

Can we dismantle polarization?

Can we extend humanity to all? How do we dismantle the polarization eating away at our world? We live in a moment of time where people are being demonized and dehumanized for seeming to be different: thinking differently, speaking with different accents, looking different, worshipping in a different way — the list goes on.

We are creating a chasm filled with distrust. Language can condition us to devalue others and exclude them from our cultural milieu, erasing their existence from our concept of humanity. This path can lead to the extermination of certain peoples.

Our polarization is not just a theoretical moment. Group loyalties can lead to an unconditional defense of some and overzealous condemnation of others. Discord, intolerance, and violence become legitimized through the distortion of information to fit a narrative of a particular audience.

The origin of such distortions often arises from unprocessed anger. Beneath the anger, we may discover guilt, shame, sadness, insecurity, and fear. One way is to develop a non-defensive empathy that focuses on what we need to do for the common good.

As I write this, it is snowing. Snow is blanketing the country. One thing we all need to do is shovel out our hydrants, check on our neighbors, seek connections that develop human touch and care, and create moments that see people as real. Touch both their humanity and our own.

Chapter 69 of the *Rule* focuses on how easily the legitimization of violence becomes acceptable. Benedictine spirituality relies on commitment and community. The end does not justify the means. Choosing to do evil to bring about good is not Benedictine.

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Artwork by Br. Martin Espamer, OSB



A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a false greeting of peace or turn away from charity to another. Do not swear an oath, lest perchance you swear falsely, but speak the truth with heart and tongue. Do not return evil for evil (cf. 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9). Do not wrong another but bear patiently the wrongs done to you. Love your enemies (cf. Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27). Do not curse those who curse you but bless them instead. Bear persecution for the sake of justice (cf. Matt 5:10). You must not be proud.”

(Rule of St. Benedict 4:22-34)

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Jesus' Two-Edged Sword



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

Have you ever considered St. Benedict's *Rule* for monks as a manual for those pursuing the noble vocation of neutralizing polarization?

An unusual thought. But, after all, Benedict was writing for a community – a community of diverse people who were at least somewhat committed to living together. A noble thing, to want to live together. But one lesson we learn very early in life is that whenever two or three (or certainly more!) come together – whether they come together in Jesus' name or not – there is bound to be competition. And rivalry. And jealousy. And quarrels and disagreements.

In today's vocabulary, whenever two or three come together, almost for any reason at all, there is bound to be polarization. But hasn't it always been that way? I think of Cain and Abel! Perhaps I should go back even to Adam and Eve and the snake!

Sometimes it seems as though Jesus doesn't help much. Early in Matthew's gospel, He is recorded as saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (5:9). But later on in that same gospel, he says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword." And those peace-making children of God? "I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother," (10:34-35).

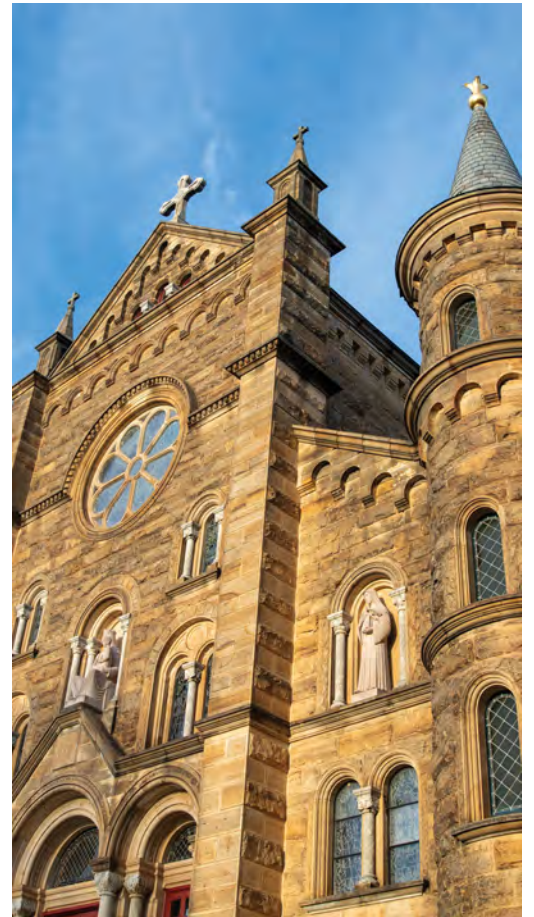
Benedict has his own "conflicting quotes." His Chapter 69 condemns "The Presumption of Defending Another in

the Monastery." The very next chapter condemns "The Presumption of Striking Another Monk at Will."

So, we should not defend another. Nor should we strike another. What are we to do?

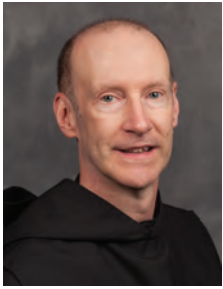
I suggest this as Benedict's remedy for polarization: *Your way of acting should be different from the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else. You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love. Bind yourself to no oath let it prove false but speak the truth with heart and tongue.* (4:20-28)

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Musings from the Chaplain

Why community is important to Benedictines



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

One value of Benedictine spirituality is “community.” This is not merely a group of anyone, but people who are concerned for each other. This

may be a religious order, a family, workers in a workplace, or other types of groups. Members of this type of community communicate with each other, but also listen to each other, as well as those outside of their group.

Someone who listens does not dominate conversations or hold his or her opinions as the ones that are always right. When we listen, then we can learn from others. St. Benedict tells us to listen with the ear of our heart. We do not listen just to gather information; rather, we are to listen with love and with feeling. In addition to listening, it is important to dialog. When we engage in conversation, we are able to learn from others, and the only way to do

this is to reach out and encounter them.

Pope Francis has emphasized encounter, dialogue, and listening. His encyclical letter *“Fratelli Tutti - On Fraternity and Social Friendship”* is an invitation to renewed social friendship and a universal fraternity. The Holy Father emphasizes dialogue and friendship in society, and from this emerges the concept of life as the “art of encounter” with everyone, especially with people on the edges of society, because each of us can learn something from others.

No one is useless, and no one is expendable. Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word, “dialogue.” If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. All of us are called to a deeper understanding of social friendship, community, and our shared responsibility to promote the common good. The Holy Father tells

us to be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, and building bridges.

The opposite of a caring community that listens and dialogues is individual polarization. Polarization splits, divides, rends, scatters, and closes. It has an “us/them” outlook and is recognized by extremes. A caring community rooted in Benedictine spirituality heals, unites, gathers, and opens. It has an “all of us are in this together” outlook and is recognized by moderation.

We are all being called to something outside of ourselves, something greater and beyond ourselves. If we were to only listen to ourselves and our own ideas, rather than to God and to other people, we would remain stunted and shallow. A remedy for this is Benedictine spirituality, rooted in the *Rule of St. Benedict* and, therefore, rooted in a Gospel way of living.

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB
Oblate Chaplain

Notes for Novices:

Recognizing the signs of polarization



Br. Gregory Morris, OSB

“In all things, therefore, let them all follow this Rule as their teacher...” (RB 3:7)

Among the hallmarks of polarization is

the systematic fragmentation of human collaboration and fraternal engagements between individuals, neighborhoods, and communities. Siloing ourselves through rampant exposure to social media and ideologically driven news outlets, we become vulnerable to increasing self-referential, narcissistic patterns of experience.

We become solely occupied by perceived social woes and cultural turmoil that we try to control or protect our enclosed world from any threat. Polarization thrives on indifference, inattentiveness, and irresponsibility. It promotes an endless cycle of fear, hatred, and suspicion. It is a life that leads to self-

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isolation and self-destruction. In short, it is the pathway of bad zeal and the Father of Lies.

Our way of life includes engaging in ongoing acts of self-knowledge (honesty), self-acceptance (humility), and self-gift (hospitality). Such actions engender an authentic evangelical life of walking together with God.

Walking together is hard; sometimes it seems impossible. Disagreements

and controversy will emerge, personalities will rub against each other, and our selfishness will seek to thwart our yearning for better days. The key is doing these things *together* with faith, hope, and charity through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The *Rule* is a teacher, not a jurisprudence manual or a code of conduct. It is a school, a workshop where we learn to be genuinely free through prayer and work. It is a

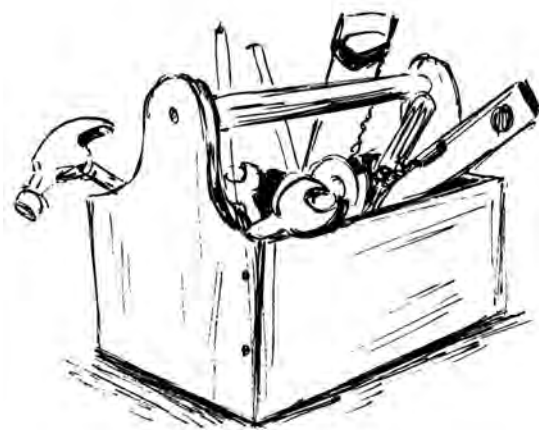
ladder of humility where our pride descends, and our hearts ascend to the heights of agapeic love. It is a pathway toward integration and away from polarization. In short, the *Rule* is the way of the One who is Crucified and Risen.

*Br. Gregory Morris, OSB
Oblate Novice Mentor*

The Oblate Toolbox

Looking for peace?

Return to the oblate promises



Angie McDonald

Could it be that the solution to the extreme polarization so prevalent today is something as simple as the word “community”?

I’m pretty sure that polarization, taken to the lengths we see today, is simply no match for our Benedictine spirituality.

Why is this?

One of our three oblate promises is stability of heart. Through this promise, we continue to strengthen our bond with the monastic community, a bond that transcends our human differences. How many times have many of us spent time on the Hill of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, experiencing its peace and drinking in its tranquility amid our busy lives?

When we visit, we greet old friends and make new ones. Such a setting seems to put out all the fires we thought needed tending.

Whether at the Archabbey or away, the same holds true in our promise of fidelity to the spirit of monastic life. When we come together in our homes or at oblate chapter meetings to pray the Liturgy of the Hours at Lauds, Vespers, and Compline, we are not left to our own individual moods or preferences.

Instead, we bring these to the altar of prayer and surrender them into God’s keeping – several times a day, every day of the week. I really need this regular attitude adjustment in my life – and it works!

And then there’s obedience, which we come to understand as listening for the voice of the Lord – and responding accordingly. By actively listening in all

situations, we cannot help but open our hearts to others to consider what they may have to say to us. Who doesn’t want to defuse a bomb about to explode?

If we are feeling fragmented by the polarization taking place around us – and even within us – St. Benedict has an answer, one that isn’t new. In his time, he likely experienced much of the same kinds of pressures we all face. As the father of Western monasticism, he has given us a blueprint to follow.

We just need to follow it.

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Embrace the antidotes to polarization



Ellen Godbey

I confess, I am polarized. I hold fast to my values and beliefs; I will not change them nor waver from them. The other side is wrong and even evil. I do not want to be

divisive; I want to promote peace, practice humility, and be hospitable. On the surface (and probably because I associate most with those of like beliefs), I am open and welcoming. But those internal convictions will not back down.

How does one “dismantle polarization”? It seems like a hopeless task, getting more impossible every

day. But as the old song goes, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Dismantling polarization begins with me and my attitudes and my attempt to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ.

During the Oblate Study Days in June, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, listed and discussed the Benedictine antidotes to polarization of moderation, mutual obedience, community, faith, hospitality, discretion, humility, and silence. It is a very tall order to embrace these antidotes.

I can't worry about or try to change the other, but must focus on my daily living, being true to myself, constantly discerning whether the thoughts of my heart conform with the Gospel,

and keep intensely praying to see Christ in the other. The laboratory of my heart is sometimes peaceful, but often chaotic and explosive. Only prayer and God's grace and mercy can soften and tenderize my interior so that my exterior reflects Christ.

The *Rule* states the qualities required of the abbot, “let him not...worry about things passing and earthly and fleeting” (RB 2:33). All of us would do well to contemplate that. Following Christ and building the kingdom requires firm discipline to live the antidotes, while being gentle with myself and trusting in the Spirit's guidance.

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Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord Benedictine spirituality can connect us to community



John Brooks

When I read the topic we were to write about, I Googled “neutralizing polarization.”

This is the first entry that popped up: “A new technique

for neutralizing the polarization effect, periodic forward bias pulses, is enabled by the diamond diode. A single forward bias pulse removes the polarization and by periodically applying a forward bias, the polarization effect is mitigated.”

A cursory read of the entry reveals little connection to our assigned topic;

however, upon a more thoughtful reading, there are some wisdom threads that can help guide us on our journey for solutions to neutralizing the effects of polarization in our lives.

Normally, I am a good-natured, caring, knowledgeable, and loving individual who loves volunteering, helping others, a wide range of interests, with a thirst for knowledge. I strive to be accepting of others and nonjudgmental of the beliefs and actions of others. Right more than I am wrong, I get upset when I am questioned on my beliefs.

I am thankful for my many blessings, but I believe sometimes life has been unfair to me. Everyone suffers and,

while my suffering has not been as great as some, it has been greater than most. My comfort is off-center stage, but I treasure accolades and praise. I am not a good listener. I am more of a follower and just an average leader.

As much as I strive to be non-judgmental, I am very opinionated. I am a rule follower as long as the rules don't limit my actions. After participating in a very informative meeting at Saint Meinrad, I have discerned that not only am I a member of some potentially polarizing groups, but I have been in the past and will probably remain a polarizing person.

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Looking in the mirror, I see an average person looking to connect with others who share similar interests, beliefs, and concerns. I am hoping to find comfort, security, knowledge, strength, and power.

Connecting with others through community is an important piece of Benedictine spirituality. While polarizing groups pull apart and divide societies, communities, and relationships, Benedictine spirituality unifies, comforts, teaches truth,

releases power for the good of all, and fosters eternal security.

Benedictine spirituality changes our hearts gently with love and compassion through short “pulses” of wisdom that easily find a home in our hearts. Benedictine spirituality, while embracing our differences and uniqueness, guides us on a path of community, where our faults and weaknesses are gently corrected, and our strengths and gifts are highlighted.

The Benedictine bias toward community spreads out, like the little mustard seeds, through our love of others, planting the seeds of our common connections — our quest to be more like God and to honor the image God created within us. It teaches us that our way of doing things should differ from the world’s way and that through our actions we can help others find the God who lives in their hearts.

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Listening like Benedict: A necessary spiritual practice



Beverly Weinhold

Listening is at the heart of the Gospel. God the Father said to Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him” (Mark 9:7). Listening draws us closer to God, gives us insight into our true selves, and makes friends of strangers.

Spiritual directors are trained to listen deeply. We accompany others in contemplative listening to hear the Holy Spirit to discern divine guidance from God. We do our best work when we listen well, paying close attention to people’s unique experience without offering advice. Suspend assumptions, clarify questions, and open space to deepen another’s relationship with God.

William Barry, co-author of the classic *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, cautions directors to curb our penchant for “meaning making”: “We can only discern what, in this

experience, is of God, and what is not, if we have paid attention to it as an experience with many dimensions.”¹

Listening isn’t only an art of spiritual directors, but a call to any serious God seeker. Yet, many do not listen well. All around us are people who feel invisible, unheard, and lonely. It’s hard to hear.

I saw this in spades at lunch last week with my lifelong friend, Susan. Waiting to order, we chatted it up about our children, exchanged our aches and pains, and laughed at how old we looked. Over coffee, our conversation changed. Suddenly, Susan turned serious. “Will you listen to me?” she asked. I was surprised. I thought I was listening. “Of course.” I responded.

Gripping the table and holding my gaze, she spoke haltingly. “Sometimes I don’t know who I am. I don’t know where I am. And I don’t know where I am going.” Hearing these words broke my heart. “I have dementia,” she

disclosed. Reaching across the table, we held hands. We were there for one another in the sacrament of that suffering moment.

Deep listening isn’t an option for oblates. St. Benedict begins his *Rule* with the word “Listen.” It is repeated six times in the Prologue for emphasis. Writing about A.D. 540, he instructed the reader to listen to God through sacred scripture, prayer, the abbot, and each other. He asks us to listen to strangers, guests, the sick, and the poor. Benedict solidifies the call to listen in his concluding chapter, encouraging readers to listen to the Old and New Testaments, our holy Catholic Fathers, and the *Rule of St. Basil* (RB 73:2-6).

Listening was bedrock to Benedict. But in the words of Ernest Hemingway, “Most people never listen.” While mothers and fathers likely said, “listen up,” many of us never did. Spiritual directors, mental health counselors, and business leaders are trained to listen, but most people are not.

As children, we are taught to read, write, and speak, but only five percent of our population has any training in listening skills.² Stephen Covey popularized the importance of listening skills in his best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. He ranked listening on a continuum of five levels. They are:

- First level is ignoring. It's a superficial brush with what was said, then going about your daily business.
- Second level is pretending. Pretend listeners give an impression of listening with their eye contact and body language, but they are just checking the boxes.
- Third is selective listening, scanning what is said and interrupting to make a point before finishing another's sentences.
- Fourth is attentive listening. We offer our time and attention, but we are in our own skin and not inside the speaker's frame of reference.

- Fifth is empathetic listening. Here we listen to understand. We suspend assumptions and drop judgment, wanting to walk in another's shoes.

Covey concludes with these words: "To truly listen means to transcend your autobiography, to get out of your own frame of reference, out of your own value system, out of your own history and judging tendencies, and get deeply into the framework and viewpoint of another person." This is called empathic listening. It is a very rare skill. But it is more than a skill. Much more.³

Listening is a spiritual practice. It is both a grace we are given and a skill we hone. It is a grace given from God. Benedict goes beyond Covey's compassion, calling it listening with the ear of the heart. Gratefully, God promised to soften our hard hearts: "And I will give you a new heart...and I will take away the stony heart...and will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekial 36:26).

To listen with the heart is hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, defenses, or declarations. It sets aside an agenda and drops the ego in order to deeply understand another. It is spiritual hospitality that pays attention to welcoming another in the name of Christ (RB 53:1). Here are five tips:

1. Put aside agendas and seek to understand.
2. Suspend assumptions.
3. Pause often.
4. Honor the Christ in others.
5. Ask open questions/Avoid advice.

Listening with the heart is a rare commodity. I want to listen like Benedict. Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre said that the world needs a new Benedict.⁴ I believe our calling as oblates is to rediscover the importance of listening with the ear of the heart, becoming the new "Benedicts" for a time such as this.

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¹ Barry, William A. *Spiritual Direction In Daily Life*. Review of Ignation Spirituality, xxxvi, 1/2005.

² Covey, Stephen R: (1989). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Free Press:US
<https://www.leaderwholeads.com/levels-of-listening.html>

³ Lindahl, Kay, (2016). *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening*, Skylight:VT.

⁴ Conden, Claire, SGS. *Listening With the Ear of the Heart*. The Good Oil, 2014.

The Risen Life of Christ in us



Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB

This is how we know that the Risen Life of Christ is in us – because we love one another.

Love begins with desire. To pursue the good for

others, even at a cost to myself, I have to want it. To love, I must *want* to love. This is especially true when the person I am seeking to love is not a person I would otherwise even like, much less feel affection for! Perhaps they rub me the wrong way sometimes, or their behavior annoys me, or their opinions oppose my own, or their politics are antithetical to

mine. Nonetheless, the example of Jesus is clear – none of these things is to be taken into account when it comes to love.

For us to realize the truth of who we are in Christ, we must know Christ. Regular, deep prayer stokes our desire for God and leads to knowledge of Christ beyond a merely notional or

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conceptual level; knowledge of Christ is established in love.

This is the foundation of humility, and it consists of two aspects: the fact of our having first been loved by God and given by the Father to Christ, destined, if you will, to belong to Jesus in baptism. But it also consists of the truth of what we've made of our lives concretely. We've all sinned and missed the mark of our truth and defaced the image of God in us by demonizing others, ostracizing our neighbor, and contributing to the injustices of society in often quite subtle ways.

Prayer opens our minds and hearts to the fact of our need for God's mercy and forgiveness. By engaging the Word of God in prayer, we come to know better the mark for which we desire to aim, and know, too, how we've missed it, what blinds us and blocks our aim.

By engaging the Spirit of understanding and wisdom, we will see better strategies we can implement in our lives to aim better at the mark by resolving more firmly to love tenderly, to forgive generously, to act compassionately, and to walk humbly with our God – because this

corresponds with our truth: who we are as intended by God to be.

When we stoke our desire for this through prayer, we demonstrate we belong to Christ; we belong to the truth, as John writes in his letter, and we can be confident, despite our frailties and our flaws, because God's love is greater than our faults and frailties.

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Signals in the Noise: Listening with bananas

Editor's Note: Signals in the Noise is a column for oblates trying to tune into God's presence amid the stress of everyday life.



Keith Jennings

Liturgy, learning, and listening. If asked to boil down Benedictine discipleship to its essence, I would explain it as these three "Ls."

For me, liturgy means participating in the daily prayers of the Divine Office. Learning means continuously reading St. Benedict's *Rule* and applying its principles to my life as an oblate of Saint Meinrad in the world. And, listening means practicing the presence of God through *lectio divina*, centering prayer, and other contemplative practices.

These three disciplines are the foundation of prayer and work in my life. But there's a problem.

I'm very consistent with the liturgy and learning aspects of the Benedictine way, but I struggle with the discipline of listening. Not because

I don't think it's important or want to make time for it. I struggle to find time for divine listening because my home and work lives are busy and demanding. My days are a morning-to-bedtime drumbeat of requests, interruptions, deadlines, obligations, chores, illnesses, and travel.

I'm betting you face similar challenges as an oblate. You have work, church, and community responsibilities. Your kids, grandkids, or parents need care and attention. Pipes leak. Invasive weeds need clearing. Meals need planning, and groceries need to be bought. Friendships need nurturing.

These aren't hassles we're supposed to tolerate until we can get to the "real work" of God. These are the real work of loving God and our neighbors. The problem for me is that, in this season of life, there aren't any dependable blocks of time for the silence, stillness, and surrender that deep listening demands.

Or is there?

Years ago, I discovered something that blew my mind. Throughout my Benedictine oblate journey, I keep returning to that discovery for insight.

Before I reveal what that is, I want you to imagine walking into a kitchen. On the countertop is a large bowl of fruit. Imagine reaching in, picking out a banana, peeling it, and taking a bite.

Question: Which end of the banana did you peel?

I've always peeled bananas at the stem. It seems most people do. However, bananas don't always peel easily. My twisting and digging at the stem wind up making the banana tip gooey. So, I break it off and throw it away, wasting part of the banana.

Years ago, I learned that monkeys peel bananas at the tip, not the stem. If you pinch the tip of a banana in a cross shape, the peel falls open, keeping the entire banana perfectly intact. Like most people, I had been

peeling bananas the wrong way most of my life!

That's the discovery that blew my mind.

What that taught me is that most of our everyday habits were formed by copying what we saw others doing. The problem, of course, is that they did the same thing!

There's an oft-told fable in the business world. It goes like this:

A grandson wanted to learn his grandmother's special recipe for Thanksgiving ham. He got all the ingredients, basted the ham, and cut off the ends just like his grandmother did. Then he baked it at the exact temperature and time she recommended.

People raved about the ham. So much so that he became convinced that there was something about cutting off the ends of the ham that affected its flavor and tenderness.

One day, he asked his grandmother about how she discovered the secret of cutting off the ends. She said, "I have to cut off the ends, because that's the

only way I can get the ham to fit in my small oven."

This ham fable taught me that what's effective for one person may not apply to the situation and season of another. The banana peel tip taught me that doing things the way most people do them doesn't make it universally right, wise, or effective.

With deep listening practices like *lectio*, I'm discovering that, for me, it's like trying to peel a banana at its stem. To fit in 10 minutes of *lectio* before taking my daughters to school, I must function on six hours of sleep, because the earliest I can get to bed is 11:30 p.m. after helping with schoolwork, pets, and dishwashing.

I have to finish Lauds, the day's reading of the *Rule*, and *lectio* by 6 a.m. to get everyone out the door on time. So *lectio* typically gets cut short, or out completely.

Here are some ways I've discovered I can practice deep listening in my everyday life.

I sleep outside almost weekly. There's something about hearing crickets, cicadas, tree frogs, and the hum of

distant cars that immediately brings me into the present moment. I fall asleep and wake up with a deep sense of God's presence and grace.

I've started writing some or all of the morning's Scripture reading on an index card or taking a screenshot on my phone. That way I can return to it throughout the day. These act as *lectio*-like prompts when quiet moments present themselves during the day.

When I have a gap between meetings, instead of processing email, I close my door and sit in complete silence for whatever time is available (usually it's a five- to 10-minute block).

I know that I'm missing out on the fruits that traditional practices of divine listening offer. But I'm discovering that God's Spirit is a continuous signal being broadcast to the ends of the universe.

For those of us continually moving, our job is to keep turning the dial on the ear of our heart until we find that ever-present, loving signal.

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Listening to others can strengthen the social fabric



William Hamrick

Listening is a complicated subject, and its importance for the topics announced for the next three issues of the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* testifies to its

significance. There are different types of listening, and at least one kind that I will not be discussing here.

Examples include health care workers who listen to patients' bodies for various reasons, sonar operators who listen for other ships and animals such as whales, biologists who record animal sounds, and astronomers who listen for sounds of extraterrestrial life.

All of these cases consist of listening as monitoring, of listening *for* something. At issue here is listening to others as part of inter-corporeal communication.

Listening to others and being listened to show us that, as Ruth Leys at Johns Hopkins University points out, an individual does not exist as "a

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preexisting, self-identical, autonomous subject.” Rather, there is “an unconscious identification with, or *incorporative binding* to the other that occurs prior to the distinction between the ego and its objects.”¹ This “incorporative binding,” happens primarily in perception, touching, and linguistic expression, and we can do this because the other’s body, like our own, “is no mere physical object, like a stick or a stone, but a *field of expression* for the life-experience of that psychophysical unity we call the other self.”²

A simple example is the functioning of a musical or choral group or monks singing in choir. The members are not fungible like Snap-On tools. They listen to each other; they know what will be played and sung and how it is supposed to sound. Hence, they make up an ensemble of interconnected performers. It is a question of a “mutual tuning-in relationship” upon which alone all communication is founded.”³

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected our organic interconnectedness because of the damage done to the “mutual tuning-in relationship.” The social fabric

really is one and, as we have seen in horrifying abundance, easily torn apart by violence, racial hatred, discrimination, conspiracy theories, the spread of baseless claims of electoral fraud, and the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

As opposed to this social mayhem, listening to others embodies a kind of respect because it involves giving oneself to others. By analogy, when we read a book, we give ourselves to the author to learn from him or her rather than impose our own interpretation on the text.

When we are in an art museum, we do not reflect on an artwork by imposing our own meanings on it. Out of respect for the artist, we let it speak to us. Similarly, at symphony hall when the orchestra plays, everyone becomes immediately silent rather than talking over the notes. They give themselves to the music to be instructed by it and to the musicians out of respect for their performance.

The essential lesson in each of these cases is that listening implies giving rather than taking, cooperation rather than dominance, and the building of

community rather than damaging it. Listening also requires enough humility to admit that one could be wrong.

These are also key Benedictine values that are under assault almost everywhere in our fractured society. Perhaps there is nothing new in people’s refusal to listen to others. Thucydides, for example, observed, “Most people, in fact, will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear.”⁴

However, what is new and unprecedented are the ubiquity, intensity, and violence in hate speech. Such anti-social behavior has been reinforced by partisans living in their own silos and unwilling to lend themselves to others in order to learn from them in “mutual tuning-in relationships.” Instead, we’ve even grown used to mass shootings, and certain people have told pollsters that, in some circumstances, it would be permissible to kill political opponents. Never was there more need in this country for us to take listening seriously and be a light for a fractured world.

*William Hamrick, oblate
St. Louis, MO*

¹ Ruth Leys, From *Guilt to Shame, Auschwitz and After* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 82.

² Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, translated by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert, with an Introduction by George Walsh (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 22.

³ Alfred Schutz, “Making Music Together” in *Collected Papers*, Edited and Introduced by Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 161.

⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner with an Introduction and Notes by M.I. Finley (London: Penguin Books), I, 47.



Got a hobby?

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An unspeakable outward sign: Understanding silence

“Nature is predominantly silent, except for the sounds of insects, birds, and animals, which do not really destroy the underlying silence of nature. Silence is the ambiance that nature chooses, so that life may flourish, may evolve. The big bang at the beginning of creation must have been a silent bang, because there is no sound in the vacuum of space. Silence is prior to sound; it is the milieu from which sound emerges and to which it returns.”



Diane Walter

Father Charles Cumming, OSCO, penned this beautiful paragraph in his book *Monastic Practices* at his home of the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy

Trinity, a quonset monastery in a pristine valley nestled in the mountains of northern Utah. Light pollution did not inhibit stars above his Trappist home. The sounds of insects, birds, and animals were a constant ambient background.

Thirty years ago, I traveled to visit that monastery often, drawn not just by the peace of the people and their place, but also by Benedictine spirituality. I felt welcomed, and noticed others did as well. There, I found silence was not oppositional, but foundational.

The very idea of silence as a good thing felt odd at first. It seemed impossible to solve problems with silence. It appeared permissive in practice, allowing someone else to say something that was possibly disagreeable or even entirely wrong.

Part of what feels odd about upholding silence is that, in our culture, silence is imagined to be a dialogic cudgel or lazy passivity. For instance, it is widely understood that the “silent treatment” is an oppositional punishment. In business

meetings, the silent person is the one “not engaging.” In education, silence is the posture of absorbing information, and that is often viewed as “non-creative productivity.”

Our culture also sees nature as polarized against us. Nature is widely imagined as something to be battled, contained, and controlled. It is not uncommon to hear annoyance toward weeds and weather, or even the mere sound of a bug, a bird, or a dog. It is less common to witness admiration toward a wild flower and hard rain, or the rhythmic tick of a bug, the backdrop of a bird song, or a happy bark.

In the times I have been successful at silently listening to an argumentative person, I have learned that whatever was presented initially is often not the actual subject at hand. Instead, what began as a polarizing statement transforms into a revelation of profound personal pain, fear, or loneliness.

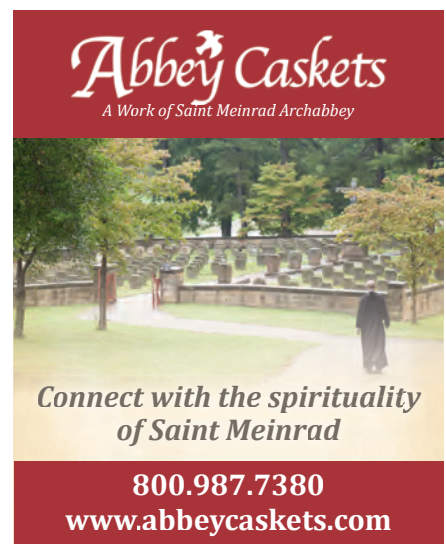
Part of the transformation that the *Rule of St. Benedict* elicits is that silence is relational. To read in silence, or listen in silence, or pray in silence, we are not shutting doors, but creating a space to share. Honoring silence is not oppositional, but wholly invitational. St. Benedict is encouraging his readers to create room within the heart to come to right conclusions and humbly acknowledge wrongs. His *Rule* aims for a communal conversion that is led by compassion.

Near the end of The Prologue in verse 49, St. Benedict wrote, “But, when you have advanced in *conversatio* and in faith, you will run with your heart enlarged and with the unspeakable sweetness of love on the way of God’s commands.”

The goal is to grow the goodness of our hearts, and the outward sign of that growth will be our “unspeakable sweetness.” We offer silence, not as a hollow contrary gesture, but as the foundation on which we can best reflect the vastness of God’s hospitality and love.

(Note to the Reader: Pope Pius XII declared the Big Bang theory as compatible with the Catholic belief of creation on November 22, 1951, at the opening session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.)

Diane Walter, oblate
Georgetown, KY



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Polarization: Build bridges, not barriers



Beverly Weinhold

Polarization is sweeping our country like wildfire. People are sorting into sides and splitting off. Not only in politics, gender identity, race relations and

religion, but it is seeping into churches, friendships, and families. In my work as a counselor and spiritual director, I hear of adult children becoming estranged from parents for no given reason. This phenomenon is a fast-growing form of the polarization becoming epidemic. Jesus sums up the subject of polarization with a powerful statement: “A house divided against itself can’t stand” (Mark 3:25).

Psychologist Jan-Willem van Prooijens, defines polarization as “the extent to which citizens become ideologically entrenched in their own values and political beliefs, thereby increasing the divide with citizens who hold different values...fueling a perception of society as a struggle between us versus them.”¹ Breaking it down, this form of resistance digs its heels in and “affects all that we hold dear,” adds Aaron Wessman, author of *The Church’s Mission in a Polarized World*.²

Responding to Wessman’s watershed book in a Focolare forum,³ Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, reflected on neutralizing polarization: “It helps to distinguish between ‘positive/negative’ and ‘positive/positive’ polarization.” Positive/negative refers to opposites like good vs. evil. This kind is resolved by eradicating one opposite in favor of the other.

Whereas, positive/positive polarization isn’t about opposites, but differences

like Republican and Democrat or Protestant and Catholic. Here, instead of eradicating the opposite, we hold the differences in a tension of two truths, not cutting off but becoming curious. This middle way is reminiscent of St. Benedict’s moderation that builds bridges, not barriers.

Jesus’ way was building bridges: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14). Following Christ and being oblates, we too are called to be bridge builders over troubled waters in a divisive world. How do we begin? Taking a cue from Benedict, it seems to start not only with listening, but with seeing. Benedict listened with the ear of the heart, and he saw with the eye of the soul.

Benedictine spirituality sees all people as equal. All are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). Benedict didn’t judge people based on the color of their skin, age, education, religion, or how much money they had in the bank. Seeing Christ in them, he simply bowed down (RB 53:1,6).

Near me lives a man who makes his living poaching what neighbors throw away, then selling it for profit. Most days, he walks by my house to take a seat on a bench bounded by our community garden. Going silent, I judged this man. Walking my dog, I looked away and passed him on the other side of the street without a word.

I refused to catch his eye and I did not see him as equal. Showing up for Vespers online, God got my attention. Wriggling on a hook held by God’s gaze, I was goaded to see this gentleman differently. Being stubborn, I took small steps. I looked him in the eye when he went by and blurted out a greeting.

Benedictine spirituality sees people as beloved because God so loved the world. Beyond equal, we are all beloved, because the Divine Spark dwells in us. This significance is key to emotional health in a cancel culture. Being held at the center with God’s love and companioned by the Holy Spirit offers a deep well of wide welcome to diverse strangers. Joyce Rupp tells the story of how she grew spiritually, seeing herself as a “container” of God:

“I learned I had a secret companion who always kept me company, even when I was doing daily chores. Hidden away deep in my heart was a loving being named God who would always love me and would never leave me alone because I was carrying the life of God in me. I began carrying on endless conversations with this friend. As I grew older, I recognized this inner presence as a dynamic source of guidance and consolation. I became ever more deeply rooted in the belief that this indwelling God loves me totally and unconditionally. To this day, I draw comfort and courage from the belief that I am a container holding the presence of God.”⁴

Benedictine spirituality accepts people just as they are, not how we want them to be. It’s notable that Benedict began his faith journey as a hermit in a cave, coming later to favor cenobitic life in community. Living the life of a loner, he gleaned insight into himself and others, growing in the conviction that people’s rough edges are best honed in community. No Pollyanna about human nature, he saw the key to spiritual growth was the practice of seeing Christ in every person, no matter how irritating (RB 27:1).

Monks practice community in a monastery where all follow the *Rule*. An oblate’s monastery is in our

family, work, church, friends, and wherever we encounter people. No abbot accountability, but angels aware are calling us to account witnessing faith to a watching world. Here, in an interior cell, we are called not to cut off, but “crossover.”⁵

There is no formula for that. But playing polite, going silent, or simply tolerating people isn't the way to build

bridges, not barriers. Instead, we are called beyond our comfort zones to be curious rather than self righteously silent; to engage in healthy conflict rather than playing polite; and to accept people as they are instead of simply tolerating them. Even if we encounter evil, we could wash Judas' feet, not offering evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Benedictine hospitality has provided a welcoming presence for diverse people for 1,500 years. So, seeing people equal, beloved, and imperfect is a starting point to build bridges, not walls. Here, we create an “oasis of peace in a striving, searing, simmering world.”⁶

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¹ Jan-Willem van Prooijens, “The Psychology of Political Polarization,” *Current Issues in Social Psychology*, (2021): p2.

² Aaron Wessman, *The Church's Mission In A Polarized World*, (New York: New City Press, 2023) Introduction.

³ Focolare (4.27.2022): <https://www.focolare.us/event/healing-a-polarized-world/>.

⁴ Joan Rupp, “The Cup of Our Life: A Guide For Spiritual Growth,” *A Guide To Prayer For All Who Seek God* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2003): 78-79.

⁵ Aaron Wessman, *ibid.* 159-189.

⁶ Joan Chittister, “Peace In the Monastery of the Heart,” *HuffPost Benedictine Spirituality*, April 18, 2011.

The historical context and impact of the Desert Sayings



Dr. Michael Seretny

Two events have transpired since we last spoke of the weekly Desert Fathers' Reflections. In October 2023, we lost Janis Dopp, the beloved director

of our oblate community at Saint Meinrad. This event was surprising, but not unexpected given the health battles she fought to keep working and living. Also, as happens each liturgical year, we arrived at the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Both events bear some reflection.

Regarding Janis, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, wrote a beautiful and inspiring article on Janis' funeral Mass in the last *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*. More to the point, he reminded us of three critical elements that came together in her Mass on the Hill: 1) we remember, 2) we regret, 3) we rejoice.

Of these, “remembering” is foremost on my mind. I remember that in very early 2023, Janis asked and then appointed me to the Oblate Council. I spent much of that year trying to find my way and place in the Council. It is an ongoing process. Germane to my thoughts, the Desert Fathers' Reflections was to become her last charge to me.

Somehow it fit with her grand plan for the ongoing spiritual formation of oblates. It gave me a focus with which to labor. As such, I am happy to share our efforts and progress with all of our Benedictine Oblates. In doing so, I “remember” and “rejoice” about what she saw in this formation activity. I “regret” she is not here to see the fruit of her vision.

Of the second event, the end of Ordinary Time brought the close of 26 weeks of Desert Sayings posts. We closed with an attribution of Abba Joseph's concerning the path to “monastic perfection.” A path that

Benedict shares with us in the *Rule* at Chapter 73, the ongoing act of daily *conversatio*.

Abba Joseph asks: “Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and Abba Poemen said to him, “If you will, you can become all flame” (Ward, 1984).

During those 26 weeks, we read and posted personal reflections of the attributions of many Desert Fathers and Mothers. There was considerable sharing on the early concepts of prayer. We looked at personal prayer, intercessory prayer, and “hesychia,” silent contemplation. We explored silence and simply being present in adoration, and the battles with temptation and the eight deadly sins — logismoi from Abba Evagrius. These hermeneutical practices were the innovations of these desert hermits. We

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discovered a rich source of reflection and even material for daily *lectio*.

Thus, at the first week of Advent, we took a break and focused on the two liturgical seasons before us, Advent and Christmas. Following the end of the Christmas Octave, the Desert Sayings Reflections returned, albeit in a more traditional teaching paradigm. It seemed important to ground these Desert Sayings in their historical context and future monastic significance. The context: “Institutional Christian monasticism appears to have begun in the deserts in 3rd century Egypt as a kind of living martyrdom” (Merton, 1970 & 2006).

Each week, until Ash Wednesday, we examined the historical impact of the earliest “Innovators 339-435” (Desprez, 1990) of monastic practices and focused on three seminal Desert Fathers. We could recognize those desert practices in our daily reading of the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

The first presentation was: “Antony of Egypt (c. 251-356) called Antony the Great. ‘The Father of Monks’ was born in central Egypt circa 251 A.D. While history reveals he was not the first early Christian to leave for a hermit-like desert existence, which is attributed to Paul of Thebes, he is clearly the founder of the ‘Desert Fathers’” (Ward, 1984). His life is reflected in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Ward, 1984) and in Anathasius’ *Life of Anthony* (Ehrman & Jacobs, 2004).

The second weekly presentation was: “Abba Pachomius (292-348) born in Thebes to pagan parents. As was common in his day, at age 21 against his will, he was forced into military recruitment for service in the Roman army. He and other youth were gathered onto a ship and sent down the Nile to Thebes. As was custom in those days, the military ship was greeted by local Christians who brought food and comfort to the troops. These two

customs of the day, conscription and Christian charity, had a significant impact on Pachomius. He vowed upon leaving the army to be baptized Christian. And so, he was baptized in 314 A.D. He sought the guidance of a local ascetic hermit named Abba Palaemon (Merrett-Crosby, 2011).”

“After studying for seven years with this holy hermit, Pachomius set out to become a solitary hermit near to Antony of Egypt from whom he learned Antony’s model of eremitic life. One of his devotions was to pray with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross. While praying in Tabennisi at the ruins, he heard a voice that told him to build a dwelling for visiting hermits. He immediately consulted his mentor Abba Palaemon, who considered the voice to be the intervention of God (Dunn, 2000; Merrett-Crosby, 2011).” True to his title, the Father of Western Cenobitic Monasticism, he built the first cenobitic (enclosure) community and wrote a *Rule*.

Finally, in the third week, we examined the impact of Basil the Great, the Father of Eastern Cenobitic Monasticism: “Basil of Caesarea (329-379) imparted his substantial influence on the development of cenobitic practices, not as a converted pagan (Pachomius), or even the faithful looking for the heroic life (Antony). Basil the Great was the Greek bishop of Caesarea, in Cappadocia. As such, he leaves his contributions as a member of the Christian hierarchy. Yet history reveals that even his contribution was more than just his Episcopal presence.

“Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa are celebrated as the Cappadocian Fathers. They were outstanding in their defense of the divinity of Christ, as formulated in the Council of Nicaea. They also defended the Church against Arianism (Merrett-Crosby, 2011). Basil’s brother, Gregory, was Bishop of Nyssa. They were both close friends of Gregory of Nazianzus, who was the Patriarch of Constantinople. This same region in

Cappadocia was fertile land evangelized by Paul himself. In the Eastern Church, Basil, John Chrysostom, and Gregory the Theologian hold the title: Great Hierarch, ‘revealer of heavenly mysteries’ (Meredith, 1995).”

On Ash Wednesday, we closed Desert Fathers once again to turn our attention to our *Bona Opera* promises and the season of Lent. The Desert Sayings have become a rich source of potential daily *lectio*. We will return to examine the historical impact these early Desert Fathers had on Benedict and his *Rule* after the Easter Octave. We are hoping to convene a small group of oblates at the Study Days to chart this path.

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A mathematical and spiritual journey with the Archabbey Church pavement

Part Four: Symbolism (Sierpinski Triangle)

Christ is risen! Alleluia!
Death by life has been defined.
Random patterns, Alleluia!
Bear his hallmark and design.
Christ the fractal,¹ Alleluia!
Truly human and divine.



Maureen Reichardt

After Mass one Sunday at Saint Meinrad, Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, approached me with a piece of paper in his hand, saying, “I would like to give this to you

because I think you will appreciate it.” Written on the paper was the text of an Easter hymn, titled “Christ is risen! Alleluia,” which was inspired by the geometric designs in the Archabbey Church pavement.

As a mathematics teacher, I was delighted by the many mathematical references in the hymn, but the line that captivated me the most at first reading is “Christ the fractal, Alleluia!” Although I had some understanding of the meaning of the word “fractal” and I knew it was connected to the Sierpinski triangle-within-triangle patterns in the Archabbey Church floor, I still wondered, “What does the phrase ‘Christ the fractal’ really mean?”

In this final article about the Archabbey Church floor, I will explore the geometry of the Sierpinski triangle motif and offer some thoughts about its

symbolism. I begin with an examination of two different methods of constructing a Sierpinski triangle: the geometric method and the seemingly random process called the “Chaos Game.”

The geometric construction of a Sierpinski triangle begins with an equilateral triangle, which is called a “Stage Zero” Sierpinski triangle. This process continues by locating the midpoints of the three sides of the Stage Zero triangle and connecting them to form four smaller equilateral triangles. The middle triangle is then removed. In Image 1, the “removal” is indicated by coloring the triangle blue/white. The remaining three yellow/white triangles constitute the Stage One Sierpinski triangle.

A Stage Two Sierpinski triangle is formed by repeating this process with the three yellow/white triangles: connecting the midpoints of the sides and then “removing” the three new middle triangles by coloring them brown/white [Image 2].

To move to Stage Three, the process is repeated using the nine yellow/white triangles from Stage Two. The removal of the nine new middle triangles is

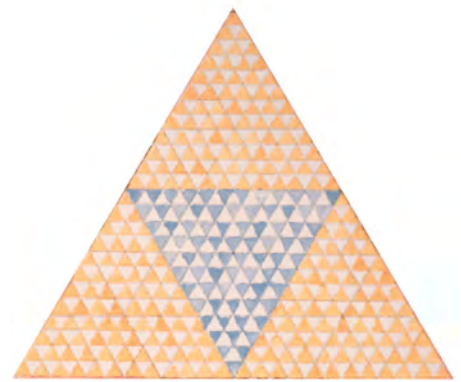


Image 1: Stage One Sierpinski Triangle. (Images 1-3, 5-7 from a painting of a reimagined Archabbey Church floor by Maureen Grant Reichardt.)



Image 2: Stage Two Sierpinski Triangle.

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indicated by coloring them red/white [Image 3]. In mathematical theory, this process continues infinitely; on the Saint Meinrad pavement, however, the process ends at Stage Three.²



Image 3: Stage Three Sierpinski Triangle.

The resulting figure, composed of the yellow/white triangles, is named for the Polish mathematician Waclaw Sierpinski (1882–1969) who studied and wrote about the pattern. Although named for a 20th-century mathematician, this same design was used many centuries earlier in both ancient Roman mosaics and in 12th- and 13th-century Cosmatesque pavements.

The Sierpinski triangle is one of many geometric figures studied within an area of mathematics called “fractal geometry.” Coined by mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot (1924–2010), the word “fractal” comes from the Latin adjective *fractus* (“broken”) and is used in reference to the “broken” nature of fractal patterns.³

A second method for constructing a Sierpinski triangle is called the “Chaos Game.” This process begins with the selection of the three vertices of an equilateral triangle [A, B, and C in Image 4] along with one random point, called the “game point” [G1 in Image 4]. Next, one of the three vertices is chosen at random (point A, for instance) and a new point, G2, is plotted halfway between G1 and the chosen vertex.

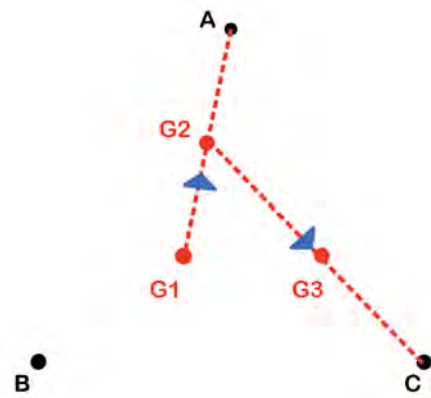


Image 4: Chaos Game (3 repetitions).

This process is repeated infinitely many times. Image 4 illustrates a third game point, G3, which is located by moving halfway between G2 and the randomly selected vertex C. As the number of repetitions continues to 250 [Image 5], 1,000 [Image 6], and 5,000 [Image 7], a familiar, ordered, pattern emerges from the “chaos”: a Sierpinski triangle.⁴

In light of this discussion of Sierpinski triangles, what meaning can be drawn from the phrase “Christ the fractal”? The Archabbey publication *The Renewed Heart of Saint Meinrad*

observes that, within the pavement, we see a representation of the “cosmic dichotomy of order and chaos.”⁵ First, we see this dichotomy within the Sierpinski triangle itself – an ordered pattern that emerges from a seemingly random and chaotic process.

We also see this dichotomy within the overall design of the pavement. Although the Archabbey Church flooring can be classified primarily as *opus sectile* (“cut work”), it also includes large portions of terrazzo pavement, which is characterized by roughly cut pieces of stone arranged in a manner that appears to be quite haphazard.

Fr. Harry Hagan has suggested that the *guilloche*, the intertwining circular pattern that runs down the nave and separates the *palladiana*-style terrazzo⁶ in the aisles from the Sierpinski triangles, can then be viewed as symbolic of Christ bringing order from chaos: “In him [Christ] all things hold together.”⁷ Fr. Harry’s Easter hymn evokes this same sense as we sing, “Random patterns...bear his [Christ’s] hallmark and design.”

For me, the dynamic, infinite construction methods for a Sierpinski triangle suggest a journey through time. Both processes demonstrate movement and development from a simple equilateral triangle, through infinitely many stages, toward a complex geometric figure that can never actually be completed. The steps of this process bring to mind my spiritual journey: from baptism, through a slowly evolving growth in understanding and

¹ “Fractal geometry” focuses on the study of broken, wrinkled, uneven shapes.

² For a demonstration, see the first three minutes of this video: Sawyer, Megan. “Heart of Mathematics: Sierpinski Triangle.” YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcTl0RgvbKk>

³ Geometric fractals share other characteristics beyond “brokenness” and “infiniteness.” Interested readers can easily find examples of other geometric fractals and their shared characteristics on the internet. Although space limitations for this article do not allow a full discussion of the theological symbolism of each of these characteristics of fractals, interested readers are encouraged to explore these ideas on their own.

⁴ For a demonstration, see this video: Viral Hog, “Man Demonstrates The Sierpinski Triangle in Mathematical Visual.” Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgu5-3ihVVI>

⁵ Saint Meinrad Archabbey, *The Renewed Heart of Saint Meinrad: The Art and Architecture of the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln* (13).

⁶ The Archabbey pavement incorporates two different styles of terrazzo. Red venetian-style terrazzo, made with small chips of marble, appears in the areas between the large triangles and the circles. White *palladiana*-style terrazzo, constructed with large irregularly shaped and randomly placed white marble slabs, is found in the side aisles [see Image 4 in Part 2 of this series].

⁷ Colossians 1:17

relationship with God, toward the One who is always fully revealed but cannot be fully grasped in this lifetime.

I will close this series of articles as I began: over 22 years ago, the beautiful geometric marble pavement in the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church captured my imagination. Often, I thought I had probably exhausted my study of its symbolism, then I read

something that sparks a new idea, or I have a conversation with someone who shares my interest in the floor, or I simply sit in prayer in the Archabbey Church. In those moments, I realize that my mathematical and spiritual journey with the floor will be a lifelong exploration of the many layers of meaning in its design.

I hope that the thoughts I have shared about the history, geometry, and symbolism of the pavement will prompt or give new direction to your own spiritual journey. As before, I would enjoy hearing from you: mreichardt9634@comcast.net.

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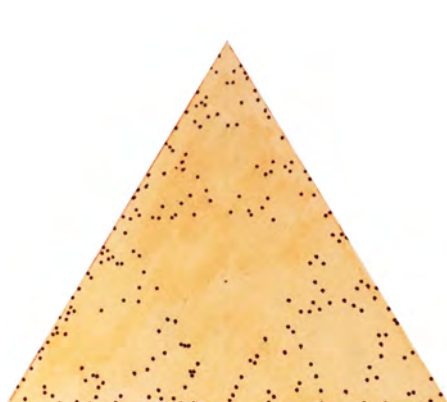


Image 5: Chaos Game (250 repetitions).



Image 6: Chaos Game (1,000 repetitions).

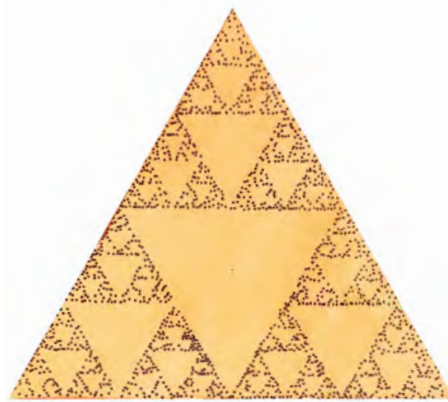


Image 7: Chaos Game (5,000 repetitions).



OBLATE NEWS

DEATHS

James Watkins, of Random, West Virginia, died on March 28, 2023.

Mark Fetter, of Louisville, Kentucky, died on September 26, 2023.

Eddy Poor, of Taylorsville, Kentucky, died on October 22, 2023.

Michael Langdon, of Indianapolis, Indiana, died on December 9, 2023.

Michael Witka, of Noblesville, Indiana, died on December 25, 2023.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Investiture and Oblation Rites: March 2, 2024; June 8, 2024; September 28, 2024

Oblate Events/Retreats: March 19-21, 2024: Lenten Retreat; June 10-13, 2024: Study Days; July 11, 2024: Day of Recollection

Oblate Chapter Coordinator Meeting: August 26-30, 2024 ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Br. Gregory Morris, Fr. Eugene Hensell, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Meinrad Brune, Fr. Jeremy King, Br. Zachary Wilberding, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, Fr. Simon Herrmann, Fr. Thomas Gricoski, Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, and Br. James Jensen; seminarians, Br. Agustin Lopez and Br. Stephen Johnson, Nov. Andrew Levering; and oblates Marie Kobos, Joanna Harris, Michelle Blalock, Teresa Lynn, the Oblate Council and Finance Committee members, Quarterly Editor Kathleen Polansky, and Assistant Editor Angie McDonald. ♦

Articles sought for future issues!

The *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites oblates and oblate novices to submit news and information about your chapter or write an article about your Benedictine journey.

We also have a theme for each upcoming issue that we welcome you to reflect on and submit an article. Finally, please submit a book review for the Reading Room column.

All submissions must include your name, city, and state. A maximum 700 words is suggested for all submitted articles. If choosing to add sources, please use endnotes and *not* footnotes. Send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com.

Upcoming themes and submission dates:

Summer – Final due date: May 1, 2024 (Self-esteem vs. Ego)

Fall – Final due date: Aug. 1, 2024 (Women of Faith in the Life of the Church)

Winter – Final due date: Nov. 1, 2024 (The Power of Ritual in Monasticism and the Lives of Oblates)



OBLATE RITES SEPTEMBER 2023



On September 23, 2023, 14 people were invested as oblate novices and six people made their final oblations during the Oblate Rites in the Archabbey Church. Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, presided over the rites.



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Reading Room



Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading by Paul Saenger, Stanford University Press, 1997.

This is not an easy read, but I'm willing to bet it will be an interesting read.

We take for granted that, in written texts, there are spaces between words. Just like what

you're reading now. That wasn't always the case. Saenger does a detailed job of filling you in on why there were once texts without spaces between words, and then follows the advent of placing spaces between words beginning around the seventh century CE.

The vocabulary of the book is rough, but a glossary is provided. While reading this tome, I frequently flipped back to the glossary, finally slapping a sticky note on the first page of the glossary to mark it! What kind of words? Take a gander at these: interpunct, monolexic abbreviations, parafoveal vision, foveal vision, dasia, diastole.

So why read this? Because it's very interesting. The first sentence of the book states, "Modern reading is a silent, solitary, and rapid activity. Ancient reading was usually oral, either in groups, or individually, in a muffled voice" (p. 1). The remaining 300 pages answer why that shift in reading occurred.

Whether *lectio divina* or the Hours or the *Rule of St. Benedict*, oblates spend a great deal of time studying and praying with texts. This book explains how (not why) we read those texts. It provides good background on texts used in classes, especially my Catholic Spirituality class where we tackle (among other masters) Cassian, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux. I think anybody out there teaching English would find this book interesting.

This is not casual reading. Find yourself a quiet place to hunker down with highlighter in hand and give it a go. I think you'll like it.

*Mark Plaiss, oblate
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