

ABSTRACT

To Gladden the Heart: Brewing and the Monastic Tradition

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The main elements of the Benedictine Rule, “ora et labora” or prayer and work, combined with the emphasis on hospitality came together in the process of monastic brewing. The development of the brewing tradition within monastic communities allowed for the development of self-sustaining communities. Intellectual, spiritual and physical exercises interact to give monastic brewing its distinctive characteristics. The beer produced in these communities reflects a concern for quality, for local sourcing, and for “gladdening the heart.” This is, indeed, the correct way to both make and consume beer.

**TO GLADDEN THE HEART:
BREWING AND THE MONASTIC TRADITION**

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CHAPTER ONE

The History of Beer

The Ancient World

The origins of beer-making can be traced to the fourth millennium B.C. in the region of Mesopotamia. According to Richard Ungar in his *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, “a site in the Zagros mountains of western Iran [which] yielded the earliest botanical evidence of beer-making, dated to about 3500 B.C.”¹ However, this was not a large-scale operation but probably most akin to home-brewing nowadays. This kind of small, home-scale brewing seems to be the only type of brewing that existed for approximately the first one-thousand years of brewing. As historians note, there is no mention of “a complex that may have served as a brewery [or] the first mention of the trade of brewer [until] the mid-third millennium B.C.”² This makes sense because the knowledge of beer-making, and even beer in general, would have taken much time to become widespread and popular enough for the need, or want, of any sort of larger-scale operation. Even in those days beer was closely connected with religion and spirituality. As Ungar notes, “Beer was thought to have both magical and medicinal powers”³ The *Epic of Gilgamesh* gives evidence to these powers in Enkidu who drank ale for the first time. Because of the “seven goblets” of ale that he drank, “his mood became free, he

¹ Richard Ungar, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

started to sing, his heart grew merry, his face lit up.”⁴ One could argue that this happiness is just due to the alcohol content, not any sort of spirituality, but the usefulness and blessings of beer were seen to extend far beyond this.

In his fascinating study, *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages*, Patrick McGovern, a professor of Anthropology and Director of the Biomolecular Archeology Project, writes about the genetic and evolutionary origins of the human attraction to fermented beverages. He writes that some primates are known to enjoy both the taste and effects of fermented fruits. Therefore, the earliest form of alcohol seems to be an accidental discovery of this mature, fermented fruit. McGovern observed that the use of alcohol in moderation can have many social and physical benefits. From this, he notes that, in our evolutionary development, the use of fermented drink coincides with the development of “uniquely human traits”: “self-consciousness, innovation, the arts and religion, all of which can be heightened and encouraged by the consumption of alcoholic beverages.”⁵ McGovern too acknowledges that in many areas of the ancient world, particularly in Egypt, beer is “imbued with powerful ritualistic and symbolic significance,” an essential part of marriages and funerals. As he puts it, there is no beer, there is no ritual.”⁶ He also notes that beer, unlike wine, is a universal beverage. Like bread, it is a “staple for commoners and Kings alike.”⁷

⁴ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Andrew George, trans. Penguin Classics, 1999, pp. 100-105.

⁵ Patrick McGovern. *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer and Other Alcoholic Beverages*. University of California Press, 2009, p. 27.

⁶ Ibid. p. 252.

⁷ Ibid. p. 244.

Ancient peoples treated the brewers themselves as if they occupied some sort of holy office; there was even had a goddess of beer. "Some brewers appeared to have an official function, wore certain specified robes of office, and were associated with temples... beer seems to have played a significant role in offerings made to the gods at altars. There was even a goddess of beer, Ninkasi [whose] status [came] from having given the art of beer-making to humankind."⁸ Brewing and even beer itself was seen as something sacred, a gift from the gods, which could almost make the brewers themselves intermediaries between man and the gods. The connection between beer and spirituality continued as religion itself evolved. "For monks and nuns, beer had spiritual and medicinal functions which may date back to the ninth century."⁹ However, the medicinal powers that some monks and nuns believed beer to have seem much more magical than medicinal, which is evidenced by "Hildegard of Bingen [who] urged the use of beer made from barley or wheat in the treatment of lameness."¹⁰

In this early period, Herodotus describes beer-making by the Egyptians in terms of wine. It is simply a type of wine made with barley instead of grapes. Herodotus explains why this is so, saying, "They use a wine made from barley: for there are no grape vines in their land."¹¹ He is pointing to the fact that, by and large, wine was limited by geographic location. This is partly because the grapes could only be grown in certain

⁸ Ungar, p. 15.

⁹ Ibid. p. 27.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Herodotus. *The Histories*. Aubrey de Salincourt, trans. Penguin Classics, 2003, 2.77.

favorable climates, and many of these Mesopotamian climates were too harsh for them. Beer-making, on the other hand, could thrive in virtually any climate because of its reliance upon grains. Thus, beer “dominated the region and was pre-eminent in ancient Sumer, Akkad, and Babylonia, “the so-called cradle of civilization.”¹² The extensive language surrounding beer-making, the frequency of its usage in “sayings and idioms,” and the complexity of beer and beer-making itself “suggest widespread production and a vibrant drinking culture,” which is evidenced by the many taverns in existence during this time.¹³ The high status of beer and the fact that it was not limited geographically gave rise to its widespread popularity. This status, later on, would be all but destroyed in mainstream culture, with beer being seen as lowly (especially when compared to wine) and only for peasants. But in its origins, beer was both more widespread and more elevated than wine. Beer, however, had to be kept near the consumption sites because it did not travel well in the Mesopotamian climate and could quickly become undrinkable.¹⁴ This worry was not quelled for many centuries, until the introduction of hops, which kept beer drinkable longer.

Brewing existed in Egypt as almost as early as in Iran, near 3500 B.C. Women usually performed the brewing in Egypt, and beer was consumed by all social classes, in large quantities”¹⁵ The amount of beer that they consumed was so large that Pliny

¹² Robert Curtis, *Ancient Food Technology*. Brill, 2001, p. 88.

¹³ Ungar, p. 16.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁵ Louis Hartman and Al Openheim, “On beer and Ancient Brewing in Ancient Mesopotamia.” Supplement to the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Baltimore: American Oriental Society, 1950, p. 10.

described Egypt as a place where “drunkenness never ceases.”¹⁶ He, like Herodotus, describes beer as a type of wine. For Pliny, beer is just undiluted wine. Pliny explains that the Egyptians “...make [a] similar drink [to wine] from their own grains...Of course, they drink such juices unmixed (with water) and they do not soften the drink [beer] by dilution as is typical with of wine. And, by Hercules! In Egypt it seems as if the earth is prepared (entirely with) grain. Alas, what a marvelous skill of terrible things! They even discovered how to get drunk on water.”¹⁷ Here, Pliny seems to lament the discovery of beer, or, if not the discovery, the way Egyptians seem to abuse it. It seems as if he almost sees it as a danger (because of the abundance of grain and the propensity for drinking in Egypt) and maybe even something less civilized than drinking wine (because they do not dilute it). However, a reason for drinking this much (and not diluting their beer), may relate to nutrition. Egyptians got a majority of their calories and vitamins from drinking beer.¹⁸ This is also one of the theories for why monasteries started brewing beer. Monks had to fast often, so beer was seen as a way to get many needed nutrients during this time. Beer, in this case, was better than wine for the monks because it was much more substantial and filling. Of course, the monks, unlike the Egyptians, drank in moderation.

As these classical civilizations developed, so did the arts of brewing. “Breweries in Egypt as in Mesopotamia could be sizeable. A site identified as a brewery excavated at Hierakonpolis is estimated to have had a capacity of more than 1,200 liters per week so output was for more than domestic consumption. A brewery in Syria from around 1500

¹⁶ Pliny, *Natural History*. John F. Healy, trans. Penguin Classics, 1991. 14.51.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ungar, p. 18.

B.C. had stationary vessels with a capacity of up to 350 liters.”¹⁹ To put this in perspective, modern day monks in Norcia, Italy built a brewery that only had a capacity of 250 liters before their expansion. Even with their expansion, the brewery’s capacity is still only 1200 liters.²⁰ This amount is still very small for a monastic brewery nowadays; the smallest Trappist brewery, Westvleteren, has a capacity of about 5,000 hectoliters. Nevertheless, these figures show the impressive scale on which breweries started out at and the more modest scale on which the monks at Norcia currently brew. Even if the Norcia brewery does expand to 3000 hectoliters, which is probably needed due to popularity, and which will dwarf the size of their old brewery, that is still only 60% of the production of the smallest Trappist brewery. And, it is still far below the output of the ancient brewery at Hierakonpolis.

The Carolingian Period

It is impossible to overstate the significance for brewing of the development of monasticism in the Middle Ages. Indeed, “the first large-scale production of beer in medieval Europe took place in the monasteries which emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries... The political revival of the eighth and ninth centuries associated with the Carolingians, and especially with the reign of Charlemagne, was critical in promoting the development of estate or official production.”²¹ This went hand-in-hand with the Carolingian promotion of the Rule of St. Benedict and the brewing tradition already

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰ Visit to the brewery in Norcia, Italy. June, 2017.

²¹ Ungar, p. 26.

established within the Frankish kingdom.²² The Rule called on the monks to be self-sufficient by the labor of their own hands, offer hospitality to guests, and live largely within their specific monastery's compound. Brewing beer accomplished all of these things and supplemented their ordinary diet. Exemplary in all these respects was the monastery of St. Gaul.²³ "Indisputable evidence that monks made beer in the Carolingian empire comes from grants awarded to monasteries of the right to use gruit. The state had the power to control the use of gruit, which was, by far, the most popular additive for ale throughout the early and the high Middle Ages in most of northwestern Europe."²⁴ Essentially, gruit "was a combination of dried herbs, including wild rosemary [and] bog myrtle [which is associated with willow]."²⁵ Gruit had many of the same qualities as hops. Both "gave beer a specific and unique taste, a specific smell, and some resistance to spoilage"²⁶. Both also were controlled and/or taxed by the government.

One of the great advancements in the process of materials for brewing had to do with the use of hops. Here, too, monasteries were crucial. "It [also] appears that hopped beer brewing, at least on a large scale, began in the big monasteries of the Carolingian

²²Alessandro Barbaro. *Charlemagne: Father of a Continent*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 228.

²³ Walter Horn and Ernest Born. *The Plan of Saint Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of and life in a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. Vol. 2. p. 261.

²⁴ Ungar, p. 30.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶ Ibid.

era.”²⁷ For example, “the prominent Carolingian abbot Adalhard of Corbie in 822 laid down detailed methods for the preparation and distribution of hops in the context of brewing cervisia. Abbot Ansegis of Wandrille (c. 830) talked about beer made with hops.”²⁸ Hops had been raised in the gardens of monasteries during the eighth century, if not earlier, and were originally used in a purely medicinal fashion.²⁹ The monks’ belief that beer had medicinal powers and the fact that monasteries already had hops at their disposal may have led to the experimentation of producing beer with hops. But the use of hops goes much further back in history. It already had a long tradition of use before the medieval period: flavoring for the Romans, an “aid for liver problems” according to Pliny the Elder, and “medical benefits” from eating them according to Strabo.³⁰ The fact that the Romans used hops for flavoring and that there was also “linguistic evidence connecting hops with intoxication” probably made experimentation with hops attractive.³¹ However, the more widespread use of hops does not seem to come until the thirteenth century when they were “... widely cultivated throughout northern Europe and had many different uses, among them replacing grain... in the making of beer.”³² The Carolingians were ahead of their time in many things, including the use of hops in

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ungar, p. 54.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Strabo. *The Geography* and Pliny *Natural History*.

³¹ Ungar, p. 53.

³² Ibid., p. 55.

brewing, and the monks, as is often the case in this period, were at the center of this development.

Historians have vacillated regarding the significance of Charlemagne's reign, but "the current state of academic research... allows us to revise the term used twelve centuries ago" and "speak of Charlemagne as a father of Europe."³³ The Carolingian age was the "basis for the demographic and economic recovery that became clear around 1000 A.D. and from which modern Europe was born with all its overwhelming vitality."³⁴ In all areas of public life—economic, judicial, intellectual and religious—Charlemagne brought about reformation and renaissance.³⁵ As centers of both religious practice and learning, the monasteries were central to both the reform and the renaissance. Charlemagne tried to unify religious practice in part by insisting that all monasteries follow *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, a copy of which—believed to have been written by the Saint himself—he ordered brought to him from Montecassino.³⁶

Both Charlemagne and Alcuin, who was sent for by Charlemagne from London to join him, were already well-versed in the quality and tradition of beer." In 778, Charlemagne himself said that he was going to have a brewery at his court so that the quality of his beer could be maintained."³⁷ Alcuin also was heard to have "...complained

³³ Barbero, p. 3.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

³⁷ Ungar, p. 26.

about the bitterness of continental ale.”³⁸ Charlemagne and his court’s love for beer, the Frankish tradition of brewing beer, and their promotion of The Rule led to the proliferation of monastic brewing. This was to prove very important for the whole future of beer production because “Monks introduced a new form of organization to brewing and the new form served as a model for later developments and for the long-term evolution of the industry.”³⁹

Although Charlemagne and his promotion of monastic brewing led to its proliferation, Charlemagne was not responsible for starting the first monastic breweries. We do not have very good records of these early years of monastic life so what historians have to say about brewing in this period is somewhat speculative. “Jonas of Bobbio, in his *Life of Saint Columbanus* written around 665, mentioned beer as an alternative to wine but also notes it was not liked in a number of places. Monasteries were the only institutions with quantities of surplus grain on any kind of scale, so they were alone in having resources which would allow large-scale brewing. They also had the capital to build the necessary facilities.”⁴⁰ St. Benedict specifically talks about the consumption of wine in his Rule—but not beer. Therefore, it seems that monasteries would have been producing their own wine since the beginning of the monastic period. However, it seems that Jonas of Bobbio suggests that some monasteries produced beer, as a substitute for wine, possibly only if wine production was not possible. This possibility, plus the monasteries’ possession of excess grain and capital, point towards a tradition, though not

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

yet widespread, of brewing before the Carolingian period. Later, brewing of beer was given official sanction. “At a church synod in 816, it was agreed that shortages of wine in monasteries were to be made up with beer.”⁴¹ This agreement may simply have recognized a practice that many monasteries were already engaged in and may have been the reason why the synod accepted the practice so quickly.

The unique feature of monastic brewing is that it is more than providing drink. In the monastic tradition, beer is connected to the spiritual lives of the monks. Especially in the Benedictine tradition, it is connected to the elevated role of manual labor. The Benedictine commitment to the motto “ora et labora”, and to the offering of hospitality to guests are important features of monastic life. In fact, running parallel to the development of monastic brewing is the expansion in the Middle Ages of inns or travellers houses, where beer was served. For guilds of local workers, beer consumption fostered “fraternal feelings” and a sense of “solidarity.”⁴² In this way, beer fostered community both inside of and outside the walls of the monasteries.

The Brewing Process

From the earliest civilizations up to the time of the Romans, we can detect a clear line of development in processes by which beer was brewed. The earliest Mesopotamian brewers seem to brew similarly to the beer goddess Ninkasi, who “...was said to mix bappir [a “beer bread” made from either malted barley or emmer, which is a type of

⁴¹ Ungar, p. 29.

⁴² Gregg Smith. *Beer: A History of Suds and Civilization from Mesopotamia to Microbreweries*. Avon Books, 1995. pp. 20-21.

wheat] with sweet aromatics, such as the root skirret, which tasted like licorice, and honey to help fermentation.”⁴³ The first stage of malting the barley was in and of itself very time consuming. The barley had to be doused and then either “buried it in the ground or dried it in the sun for up to three weeks.” After this “germination,” the malt would have heat applied to it in kilns and then the malt would have to be crushed and occasionally would be “sieved to get out the hulls.” From here, they would make the beer bread, crush it, and add water. “They heated the mixture with occasional stirring” and then cooled it off before adding “various sweeteners to increase fermentable sugars” including “honey, wine, or the juice of dates.” This wort would then be transferred to a vat “where heavier matter settled out and fermentation took place.” They most likely relied on airborne yeasts for fermentation and could change the taste of their beer by adding spices at some point in the brewing process. “From the fermenting containers, the drink went into cleansing containers something like pottery jars where it was allowed to settle, or it was put directly into...sealed jars for consumption.” Xenophon tells of the need to drink this with a straw, and also, like Pliny, points out how strong this type of beer was because it was usually consumed undiluted. Xenophon explains, “There were wheat, barley, pulses, and barleywine in the mixing bowl and grainy things floating at the brim. Straight straws...were placed inside. When thirsty, one puts it in the mouth and sucks. If someone did not pour water over it, it is thoroughly undiluted [very strong].”⁴⁴ The straw was needed to keep all these floating grains out of the mouth of the drinker. Therefore, the straw was the earliest form of filter in beer-making. Also, Xenophon

⁴³ p. 17.

⁴⁴ Xenophon. *Anabasis*. Rex Warner, trans. Penguin Classics, 2004. 4.5.26-7.

explains that the undiluted beer was "...very pleasant to one who has acquired the taste."⁴⁵ From this, we can see that beer was and always will be an acquired taste. It would seem that many probably started out drinking diluted beer and then eventually gained enough of a taste for it that they wanted something stronger, and thus started drinking the undiluted beer.

Egyptians are thought to have had a similar brewing process, however, "there may have been only light or no flavoring in Egyptian beer."⁴⁶ Later, in the eighth century and on, it was found that "beer could also be made with dates in place of grain."⁴⁷ Later, Roman brewers had a much easier time as they had

ovens that could have easily served for drying malt. In general, Romans probably roasted their malt to stop the malting process, to make it easier to grind, to increase the content of sugars, to promote fermentation, and to enhance flavor. Roman practice was a step beyond Egyptian practice since brewers there resorted to adding only a little water to the grain to ease the work of milling. Roman brewers certainly had one great advantage over their Egyptian predecessors in that they had wooden barrels. Strabo first mentioned casks about 21 A.D. so it was the first century A.D. when the Celtic invention came into use in the empire. The casks made brewing, packaging, and shipping much easier.⁴⁸

Throughout the early and high Middle Ages, gruit was used to give flavor to the beer. At this time, too, all of the brewing still happened in one vessel; the mashing and boiling processes were not separated. This led to some believing that gruit was related to grain because they were all mixed in at the same time. "Water and malt were poured in

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Herodotus. *The Histories* and Pliny *Natural History*.

⁴⁷ Ungar, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

together and heated along with any additives [gruit] the brewer thought would help. After boiling, she or he put the resulting liquor in wooden troughs or barrels to ferment. If the malt went directly into the brewing vessel, then additives were probably mixed with the grains first, so surviving documents might leave the impression that gruit was related to grain.”⁴⁹ Many beer recipes had other additives in addition to gruit, including: “ginger, anise, and cumin... laurel, marjoram, mint, sage, and acorns.”⁵⁰ Gruit gave beer some resistance to spoilage, but hops made beer last much longer than gruit and allowed beer to be exported long distances.

Hops were first used by the Carolingians in the 800’s but the first mention of the use of hops in other contexts comes from the “medical practitioners and teachers of Salerno... [who believed] that hops functioned as an effective diuretic, and... the best results came from drinking beers heavily hopped.”⁵¹ The widespread use of hops, at least in Northern Europe, does not seem to have happened until the thirteenth century.⁵² This came on the heels of an expansion of beer due to “The increase in the number and size of monasteries in general, but also their spreading across Europe, reaching previously unsettled areas in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, [which] presumably promoted beer brewing.”⁵³ Hops allowed the consumption of beer to spread even further. This is due to

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵² P.R. Ashurst, “Hops and their Use in Brewing.” in *Modern Brewing Technology*. W.P.K. Findlay, ed. Macmillan, 1971, pp. 32-34.

⁵³ Ungar, p. 34.

the fact that “Hops gave beer greater durability. Certain hop resins, extracted during boiling, helped to prevent infection of the wort and beer by various bacteria. Hops keep beer from contracting diseases. Since hopped beer could last longer it traveled better... In the absence of hops, the way to contain bacterial growth had been to raise the alcohol content. So beer with hops could be less strong than its predecessors... [Beer] now joined the few foods that would keep for months without becoming indelible.”⁵⁴ There was now a commercial market for beer; it was no longer a local commodity. This also fueled competition, even though German hopped beer dominated the market for the first two hundred or so years.⁵⁵

The use of hops was also probably responsible for creating the separation between the mashing process and boiling process. This separation is something brewers still practice today.⁵⁶ The addition of hops to beer also made many view it as “a higher quality product” than it was seen as before. Beer also enjoyed a price advantage over wine in some areas, including northeastern Europe.⁵⁷ “The development of quality beer with hops made possible not only the long-term growth of the brewing industry, but also the gradual erosion of the market for wine and the slow migration south and west of the border between the regions where wine was preferred to beer.”⁵⁸ Wine prices eventually started rising, so in relation, beer prices were falling. “In general, changing real incomes

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

in the late fourteenth century in the wake of the Black Death worked to the advantage of hopped beer brewers.”⁵⁹ At the same time, the brewing industry of the northern Low Countries was on its way to producing only hopped beer. This expansion of hopped beer brewing in the Low Countries and the creation of a trading network led to increased competition and an even greater expansion of hopped beer brewing into other areas of northern and western Europe. This led to the “golden age” of brewing from about 1450 to the seventeenth century. During this time

Though levels of output as well as the number and size of breweries varied... brewing expanded in those years. It grew as population increased. In some places in northern Europe, it grew faster than the population. It enjoyed unprecedented economic success. Beer invaded new parts of Europe, claiming of reclaiming territory where wine was the preferred drink. The higher quality of hopped beer compared to its predecessors, the greater efficiency of producers over time, and improvised distribution all combined to make beer an increasingly popular drink.”⁶⁰

This popularity of hopped beer, combined with the fact that beer’s price point was much more appealing than wine’s, and the ever-increasing taxes on wine, led to the “beer border” moving steadily south. More and more people were choosing beer over wine because it was something that they could afford to drink every day. Wine was now only truly bought for special occasions. It had gotten to the point where not even skilled laborers could afford to buy wine for daily consumption.⁶¹ Beer’s lower prices were due to the fact that Brewers found that it was more cost efficient to produce as much as they could and ship [or export] as much as they could at one time. Because of this realization,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

the market was flooded with a vast increase in beer and this in turn triggered a decline in prices or guaranteed prices would stay low.⁶² However, this had a negative impact on small brewers in the seventeenth century. They were no longer able to compete with the massive output and growth of these bigger breweries that were being actively supported by the government or relevant authorities.⁶³ Governments sided with these bigger breweries because of beer's immense success as an industry in the fifteenth century and "beer production and beer sales served as excellent sources of tax income."⁶⁴ These same breweries were also very important in their "contribution to the development of local and regional economies."⁶⁵

Information about the technical aspects of beer brewing spread far and wide during the Renaissance because of the greater number of modes of communication. This allows us to know many more details about the equipment and ingredients used and the brewing process itself. For example, a German brewer in 1539 wrote a book "...on how to deal with serving beer, how to maintain its quality in the cask, and what to add to counteract deterioration during storage. Fresh eggs, salt, hops, a handful of ashes, and even a little wine at the right time could improve beer or save it from being undrinkable. The longer the beer could be kept, the greater the need for some additives before serving."⁶⁶ While it seems doubtful that eggs or ashes could possibly improve beer, it is

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 231-232.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

nonetheless interesting in seeing how creative some brewing methods were. Overall, it seems that the equipment used and the brewing process itself stayed the same from 1400 until about the 17th century. The biggest and longest lasting improvement around this time seems to be “...the setting of the brewing kettle on top of an iron grate set on a furnace” to better regulate temperature.⁶⁷ This innovation would seem to have cut the overall brewing time down substantially in addition to allowing for greater temperature control throughout the process. Eventually, “By the early seventeenth century, bricked ovens under large kettles with some plumbing to move water and wort to and from the kettles were part of virtually all urban breweries.”⁶⁸ This kind of plumbing seems to be an early version of what many brewers have today, a kind of closed system with tubes going from mash tun to boil kettle, connected to a power source which siphons the wort through the tubes. This ensures that no wort will be lost in transfer from the tun to the kettle and also most likely helps with heat retention.

Another firsthand account an inventory list dated from 1468 in England tells us of other advances in technology around this time. “There were no less than twenty small tubs of yeast and a loose wooden frame with small openings or false bottom for the mash tun.”⁶⁹ The false bottom is a very crucial piece of equipment and is still used today. This, ultimately, would give brewers a much clearer beer because the bottom strains most, if not all, of the grains out of the wort before the beer is transferred to the brew kettle. This

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 146-147.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 147-148.

may have replaced the “vat for letting unwanted matter settle out” (as referenced in a London will from 1335) or could have been used in combination with it to get maybe an even clearer beer.⁷⁰

Refrigeration, which is especially important for fermentation, however, was not developed until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Because there was no temperature control, many brewers were not allowed to brew in the warmer months.⁷¹ Many locales prohibited both brewing and malting in the summer because “... malting and fermenting needed cool and even temperatures... it was... common knowledge that the best malt was made in the winter.”⁷² This led Bavarian brewers to brew “March beer” which was made with a greater number of hops and had a higher alcohol by volume and stronger taste. Because of that, this beer would last far into the summer months. This helped them “compensate for the lack of summer production.”⁷³

Hops, although used for many centuries before, did not become the most common additive to beer until the sixteenth century. It had totally replaced gruit, which only had the “slightest evidence” of use in the Netherlands at this time.⁷⁴ Other common additives at this time were “sugar, honey, spices (such as cinnamon and cloves)... dried stems, roots, leaves, and flowers of plants... cherries, sloes, and raspberries.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 150.

⁷² Ibid., p. 148.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Including new additives, brewers at this time looked into new ways to

eliminate impurities and unprocessed vegetable matter. They tried a pig's or ox's foot but also burned salt, clean sand, lime, ground oak bark, and the more modern option of dried fish membranes as finings to make for a clearer beer. Bruges brewers skinned the feet of oxen and calves, boiled them to get rid of the hooves, and then hung them along with other items like berries or an egg, in a bag in the brewing kettle.⁷⁶

Infection was a very big problem in the early and high Middle Ages when brewers were relying on airborne yeasts for fermentation. At this time, brewers mainly had their own yeasts that they controlled and maintained, which was much less risky than airborne fermentation.⁷⁷ However, brewers should have still been worried about infection because of precisely what they were putting in their beer to try to “eliminate impurities.” If anything, it would seem that adding “dried fish membranes” and “a pig or ox’s foot” would introduce impurities and make it much more likely for the beer to be infected. It should also be mentioned that “pure yeast” was not possible until the invention of refrigeration equipment in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

This “golden age” of beer could not last. Ironically, beer’s success led to its own downfall. Brewing became so widespread that there was no longer a need to import hopped beer. To a lesser extent, the wide fluctuations of grain prices over the years also created a somewhat unpredictable burden for brewers. At the same time, brewing faced increasing competition from wine and brandy, spirits, and tropical drinks. As brewers

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

⁷⁷ Karl-Ernst Behre, “The History of Beer Additives in Europe—A Review.” *Vegetation History and Archeobotany* 8 (1999), pp. 35-48.

⁷⁸ Ungar, pp. 152-153.

faced different limitations, requirements, and increasing taxes by governments and local authorities, brewers could no longer maintain profitability.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theology of Work

Laborem Exercens

In his encyclical on work, *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II develops a theology of labor based on an interpretation of scripture, especially Genesis. He explains the reason for emphasizing this text:

The Church finds in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth. An analysis of these texts makes us aware that they express-sometimes in an archaic way of manifesting thought-the fundamental truths about man, in the context of the mystery of creation itself. These truths are decisive for man from the very beginning, and at the same time they trace out the main lines of his earthly existence, both in the state of original justice and also after the breaking, caused by sin, of the Creator's original covenant with creation in man.¹

He proceeds to focus on the creation of human beings and the divine command: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." He admits, "these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work," yet adds that "beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world." The imitation of the divine creator is implicit in this command: "Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe."

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*. Paulist Press, 1988, p. 4.

He expands on this point later in the encyclical:

This description of creation, which we find in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis, is also in a sense the first "gospel of work". For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God both in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of work and rest.²

The New Testament, in the life of Christ and the teachings of Saint Paul, reinforces the notion of the indispensability and dignity of labor. As John Paul II writes: "This teaching of Christ on work, based on the example of his life during his years in Nazareth, finds a particularly lively echo in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Paul boasts of working at his trade (he was probably a tent-maker), and thanks to that work he was able even as an Apostle to earn his own bread."³

As have others, John Paul II notes that the Christian understanding of the dignity of work stands in contrast to the pagan "differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done."⁴ To slaves was assigned the type of "work which demanded... the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands." Building upon "certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament," Christianity transformed the understanding of work. The incarnate word of God "who, while being God, became like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the

² Ibid., p. 25.

³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

carpenter's bench."⁵ Thus, for Christians, "work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'."⁶

The reliance on Genesis brings to mind a possible objection to John Paul II's defense of the dignity of work. It might seem that the duty of labor enters into human history only as a punishment for sin, since it is only after he has "broken the original covenant with God," that man hears the "words: 'In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread'."⁷ John Paul II responds, "God's fundamental and original intention with regard to man, whom he created in his image and after his likeness, was not withdrawn or cancelled out." The reference to the "sometimes heavy toil that from then onwards has accompanied human work." They do not, however, "alter the fact that work is the means whereby man achieves that 'dominion' which is proper to him over the visible world, by 'subjecting' the earth."⁸

Other Papal Accounts

Popes focus on the connection between natural and human ecology. Benedict XVI affirms the reciprocal influence explicitly in *Caritas in Veritate*: "The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa."⁹ In a speech on

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. Ignatius Press, 2015, p. 16.

environment and health, delivered in March of 1997, John Paul II addressed the difference between environment as “resource” and environment as “home.” When modern society seeks “power over nature,” and sees nature as raw material for “unlimited profit-seeking,” it makes it difficult to see nature in a contemplative way. Here we can see that the Benedictine connection between work and prayer provides a counter to contemporary temptations and misunderstandings.

Dominating or subjecting the earth does not mean unlimited and arbitrary use of nature’s resources. The Popes commonly speak of the human stewardship over nature. In his recent encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis contrasts two ways of approaching nature: “nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled,... creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.”¹⁰ The subtitle of Francis’ encyclical, *On Care for our Common Home*, underscores the connection between natural ecology and moral ecology, between environmental conservation and the preservation of a culture befitting the dignity of human persons.

Contemporary papal writings on the environment and on the distinctively theological approach to it owe much to the monastic tradition. In a detailed study entitled *Holy Work: Toward a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor*, Dom Rembert Sorg examines the theology of work in Benedictine monastic communities. As Sorg cites, St. Basil explained:

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*. Ignatius Press, 2015, p. 76.

It has to be understood that the one who works must do so not to supply his own needs by his work, but to fulfill the Lord's command Who said: 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat.' For to be solicitous for oneself is altogether forbidden by the Lord saying: 'Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on,' and adding: 'For after all these things do the heathens seek.' Wherefore, in labor the purpose set before everyone is support of the needy, not one's own necessity. For thus will he avoid the accusation of self-love and he will receive the blessing of brotherly love from the Lord saying: 'Whatever you have done to one of my least brethren, you have done to me.'¹¹

Here, Saint Basil describes what work is supposed to be ordered to. Work is not something that is done only for oneself, to get a paycheck in order to take care of one's own needs and even wants, which seems to be our modern view. This modern view, in Saint Basil's eyes is "heathenistic," it is not Christian in the slightest. Work, instead, is to be ordered towards the needs of others. When the motive behind our work turns from something self-serving to something selfless, then we are doing God's work. As Basil points out, Jesus' work and ministry on this earth leaves the greatest example of truly holy work, what God intended each and every one of us to do.

The Example of Christ

This does not mean, however, that we should not care at all for ourselves, or our most basic needs. Our ability to provide these most basic needs—such as food and clothing—for ourselves "...is a self-love, which is image and likeness of God... [and] the first step towards, and the lowest attainment of, charity."¹² This is a form of charity because one does not need to rely upon others. It puts one in the position of being able to

¹¹ Quoted in Dom Rembert Sorg, *Holy Work: Toward a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor* (Santa Ana, CA: Source Books, 1923), 13. *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, Interrogatio 42 (p. 31, 1024f.)

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

“give to everyone who asks and ask nothing in return,” as is written in the *Didache*.¹³

This quotation also shows how important almsgiving is and how closely it is tied to manual labor. In fact, “...the early monks...devot[ed] all their surplus to almsgiving.”¹⁴

Almsgiving is a crucial part of charity. Because its focus is on others, it is a higher attainment of charity than self-reliance, but one still has to attain self-reliance first in order to be able to reach this stage. Almsgiving does not have to be monetary but can include work performed for others or goods given to others, as is exemplified in Jesus’ life.

Jesus’ example shows us what kind of work we should be doing and how it should be ordered. We can look back even further, however, all the way to creation, to find the reason why man is innately ordered to work, to perform manual labor, in the first place. It is because of the way God created us. “Man is intended to be the image and likeness of God Who is Lord and Owner of all things because he made them...He made us and he owns us. Consequently, one aspect of man's image and likeness is lordship or ownership which is acquired and exercised through manual labor. For, manual labor...continues and completes the work of creation.”¹⁵ Man, through his work, becomes the “*imago dei*,” or image of God by acting as His servant and his counterpart in caring for the land which He created.¹⁶ Man is at once both lord and servant through his work.

¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

He becomes lord over the land, but at the same time, is a servant to the Lord who created the land. Man's obligation to work can also be attached to original sin. Through work, we are receiving our due punishment for, and eventual satisfaction of, original sin. The satisfaction comes from the "drudgery," "sweat," "thorns and... thistles" that we are due to encounter in our manual labor.¹⁷ Because of this, it is unwise to pick an occupation that is "pleasurable or light," that lacks any sort of "physical exertion."¹⁸ The physical pains that one will go through in these "heavy" occupations seem like nothing when the reward of satisfaction of original sin is factored in. The body is temporary, but the soul is everlasting. Therefore, the acceptance of our due punishment is much more beneficial to us, trading temporary pain for everlasting bliss.

Manual Labor

Manual labor is also needed on a much more basic level, to prevent idleness. An entire chapter (48) of Benedict's *Rule* is devoted to "The Daily Manual Labor." The chapter begins with the stark statement: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul." Benedict's remedy is "specified periods of manual labor."¹⁹ Idleness is a vice that results from original sin, and leads to, first and foremost, temptation. Cassian stated that "... a busy monk is besieged by a single devil, but an idle one [is] destroyed by spirits innumerable."²⁰ In other words, manual labor brings peace and focus to an otherwise

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁹ *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Timothy Fry and Timothy Horner, trans. The Liturgical Press, 1981, p. 69.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

wandering mind. One is focused on the task at hand, and this brings a sort of calm to the mind, taking away any worries one may have. It is for this reason, their constant prayer and manual labor, that monks "...as far as humanly possible...are dead to comfort and luxury and even carnal needs."²¹ The peace of mind that comes from their lifestyle makes them realize what is truly important and orders their wants and needs correctly. The "unclean spirits" that humankind faces are conquered by the monks in their prayer, fasting, poverty, manual labor, and chastity.²²

For Benedict, manual labor is more than a remedy. As he puts it in the same chapter (48) on manual labor from which we just quoted, "When they live by the labor of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks."²³ Manual labor is something that God intended for us to do, and therefore it is a good thing and also something that must be done. When we choose idleness over manual labor, it is as if we are disobeying God himself, and that is why there is so much harm in it. "The deep anthropological reason which St. Basil had in mind for the harmfulness of idleness is human nature's obligation to labor. It stems from the fact that since God has given man the faculties and tools for work, he is bound to use them."²⁴ Our ability to do work (these faculties and tools we possess), then, should be seen as a gift from God. This gift "bears fruit" within the monks, in their "calm, tranquil peace and silence" and also allows their

²¹ Ibid., p. 20.

²² Ibid., p. 18.

²³ *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, p. 69.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

souls to become “blissful... with the Wisdom of God.”²⁵ In this manual labor, the monks are able to find peace, but more importantly, they are able to find God. There is a kind of contemplation that comes with this manual labor for many monks, and this contemplation is ordered towards God, who created this land on which we work, and more importantly gave us the faculties with which to work this land and produce great things from it. Among the traditional forms of work, agricultural and productive activities including brewing, are ordered to higher things. According to Pius XII, the mind is “...tranquilize[d], strengthen[ed], and lift[ed] up to higher things” through “prayer, work, and application.”²⁶

The collected and reflective soul is both a condition and a fruit of the monastic life. This is an important theme in Gregory the Great’s *Life of St. Benedict*. Speaking of Benedict’s early difficulty with a rebellious and murderous community of monks, Gregory observes, “every time we are drawn outside ourselves by too much mental agitation, we are not with ourselves even though we think we are. Because when we wander here and there we do not see ourselves.” Benedict always lived with himself... He was always aware of being before the eyes of the creator. He was constantly examining himself and he did not let the eye of his mind wander about.”²⁷

As Dom Rembert Sorg shows, even those who came before St. Benedict in the monastic way of life realized the importance of manual labor. They specifically pointed

²⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁷ *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great*. Terence Kardong, trans. Liturgical Press, 2009, pp. 22-23.

to agriculture “...as the ideal work for cenobitic communities.”²⁸ St. Basil was in agreement with this too, stating that this type of work was so suitable for monks because they could produce all of their needs right there at the monastery itself.²⁹ Their lives were thus self-sufficient as a community.

There is a story of a monk at Monte Cassino who came from a wealthy “aristocratic background”; he was accustomed to being served by slaves.³⁰ The young monk’s spiritual devotion often waned when he was asked to perform menial tasks in the monastery. He rebelled against the “humble tasks assigned to all the monks... the ordinary tilling of the soil, the daily weeding of the garden.” After his attempt to assign tasks that combined labor with the enjoyment of hearing spiritual conversation failed, Benedict chastises the monk for his pride and urges him to return to his cell and seek deeper self-knowledge.³¹

One of the most interesting features of Sorg’s book is the way it demonstrates the change concerning labor that the monks brought about. What Benedict quietly introduced was nothing less than a revolution in the understanding of human work in Western civilization. The Roman view of manual labor, including agriculture and any kind of work deemed “servile”, is that it should only be done by slaves, or those of the

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *Man of Blessings: A Life of St. Benedict*. Paraclete Press, 2006, p. 107.

³¹ Ibid., p. 108.

lower classes, such as serfs.³² Romans had such contempt for manual labor because of this hierarchical view, and preferred taking part in political discourse or philosophical thought. The monks that still held on to this Roman view were called pusillanimous monks. They suffer from this “false cultural prejudice” against manual labor and are not seen as “true monks” because of this.³³ They are not using “the faculties and tools for work”, which is God’s gift to them. “St. Benedict erased the distinction between slave and free by teaching his monks that they are all equal in their slavery. This was a direct Christian challenge to the contemporaneous paganism, latent in the Christian culture of his times; that is, in the person of the pusillanimous.”³⁴ St. Benedict taught that we are all “slaves to God” and that this kind of servility is something to be celebrated, not looked down upon.³⁵ This servility brings us closer to Christ, who was the ultimate servant, ministering to all those in need. Jesus was not “too good” for servile work, as many Roman freemen thought they were. However, St. Benedict’s rhetoric must have made an impression on many of these freemen because out of all the wide-ranging “vocations to St. Benedict’s monastery... a good percentage of them came from the class of the Roman freemen.”³⁶

The Abandonment of Manual Labor

³² *Holy Work*, p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

According to St. Gregory's *Dialogues*, St. Benedict practiced what he preached. Gregory's account of Benedict's life contains stories of St. Benedict "... working in the fields with his monks at Monte Cassino... [and] supervis[ing] the clearing of the land at Subiaco."³⁷ Gregory's *Life* contains numerous examples of Benedict's monks building and working with natural materials.³⁸ However, his example and his stress of the importance of manual labor was not enough to keep many monasteries from eventually straying away from work. If we move "from St. Benedict to the apogee of the Benedictine Order, as represented by the Cluniac Congregation during the reign of Peter the Venerable (1122-1156), we find that manual labor was practically abandoned by the monks...Peter the Venerable suggested that all manual labor of monks should consist in copying books."³⁹ Cluny started to focus more and more on prayer and intellectual work until all manual labor was abandoned and hired-out to servants. The book-work—copying and illuminating—of the monks performed an important function in medieval, Christian culture. There was a real need for such work.

As Christopher Brook puts it in his book, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages*:

All books were handwritten on parchment at this period, and thus extremely expensive and, by our standards, extremely scarce. A thousand books made a large library in the Middle Ages, and if a hundred or two hundred monks wanted to read the same book, it could only be accomplished by a public reading. Public reading was a much more essential part of their life than we can readily grasp; this helps to make

³⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁸ See, for example, *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great*, pp. 50, 52.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

sense of the long lessons at Matins and the solemn readings at mealtimes in the refectory.⁴⁰

The culture of book-making, copying, and illustrating was part of the renaissance of learning initiated by Charlemagne. It contributed directly to the spiritual life of the community of the monks and to others.

The attention to books was undoubtedly a kind of physical labor; yet the old-fashioned work that produced sweat on the brow fell increasingly out of favor. The neglect of manual labor was in part made possible by the exorbitant wealth of the monastery at Cluny. Brooke explains,

As living standards rose in the twelfth century, the difference between the ascetic Cistercians and the more luxurious secular aristocracy became much sharper, and the Cluniacs were tempted in some measure to follow the latter. The Cluniac life was a traditional mode, based in the Rule of St. Benedict...but based even more on custom, a tremendous ritual, which left little time over for most of its members for much adventure in the life of prayer or intellect⁴¹

“Cluny provoked the Cistercian reform which made such a strong point of restoring manual labor for monks.”⁴² This reform was started by Robert of Molesmes, who is seen as the founder of the Cistercians. The Cistercians saw the need for reform as many monasteries were starting to stray away from the principles, especially of manual labor and poverty, put down in the Rule. They believe what Pope Pius XII believes, who “... lauds Benedictine manual labor [and] places intellectual work alongside it as a

⁴⁰ Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages*. Paulist Press, 2001, p. 76.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

⁴² *Holy Work*, p. 51.

complement, not a substitute, in the Benedictine apostolate."⁴³ It is all about getting back to a true living out of the Rule. Benedict would probably not have even recognized Cluny as being monastic because they were not living out the monastic lifestyle that he had laid down. As Brooke puts it, "Criticism came above all from the new orders, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux poured out his wrath against rich monasteries, including Cluny, in his...Apologia. Bernard accuses them of being too rich, of living too delicately, of adorning their churches with preposterous ornaments and of not testing the vocation of the novices or giving them sufficient instruction before admitting them."⁴⁴

The Return to a Theology of Work

The change in the ranking of manual labor from the ancient world to the Benedictine community does not mean that the monks neglected those activities prized by the ancients: communal discourse and contemplation. Nor are the Benedictines celebrating manual labor for its own sake. Manual labor is only something truly special when it is joined with the Divine Office. When this happens, manual labor "...itself takes on the character of prayer."⁴⁵ When manual labor is treated as a part of the liturgy, then its properties change. It is re-ordered with the ultimate goal that this work will be pleasing to God, just as prayer is pleasing to God. Manual labor becomes another form of communication with God, through interaction with His creation. It allows the "...work itself [to] become a pure love of God."⁴⁶ In addition, "...the monks, the tools, and the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁴ *The Age of Cloister*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ *Holy Work*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

products of their labor were made sacramental by the liturgy. The products are holy because they are God's direct possession."⁴⁷ Manual labor's importance is elevated, and everything used in it and all that comes from it belongs to God, and therefore is good and holy. "All these points are tied together by the fundamental idea that the monk's sacramental function in Christ's Body, and the peculiar life which he supports by his labor, is the Divine Office. Precisely because the latter is an *Opus Dei*—God's own work—the spirit of God in the monks does both the work and all the manual labor that subserves it."⁴⁸ Manual labor becomes so closely tied to sacramentality and prayer, that, just as in sacramentality and prayer, the monk's will is so closely aligned with God's will, that they become one and it is as if God himself is participating in the manual labor with the monks.

From the time of Charlemagne, the monasteries became in many communities the center of civilization. They were at the center not just of religious life but also of the economic and cultural lives of local communities. Dom Cyprian Alston points out that "around many of the greater monasteries, towns grew up which have since become famous in history...Large-hearted abbots, eager to advance the interests of their poorer neighbors, often voluntarily expended considerable annual sums on the building and repairing of bridges, the making of roads, etc., and everywhere exercised a benign influence, directed only towards improving the social and material condition of the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

people amongst whom they found themselves."⁴⁹ Of course, the monasteries practiced almsgiving: "the profits accruing from the labor of monks were employed ungrudgingly for the relief of the distressed, and that in times of famine thousands were saved from starvation by the charitable foresight of the monks."⁵⁰ Alston sees the monastic elevation of manual labor as central to the monks' success in influencing and leading local communities: "The principle of labor was a powerful instrument in the hands of the monastic pioneers, for it attracted to them the common people who learned from the monasteries thus reared as from object lessons, the secrets of organized work, agriculture, the arts and sciences, and the principles of true government."⁵¹ The simple embrace of manual labor thus has many unanticipated benefits.

⁴⁹*The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. Charles G. Herbermann, et al., eds. Robert Appleton Company, 1907, p. 468.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT AND MONASTIC HISTORY

The Rule

Benedict's *Rule* begins with an invitation that is both personal and dramatic:

Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and attend with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.¹

It is difficult to overstate the historical influence of the *Rule*. Yet it was not so much groundbreaking in thought as in execution. He was heavily influenced by the earlier rule written on monastic life (*The Rule of the Master*) and Cassian and his mystical writings. Some of the main tenets of monastic life Benedict copied directly from the *Rule of the Master*, such as the monks' "...discipline of personal poverty, and chastity, and total obedience..." to an abbot "...who had all the powers of a Roman paterfamilias...."² This idea of total obedience to the abbot also comes from Cassian, who places specific emphasis on the abbot's "...mixture of sternness and mercy...."³ This is why Benedict's

¹ *Rule*, p.15.

² *The Age of the Cloister*, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

abbot is at once "... owed complete obedience... even if [the monk] thinks [his] order is wrong." yet also "... [his] business is to help the monks."⁴ This gives the abbot the role of father and the monks the role of sons. The abbot is supposed to show the monks the way, show them how to live the true monastic, holy life. He is to lead by a "twofold teaching: he must point out all that is good and holy more by example than by words, proposing the commandments of the Lord to receptive disciples with words but demonstrating God's instructions to the stubborn and the dull by a living example."⁵ His orders have ultimate authority: "he holds the place of Christ in the monastery."⁶ But he is not to be unyielding or overly harsh in his orders, always seeking the best for the monks' themselves and, in some cases, praising them when they have done well.

Although Benedict, in effect, "copied" some things from *The Rule of the Master*, he transformed the Master's words into something almost completely different. After all, there is a reason why Benedict's *Rule* survives today as authoritative and the Master's does not. Benedict's *Rule* "... is something much more than a second edition, for in numerous points of principle and practice the Master's teaching is modified; and the whole structure is tightened and clarified."⁷ A guide for beginners, the *Rule* streamlines everything to focus on the monastery as a "school for the Lord's service."⁸ All in all, his writing was something that was much more easily understood and much better structured;

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Rule*, p. 22.

⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷ *The Age of the Cloister*, pp. 44-45.

⁸ *Rule*, p. 18.

it had a greater ability to be readily executed. Another selling point is that it actually worked. Monasteries based on this rule were thriving; others saw this and built their monastic plan upon this *Rule*, too.

The monks' themselves were thriving, too, because of Benedict's *Rule*. "The little rule for beginners describes a life of great earnestness and severity; to those of us who lead the life of ordinary mortals in the early twenty-first century, a life of dedication and monotony beyond our dreams."⁹ However, something that antithetical to modern life could only bring happiness. We live in the unhappiest era in history and it is precisely because we have become too modern. Our lives have almost become dictated by technology. When you have the world, and a million types of different entertainment at your fingertips, almost everything else becomes monotonous in comparison. It also distances us from making true, personal connections with other people; there is a loss of humanity in it. The paradox of the *Rule* is that community is based on silence. Benedict devotes an entire chapter to the "restraint of speech" (6) and urges that silence should be "diligently cultivated at all times."¹⁰

Monastic life, as described in the *Rule*, "... shows shrewd and subtle insight into human nature; it combines unyielding demands for obedience and stability with moderation and humanity."¹¹ Benedict's harshest judgment is shown toward those monks who "are always on the move, never settle down and are slaves to their own wills and

⁹ *The Age of the Cloister*, 47.

¹⁰ *Rule*, 64.

¹¹ *The Age of the Cloister*, 47.

gross appetites.”¹² There is an accountability and a humanity which is desperately needed in life and wholly missing from modern culture. We have become consumers, and self-interested ones at that, who are detached from each other on a basic human level. The monks, however, are constantly in community with each other and have little to no forms of distraction. This allows them to focus on what is truly important, their brothers in the community and God. “The monk in Benedict’s *Rule* spends most of the day in silence: he is occupied either in the communal worship in church (eight services or offices and the mass are spread over various hours of the day) or in private meditation and spiritual reading, or in manual labor for the support of the community, or in eating and sleeping. The principal psychological dangers of such a life are neurotic extremes of depression and exaltation; and the answer to these, humanly speaking, is to maintain regularity and devotion.”¹³

Only by sacrificing one’s will to God and by giving up one’s attachment to all material things can one find monastic peace. Benedict is quite clear about the demands of poverty, the model for which is the community in the *Acts of the Apostles*, which “holds all things in common.” Benedict calls private ownership an “evil practice” and states, “without an order from the abbot, no one may presume to give, receive, or retain anything as his own, nothing at all.”¹⁴ In addition to poverty, silence is also key to the monks, whereas it is deafening to many in our culture. This is the true measure of

¹² *Rule*, 21.

¹³ *The Age of the Cloister*, 48.

¹⁴ *Rule*, 56.

whether one is at peace with oneself, and whether one's thoughts are ordered correctly. For those who are, silence is a beautiful thing. For those who are not, it can be unbearable. The monastic way of life also is constructed to ward off the evils that can come with living such a life—psychological problems. This type of “regularity and devotion” which wards off these evils is also largely lost in mainstream culture and probably contributes to the rising percentage of people with depression, anxiety, etc. each year.

Pope Gregory the Great and Charlemagne

The widespread use of the *Rule* and in turn the spread of monasticism was in part due to the support of figures like Pope Gregory the Great and Charlemagne. Pope Gregory's *Life of St. Benedict* had a huge influence on the Church. In it, he commends Benedict as a “man of venerable life,” who “while he was on this earth could have indulged himself freely, but he despised the glory of the world as a faded bloom.”¹⁵ Gregory was not just a gifted theologian and writer; he was especially known for his “...comprehensive genius and organizing ability...” in ecclesiastical life and his “liturgical reforms [which] were first implemented in the churches and monasteries of Rome.”¹⁶ His organizing ability coupled with the fact that he saw the need for reform probably made him respect the *Rule* and see its immediate practical ability. His endorsement of the *Rule* due to this made the *Rule* achieve wide-spread acceptance. Gregory “...commend[ed] the *Rule* for its penetrating wisdom and clarity.”¹⁷ Toward the

¹⁵ *Life*, p. 1.

¹⁶ *The Age of the Cloister*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

end of his *Life of St. Benedict*, Gregory praises him for his teaching, which “flashes forth brilliantly.” He adds, “he wrote a Rule for monks that was outstanding for its discretion and limpid in its diction. If anyone wants to examine his life and customs more closely, they can find in the same Rule all that he modeled by his conduct. For the holy man could in no way teach other than he lived.”¹⁸ His authority as a church leader and his vast experience elevated the importance of these words, which stayed with the *Rule* in perpetuity. His words elevated the Rule itself to such an importance that it became something like monastic canon. It was now seen as something much more authoritative than just a guide on how to live in a true monastic community.

Amid his many political and military initiatives, Charlemagne initiated liturgical reforms, improved the education of the clergy, and decreed that “all monks of the empire should observe Benedict’s Rule.”¹⁹ Charlemagne’s endorsement was much less by words than by actions. Monastic life, for Charlemagne and his court, went hand-in-hand with the intellectual climate that he was trying to create. Charlemagne “...provided the force and power behind...” the “...religious and monastic reform and intellectual revival...” of the ninth century.²⁰ He was so involved in this that he even “...sat on his...throne in the Palatine chapel during mass directing the service....”²¹ Charlemagne and those within

¹⁸ *Life*, pp. 139.

¹⁹ Alessandro Barbero, *Charlemagne Father of a Continent*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 228.

²⁰ *The Age of the Cloister*, pp. 58-59.

²¹ *Ibid.*

his court, such as Alcuin, was responsible for the increased emphasis on education and increased importance placed on ancient literature. Alcuin, and other scholars within Charlemagne's court, copied many of these ancient texts better than anyone before, or after, them. Because of this, to the Carolingians is "... owe[d] the survival of a number of ancient works of literature and learning, and the purity of text still more."²² This includes a copy of the *Rule*, and although the text from the Carolingian era is not the earliest surviving copy, it is by far the best surviving copy.²³ The emphasis placed on the copying of manuscripts by Charlemagne's court was continued in the monasteries of the time. Because of this, monasteries became the centers of learning and intellectual discussion throughout Europe. But the monasteries also contributed to other endeavors.

The abbey of St. Gallen truly started flourishing during the reign of Charlemagne, in which time it became an imperial abbey. As W. Horn and E. Born observe in their comprehensive publication, *The Plan of St. Gall*, "Charlemagne's most outstanding trait was an overriding insistence on order and consistency."²⁴ Thus, as we have noted, he sought uniformity through the use of exemplary models. In this respect, St. Gall stands out among all the achievements of Charlemagne's reign. Again, Horn and Born: "The Plan of St. Gall gathers the whole of Carolingian life."²⁵ The plan included workshops, baking areas, and a brew house, along with sophisticated technology—advanced lighting,

²² Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²³ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²⁴ W. Horn and E. Born, *The Plan of St. Gall*, 3 vols., (Berkeley: 1979). Excerpted as "Heaven on Earth," *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 171-179.

²⁵ Ibid., 175.

heating, and the use of water mills for power.²⁶ With its expansion as a monastery came the expansion of its brewery, too. The brewery at St. Gallen was truly the first modern brewery. The brewing operation itself was “spread out over 40 buildings and yielded 10 to 12 hectoliters of beer a day” (10 hectoliters is roughly equivalent to 264 gallons or 2,112 pints a day).²⁷ Because they had three breweries, this amounts to 704 pints per brewery. In order to keep up with this huge production, almost everyone in the monastery participated in the brewing process. They even had to hire out over 200 serfs in addition to those at the monastery. This process truly brought everyone in the community together for one common cause, to serve others with their beer of “good and consistent quality.”²⁸ Consistence was something almost unheard of at this time because of the little knowledge of yeast and even the brewing process in general at that time. This brewery contained very modern aspects, though. It was the first to have direct-fire for the boil kettles, as they were mounted over furnaces. They also filtered their beer through pressed straw, which plays a very important part in the quality and look of the beer, a process that was little known of at this time. Last but not least, they had cooling rooms for fermentation and also knew how to jumpstart fermentation by using beer that was already fermenting.²⁹ These processes were largely innovative at that time and many versions of them are still used today. As Horn and Born comment:

²⁶“St. Gallen.” *The Oxford Companion to Beer* as cited in *Craft Beer and Brewing Magazine*. (www.beerandbrewing.com).

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

The furnishings of the Larder could be most easily determined by the monk in charge of the monastery's food supplies, but the layout of the Cellar called for superior skills in architectural planning since its features were of prime importance for the welfare of the brothers and other men residing in the monastery. Whoever built this structure had to understand clearly how many and what size barrels were needed to provide every member of the community the daily ration of wine or beer permitted by St. Benedict.³⁰

The goal was not order or production for its own sake. Instead, a kind of intense hospitality, fueled by love for one's neighbor, manifested itself in this beer and this community and led to it being one of the many "great achievements in the Middle Ages."³¹

Traditional Monasticism and Reform

Soon after Charlemagne's death, Benedict of Aniane was instrumental in "...form[ing] the basis [of] traditional monasticism."³² His appointment as archabbot of all the monasteries of Francia, combined with the increased promulgation of the *Rule* from Gregory the Great and Charlemagne, "...sowed the seeds from which the traditional monasticism of the tenth and eleventh centuries... was to grow."³³ In other words, there was not an immediate response to what Benedict was doing, but it took time for his

³⁰ "The Medieval Monastery as a Setting for the Production of Manuscripts," Walter Horn and Ernest Born Source: *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, Vol. 44 (1986), pp. 16-47. Also see "The Measure of Wine and Beer Allowed to the Monks" and "Are the Barrels Drawn to Scale and Scale to Need", Plan, I, 296-303, 303-305 in Horn and Born, *The Plan of St. Gall*.

³¹ "St. Gallen." *The Oxford Companion to Beer* as cited in *Craft Beer and Brewing Magazine*. (www.beerandbrewing.com).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

words and actions to see fruition. He, much like Gregory the Great, saw and elevated the importance of the *Rule* as intrinsic to the faith. Because of both of their endorsements of the *Rule*, it “... ceased to be... [just] a revered model... and became the basic norm—to be studied and learned by heart as no other Rule or model was studied.”³⁴ This kind of consistent support, from century to century, is what kept it from becoming just another Rule. Its importance increased with each endorsement and thus became central to the faith. Benedict of Aniane “formed” traditional monasticism in putting forth “... a series of monastic customs, [which were] joined to the Rule... Its most essential features were liturgical. God’s work... ceased to be merely a part of divided routine and became the *raison d’etre* of the monastic life, and a liturgy of ever-increasing elaboration grew up to match its new vocation.”³⁵

This increased importance put on liturgy, however, may have led to the Cistercian monastic reform of 1098. Cluny was the greatest example of this, as the reform focused almost solely on liturgy and did not seem concerned with the role of manual labor. Almost all of the monasteries “... that flourished in the eleventh century had mostly been founded or re-founded in the tenth [and] all accepted the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the legislation of Benedict of Aniane as the basis of their life [but also] accepted a much larger liturgy and much less manual work than the earlier Benedict had expected.”³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

Monasteries that fell into liturgy and nothing else were relatively new monasteries (or newly re-founded) and they flourished.

Monasteries that flourished had no need to do the manual labor themselves because they were wealthy enough to hire out others to do the work for them. Monasteries that were young or re-founded soon after the time of Benedict of Aniane may have put more authority on his teachings than they should have. Benedict of Aniane had so much support and authority that his views held sway. Cluny was the biggest and most extreme model of this, so they were targeted first for reform. It seemed that Cluny was allowed to become so different, so un-monastic, because of the great amount of “secular freedom” that they possessed, becoming “... wholly independent of every power save that of the Pope....”³⁷ They were not really held accountable in any sense and could do what they pleased. Cluny itself had hundreds of smaller houses that became dependent upon it, houses spread “over most of Western Europe except Germany” that became part of the “Cluniac allegiance.”³⁸ And so, this produced a domino effect where all the monasteries in this allegiance and others that were seen as sharing similar characteristics to Cluny were also reformed. Because of the sheer number of houses in the allegiance alone, the Cistercian reform became widespread and exhaustive.

Cluny and the monasteries in their allegiance were missing one of the most important points in the *Rule*. This is Benedict’s condemnation of idleness. At these monasteries, one could argue that the monks were not idle because they were at all times

³⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

either praying, taking part in the liturgy, or engaging in intellectual thought and reading. Benedict, however, specifically notes that idleness can and should be prevented by manual labor and spiritual reading specifically.³⁹ It seems that Benedict is worried both about the idleness of the mind (which is why he prescribes spiritual reading) and the idleness of the body (which is why he prescribes manual labor) equally. The Cistercian reform put great importance upon manual labor, to prevent the idleness of the body and to hearken back to Benedict's original wishes. Benedict defined work "...as what is necessary, what has to be done, and it seems that he is essentially thinking of the chores of a community...He was concerned that the jobs that had to be done were accomplished, and in the process a useful element of variety enter the monastic day."⁴⁰ Here, we see that Benedict also, to a lesser extent, prescribed manual labor to give the monks some more variety in their daily lives. This would greatly help the monks not just "go through the motions" and would enhance and also connect to the spiritual work that they do throughout the day. This also created different parts of the day, which each required their own specific focus and their own specific intention.

The Cistercians

These Cistercians wanted to build the ideal monastic community, as prescribed in the Rule. They were "...inspired by the vision of self-contained houses of monks cut off from the world... and by their knowledge of the way of life of the monks of the desert—

³⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

the ultimate inspiration of medieval monasticism."⁴¹ They believed that only in these secluded communities could the community, and the monks themselves, survive and thrive in true holiness. This was the first form of asceticism, taking the example of the early eremitic monks such as Antony the Great. It also allowed the monks a sort of freedom from distraction and other problematic issues that could arise when living within a populated town or city. Most importantly, it precludes the monastery from relying on anyone else besides the monks, and thus created a need for manual labor by the monks themselves. The monks were expected to "...grow their own corn and to produce their own clothes... The Cistercian... brothers were farmers, shepherds and masons; they were also millers, fullers, weavers and what-have-you."⁴² There were a variety of needs for the enclosure that could only be met by these monks, and so the monks became skilled craftsmen in a variety of subjects. Because they were so skilled in these crafts, their business ventures grew and they became very successful entrepreneurs. This caused them to become more intertwined with the outside world than they originally set out to be and also grew their wealth. It also caused them, eventually, to use lay brothers because the work became too great and too large for just the monks themselves to complete it. These lay brothers took the monastic vows but did not really participate in the monastic liturgy; they only truly participated in the manual labor of the monastery. They were the opposite of the monks at Cluny, who only participated in liturgy. Although this practice is not the same as hiring out the work to serfs, as they did at Cluny, the Cistercians still did not do

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

⁴² Ibid.

all of the manual labor themselves, i.e. with their “true” monks. All of these contributed to tensions and temptations within the Cistercian community and eventually seem to have led to the later Trappist reform of the Cistercians.

These secluded monasteries could not have even survived in the first place without Saint Bernard, who was the “...tremendously powerful personal influence [at] the center” of the order.⁴³ Bernard was known for his pious devotion, eloquence of speech and writing, and for his leadership abilities. He also exemplified the combination of work and rest at which the Benedictines have always aimed. He was known for not being “distracted in the midst of labor.”⁴⁴ Because of his holiness and his “self-forgetfulness” he was able to find “rest in all things.”⁴⁵ The organizational structure of the Cistercian monasteries made it “...the first order in the modern sense.”⁴⁶ This structure would have crumbled, however, if not for Bernard. He was the glue that held the Cistercians together. He was the reason that the yearly abbot visit to Citeaux was not seen as a requirement but rather seen as a great opportunity. Because of him, “...the abbots were drawn to Citeaux as to the gate of heaven, by a zeal that defies analysis, and the call to chapter and the energy with which the program was inspired and enforced in every corner of Europe....”⁴⁷ Everyone just wanted to be in his presence; people were drawn to

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

⁴⁴ Thomas Merton, *The Cistercian Fathers and Their Monastic Theology*. Cistercian Publications, 2016, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 317.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

him just for his personality alone. It was through his individual characteristics that he was able to "...mold an order and more than an order."⁴⁸ He was responsible for unifying the whole order during its early and most uncertain years.

This monastic reformation is seen by some to be the "...first phase of the twelfth century Renaissance."⁴⁹ This reformation was characterized heavily by a return to the *Gospel* and the teachings of the early church. These reformers "...read the *Rule*... as if it had just been written, fresh and new."⁵⁰ They seem to have read the *Rule* as Cassian, who came before the *Rule*, would have. This kind of reading construes the *Rule* through the lens of the *New Testament* and the apostolic life. After all, "Cassian had found the origin of the monastic life in the *New Testament*."⁵¹ This is why, in most monastic rules, "...at the heart... lay an echo or quotation of the words in the *Acts of the Apostles* that defined the life of the apostles and early disciples."⁵² Monks started to put a greater importance on this and wanted to bring their lives into even greater harmony with the lives of the apostles.

The whole of the twelfth century Renaissance was based on a return to the past: a return to ancient Greek and Roman texts, to the teachings of early church fathers, and to the enhancement of education as a whole and specifically within the church and its

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

immediate institutions. From this return to the past, came innovation. Specifically, this was found in the “creation of the universities...and the great churches of the Romanesque and Gothic periods.”⁵³

The Trappists

The various branches of monasticism continued to develop through the high Middle Ages and into the early modern period. The modern age, with the destruction of many monasteries in the Protestant Reformation and the banishing of monks during the French Revolution, would bring many trials to monasticism. Yet, monastic communities persisted, flourished, declined, and were reformed. The most important development in this epoch is the beginning of the Trappist order, a branch of the Cistercians that sought, yet again, to provide a reform that would return monasticism to its original inspiration. The first monastery in this tradition is La Trappe in France, which in 1664 began a reform movement that has come to be known as the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. The Trappists place an emphasis on simplicity of life, silence, and a return to manual labor, in accord with the statement from Benedict’s *Rule* that the monks live by the “work of their hands” (48). Undoubtedly the most famous product of monastic labor is the brewing of beer. Modern Trappist monks, whose beer is celebrated across the globe, and who have developed a large and successful industry, are seen as the epitome of the *Rule*’s success.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 126.

But the influence of a return to the *Rule* also created a distinctive integration of the theology of labor and attention to the life of the spirit. Just as was true in the twelfth century, a rebirth of monasticism is evident in our time.

CHAPTER FOUR

MODERN MONASTIC BREWING: THE TRAPPISTS AND A RETURN TO THE ORIGINS WITH THE BENEDICTINE MONKS OF NORCIA

Belgian Beginnings

Why Belgium? For the modern history of monastic brewing, that is the fundamental question. “In 1790 the French revolutionary government suppressed all monasteries and religious houses in France, confiscating their property.”¹ Because of this, many French monks fled to other countries. They did not want, however, to settle in these places permanently. Belgium emerged in 1830, just fifteen years after Napoleon was defeated, “as an independent democratic monarchy [which] enjoyed religious freedom, although its population was mainly Catholic.”² Because of the timing, the guarantee of religious freedom, and the fact that Belgium was a majority Catholic, many monasteries (including Trappists) flocked to this location.

Belgium was established in 1830 and soon after Trappist abbeys began brewing. “The first Belgian Trappist abbey to revive brewing was Westmalle in 1836. Then came Westvleteren in 1839 and Chimay in 1850.”³ Add Achel, Orval, and Rochefort to this list and you will get the six Trappist breweries in Belgium today. To be called a Trappist brewery or to be classified as brewing an “Authentic Trappist Product”, the beer has to

¹ Stan Hieronymus, *Brew Like A Monk: Trappist, Abbey, and Strong Belgian Ales and How to Brew Them*. Brewers Publications, 2005. pp. 30-31.

² Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

³ Ibid., p. xvi.

“be made within the walls of a Trappist abbey, under the supervision of the monastery community, and the largest part of the profit from its sale must be spent on social work.”⁴ It seems like this definition gives a lot of leeway to these abbeys, and yet there are only eleven that qualify as making an “Authentic Trappist Product.” This definition allows for the use of lay brewers, who are not active within the community in any sort of spiritual sense. In fact, of these six in Belgium, “all...except Westvleteren, are under the auspices of a lay brewing director and have been for decades.”⁵ This means that in these breweries the monks’ only real job is to oversee production. “Monks... control [a monastery brewery] by determining the brewery’s operational policies and strategic approach.”⁶ “Operational policies” and “strategic approach” have little or nothing to do with manual labor and seem much more like worries of C.E.O’s for very large companies. These breweries “...are commercial concerns that seek to be successful in the international beer market.”⁷

Today these beers are the most sought after in the world; they are often credited with helping provoke the surging interest in craft beer. Yet this popularity was far from the original intent of Trappist brewers. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, when many Trappist breweries started to re-emerge, there was not a large need for these Trappist beers. In fact, a vast majority of their production was for on-site consumption,

⁴ Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

⁵ Ibid., p. xvi.

⁶ Ibid., p. xvii.

⁷ Ibid.

with only a miniscule amount being used for sales outside of their monasteries. This is because of the massive beer-culture that had already been established in Belgium at that time. Hieronymus points out that “In 1900 Belgium was a country of 6.7 million people with 2,362 towns, 197,821 drinking establishments, and 3,223 breweries.”⁸ In other words, the market was so saturated already, with approximately 1.4 breweries per town, that outside production was just not needed from these Trappist breweries. By 1920, however, the number of breweries in Belgium had dropped to about 2,000 and by the end of the 30s had dropped to a little over a 1,000. In the span of just about forty years, the ratio of breweries to towns went from just under 1.4 to just a bit over .4. This trend continues up to the present-day, where only 130 breweries remain in Belgium, while the population has grown to around 10.5 million. The huge slack in domestic production had to be mitigated somewhere, and this is why the Trappist breweries came in and started ramping up their production and outside sales. Hieronymus writes, “Trappist breweries expanded as other ale producers, often local and small, failed.”⁹ This could be, in part, because they led the charge in trying to “improve the quality and image of Belgian beers.”¹⁰ In doing so, they helped come up with a unique and distinct style, something that could truly be called “Belgian.” These beers are renowned for their somewhat paradoxical high abv (alcohol by volume) and light body, which is greatly due to their use of “candi sugar”, a kind of caramel syrup.

⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., xvi.

Based on production, the largest of these Trappist breweries in Belgium is at Scourmont Abbey, where the world famous Chimay beer is made. Scourmont was founded in 1850 by monks sent from the already established Westvleteren. It took twelve years for them to get the abbey on its feet, but, once that was accomplished, they immediately started producing beer. Their first beer, made in 1862, was sold to the public. In doing so, this abbey became "...the first monastery to sell beer away from its door, the first to bottle, and the first to promote the Trappist mark."¹¹ Unlike many other Trappist breweries, the producers of Chimay knew from the beginning that they wanted to sell their beers to the public. This difference may account for why Chimay beer is sold "in more countries than any other Trappist brewery, and exports the largest percentage of its production (120,000 hectoliters, or 102,000 barrels), about 35%."¹² Chimay is by far the most widely available Trappist beer on the market, which is evinced by the fact that it is even readily available in Waco. This large-scale production is the reason why "Including the brewery, bottling plant, and marketing, eighty-two people work for Bieres de Chimay."¹³ This is contrasted with the fact that there are only twenty monks living in the monastery. In other words, this is truly an example of a brewery with a monastery, not a monastery with a brewery (as it should be). Even so, "...Chimay employs more than one hundred and fifty people, making it one of the biggest employers in one of Belgium's poorest regions."¹⁴ It may seem that this monastery has become too

¹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹² Ibid., p. 8.

¹³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

secularized, in large part because of the success of the brewery, but in doing so, it is creating jobs and economically vitalizing a community that was in desperate need.

Chimay's zeal for producing large quantities of beer, much of which is exported, seems to stand in stark contrast with the highly closed off brewery of Westvleteren, another of the famous Trappist breweries. Even though Westvleteren preceded Chimay in brewing by twenty-three years, the former abbey did not start selling beer outside of the monastery until nine years after Chimay. Hieronymus notes that the closed-off nature is purposeful, "Westvleteren tries to be the least commercial of the Trappist breweries, with the monks openly determined to remain involved in brewing without having it overshadow their daily lives."¹⁵ They seem to carry the same attitude today as that of one of their earlier abbots, who could have easily expanded production and outside sales of their beer, but instead chose to contract it, believing that "...too large a brewery would disturb the monastic spirit."¹⁶ Westvleteren keeps its production to a mere 4,750 hectoliters, or 4,050 barrels. This is enough to sell their beer at the monastery itself and send a limited quantity to cafes within Belgium. They are adamant that their beer should not be sold through distributors, mainly because it goes against their "monastic ethic." Brother Joris, the head monastic brewer, explains, "We do not advertise, we have no publicity... We live on brewing, but we do it so we can continue with our real business, which is being monks." In fact, Brother Joris is the only remaining head monastic brewer out of the six Trappist breweries in Belgium. The other five Trappist breweries have lay

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

head brewers. At Chimay, all the brewing is done by lay people.¹⁷ Westvleteren does have lay people help in the brewery and bottling operations, but these operations are still largely dominated by the monks themselves. In fact, every lay person is coupled with a monk whom the lay person assists. The fact that they have kept their output small and that they have the largest number of monks out of any Trappist monastery (at 28), not to mention the youngest too, allows the monks themselves to have almost total control over the entirety of the brewing process.

Birra Nursia and the Monastery of St. Benedict in Norcia

In Chimay and Westvleteren, we have two very different models of monastic brewing. Westvleteren is quite explicit about the precise and limited role that brewing plays as one element in the calling of monks and the mission of the monastery. Perhaps the most theologically reflective monastic brewery is the most recent: *birra nursia* in the monastery of Saint Benedict in Norcia, Italy, the birthplace of Saint Benedict, the founder of western monasticism and the author of the *Rule* that integrates manual labor into the theological vision of monastic life. Originally, the birthplace was celebrated as a holy place, mainly as a site for pilgrimages. By the tenth century, monks started to arrive and establish communities there. Monks occupied the location for many centuries but were eventually forced out in the early 1800s because of the Napoleonic Code. These communities did not come back to Norcia after this.

¹⁷ Caroline Wallace, Sarah Wood, and Jessica Deahl, *Trappist Beer Travels: Inside the Breweries of the Monasteries*. Schiffer Publishing, p. 98.

The Benedictine monks who live there now had no historical ties to this area and did not originate there, but in Rome. Their monastic community was founded in Rome in 1998, but just two years later, moved to Norcia. This may seem counter-intuitive to move from the cultural center of Italy to a town of less than five thousand people (before the recent earthquake). However, in Norcia they saw a place where the spirit of the Rule lived and could be lived out. The monks were truly needed and appreciated here, by the people and the town as a whole. In fact, the citizens wrote to the Pope, in a petition that was signed by most of the town, to send monks to the birthplace of St. Benedict. In Norcia, the monastery struck the perfect balance of being in the town, but not of it. In other words, the town was small enough so that they could have a healthy level of isolation from the distractions of the town and the outside world, but they could still help and impact the town in a very positive way. Also, the fact that their basilica, the Basilica of San Benedetto, was located over the birthplace of St. Benedict brought many travelers directly to their doorstep. They were able to practice the injunction in Benedict's Rule concerning the welcoming of guests, particularly the "poor and pilgrims," who are to be received "as Christ."¹⁸ Ultimately the monks have had a larger impact in Norcia than would have been possible had they stayed in Rome.

The monks have focused on manual labor, hospitality, and self-sufficiency—all themes at the heart of the original Benedictine mission. The monks' dedication to serve the community and anyone else who may visit was seen in their enlargement/conversion of the kitchen and refectory. This allowed them to serve up to one hundred people. "The

¹⁸ *Rule*, p. 73.

goal for the new refectory was to make a room not only functional but also adorned with a taste of heaven”¹⁹ Their refectory, just as the Cistercians before them was to be “a sacred space intended for the refreshment of the soul as much as for the nourishment of body.”²⁰ This “refreshment of the soul” came from the beautiful paintings and woodwork and carvings done by one of their own, Fabrizio Diomedi. This pure form of manual labor, in creating depictions of Jesus himself, combines with the silence and internal prayer or theological reading during the meal to allow for proper contemplation and transform the food into something much more, the bread of life. This kind of art, holy art comparable to that of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, can only truly be found in monasteries and religious communities. This is truly manual labor in accordance with the will of God, a transformative experience both in creating and in viewing, both of which are ordered to participation in the sacramental reality depicted in the art.

As they serve others, they have also had to deal with the economic realities of the modern age. While the monks at Norcia originally just relied on donations, they have tried to make their community self-sufficient. At first, they tried to open a gift shop, but this brought in relatively little money compared to donations. The financial crisis in 2008 also hurt the monastery because most of their donations came from the United States. The monks knew that there was a long-standing tradition of monastic brewing, and they were also fans of other monasteries’ beer themselves. This interest sparked them to start doing

¹⁹ Peter Kwasniewski, “New Sacred Art: The Monastic Refectory in Norcia.” *New Liturgical Movement*, Dec. 9, 2014. (www.newliturgicalmovement.org).

²⁰ Terryl Kinder, *Cistercian Europe: Architecture of Contemplation*. Pp. 286-287.

their own home-brewing kits and visiting different Trappist breweries—such as Westvleteren and Achel—to learn from the brewmasters there. Shortly after this period of testing and learning, they created their own recipes and bought a 250L brewery (just over 2 US barrels). They have produced two kinds of beer (blonde and extra) and two sizes of bottles (.33L and .75L) since the founding of the brewery in 2012. The beer was popular from the start, and the monks realized that they needed to expand due to increasing popularity. Because of this, they increased their brewing capacity to 1200L (10 US barrels) and are looking to expand it even further in the aftermath of the earthquake. Before the earthquake, three of the monks worked full-time in the brewery, but now it is just Brother Augustine.

In principle, they want to do the brewing themselves because true monks work by the labor of their own hands. They are very idealistic in this sense. The beer that they produce is just meant to cover operating expenses, nothing more. Brewing is also a good, intense form of manual labor but can also be very peaceful, quiet, and contemplative. It allows them to grow as men and as monks. Their vision of the brewery is also pure. They are focused on their monastic vocation, but at the same time realize the need for monks to do work themselves (not just administrative work) because it provides a healthy balance within the monastery as a whole. In fact, Nursia is “... the only monastic beer in the world that is made exclusively by monks.”²¹ They also go against the vision of the large Trappists breweries because they do not want the brewery to become larger than the monastery. At that point, you are a brewery with a monastery, not the other way around.

²¹ Elisabetta Povoledo, “Italian Monastery Seeks Salvation in Beer After Devastating Quake.” *The New York Times*, Nov. 30, 2016. (www.nytimes.com).

The brewery is not run in such a way that they will become a business that overtakes the mission of the monastery; they even refuse offers from other breweries to collaborate with them because they do not want to lose the integrity of their product. However, down the road, they will be willing to help other monastic breweries start up and hopefully pass their vision on to them, too.

Ut Laetificet Cor

The motto of *Birra Nursia* is “*Ut Laetificet Cor*”—that the heart may be gladdened. Beer brings people together in a talkative, community setting. It is a way for the monks to meet people, a common ground. It is as important for donations as it is for evangelizing. People who would not normally even know or care about this monastery have now come to praise it for its craft. Something that they may have seen as alien before (an ascetic religious order), now becomes something that they can relate to. It is through beer that any preconceived notions about monks are shattered. They can also see that these monks are self-sufficient through this craft, which makes them respect their way of life even more. Many now donate to the monastery because of the beer alone, especially now in the aftermath of the earthquake, because they do not want to see it lost. Beer has provided an avenue for spiritual development as well. It sparks interest in the monastic way of life, in God, and what joy he can bring into our lives. It can help those who have any inkling of searching for faith take that first step and also those who have estranged themselves come back into the fold. Father Cassian explains this, saying, “Even if people are not churchgoers, everybody likes to drink beer. So, they come to the

monastery for the beer and pretty soon they start talking about other things, other more important things”²²

But it is not as if evangelization is the focus of the monastic life. As Michael Casey puts it in his study of Benedictine spirituality, Benedict did not provide a “plan for evangelizing the world or re-directing the flow of history.” Instead, he offered “simple directives” for a “small group to live according to the Gospel.”²³

Beer-making, for the Norcia monks, is not self-serving like it seems to have become at some of the larger Trappist breweries. Their focus is on the needs of others, the “lost”—and to a similar extent the town and the people in it. In fact, they named the beer Nursia (the Latin spelling of Norcia) “...specifically to help the townspeople, rather than naming it after St. Benedict”²⁴ This is the monks’ peculiar way of living out the vow of stability—a life-long attachment to a particular community in a particular place. To the monks, the beer is as much the town’s as it is theirs. In fact, locals do participate in some aspects of the brewery “...help[ing] in the construction of the brewery and... ha[ving] a [small] role in the brewing process.”²⁵ The process is all carried out in Norcia using “...the water of the Sibylline mountains in the valley of Norcia”²⁶ The beer

²² An interview with Father Cassian in *Monasteries of the Heart*

²³ *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality*. St. Bede’s Publications, 2005. P. 103.

²⁴ Poveledo, “Italian Monastery Seeks...” (www.newyorktimes.com).

²⁵ Carol King, “Benedictine Monks Open Brewery in Norcia.” *Italy Magazine*, Nov. 16, 2012. (www.italymagazine.com).

²⁶ “Birra Nursia.” (www.birranursia.com).

is also served in local bars and restaurants and probably is accountable for increased tourism to the city itself. This is an example of the Benedictine ideal of work, it is "... an expression of love and stewardship of the community and as a way of reordering the natural world in harmony with God's will" ²⁷ The monks are using gifts from the natural world (water, grain, hops, yeast) and their own gifts (their physical and mental faculties) to create something that is pleasing to God—beer, which has also become a way to take care of and benefit the community greatly.

Beer-making also factors into the Benedictine ideal of hospitality. Benedictines strive both to "... reject what is not life giving, and [to] build something new" ²⁸ The Norcia monks specifically "... spend a lot of time rebuilding... which is why people flock to [their] monastery. [They] have so much involvement with guests and pilgrims that it is exhausting. But this is what [they] do" ²⁹ They are here to provide something new—an alternative to mainstream life and culture. That is what pilgrims come to Norcia for, a spiritual re-nourishment, which is partly accomplished by a pure kind of hospitality that one cannot find anywhere else. These pilgrims and guests are "... received like Christ" ³⁰ They are trying to "rebuild" the very world in which we live by showing us the correct way to treat others.

²⁷ Rod Dreher. *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. Penguin Publishing, 2017, p. 61.

²⁸ Ibid., 50.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

³⁰ Ibid., 72.

The *Rule* is actually targeted at normal people, "...the ordinary and weak, to help them grow stronger in faith"³¹ However, most normal people have a negative view of the *Rule* precisely because of some of its main tenets (obedience, stability, and "conversion of life"). People view the vow of obedience as a sort of enslavement, seem to not even be able to understand the word stability anymore (even less so in the context of monasticism), and do not seem to like the lifelong commitment that conversion of life (or all three of these) entails. The monks of Norcia know better, however. Father Cassian explains that "The purpose of the *Rule* is to free you. That's a paradox that people don't grasp readily"³²It allows one "...to find the presence of God in everyday life"³³In another paradox, it seems that our own free will is actually what truly enslaves us. We become consumed by our own passions and vices. Therefore, there is immense value in having structure, a set of rules to follow, and people to be obedient and accountable to.

The monks believe that meaning can only be found when one "...has detached themselves from their own passions and who seeks to see as God sees"³⁴This is partly accomplished by submitting to something higher, that at times may not be understandable, in order to "...counteract the carnal desire for personal independence"³⁵It enables one to see past the fake and superficial to what is real and everlasting. The

³¹ Ibid., 51.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 52.

³⁴ Ibid., 55.

³⁵ Ibid., 56.

Norcia monks “... have acquir[ed] virtue as a habit” ³⁶ Still, they believe that “in [themselves], [they] are nothing” ³⁷ They owe everything to God and do not want to take credit for what is rightfully his. They believe that they only shine because He does. Their way of life and all the beauty, happiness, and peace that comes with it is merely a manifestation of God. It also speaks volumes about how successful the community itself is—they are growing, cheerful, and helping others. The community is neither too strict or too lax, and this contributes to the success which is seen in the everyday lives of the monks themselves and all the people that they serve through their hospitality, manual labor, and spiritual guidance.

It is through “suffering” that they become truly happy. It is this kind of “ascetical suffering” in which their hearts, minds, and souls are purified. These monks start with giving up the “tangible, material desires” such as food in their fasting. Through this, their wills are strengthened and they will be more likely able to conquer the tougher “spiritual passions” such as anger, envy, and pride ³⁸ Their vow of stability also allows them to grow even more in their spirituality and spiritual conviction. This spiritual conviction will not have enough time to grow if the monk does not stay in one place. It will grow weaker and weaker each time the monk is uprooted. Therefore, each monk is bound to “...remain for the rest of his life in the monastery where he took his vows” ³⁹ The Norcia monks have also seen the great importance and benefit in keeping the monastery in one place (once

³⁶ Ibid., 57.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Ibid., 66.

they found the right place)—they built the town of Norcia up once and will rebuild it once again. They are not going to abandon it because that is not what they were taught.

Concluding Personal Reflection on my visit to Norcia

One of the biggest takeaways from my time in Norcia was the joy that the monks bring to everyone they meet. I remember seeing Brother Augustine interacting with the townspeople and how their faces would immediately light up by just being in his presence. Brother Augustine would never take credit for that, however. He, along with the other monks, believes that he is nothing on his own. It is the light of God that shines within him and through him. The life that they live brings their wills so in line with the will of God that they can do no other than his will. It is evident just in their welcoming demeanor that they have truly been freed through this life of obedience, poverty, chastity, and service.

For me, the brewing of *Birra Nursia* brought me to their monastery. When I arrived there, I realized that there is much more in Norcia than just the beer. They welcomed me and fed me, allowed me to stay in their guest room, and nourished me spiritually. They truly received me as a brother in Christ. In taking part in their prayers and being cut off from all distractions, I truly felt at peace. Just being there for a few days, I felt something more powerful than I had ever felt going to church over many years.

The monks will still tell you that the brewing is very important for their monastery. But it is important precisely because it brings people to the monastery to experience something much more important. The beer brings people together and starts a

conversation, but soon you will not just be talking about the beer. Soon, you will be talking about your own spirituality, the monks' way of life, the joy that is evident everywhere you turn while at the monastery. In this way, manual labor turns into hospitality which turns into conversation which many times turns into evangelization or a return to spirituality. The beer, although important in and of itself, is only a starting point. What it leads to is what is truly important.

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