

Reinhart, Dietrich, OSB. "The Heart's Deep Gladness and the Hunger of the World."

Benedictine Pedagogy Conference 5/30/08
Benedictine University, Lisle, Illinois

The Heart's Deep Gladness and the Hunger of the World
Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB
Saint John's University (Collegeville, MN)

My title today is a distillation of a sentence from the writings of the novelist and Presbyterian minister, Frederick Buechner: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." I begin with these words, but I must confess that when Alicia Tait contacted me six months ago about giving a keynote on the 10 hallmarks of Benedictine education set forth by Association of Benedictine College and Universities, gladness was not at the top of my mind.

A year and a half earlier, the fog had lifted at a tangled meeting and somehow I found that I was the person who had to put into a single voice a document that had originated with 5 monastic authors (meeting here at St. Procopius Abbey and Benedictine University) and had been evaluated from every angle imaginable by grassroots discussions on 14 campuses, only to be torn apart and re-formulated by 14 presidents and even more prioresses and abbots working across two days as a committee of the whole and then in 10 different working groups, one per hallmark. A half-dozen dedicated (and – thank God! – relentless) reviewers and editors lent a hand, but some of them wanted more hallmarks, others fewer, still others a whole different list. Then we started the whole process over again to locate all we had written within the intellectual tradition of Catholicism itself, terrain infinitely more contested. I would still be schlepping around drafts of an endlessly revisable statement, if I had not hit upon a one liner that became my mantra: "the fundamental job of ABCU is not the writing of statements." I thought it had worked. Then Alicia wrote and asked me to write and deliver a keynote address about this statement. I began to experience real dread. Everything I know, more than I actually know, is in that statement. What more can I say about it?

I have tried to understand my fears about putting this talk together. It might come from the distance this topic is from my typical preoccupations with fundraising and external relations, all the while addressing campus problems in a mind-boggling, unremitting stream of e-mails, phone calls and meetings. I have so little time and space to engage in deep reflection on what makes for the fundamental work across a dozen plus Benedictine colleges and universities and a somewhat larger number of Benedictine high schools in our country. Of course, distance from reality has rarely stopped a president from pronouncing on deep matters within the academy. So if you recognize my limitations, I am willing to give this a shot. But realize that this address is meant to function primarily as an appetizer. The deep core of this important conference comes in the sessions that follow, it comes from the ideas and insights shared by each of you in this room.

I have one more caveat before I plunge into my remarks: My entire professional career has been spent in higher education, so that what I say may be more relevant to colleges and universities. But I recognize that secondary and post-secondary education, for all their differences, do not exist in worlds that are hermetically sealed from one another.

- For one thing, high school students (touch wood) become college students. College can just as easily stifle students, as high schools can launch them. High school can just as easily let students down, as colleges can give them a wonderful new start. Perhaps talking across the secondary ed. / higher ed. boundary is our best hope for sustained and creative support of students' growth from childhood into the uncharted paths of their adult years.
- In addition, education on both secondary and post-secondary levels deals with content. Presenting knowledge must take account of the different capacities of students, but the deep, fundamental core of knowledge is one. And breakthrough strategies in pedagogy, the need to match content to different and evolving capacities to learn, is often best nurtured by conversations with uncommon partners. So I stand in awe of this gathering

I can only frame remarks in the world I know – higher education and, more specifically, Saint John's University and our educational partner, the College of St. Benedict. If what I am about to say is off the mark for high school, remote from the actual reality of college teaching, or for that matter doesn't speak to colleagues from colleges and universities of a different character than Saint John's, I hope that dealing with that rupture between speaker and audience can enrich this conference and highlight the importance of your leadership in the broader world of Benedictine education. My remarks are organized in five sections, so let me begin by talking of

1. What it means for Benedictines to have hallmarks

St. Benedict called the monastery “a school for the Lord’s service” and set forth basic values and parameters to shape community life and guide the behavior and inner disposition of the individual monastics. So reflection on the Rule can provide remarkable insights into the nature of education and pedagogy. But Benedict did not write a charter for Benedictine schools. Throughout the ages there have been treatises on the education and formation of monks and nuns, but nothing like the Jesuits’ Ratio Studiorum, codified after the first decades of Jesuit educational work as a program for the education of lay students throughout an entire religious order.

In lots of ways Benedictines are the congregationalists of the Catholic Church. Our fundamental social reality is the indigenous monastic community – monks and an abbot they have elected from their midst, sisters and a prioress they have chosen from their ranks. With a few exceptions in history and across the world, whatever congregational or international structure there is for Benedictine monasteries is primarily there to support the vitality of autonomous monastic communities. The autonomous monasteries that sponsor our schools are in different congregations – different congregations of men, different congregations of women – and when those congregations have general chapters, they focus by and large on topics directly related to the life of the monasteries themselves, not on their apostolates. So there is no Benedictine counterpart to what an apostolic order like the Society of the Sacred Heart, has done – enacting a statement of “The Goals and Criteria for Sacred Heart Schools in the United States” and then setting up a Commission to conduct visitations of each of the 21 individual schools across America every five years to ascertain how effectively each school follows those goals and criteria.

So when ABCU’s 14 institutions sought to develop the statement on the Benedictine wisdom tradition, we started by reflecting in a fundamental way on what in the Rule of St. Benedict, drawn up 1500 years ago for life in a monastery, could be relevant to the work of higher education in contemporary America. We wanted to identify educational values that welled up from Benedictine life, values that were present when the missions of our educational institutions first crystallized and their trajectories were set, realizing that each educational community had a different origin and path of development. After a long, iterative conversation drawing on contributions from many different campuses, we arrived at ten values: love, prayer, stability, conversatio, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality and community.

We described how each value is set forth in the Rule and embodied in monastic life. Then we suggested – by analogy – how those values can be manifest in an educational community founded and sponsored by a Benedictine monastery. We went a little further and called these values “hallmarks,” a term suggesting that how extensively, how successfully each value is manifest can be evaluated – that, once assessed, what is strong can be more deeply understood, celebrated and shared, and what is weak or underdeveloped can be looked at clearly and reinvigorated. And having set up that expectation, we left it to each individual college and university to decide how to begin to use these hallmarks.

We wanted the statement to serve also as a resource for new presidents of our colleges and universities (most of whom are lay people), something for them to use in taking the pulse of the campus community and working with colleagues to frame goals for the future. We also wanted the statement to be of help to new prioresses and abbots of our founding and sponsoring monasteries (a significant proportion of whom have not worked in our educational institutions before election as a monastic superior), something for them to use in taking the pulse of how the two communities – monastic and educational – interact and fostering effective communication and collaboration.

We expected that each campus and each sponsoring monastery would want and need to make the statement its own, to redesign and recalibrate it in light of its own spirit and traditions. No two educational communities will pursue that task the same way. Each will prioritize differently the important work of

- engaging in the study and reflection, conversation and debate that allow a campus to focus on its core commitments;
- framing goals for strengthening those commitments,
- pursuing the resulting actions (in spheres from curriculum to co-curricular programming; hiring, orientation and professional development; architecture and design; all the way to marketing and communications); and
- assessing outcomes – in that recurring cycle so important to institutional vitality and, of course, our accreditors.

We also thought that a common template such as this could help Benedictine colleges and universities learn from each other’s experience and make it possible for us to create resources and insights to share more broadly with one other. Our ultimate goal is that each campus possesses a lively Benedictine character that can be renewed on an ongoing basis as the numbers of monastics wax and wane. In support of that goal, we are seeking to create resources and networks to assist our member institutions in fostering understanding of the Benedictine hallmarks

among students, faculty, administration and staff, as well as parents, alumni and the boards of each of our campuses. But I am getting ahead of myself. I need to step back and address

2. Why it is important that there be such a thing as hallmarks of a Benedictine institution of education

It is a commonplace in American higher education that colleges and universities founded initially out of a powerful religious inspiration have moved over time to the status of essentially secular institutions of learning. George Marsden has written the definitive treatment of how this has happened to liberal Protestant institutions of higher education and Fr. James Burtchael, CSC has identified haunting parallels across all denominational boundaries, including Catholic higher education. Without weighing in on historical causality, it is easy to see how the religious mission of our colleges can erode. So much of American culture operates on the premise that religion is a deeply private matter, "individualist, experiential, and eclectic," something private, akin perhaps to a hobby or a special interest, just fine as long as it stays within bounds. In addition, all our academic disciplines except theology are relentlessly secular. Framed according to Enlightenment notions of reason, objectivity and progress, modern academic disciplines are willing to study religion, but are ill-at-ease and suspicious of religion's manifestation, especially if it takes a communal shape or seeks to foster spiritual development as part of an educational program.

Without entering into historical debate or cultural analysis, it is obvious that Benedictine institutions of education have been undergoing huge changes as the number of sisters and monks once active in teaching, service and leadership has diminished.

Melanie Moray and Fr. John Piderit, SJ describe this broader development in Catholic higher education as a "cultural crisis." They write that "in order for [Catholic colleges and universities] to sustain a vibrant Catholic identity and culture, they will need to replace the witness community of knowledgeable and committed cultural icons who were the members of religious communities. No organizational culture can survive or flourish without a visible witness group ... that has both knowledge and commitment."

My colleague, Bill Cahoy, the Dean of Saint John's SOT•Seminary, suggests the challenge we face is really a huge backlog of "deferred maintenance on institutional mission" We have to do something right now. He describes it this way: "We inherited a structure built by the monastic community. It's solid, reliable, functional. But the monastic maintenance crew shrinks; it is able to do less and less, and some things do not get done. The building is still standing, and we can go on for a while, probably for some time – after all, monks do tend to build for the ages. But as with buildings so too with mission: eventually, even in the best of them, this deferral catches up to us."

Framing hallmarks of Benedictine education is an effort to undergird a massive effort at institutional re-vitalization that needs to engage the very best effort of our campuses and schools lest we go the way of so many church-related schools – Benedictine in origin, but not much else. One comes up against immense lethargy in seeking to renew institutional mission. We know the nostrums. "If it is not broken, why fix it?" "We have gotten along just fine in the past. We're already busy enough! Why stir things up?" Paradoxically, there can be bitter misunderstandings and even anger as we attempt to focus on the Benedictine character of our institutions – as if a palpable institutional mission articulated in religious terms must be an attempt to invade individual conscience, a precursor to requiring personal testimonials of faith.

Social scientists talk of the complexity of the modern university – they ask us to reckon with the collegial life of its faculty, the operations of its bureaucracy, and the give and take of its politics, but to be sure look deeper to the repository of values present at the founding of an institution, values created in moments of opportunity and challenge, and living on as lodestar for the wise or ambush for the unwary. In seeking to renew our educational institutions in light of the hallmarks of Benedictine education, we are attempting to open up that repository of values, to tap into the energy present at the founding of our institutions and bequeathed to us by the generations before us – if only we would make it our own.

At the heart of Benedictine life there is a powerful drive to integrate what one knows into life and to do so until our life simply bursts out of all that holds it back – to engage all the tough and painful demands of learning and the disjunctures that are part and parcel of faith until "we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love." The Rule is an extended invitation to dwell on the spiritual truths at the core of human life, by daily immersion in study, work and community life, mindfulness and prayer. Bill Cahoy frames this approach in stark contrast to "the modern, western, post-Enlightenment, scientific world, particularly the world of education, [where] we tend to assume that the relation between knowing and living, between what one knows and how lives is uni-directional and that direction is from knowing to living, from theory to practice." He says

that “the monastic tradition (wisely) recognizes that sometimes the movement is the other direction: knowing, understanding, wisdom also flows from how we live. Practices of charity, regular prayer, lectio, obedience, humility, and hospitality may yield understanding and not just be a product of understanding... [W]isdom has to do with the interplay of knowing and living, it is a matter of character and virtue, and the Benedictine tradition manifests this in particular ways.” The question, however, is

3. How the hallmarks can have an authentic role in our educational institutions as opposed to within monasteries themselves?

We took pains in the ABCU statement to differentiate between how Benedictine values are imagined and experienced in a community of monks and sisters vowed to live together for a lifetime and how they are manifest within an educational institution – where the commitments of faculty and staff are deep, but mediated by contracts and catalogs rather than vows; where grounding in the mission is always in dialogue with other commitments – to one’s profession, one’s family, neighborhood, church and town; and where the largest group of participants, the students, enter into the community with the explicit purpose of moving on to life elsewhere.

It is easy to imagine that the work of embodying Benedictine educational values is done by sisters and monks – we just need to give them space and encouragement and they will set the tone, do the heavy lifting, keep things in focus for the institution. This viewpoint is not all that uncommon in our institutions, but it has obvious problems. There simply are not enough monastics in our monasteries or schools, not enough now, not enough as far as the eye can see. But you know, to expect that only the Benedictines can tend the deepest mission of our schools is a profound misreading of the importance of lay people to our institutions.

It was moms and dads – lay people all – who scraped together the resources for our first students to attend our schools and supported the risks we asked their children to take on behalf of learning and character formation, even as part of their hearts was breaking to see their children go away and grow away. That is true in every age. In addition, over the last fifty years, lay people have assumed greater and greater roles in our institutions. They do more than add water and stir the ingredients that Benedictines provide. They play a decisive role in every part of our institution. But it can be easy for lay colleagues to feel at times that their role is bounded, tied to special tasks, while institutional purpose and direction is framed and decided elsewhere.

From the start, the graduates of our institutions – overwhelmingly lay – have been the fiercest advocates for the core purpose of our schools, something they often discover essentially in hindsight, but that is nonetheless a precious realization. And, of course, something new is always going on in our students. So much of our work as educators is to keep up with the remarkable, unpredictable growth and development of our students. It is what keeps us alive, on our toes and always stretching. For all the age-old wisdom that resides in Benedictine bones, there is always something brand new that emerges in working with lay colleagues, finding common purpose with parents, staying in relationship to alumni and, of course, encountering the individual student in all of his or her particularity. St. Benedict calls these persons, who are not themselves monastics, “the guest” – not outsiders at all, but actually Christ himself bringing something new, something salvific, into the lives of monastics.

So we need to engage the lay people in our educational communities on their own terms. As Sr. Mary Collins from Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, KS says, we need to recognize the dedicated lay people among us, ask them how they came to be inducted into our educational mission, and listen hard to what they tell us. Conversation between monastics and lay colleagues, and of both with students, parents and alumni (in what Sr. Mary calls “intergenerational interaction in favorable settings”), conversation is what will anchor the Benedictine hallmarks for the long haul – conversation between those who have vowed to follow the way of life set forth by St. Benedict and those who represent Christ bringing questions and expectations, context and purpose to all that a Benedictine educational community sets out to do.

We all have a big job ahead of us: seeing the relationship of our teaching and service to monastic culture and not just the norms of the profession, inviting others to do the same, breaking down any residual sense of insiders and outsiders, as we talk and listen to others puzzle over how what we do in our educational institutions relates to love, prayer, stability, conversatio, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality and community. The ABCU statement tries to seed conversations about what those values mean in a monastic context and, by analogy, what they can mean in an educational context for lay people. What we want to see is a Benedictine culture in our schools that is rich and authentic, and every bit as palpable as that of the monastic community itself. Which leads us to ask

4. How the hallmarks can be used by our schools in concert with our monastic communities themselves

Our monasteries are growing smaller. They have been growing smaller for decades. Note I say “growing smaller” not “shrinking.” The numbers of sisters and monks is certainly shrinking, but our monasteries often have new vitality as they grow smaller. Their particular Benedictine character is stronger. We experience more interest in prayer and spiritual direction from people outside the monastery, more new ventures in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. The new members we get, quite frankly, are more often drawn to the common life and the new apostolates of prayer, hospitality and dialogue than to service on our schools. New sisters and monks have already had careers. They join monasteries for something other than a career. And we know that education on all levels demands the very best of its faculty, administrators and staff. It cannot be taken up lightly or half-heartedly.

The tenor of the ABCU statement is meant to invite new monastics to see the bridges between the new life they have embraced and the educational service undertaken by colleagues overwhelmingly lay in the Benedictine wisdom tradition. We hope that the institutional renewal called forth by educational communities embracing the hallmarks of Benedictine education can serve as an invitation for newer sisters and monks to imagine that educational work can give voice to their monastic vocation, provide a venue for plumbing the depths of Benedictine spirituality, and along the way play a powerful role in enlarging the significance of their lives.

Recognizing the reality of change within our institutions, we are trying to chart a way to move from “monasteries founding and running a school” to a strong schools with deep traditions and extensive support, each “a school enlivened because it has a monastery at its heart.” This is a different relationship than has perdured from the past, but if cared for with creativity and wisdom, this new relationship can create arenas for vital Christian living and service, each following the venerable Benedictine tradition of being a seedbed for the social and cultural renewal so desperately needed in the larger world.

5. Task ahead of us

The task before us is to make explicit the values at the heart of our schools, powerful values that were pervasive when monks and sisters predominated on our faculties and have lived on as sources of inspiration as monastic colleagues have become fewer and fewer in number.

We need to explicate Benedictine tradition so that we can find room for it within for the lives of all the members of our academic communities. The hallmarks point the way, but far deeper inquiry and reflection has to occur. Examples abound. I'll give just three.

My confrere and colleague, Fr. Columba Stewart has drawn on decades of study and teaching of the Rule to craft a protean talk on “Pedagogy in the Rule of St. Benedict” that he delivered at last November’s meeting of the International Conference on Benedictine Education in Santiago, Chile. Available at the Benedictine Educators’ website, this talk sets forth six pedagogical principles founded in the Rule: (1) the fundamental attitude of listening, (2) the importance of priorities and perspective, (3) the recognition that all learning is relational, (4) that relationships are ordered, (5) that true learning is developmental, and (6) that some lessons are more important than others.

There is a remarkable reflection on how *lectio divina* actually can serve as the fundamental practice for teaching in Maria Lichtmann’s book, *The Teacher’s Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (published by Paulist Press). Dr. Lichtmann speaks of the careful attention, reflection, receptivity and transformation that come from close reading of texts, of one’s students, fundamentally of one’s self. She argues that “replenishing the underground springs of a teacher’s own inner life” is the indispensable requirement of professing one’s discipline and helping students to deal with the “dislocation” that is always as such an important part of helping them find their own voice.

And then there are remarkable talks on “Globalization and Education: A Benedictine Response” and “The Benedictine Wisdom Tradition Meets the Catholic Intellectual Tradition” that Sr. Mary Collins has presented in recent years for the International Conference on Benedictine Education and ABCU, respectively (and available on each organization’s website). Each talk is a model of careful reasoning and deep reflection on Benedictine values. Sr. Mary concludes the latter talk with a statement that helps me move to the end of this address: She says that the Benedictine wisdom tradition and Catholic intellectual tradition “will be alive on campus only if you who lead and sponsor Benedictine colleges and universities, and your associates in classrooms and offices, are yourselves possessed by them.”

This brings us back to Fredrick Buechner. “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Benedictine education is nothing if it does not position itself right at the juncture of that place, where a person’s deep gladness meets the hunger of the world. Two vectors so often pitted against each other, but actually deeply intertwined. To educate our students for the world in which they will live their adult lives –

a world multicultural and global beyond our wildest reckoning, beset with massive environmental change, in which the quality of one's inner life, one's core purpose, will be under pressure and in which it will be easy to lose one's moorings – requires nothing less than a deep revitalization of the well-springs of our educational communities' core values.

It is a great joy, the deepest of gladness, to help our students discover:

- the ground on which they stand;
- the voice with which to articulate, sometimes haltingly, the deepest truths of their lives;
- eyes and ears to see beneath what is commonplace and draw deep inspiration;
- inner resources to reckon with challenges, difficulties, contradictions – to bear with them until, again and again, fresh insight emerges; and
- hands to take what they have learned and internalized, and put it to the service of others.

These are the practices cultivated by St. Benedict, handed on to the monastics who seek to live by his Rule, and the most precious aspects of the educational mission of our institutions. What you are about in this conference is of fundamental importance to your schools and all Benedictine high schools, colleges and universities. Thank you for your attention. I wish you abundant blessings in this important conference.

1 Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 95.

2 See for example Aquinata Böckmann, OSB, *Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict: Expanding Our Hearts in Christ* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 33-49 and Columba Stewart, OSB, "Pedagogy in the Rule of Saint Benedict," International Conference on Benedictine Education, Santiago, Chile, 2007, <http://www.b-e-net.org/study/2007.shtml>.

3 See <http://www.sofie.org/resources/other/>.

4 George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994) and James Tunstead Burtchaell, CSC *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998)

5 Michael Robertson, "Reading Whitman Religiously," *The Chronicle Review*, April 11, 2008, B6.

6 Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Religion on Our Campuses: A Professors Guide to Communities, Conflicts, and Promising Conversations* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) provides a cogent analysis of how religion fares in the academy and insights into how conversations about it can strengthen a campus community.

7 Melanie M. Moray and John J. Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006). 272.

8 William J. Cahoy, "Benedictine Wisdom & The Catholic Intellectual Tradition," Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities, 2006, College of St. Scholastica, MN, 2006, p.4, <http://www.abcu.info/essays.html#essays>.

9 Morey and Piderit set forth a powerful typology of Catholic colleges and universities, four different models, each with a different goal: (1) Catholic immersion, (2) Catholic persuasion, (3) tending to a Catholic diaspora and (4) forming a Catholic cohort (54-55). They argue that in seeking to strengthen its Catholic identity, a Catholic college needs to know what model it is following in order to pick the right strategy. (273). If this is accurate, then each ABCU institution needs to know what model of being Catholic it is following before it sets about deciding how to embody the Benedictine hallmarks. I suspect that those hallmarks can be adapted to either model, but there will be different strategies for each. This is a horizon that individual campuses and ABCU as a whole could benefit from discussing in some depth.

10 Bensimon, Estela M. et al, *Making Sense of Administrative Leadership: The "L" Word in Higher Education* (Jossey Bass, *ERIC Digest*, 1989).

11 RB Prol 49.

12 Cahoy, pp. 6-7.

13 Mary Collins, OSB, "Globalization and Education: A Benedictine Response," International Conference on Benedictine Education, 2005, http://www.b-e-net.org/study/2005globalization_education.shtml]

14 Columba Stewart, OSB, "Pedagogy," pp. 12-21.

15 Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (NY: Paulist Press, 2005).

16 Mary Collins, OSB "Globalization and Education" and "The Benedictine Wisdom Tradition Meets the Catholic Intellectual Tradition: Shall We Gather at the Altar?," ABCU meeting, 2007, Benedictine College, Atcheson, KS