the Dominican's scholarship and the Jesuit's practical ways. He, of course, did not want to pronounce an exclusion, but rather a dominance or emphasis. Benedictines also do studies, deal with intellectual problems, and perhaps have some apostolate. On the other hand, Dominicans and Jesuits need to have a contemplative basis—they must have poetry. Nevertheless each one's focus does mark the three types.

Monastic life is already pretty much a poem, you might say, as the monk gets up to the sound of bells, sings all day long, carries out many a mysterious ceremony like a dance, lives with one foot in the invisible world, kind of like in fairy story. He's something parachuted out of Middle Ages somehow into the twenty-first century.

All religious orders have for their goal to seek God, but they add specific goals such as teaching or nursing the sick, but in the Benedictine monastery the only program is personal union with our Lord. Very formally, directly, his life aims what I have called the poetic gaze on divine things--aiming at a sort of personal experience of Christ and his mystery--and he uses poetic means for that.

All is poetically organized in the monastery to help this quest for God, so the monk's deep attention can always be on that one goal. "Above all things may the monk flee forgetfulness," St. Benedict wrote.

The Benedictine uses nature, the sensible world to rise to God. Everything is arranged to "feelingly persuade him" as the poet said, to instill habits so that little by little spontaneously, naturally looks toward the invisible. Everything for the monk is a sort of sacramental, something poetic through which he goes to God.

There is of course the physical environment, which affects us more importantly than we realize. The monks live in the country, where things more immediately point to their maker. They keep their grounds handsome—not just useful, but poetic, pointing higher. Monastic architecture is simple, handsome, noble, uplifting without curiosities that distract. The church building is, of course, the most beautiful of the buildings, the tallest, attracting the gaze and the heart. The other buildings are nestled around it, with a zone of silence and recollection at its approaches in the cloister gardens.

All monastic life is dressed up, so to speak, so that the monk doesn't remain on the material, or even human level. He lives in an atmosphere of signs. In the various buildings, each room has its reference to the invisible—a crucifix, a sacred statue or painting, that all venerate in their comings and goings. Anyone who has eaten with us sees how meals are accomplished in God's presence, something like a liturgical office, with the reading at table chanted not read--our constitutions even say that the food should be well prepared and well presented, for the glory of God.

There is much more one could mention--the religious habit of course which is a constant, poetic reminder for the monk of his consecration, or the supernatural courtesy by which the monks practice recognizing Christ in others.

But there are two aspects of our life I would like to say a little more about: liturgy and then studies.

The heart of the monk's life is of course the liturgy. The monastic schedule itself is organized around the Divine Office. These official times of public prayer regularly punctuate our day, so that we don't forget the one thing necessary, so we don't get immersed in particular activities, to maintain recollection in our soul, an atmosphere of prayer and peace in the monastery. The monk is always pretty much either preparing for an office, or coming from one. With so much time, and so regularly,

spent in office, the monk quite naturally acquires the habit of the divine presence, the habit of speaking with God.

And, of course, the liturgy itself is almost all poetry. There are the church hymns and compositions, but the subsistence of the Divine Office is the psalms. Let me pause here a moment, because we will never have a high enough esteem for the psalms. Father Louis Bouyer mentions how they condense the whole Bible and indicates that they are a sweet, poetic way to God:

If the Bible is a world brought into the perspective of the divine plan, the psalms fit into it as a microcosm which condenses all its beauty in the translucent crystal of their praise. The splendor of the psalms will guide the monk spontaneously and better than any laborious industry along the journey he must make from those beauties which are only a reflection to the Beauty beyond compare of the one and only Source. Their literary beauty is inseparable from their spiritual beauty.

The psalms express pretty much every human sentiment before God—they cry out joy, pain, worry, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. A French poet wrote about them,

Never have the human fibers vibrated with such intimate, penetrating, grave harmonies; never has a poet risen so high and cried with such an exact note. Never has man's soul poured itself out before man and before God in such tender, heart-rending, sympathetic expressions and sentiments. All the most secret sighs of the human heart have here found their voice and notes. One is struck with deep wonder at these psalms that speak to God the Creator like a friend to a friend, who understands and praises his marvels, who admires his justice, who implores his mercy. The psalms express in exquisite terms the relation that our heart strives to bond with the supreme faithful, living God, praying he be our protector and friend. They give amplitude, intensity and depth to the thoughts and aspirations of all.

The psalms are simple and teach us to be so, as they appeal directly to God. "You are great, you made the world, I'm miserable, help me!" Listen to some of these verses:

Towards thee I lift my eyes, thou who abidest in heaven; from where will come my aid? from YHWH who made heaven and earth. Lord God of my salvation, when I cry out during the night before thee, may my prayer come into thy presence. I call upon thee all day long, I lift up my hands to thee. Why dost thou push me away, why dost thou hide thy face? I am poor; save thy servant my God who hopes in thee, because thou my God art good, full of compassion for those who call upon thee.

How movingly, beautifully they express our desires, our love: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh faints for thee. As the deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, my God." And they praise Him as no one can: "I want to exalt thee my God, my king, bless thy name forever. My God is great and exceedingly worthy of praise, his greatness is unfathomable. I will praise God all my life, I want to sing to him forever." They teach simple and deep truths about God; they point to Christ and His mystery. Reciting them regularly inscribes in us the habit of a proper relation to God, of being in His presence, of presenting everything to Him. We can

live them with Christ, with the Church.

And of course, once again, all is sung in our liturgy. Let me say that Gregorian chant in particular enters marvelously into the sacramental order. Gregorian chant affects us sensibly and emotionally, but it is not sensual--it doesn't have a beat, it does not focus on the sensitivity. It nearly always remains serene and balanced, even when expressing jubilation, or, on the contrary, deep sorrow or anguish. Thus it is more spiritual, and also more apt for deep and delicate feelings. Furthermore it espouses the text, brings out its meaning. As Pius XII wrote,

This chant, because of the intimate union of melody with the sacred text, not only fits the words perfectly, but seems to bring out their strength and efficacy as its sweet charm sweeps into the listener's minds.

Gregorian chant speaks to the soul, attracts the heart, and helps us glimpse the mystery.

We might mention also that we use Latin [at Clear Creek Abbey], besides other reasons, because of the poetic one that this noble language, not used in our common day speech, cultivates the sense of the sacredness of the Church's prayer. An Iraqi who converted to Christ and the Church, after having been beaten up, tortured, and nearly killed, finally was able to flee to France. After he was settled in a couple of days, the Frenchman who had received him took him to Mass. He wrote about this experience in his book *The Price to Pay*:

On the following Sunday, Thierry brought us to the church of Val-de-Grace, where he sang Gregorian chant with the choir. I was gripped by the sonorities, which were much subtler and musical than Arabic. Although I did not understand it, I immediately felt an attraction for that language. As I listened to that slow, profound music, I found again the prayerful atmosphere that I had experienced in the churches in the Near East. This chant touched me deeply; it immersed me in a peace that I could not have imagined only a few days before. What impressed me most was the silence that set in after the singing; it was tangible, and to me it seemed filled with the divine presence.

As we left the church, I told Thierry, "Those chants are really very beautiful! It is though French were the language of God." "That was not French, but Latin," Thierry replied with a smile. The name didn't matter, since I knew nothing more about it. For me, it was the language of the Latin Church of the West. Yet, oddly enough, I found in it a bit of my faith, which had been born in the land of the East.

Then there is the masterpiece of the liturgical year itself, all the liturgical seasons-- Advent, Christmas time, Lent, Easter time--fasts, feasts, and celebrations. The monk can follow Christ in His various mysteries all day long, day after day, as no one else can. Recollection and meditation on Christ's mysteries become simple, easy, habitual, and natural in such a life.

Liturgy permeates the monk's life, like the radiance of Christ on Mount Tabor shining out. It lifts everything up. Thus studies in a monastery are inseparable from his liturgical experience, in fact

from the whole context of the monk's life, from his whole of life of prayer, from the entire monastic family's quest of God. These studies are part of the quest.

The monk wants to know Christ and His mysteries as well he can. One of the means for that is theology. He accomplishes real speculative theology, reads the *Summa*, he deals with problems, draws out conclusions, but more than the Dominican who has a special role of teaching at the university, or than the Jesuit who has to prepare his apologetics, the monk can focus on the ultimate end, wisdom--appreciating, savoring the truth, possessing the truth in the heart, being possessed by it, seeing all in the ultimate light of first principles. He can fulfill theology, as we have said, by going beyond particular problems, beyond even clear ideas, to gaze towards God's face. Studies in a monastery are accomplished in order to love, in order to pray, in order praise and admire, to be in contact with God, to experience His presence if possible.

Linked to a monk's theological studies is what one calls *lectio divina*, i.e., prayerful, spiritual, cordial, sacred reading where one reads not just to be instructed, but to be nourished in intelligence, but also in will, and heart, where one is in dialogue with God, one opens oneself to be formed by Him. This type of reading can be done with any spiritual book but let me deal with Scripture, God's own word, the first book, to which other books used in *lectio divina* should lead and from which they should flow.

In an historical approach, one might strive to discern the sources of the text, date it, verify its authenticity, even analyze its coherency, and examine the culture of the author. A philosophical or theological study would draw out the doctrine, find the syllogisms, organize the ideas, using it as a source of abstract ideas, moral precepts, and dogma.

A monk can and should do all that, of course, as it helps to deepen our understanding, but he is ultimately seeking a poetic experience of Scripture. Pope Benedict XVI described *lectio divina* as the "diligent reading of scripture accompanied by prayer for an intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in prayer responds to him with trusting openness of heart." In such reading, enveloped in prayer, in faith, hope, and charity, God's word is received as addressed to the monk here and now for his salvation, for his life now and forever. He pays attention to what he reads—to the promises, to commands—but most of all perhaps to the One who is speaking, who is opening His heart to us. He strives to adhere with all his being, let himself be transformed. As St Jerome said, "Apply yourself totally to Scripture, apply Scripture totally to yourself."

So everything in this poetic life--the physical environment, the liturgy, the family life, *lectio divina*--aims at bringing the monk to the characteristics of childhood, as Newman envisioned, as mentioned at the beginning of this talk: simplicity, reverence, perception of the unseen, recognition of

the mysterious.

With his life so unified, gradually the monk's whole being--his mind, his will, even his memory, imagination, emotions, all his energies--comes together around the one thing necessary, in such a way that he becomes simple, with no outside preoccupations or distractions. Everything spontaneously goes towards Christ's mystery. And, as Newman said, the monk is reverent, used as he is to considering great things and so has a sense of his littleness, like a child in the presence of grownups. And the monk has the habit of going beyond the limited, the visible towards the invisible, to the depths of things. He learns how to follow this world's relationship to the spiritual: he perceives the unseen, so to speak; the invisible is as real, even more real, to him than things of sight. And in this, of course, he recognizes that reality is mysterious, that the invisible world indeed far transcends human capacities, but full of values that are beautiful and call us. The monk feels at home among the mysteries, natural in the supernatural, in the invisible.

He doesn't leave the childhood Wordsworth speaks of, or rather the monk gradually returns to it:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream. . . .

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

The monk is useless; contemplative life is useless; poetry is useless. In fact, the poetic gaze towards God accomplishes man in fullness. It makes man exist as he should face to God, as someone

wrote, "full of knowledge and love, of admiration and gratitude toward the beloved Father whose name we love to pronounce." That's what the world most needs today, and always.

V. Oblates

Now we come to the oblates. The oblate is not a monk, he can't live exactly like a monk, but he should keep the monk's life as a reference for his own life and be inspired by the monks. He has the same goals--simplicity, reverence, perception of the unseen, recognition of the mysterious--and he needs to take up Benedictine poetic means for that. He needs to have his heart full of songs, like Miss Prim about whom it was said,

Poetry seemed to have taken possession of her... It was not so much her enjoying the poems as much as the poems enjoying themselves in her. They alighted in her mind and her soul at dawn, as she rose to watch the sun rise. They startled her at midday as she watched the Benedictines out in the fields put down their hoes to recite the angelus. They lulled her in the evening as she sat reading.

So, draw from this little talk the recognition of the importance of the poetic mode to take up contact with Christ and His mysteries, that you need a whole environment that helps you look through and beyond things towards the invisible, to lift up your hearts, where all is beautiful and points beyond this world, where everything is dressed up a little for the glory of God. Consequently, take care of the home and its grounds, so they be handsome and agreeable; with a little sanctuary hopefully that is a continual reference for the mind and heart during the day, with a couple of well-placed images of Our Lord and Our Lady. May meals there be a celebration together of the Lord's gift and the joy of the family. May nothing be slovenly in our homes and our persons, because if the exterior is slovenly, the interior will be as well.

And of course, try to live by the liturgy, attending monastic services when you can, praying the psalms on your own in living contact with your brothers, the monks. Remember, during the day when the time of the Hours they are praying come up, that you can join with them with a short invocation. And try to follow the seasons, feasts, and fasts. I can't recommend too much Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year*.

And you need some spiritual reading. Besides the Benedictine authors I have often mentioned, let me recommend the *Ignatius Study Bible*, which will help you with a few key terms and notions, enough to open up some new doors. Sometimes we should pick out a passage to meditate, to memorize.

The spiritual life grows naturally in such an environment, day by day, gradually, not in a herky-jerky, artificial way.

Conclusion: Our Lady

To conclude let me just invoke the Virgin Mary, that little girl who lived the perfectly poetic life, with her heart full of God's word, who was perfect, deep simplicity, who knew how little she was in her heavenly Father's hands, who lived with the unseen mysteries as the great reality. When we pray the Rosary, she will teach us that fixed, loving gaze on Jesus. Think of how she looked at her little babe in her arms, and then the boy, then the youth working in the carpenter shop, then the young man on the Cross--with all the memories and experiences, thoughts about Him, assumed into a simple loving view.

This little girl is a beautiful song, and she is also Our Lady who inspires music in our soul and makes us poets. By striving to make all things beautiful for her, our home and its environment, our work, our schools, our liturgy, our monasteries, all our activity and culture will be more beautiful for her Son as well. To end, let me quote some lines by Gerard Manley Hopkins about Mary being a sort of poem who brings us God's glory in a way we can receive:

Of her who not only
Gave God's infinity
Dwindled to infancy
Welcome in womb and breast,
Birth, milk, and all the rest
But mothers each new grace
That does now reach our race—
Mary Immaculate,
Merely a woman, yet
Whose presence, power is
Great as no goddess's
Was deemèd, dreamèd; who
This one work has to do—
Let all God's glory through, . . .

Through her we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight.



Father Francis Bethel, O.S.B., a monk of Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma, is that community's Master of Novices and Master of Oblates. A native of Wichita, Kansas, Father Francis studied in John Senior's humanities program at the University of Kansas in the 1970s. Senior introduced Father Francis to the Benedictine Abbey of Notre Dame de Fontgombault, where Father Francis made his vows in 1977, subsequently to be chosen as one of the founders of Fontgombault's foundation, Clear Creek Abbey, in 1999. He is the author of John Senior and the Restoration of Realism (Thomas More College Press, 2016).



The Psalms – Good, Honest, Prayer

Why, O God, have you cast us off forever? (Ps. 74:1b)

Father Michael Peterson, O.S.B.

I AM sure many of us feel very uncomfortable to admit that sometimes our prayers have question marks in them: Why? How? When? What?? I mean, isn't prayer about, "God, you are to be adored in all things! God, you are great! The stars, the universe--amazing work. Indeed, you are my God!" Exclamation point! But what about, "Why, O God?" Is that prayer? I shouldn't question God, should I?

The Psalms gives me permission to tell God exactly how I feel, even if I may cringe at expressing it so raw and seemingly so untrusting of God's divine providence. If indeed, as St. Augustine of Hippo wrote that, "To sing the Psalms is to pray twice," then to sing is to be doubly honest. The human emotion of doubt will run deep into our soul when I sing--and that's the point. Question marks are a way of clearing the air between God and myself when real questions arise. Question-mark prayer is, humanly speaking, very honest. What is more valuable in our prayer life than honesty? Good prayer is honest prayer. God calls us "friends," and friendship is all about honesty. God can handle question-mark prayer.

I did a search of all 150 Psalms of the Grail translation we use here at St. John's Abbey. In them there are 152 question marks and 200 exclamation points. If your own prayer life today has more question marks than exclamation points, fine. It's in the Psalms, after all: 152 times. That's good, honest prayer. Just keep praying. 

Father Michael Peterson, O.S.B. is a monk of St. John's Abbey and currently serves as Oblate Director.



Inaugural Oblations of the St. Benet Biscop Chapter of St. John's Abbey Oblates

AFTER a year of prayerful reflection on the Rule of St. Benedict, five oblate-candidates of the St. Benet Biscop Chapter of St. John's Oblates made their oblations on 12 and 14 January 2017.

Father Don Augustine Malins, Obl.S.B., a priest of the Fellowship of Blessed John Henry Newman in Victoria, British Columbia, made his oblation on Thursday, 12 January, the feast of our patron, St. Benet Biscop. His oblation took place at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Victoria, Msgr. Peter Wilkinson officiating. Father Don Augustine took St. Augustine of Canterbury as his oblate patron because "he brought the beginning of unity to the Church in England." Father Don Augustine also had the privilege of celebrating Mass, when he was still an Anglican, at the site of St. Augustine's monastery in Canterbury.

Two days later, on Saturday, 14 January, four oblate-candidates gathered at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, to make their final oblations in the Emmaus Hall Chapel.

Father William Thorfinn Brenna, Obl.S.B., a retired priest of the Catholic Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, traveled to Collegeville from Saint Paul, Minnesota. Father William Thorfinn took St. Thorfinn of Hamar, the thirteenth-century Norwegian bishop, as his patron. St. Thorfinn is believed to have been a Cistercian monk in Norway before becoming the bishop of Hamar and was exiled from his see. He died and was buried in a Cistercian monastery in what is now Belgium. As Father William Thorfinn wrote, this "kind of 'stability' (to our Lord) is what oblates are about. Also, [St. Thorfinn's] last journey was compelled and not voluntary," which strikes a chord of a like resonance with Father William's peripatetic life story.

Mr. Jason John Edwards, Obl.S.B., a member of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Bridgeport, Pennsylvania, traveled from South Bound Brook, New Jersey. Mr. Jason John Edwards, Obl.S.B., took St. John Roberts as his patron. St. John Roberts is among the forty Martyrs of England and Wales, whose feast is 4 May (which happens to be Jason's birthday). St. John Roberts was a Benedictine. Though Welsh (providing a tie with Jason's Welsh ancestry), St. John Roberts was martyred at Tyburn, which was then outside of London.

Mr. Gregory Martha Herr, Obl.S.B., joined us from southern California, where he is a member of the Church of Blessed John Henry Newman, Irvine, California. Mr. Gregory Martha Herr, Obl.S.B., has claimed St. Martha of Bethany as his oblate patron. His wry sense of humor first drew him to St. Martha since “like me, she welcomed Jesus but did not listen to him as she ought and was busying herself with practical things.” But a few months before his oblation, Gregory was struck by St. Martha’s profession of faith, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). Keeping the reality of our mortality daily before our eyes, as the Rule of St. Benedict bids us, Greg wishes to have St. Martha’s profession of faith inscribed on his tombstone.

Traveling from Saint Louis Park, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis, was **Father Stephen Aethelwold Hilgendorf, Obl.S.B.**, the rector of St. Dunstan’s Anglican Church. St. Aethelwold of Winchester is the patron saint under whom Father Stephen Aethelwold, Obl.S.B. has placed himself. “A companion and collaborator of St. Dunstan in the English Benedictine Reform, [St. Aethelwold] seems like a very natural choice given my parochial service at St. Dunstan, especially as Dunstan was Aethelwold’s abbot at Glastonbury before they both rose to episcopal dignity.”

A votive Mass of St. Benet Biscop was celebrated on 14 January in the Emmaus Hall Chapel at 10:30 a.m., Father William Brenna (not yet Obl.S.B.) presiding. The Mass setting was Healey Willan’s *Mass of Saint Mary Magdalene*, and the offertory anthem was Heinrich Schütz’s “One Thing I Ask of the Lord.” After lunch, the shrine of St. Peregrine was opened for private prayers.

The oblates made their oblations at the end of the Office of None at 3:00 p.m. Evensong was celebrated at 5:00 p.m., Father Stephen Aethelwold, Obl.S.B. officiating. The Evening canticles were sung to Sir Edward Bairstow’s E-Flat-Major Unison setting, and the anthem was Sir John Stainer’s “God So Loved the World.”

Following are the words of oblation:

PEACE
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
I, [baptismal name, oblate name, surname], Obl.S.B.,
offer myself to Almighty God
through the Blessed Virgin Mary and our Holy Father Benedict
as an Oblate of
the St. Benet Biscop Chapter of the
Oblates of Saint John’s Abbey,
Collegeville, Minnesota,
and promise, as my state in life permits,
Stability of Heart,
Fidelity to the Spirit of the Monastic Life,
and Obedience to the Will of God.

May God who has begun this good work in these oblates “bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). 



CRUX SACRA SIT MIHI LUX