



Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

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Leadership and Humility: Discussion

Sr. Johanna Becker, OSB, Karen Bissonette, Joanne Flynn, Patrick Henry, Ph.D., Sr. Rosemary Huber, MM, Elizabeth Padden-Lobue, Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB, Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, Br. David Steindl-Rast, OSB, Dr. Bonnie Thurston, Fr. Julian von Duerbeck, OSB, Ven. Yifa

from **Benedict's Dharma, September 2001**

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Patrick Henry: Thank you James. I want to thank you for reading some passages from the book. It reads really well out loud. Most of what you were reading were items from the texts that the authors wrote. Some of the passages, the ones that are in quotations marks, are from the transcript of the conversation in San Francisco and I would expect that to sound conversational. But it is very gratifying and reassuring to discover how conversational even the more formally written materials are. I can imagine monasteries using this as a text to read at meals, because it does really read well.

Finally, when you talk about the young men at the school at St. Anselm's who say they can't imagine it because they don't like the idea of stability, staying in one place, I wish they could meet my dear friend and the founder of my institute, Father Killian McDonald who just celebrated his 80th birthday last Sunday, who probably has accumulated more frequent flyer miles than any CEO anywhere, and who, when asked about his vow of stability, says, "That means, each July 11th I need to be in Collegeville to renew my vows." [laughter] So stability does include the possibility of traveling a whole lot in this day and age. So, thank you very much for all of that and especially for letting us hear these voices read. It was very rich for me. The floor is open.

Andre Delbecq: There is an interesting concept emerging in the new



Sr. Johanna Becker, OSB, holds a PhD in art history. Although retired, she continues to teach Asian art history classes. She is a member of the Monastery of Saint Benedict, Saint Joseph, Minnesota.

All articles by or about Sr. Johanna Becker, OSB



Patrick Henry, Ph.D., (here on the left with Fr. Patrick Barry) recently

career literature. People come to Silicon Valley and are amazed that the average person works for less than two years in any particular company. What they do is they accept the mission in a particular organization, complete a task, then move to another setting for a new engagement in learning, then move to another organization to take that new set of skills to another mission. The notion is they pitch a tent, they don't build a castle. They see their employment in the industry as opposed to any single company. And it's very much the ethos of the young professionals. It's not a form of selfishness and it's not a matter of being ephemeral and it's not a lack of loyalty. It is rather the sense that given the great dispersion of knowledge and information, etc., that one has to be willing in a sense to have the humility to get on your donkey and move on and learn new things and be in another setting and bring your gifts to another setting. So as you do vocational recruitment, you have to understand that among communities, at least in the West Coast, it is the young person's perspective that it's selfless being willing to unpot yourself and either to carry out a mission that requires courage or to go to a place to learn new skills. Just to contextualize that sense of mobility among the young, it might be a helpful comment.

Patrick Henry: It strikes me that there is within Buddhist tradition, certainly an ancient tradition, the notion of the monk as wanderer, which would sound rather like this and some of the early Christian monks who are not very well regarded by Benedict in the catalogue of kinds of monks. It may be that some of those monks whom Benedict dismissed, maybe that style of monastic life needs to have another look at it.

Yifa: Yes, I'd just like to clarify some of what James said about the monks in the Zen tradition. Yes, in Tonson, from the 8th century to maybe the 13th century, for the public monastery, monks were wandering around. That was traditional. But I have to point out that nowadays you don't see much about the public monastery, that means the monks and nuns don't wander around or stay in the monastery for a short term. Right now, it tends to be more long term, so our temple is more like a Benedictine order. If you enter this order, then you have to stick with this order your whole life. So when I give that number of 1500 monks and nuns, that means you have to stick with Fo Guang Shan for your whole life. That's one thing I want to point out.

retired as executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota. He was the editor of *Benedict's Dharma*.

All articles by or about Patrick Henry, Ph.D.

Sr. Rosemary Huber, MM, is a Maryknoll Sister whose ministry in hospital management brought her into dialogue with Buddhists in South Korea, with Muslims in Indonesia, and finally with Hindus in Nepal. She served as an advisor to MID and now resides in Monrovia CA where she is in charge of a retirement home for Maryknoll sisters.

All articles by or about Sr. Rosemary Huber, MM



Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, **Fr. Thomas Ryan** resides at the North American Paulist Center in

You also mentioned that there are over 1000 monks in South America. I want to point out that, in our temple, of the men and women come to the temple, 60 percent have a college education. Some of them could be CPAs or CEOs or lawyers in society. They come to the temple, not for shelter, but both for their career and also spirituality. I have the feeling this afternoon that I made a statement where I should have known more about the Christian monastic tradition in order to make that comment. You need more understanding and sympathy to learn other traditions. I hope I didn't make too provocative a statement and I apologize for any offense I caused to people. I think I should be more humble to learn more. Thank you.

Father David Steindl-Rast:

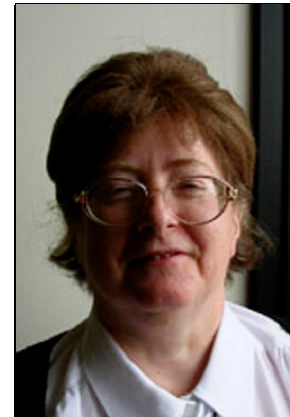
This is probably very well known by most, but it is worth mentioning in this context again of young people not wanting to stay in one place, that the Camaldolese model is different. There you have the traditional Benedictine Cenobitic community but you also have a second pole which is the outreach into mission or any work in the world for the monk and that is then counterbalanced on the other side by the hermitage. So that the Camaldolese model really has three poles, not just the Cenobitic community. And Merton thought that that was quite promising for the future and I think many of us think so.

Bonnie Thurston: This is simply anecdotal and it has to do with the fact that the icons have small mouths and big ears. One of my early spiritual teachers said the Lord God gave us two ears and one mouth which means we should listen twice as much as we talk. [laughter]

Joanne Flynn: I've never had a chance to thank the Zen Buddhist tradition for some of the silence skills that I learned from them which started about 15 years ago. I was studying Thomas Merton and I was interested in his letters to Ernesto Cardenal because I had been in Bolivia for three years. And I stumbled across his letters to Zazen Suzuki and a road began. I couldn't put that road away no matter what I did. I just want to say three things about silence over these 15 years: that Zazen, the Kahen Tai Chi, were areas of discipline where I learned a deeper silence than I learned in my own Catholic-Christian tradition. It was sorely needed at the time, and it was very hard because our tradition is not silent on many levels.

Washington DC, and works for Christian unity and interfaith relations through a variety of formats: interreligious dialogue, retreats, on-line courses, graduate instruction, workshops, etc. He has served on MID's Board of Advisors.

**All articles by or about
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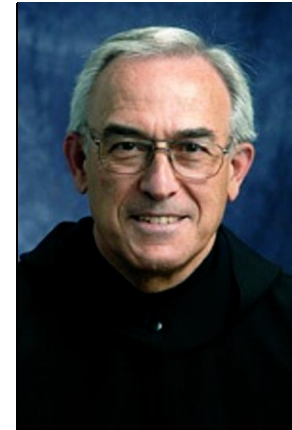
Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB, is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. She contributed to the conference on Benedict's Dharma in September 2001 and participated in Nuns in the West I and II. She lives at the community's ashram, Osage Monastery in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, and is a member of the Board of Directors of MID.

**All articles by or about
Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg,
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I remember on an eight-day Zendo, at the third day running up to the Zen master and saying I had this marvelous feeling, I could forgive this person and the image just popped up, and he said sit down [laughter]. No words, no images, no nothing, sit down. And I noticed at the end of that eight days that the only way I could describe it was I felt that my eyes had been Windexed and all of a sudden I saw the most ordinary thing in a clear way. So I want to thank you very much. And I want to say that when I got half way through a Ph.D. in theology, I got a bright idea at a traditional Jesuit university to try to go to the psychology department and the theology department and have some kind of controlled study where one floor of a company would have a couple of quiet rooms where perhaps they would have Zazen or some of the other things, and another floor that wouldn't. I spent about six months on this and I fell flat on my face. And it was only this weekend with the image of that business building of 110 floors crumbling in front of me that I truly believe that the depth of silence we're being called to is a miraculous depth. It's not about whether we're growing or not growing, or financially solvent or not. It's about whether we're going deep enough into that silence that the impossible occurs.

Linda Cavanagh: Recently, over the past couple of years my husband and I have had the opportunity to worship with the unprogrammed Quakers, and I just want to say that what I learned from them in terms of silence was as deepening as what I've learned from Buddhists and the contemplative Christians. And for those of you who don't know their witness to social justice is quite profound. So, we've come to call ourselves either Quabutions or Quabulics, we're not quite sure [laughter]. But I think it demonstrates some fluidity that flows from this struggle to really be who we are and to honor the different traditions.

Thomas Ryan: Just in response to Father Wiseman's conjecture about contemporary vocations, it's my understanding that the Benedictine sisters of Erie, PA are experimenting with a program where people can come and spend a year or two years with them. Perhaps someone can speak to that and other models, or is that the only one that we know of? What kind of reflections within that community is that experiment coming out of?



Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, has been the Secretary General of DIMMID since November 1, 2008. Prior to that he served as chair of the MID board from 2000 to 2005, and as Executive Director of MID until his appointment as Secretary General. He is a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, but resides at Sant'Anselmo in Rome.

All articles by or about Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB



Br. David Steindl-Rast,

Patrick Henry: Is there anyone here from Erie?

Unknown woman: I was in Erie and I met a woman who was about 60 and she was a mother/grandmother and she was contemplating entering, and it was a three-year process and it's happening quite frequently now.

Patrick Henry: Yes, I remember talking with Joan Chittister about such an idea probably twenty years ago. They have been thinking about this for a long time but now are actually acting on it and advertising. I've seen some of their ads in magazines, not in Playboy [laughter], I think as David was remembering some orders do. I think it is an experiment that everybody needs to watch very, very closely. Because there you have a strong community with a fair number of young sisters. Indeed, my heart was very much warmed when I heard that 35 of the young sisters there said if the Vatican does anything to Joan, they do it to us too. So you have a very strong and committed community there. And for them then to be experimenting with this, clearly they don't need temporary members in order to keep their community going. Father James, I agree with you entirely that it would be a big mistake for any community to inaugurate something like this simply as a way of keeping the numbers up. There has to be some sense of mission and vocation that lies behind it.

Sister Sarah Schwartzberg: I can't speak to a temporary membership program as such, although we do have that at Osage Monastery. But about three years ago, as part of our long range planning, we started a volunteer program. And people can come for a few weeks or a full year with an option for a one-year renewal to live and work with the sisters. Now there are some issues around that, concerning boundaries and enclosure and silence and so forth. They do have their guidelines. They have their opportunity for mentoring and the participation in our liturgy. All the evaluations on that have been excellent. What I find as director of that is that it appeals to two types of people. One is recent college graduates or semester-break kinds of experiences for young women. I discourage men at this point because we can't accommodate them. And the other is women in mid-life. And all of them are trying to seek a balance of prayer and work, and to be able to make Jesus a focus of their lives. They find that by their time in the monastery they are able to at least get some kind of handle on

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**All articles by or about
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that. We had our first experience with a non-Catholic, a Quaker, this past month and she also had a very positive experience with us. But there are issues concerning boundaries as I said, and how it is outlined and how it's presented up front as what the limitations are on that are very important to establish.

Patrick Henry: It seems to me that there can be few surprises more startling to me and perhaps to some of you than to think back 20, 25 years and to be told that national news magazines would have three-page stories about people breaking down the doors of monasteries to spend retreat times there. Books about monastic spirituality are selling in the hundreds of thousands. The interest, the hunger for what monasticism represents is really extraordinary and I don't think anybody could have predicted it. So what you're talking about is a particular instance of people responding to this kind of opportunity and people recognizing that these traditions may have some stored-up wisdom they can use. Perhaps some of you remember, at the end of his provocative and quite influential book, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre ends by saying, "Looks as if a new dark age is upon us and we are waiting a new St. Benedict." He could of chosen lots of things to say at the end, but it seems to me that that was a clue as to the depth of the crisis and the relevance of your address to it.

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