



THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Our New Library and Community Room

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

“EVERY LIBRARY IS AN ACT OF HOPE.” SO SAID FR. LUCIEN DEISS, A FRENCH PRIEST WHO WROTE SOME EXCELLENT HYMNS AND ANTIPHONS IN THE YEARS just after Vatican II. When he said that, I was sitting behind the circulation desk at Mount Angel Abbey Library, which holds several hundred thousand books in a beautiful building designed by the distinguished Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto. That library looks out to the north over the Willamette Valley and on a clear day one can see the peaks of Mt. Hood and the northern Cascades in Washington. Our new library here in Jerome is hardly on the scale of Mount Angel Abbey Library--we have less than 1/15 as many books--and our view from Flat Top Butte over the Magic Valley is not quite so spectacular. Nevertheless, this library expansion is an act of hope. In this issue of the *Desert Chronicle* we would like to acquaint you with the space and our hopes for it.

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From the Prior's Pulpit

FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD

By Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB

RECENTLY I WAS ASKED TO MAKE A PRESENTATION ON THE PSALMS TO THOSE IN THE DIOCESAN DEACON CANDIDATE

program. Now I would like to share with you some poetic devices that might enhance your appreciation of the Psalms. For example, Psalm 22:12 mentions the “big, brawny bulls from Bashan” (my translation). The repetition of the sound of “B”, also found in the Hebrew text, imitates the sound of angry bulls.

When I began translating the Psalms from Hebrew, I discovered very quickly that the Psalms are packed with puns--not for the sake of humor, but for reinforcing an idea, much like the road sign: “Road workers ahead, give ‘em a brake”. This is a mildly humorous pun on “brake” vs. “break”, but also a serious statement to protect life.

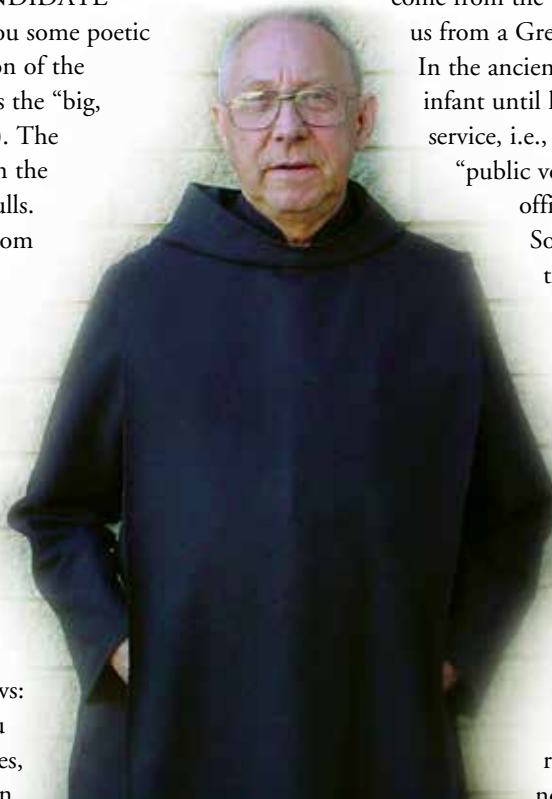
Although puns don't translate well from one language to another, Psalm 8:2 contains a very clever word play that can also “play well” in English. The New American Bible translates this verse as follows: “Out of the mouth of babes and infants you [God] have drawn a defense against your foes, to silence enemy and avenger.” This verse, in

Hebrew, contains several puns in the words “infants” and “defense”. Our military word, *infantry*, does indeed come from the word “infant”, which in turn comes to us from a Greek word meaning “unable to speak”.

In the ancient world, a boy was considered to be an infant until he had completed his years of military service, i.e., the infantry. Then the young man had a “public voice” and could be a candidate for public office and “speak out” on public matters. So, “infant” means “unable to speak” in the sense of “having no *public* voice”.

Nowadays we speak of this as “coming to one's majority”.

Psalm 8 goes on to describe the sound of an infant's crying to be like the “report” (i.e. the sound) of soldiers shouting and of weapons clashing in battle. Moreover, since infants are the hope for future generations, their crying is a “report” on the strength and future of a nation. Could there be a lesson here in regard to our own nation's falling birth rate? Well, that's another topic. But, for cryin' out loud, remember Hamlet said it first: “To be or not to be, that is the question”.•



WHY AND HOW A NEW LIBRARY?

This obvious answer is that the old one (about 600 sq. feet) was full. The library has built up slowly through donations of books and the work of volunteers who have catalogued and taken care of the books for over 40 years. A few years ago with the help of some oblates I culled many books, but that was only a temporary solution. Since then books have flowing out into the hallway and into the basement, and there was no place to put new books.

The big question has been whether it is wise to build a library at a time when the future of the book is so much up in the air. For entertainment people seem to prefer audio-visual media rather than the printed page. For those who still prefer to read, there are online sources and electronic readers. On the other hand, most of the books in our library are not available in digital form and if they are they cost money. Actual books can also be easier to use.

We have always encouraged people to use the library, but once it overflowed into the basement it was not really very accessible. It is certainly the largest library of Catholic theology in Idaho, and we want it to be available to people who would like to borrow books to read or who are working on projects for which they need access to a theological library. Having pleasant, accessible space should be more inviting to them. We hope to encourage ecumenical use as well.

There is also the question of our own spiritual and intellectual nurture. St. Benedict wanted literate monks who could pray the psalms and other biblical texts in the liturgy, read the Bible privately, and listen intelligently to reading during meals. He arranged the day so that his monks could read three hours a day. During Lent he wanted each monk to receive a book, which he was required to read straight through in a prayerful way. Because Benedict wanted his monks to be literate, they needed libraries and resources to educate those who came to the monastery without the necessary training. To stock their libraries the monks needed to have scriptoria, places where those with the necessary skills could copy books. So began a tradition of monastic libraries that has continued to today.

When a donor indicated willingness to fund an expansion of the library, we discussed the project from many angles: initial and ongoing costs, viability, use, and so forth, even whether the donor's generosity might be better directed elsewhere (in particular, to the Catholic Worker, where in the end some of the donation went). Finally, we decided to do go ahead with the project—an act of hope.♦





THE DESIGN

UNTIL NOW THE LIBRARY HAS BEEN SITUATED ABOVE THE COMMUNITY ROOM, WHICH IS USED FOR MEETINGS AND recreation (for example, TV, board games, cards, and a monthly movie). Both rooms were about 600 square feet in size; they share the southeast corner of the monastery. The community room was rather cluttered and dingy. It had been fitted for a fireplace, but that was never installed; there was no water. The basic plan is to extend the two floors out to the south and divided the upper floor in a north-south direction, so both the upper story of the library and the community room have panoramic views over the Magic Valley. The community room remains the same size, but the library is expanded to 1800 square feet so that it can accommodate all the books in the basement, the hallway, and additions for the foreseeable future.

For the design we engaged the services of a Boise architect, Rob Thornton, of Carver/Thornton/Young. Rob was a designer for the crypt chapel at the cathedral in Boise and coincidentally

was very familiar with Alvar Aalto's library at Mount Angel. As it turned out, his use of natural light in our library draws on the example of Aalto's design. He so designed the windows and the roof that the upper story of library makes maximal use of natural light.

Construction of the building was entrusted to EKC Construction of Boise. We interviewed Brian Ellsworth one of the founders of the company and worked out a plan. Charles Hummel, who was involved in the restoration of the cathedral, and many other Boise building projects, recommends the firm. EKC assigned Mark Nearman to be the on-site supervisor. Mark lived with us four days a week, so he had easy access to what was being done by the various contractors.

Br. Selby scouted the country via the Internet looking for used shelving and found us all we needed. We had hoped to increase the capacity of the library by including some compact shelving, but the cost proved prohibitive. Putting some compact shelving in the lower story remains an option for the future.

Br. Selby also did all the legwork and negotiating for furnishing the library and the community room. The library's furniture requirements are minimal: four study carrels (two on



each floor), a desk at which to check out books, and a table for discussions that can accommodate eight people (we will reuse a table and chairs from the former library). We hope to have room for an armchair near the periodical rack, which will be near the upper story window looking south.

The community room on the other hand will have mostly new furniture. The northern end of the community room is closed off as a TV room. The TV set can be wheeled from there into a larger space in the middle of the room if the whole community is watching something. The center of the community room (on the north-south axis) will be for card and board games, and the south end (with the view) for reading and conversation.

The lower floor will be used exclusively for the library. It is more austere, with a cement floor and long rows of shelves. There will, however, be a study carrel in each corner on the south end, under a small window. To check out books a patron will have to go into the hallway and up to the top floor. Two fire doors have been added in the outside halls, so that visitors can access the library without going into the monastery proper.

The library roof as it was leaked badly in the stacks. So part of the remodeling has been to add a completely new roof. This new roof is designed to provide good drainage and blend with the roof on the chapel. The larger “bricks” on the outside of the addition were chosen to echo by shape and color the bricks on the exterior of the existing building. •



THE PROCESS

ONCE WE DECIDED TO GO AHEAD WITH THE PROJECT, OUR FIRST TASK WAS TO move the books and furniture out the library and the community room. Several crews of monks and friends boxed up all the books in the library and the hallway (404 boxes) and moved them to the basement to the tune of Tennessee Ernie Ford’s “Sixteen Tons.” Fr. Boniface rented a container into which the furniture from the community room was moved. Then throughout the first half of 2015 the old library and community rooms were gutted and the new spaces gradually took shape. There were very few change orders, which helped to keep us in budget. Meanwhile, inspired by Sr. Rebecca Abel, OSB, who came in the two previous years to help us with cataloguing, Craig Evans has been barcoding all the books in the boxes, so that when we move into the new library it will be possible to check out books with a wand. He is about 80% done with the barcoding, so by the end of the summer (and the 50th anniversary of the monastery), the project should be pretty well completed. Currently, under John Wasco’s direction, a crew is being assembled to put up the shelves (191 bays of them, six or seven shelves to each bay). Once they are up we will need to haul all the books up from the basement and put them in order on the shelves. That will be a big job, since our careful organization of the boxes has become somewhat disturbed by various factors, not least a flood in the basement after one of our unusually heavy late spring rainstorms.

And then we’ll be ready to read—itsself an act of hope. •





Monks on the Radio

Pete Espil, Oblate of the Monastery of the Ascension

BY NOW I'M SURE YOU HAVE ALL HEARD, BUT IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T, THE MONKS FROM THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION HAVE BEEN FEATURED ON SALT AND LIGHT CATHOLIC RADIO, WITH TRANSMITTERS IN BOISE AND TWIN FALLS, THE FIRST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH FROM 6:00 PM TO 7:00 PM. THE NAME OF THE SHOW IS "FIRST FRIDAY AT THE MONASTERY."

The show began in September 2014, but my idea for the show was presented to Salt and Light radio several months prior. My wife (Jaime Thietten) and I spent a year cohosting a show for teenagers on the same station. When I left youth ministry in the summer of 2013 I felt it would be best to turn that show over to someone else who was still working with teenagers in the Catholic Church. In the fall of 2013 I helped with the radio pledge drive and during that time was approached about the possibility of doing another local show. We explored a couple

different ideas but neither of them seemed to be something I wanted to do. The good people at Salt and Light told me they were open to any new ideas I might have and after thinking about it I decided to present the idea of a radio show that features the monks.

The monastery has been a part of my life for a long time and I enjoy visiting when I am able. However, there been times in my life when I have lived too far away to be able to visit the monastery on a regular basis. My thought was, why not create a show that brings the wisdom of the monks and the feel of the monastery to people through the radio? I envisioned a show structured like a one hour retreat with time for prayer, teaching, and reflection. I presented the idea to Salt and Light radio and the show was born.

The structure of the show changed a little bit from my original idea, but so far has been received very well. The show follows the same format month-to-month. There are four recurring segments. The first features Father Kenneth and his wisdom on Scripture. He focuses on connecting Old Testament and New Testament themes with an emphasis on the Psalms. The second recurring segment features Father Hugh. Father Hugh teaches a little bit about the rule of St. Benedict every month. The third recurring segment features Father Norbert and is called "Everyday Discipleship." In it, Father Norbert gives practical advice on Christian living for the lay faithful. The final recurring segment is aimed at teenagers. It features a prerecorded interview with one of the teens who attended the previous summer's "Benedict – TEEN" retreat at the monastery. In addition to these recurring segments, each show features a musical meditation and a guest spot. The musical meditations are provided by Father Andrew (playing the organ), Father Ezekiel (also playing the organ) or Brother Selby (playing the harp). The guest teaching portion of the show features a different monk teaching on a different subject each month. Topics have included prayer, music, the Trinity, and the Synod on the family. In addition to all of this, there are short musical transitions that feature the monks chanting underneath descriptive narratives provided by St. Edward's parishioner Pete Hillman.

The show has been airing on the first Friday of every month on local Catholic radio. For station information or for more information about local Catholic radio in southern Idaho, you can visit www.saltandlightradio.com. If you do not live in southern Idaho, you can listen to the show online at the same website address, or you can listen to past shows by visiting the link provided on the home page of the monastery's website at www.idahomonks.org.

I will not be able to continue the show next year, because I am going to be in graduate school, but it may be able to continue it in another form. If you would have any ideas for next year, email me, desertcoyote52@gmail.com, or Father Hugh, hughf@idahomonks.org.





Blessed Achard of St. Victor

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

TWENTY YEARS AGO I WORKED ON A PROJECT TO TRANSLATE THE COMPLETE LATIN WORKS OF ACHARD OF ST. VICTOR, AS A TRIBUTE TO the man who had edited Achard's 15 sermons (some of which he had turned into treatises), Jean Châtillon, a French priest and scholar who had encouraged my interest in the theologians associated with the St. Victor, an abbey of canons regular in Paris. I wasn't able to finish the project before Fr. Châtillon died, but the book appeared in 2001. It was not a best seller, and after a few years the publisher let it go out of print. In addition to the 15 sermons the book included two philosophical treatises by Achard. One of these, *On the Unity of God and the Plurality of Creatures*, had first been published from the single surviving manuscript in 1975. Most of the copies of that edition were destroyed in a fire, so I translated it from a photocopy.

Achard was probably from England. From there he went to Paris to study and entered the Abbey of St. Victor. He was abbot there from 1155 to 1161, when he was appointed bishop of Avranches in Normandy. He died there in 1171. He is venerated as Blessed Achard. While he was bishop he contributed to the re-establishment of the abbey of La Lucerne, not far from Avranches. It was a monastery of Premonstratensians, who like Achard were canons regular, that is, clergy who lived a full community life resembling that of monks.

This year a new facsimile edition of Achard's treatise, *On the Unity of God and the Plurality of Creatures*, was published by the University of Caen in Normandy. Some professors from Caen and Paris organized a conference on Achard to commemorate the event. I was invited to attend. There were about 20 of us at the

conference. The presenters were from France, Italy, Ukraine, and the United States. Most of the papers were in French.

We visited Avranches, where the manuscripts from the great medieval Benedictine monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel are kept. Best of all, we went to La Lucerne, which has been restored largely through the efforts of a friend of Fr. Châtillon. Much of the abbey is now like it was in Achard's time. The church is a beautiful structure, which houses an effigy of Achard. One of our number gave her paper to us in the (unheated) refectory of the twelfth-century abbey. There was something mystical about being at the gravesite of a brilliant man who I knew quite well through his writings.

The net result of this six-day visit to France was that I met some long-time friends and made some new ones who like me are interested in Achard, I was prodded to think about some philosophical and theological aspects of the Trinity in ways that stretched my mind and heart, and I had the opportunity to visit some churches in Caen, the ruins of the Norman castle, and the art museum it contains. Of these the most memorable to me is the great Benedictine Abbaye-aux-Hommes, built there by William the Conqueror, who is buried in the nave.

Equally memorable was the exquisite kindness of the organizers, who welcomed me and an American colleague in spite of our pathetic French. One of the organizers even went so far as to make sure I had the opportunity to attend morning Mass one day of the congress. Achard was not a Benedictine, but his modern day devotees are models of the hospitality that Benedictine insisted upon. •





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Road Scholar Programs at the Monastery for 2015

There are still places in two of the programs this summer*

June 22-28: Medieval Murder Mysteries: Their Settings in English History

***June 29-July 5:** Ancient Rome
(Presenters: Ron Pepin, Ellen Martin, Fr. Hugh, Joanne Draper)

July 13-19: Religion and the Settling of the West

***July 27-August 2:** Dante
(Presenters: Larry Hundersmarck, Fr. Hugh, Susanna Lundgren and Jane Rickenbaugh)

August 31-September 6: Hiking amid Nature and History on the Snake River Plain



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