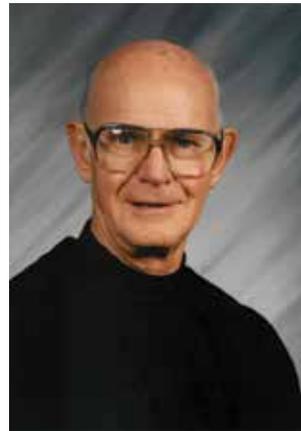


## Fr Edmund Henkels, OSB (1924 – 2017)

Fr Edmund Henkels, one of the pillars of our community for many years and a beloved teacher in our school, died peacefully at the nearby Carroll Manor Nursing Home on the morning of January 27 after a long and debilitating illness. He was born in Dyersville, Iowa on October 31, 1924 and was christened William Joseph, the youngest of the four children of Peter and Susan Henkels. Known by his family and friends as Bill, he attended Catholic grade school and high school in his home town and then entered Loras College in Dubuque, but his studies there were cut short by the Second World War. He enlisted in the Navy at the age of eighteen and attended Midshipmen's School at the University of Notre Dame before being sent to Philadelphia to prepare for service on an aircraft carrier. During most of the war he was assigned to a carrier on the West Coast, where he and others like him served as replacements for naval officers then eligible to return to civilian life. After the war, he received a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering from Iowa State University and soon thereafter came to the Washington area as a member of the Naval Reserve to work at the David Taylor Model Basin in nearby Carderock, Maryland.

Bill Henkels first visited St Anselm's Priory, as the monastery was then known, during Holy Week in 1950 and thereafter came often for Sunday mass or vespers. His mother later wrote to our then-superior, Fr Alban Boulwood, that her son would often speak of how much he enjoyed his time at the priory when he visited his parents back in Iowa, so she was overjoyed when he told her two years later that he wanted to become a monk, something that she had long been praying for. After receiving an honorable discharge from the Navy, he began postulancy in the fall of 1952 and, after finishing novitiate, made his first profession of monastic vows on January 30, 1954. Already during his years of studying theology in the priory's own small theology school, he began teaching mathematics in our school, eventually branching out to teach physics and computer science as well. As his mother, now a widow, had become too frail to travel, Fr Edmund got special permission to be ordained to the priesthood in Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport, Iowa on June 6, 1959 so that his mother could attend the ceremony.

In the monastery Fr Edmund was one of our most skilled cantors and was also frequently elected to the monastic council, while in our school it quickly became apparent that he was a gifted teacher, remaining so right up to the time of his retirement from the classroom in 2002. As news of his death spread among our alumni, we received a number of messages saying how much his teaching had meant to them. One of them wrote: "Fr



Edmund taught me freshman algebra in 1955 and changed my life. He was the first person who realized my math skills and told me I had a gift.... I always credited Fr Edmund for setting me off on using my math skills, which have led to my being incredibly successful in business. I have always and will continue to remember him fondly."

But it wasn't only in the classroom that Fr Edmund supported his students. Another alumnus wrote: "There was the time he accompanied a few of us to the bus stop when we were having some issues with the need for 'protection' from some of the local kids (our ties didn't help). After he came down with us one day, they never bothered us again."

Like any good teacher, Fr Edmund always strove to improve his classroom skills and so relished the opportunity to do graduate work in physics at Wisconsin State University, where he earned a master's of science degree in teaching (M.S.T.) in May, 1972. His commitment to serving our students to the best of his ability is reflected in a letter he wrote to Abbot Alban from Wisconsin at a time when many changes were being made in the school's administration. He said: "You know that you can count on me for carrying my share of the work load. From past experience you know that my first concern has been and is my classroom work; and the less time I have to spend on other things, other jobs, the better off I am. When I have too many things to keep track of, to worry about, I tend to lose my grip on all of them."

If that kind of commitment were all for which we remember Fr Edmund, it would already be a great deal,

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but in fact there was another and more profound side to his monastic life that relatively few people knew about until he addressed it in a speech he gave on the occasion of being inducted into the abbey school's hall of honor one autumn evening in 1999. After reflecting on his many years in the classroom, he went on to say that in the 1983-84 school year a family had begun reaching out to him in friendship and love, wishing to bring him in some way into the family circle. He found that the two sons were putting him on a pedestal where he felt he didn't belong. He lost his self-confidence, his self-image "went to pieces," and his world "came apart." Fortunately, by late summer he had asked for help, leading to a diagnosis of major depression. Both medication and a good psychiatrist helped him get his feet on the ground again, and his reading of M. Scott Peck's best-selling book *The Road Less Traveled* led him to become convinced that successful therapy usually involves religious change as well as psychological. He continued that part of his talk with the following words: "During those years of off-again-on-again therapy, I had come to realize very slowly that since I was still alive, God loved me and therefore I must be worth something, and that the only fitting response to realizing that one is loved is to love in return. During this period I had gotten to the point where my psychiatrist said, 'You don't need me anymore; you need a guru!' I didn't know it at the time, but a guru had found me in the summer of 1984."

That spiritual teacher, a Quaker, led Fr Edmund to a path of discovery about living a centered life, a genuinely contemplative life. He began not only reading but putting into practice the teaching of such works as the fourteenth-century classic of English spirituality *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the nineteenth-century Russian work *The Way of a Pilgrim*, and the writings of monastic authors like Thomas Keating, John Main, and Thomas Merton. He began faithfully practicing Centering Prayer for a half-hour early each morning before joining his fellow monks for the Liturgy of the Hours in the abbey church. But that was not all—not even the most important point. In his words:

So what good is it? Why do I do this at 4:30 in the morning? Is that the end of it at 5 a.m.? One variety of Zen says 'NO'; enlightenment means nothing unless you can take it to the marketplace, share it with others.... Prayer time is nothing unless it bears fruit to share with the world. But how do we do that?... A recommendation from my Quaker friend is quite direct: "Be a channel

for God's love!" In 1984, it seemed that I was unable to love. Fifteen years later, it seems that love is what we must take to the marketplace. Love is everything, love is the only thing, it is the only thing that matters....

So that's where I am now. That's who I am. One last thing I would like to pass along to you. It is a simple haiku which I discovered many years ago in a book on adolescent education:

Child, give me your hand  
that I may walk in the light  
of your faith in me.

Thank you for being here tonight. Thank you for supporting our scholarship fund. LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Some of our more perceptive students readily noticed the change, a true mid-life conversion to a more profound way of being a monk and a follower of Christ, a sign of the kind of progress that St Benedict clearly expects to be evident in the life of anyone who follows his monastic rule. One of those former students alluded to this grace-filled change in a message he sent us upon learning of Fr Edmund's death. He recalled how, in the mid-1980s, Fr Edmund had become a "joyous, reformed, and healthy man.... It was really a beautiful conversion, visible to even the casual observer, as was I and still am in most ways.... He was really engaged, warm and friendly by then, and I privately remarked at each meeting how God must have really touched him in his later life. He was always very smart, but now he was different.... I sensed that the kindness had always been there, but it was only truly revealed when he found something, love, to carry to the marketplace of life. There's a lesson to remember from the life and passing of this real educator and man of God for all to embrace."

Even as we commend Fr Edmund to the prayers of all who read this, we pray that each of us may be encouraged in our own life journeys to keep moving toward the things that really matter.



JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

# What Is a Vocation?

*This is a slightly revised version of a talk that Br Ignacio González gave at a school assembly in the fall semester of this school year.*

What does the word “vocation” mean to you? Would the best synonym be one of the following: Occupation? Career? Job? Profession? Or how about Trade? or Craft? or Life’s work? Might not a still better synonym be Calling? or Mission? or Response? A thesaurus would probably list all ten of these terms as synonyms, but in a Benedictine, and therefore Christian and Catholic understanding, in order to know what a vocation is, it helps to look at the root of the word. Most of us here might remember from Latin class the four parts of a common verb: *voco, vocare, vocavi, vocatus*, and that the infinitive form *vocare* means “to call, to summon, to name.” So in the Judeo-Christian tradition, one’s vocation is a call from God.

But this raises some further questions: How can I know if God is real—or has any interest in me at all? And if he is interested in me, what does he want from me? To help answer these questions, let’s listen to the wisdom contained in both the Old and New Testaments. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote roughly 2,600 years ago, we read: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5). And this: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Some centuries earlier, the psalmist wrote: “Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). Or again, “He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and he saves them.” (Psalm 145:19). This means that God knows us better than we know ourselves and wills nothing more than our complete happiness and joy.

Does this theme of happiness and joy continue in the New Testament? Yes indeed!

Jesus tells his disciples in John’s gospel, “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete” (John 16:24).

I can speak from my own experience of having served in the Marine Corps, and then after university studies, having worked in the corporate world for fifteen years before entering the monastery in 2008. I can speak of a joy in my heart that was not present until I came here, and each day my capacity to experience such joy grows. For me it is a distinct privilege and honor to live and pray and learn from Fr Joseph, who first came to the abbey seventy years ago! And to live and pray and learn from Abbot Aidan, Fr Christopher, Fr Boniface, Fr Michael, Abbot James, Fr Peter, Br Matthew, Fr Philip, Fr Gabriel, Br Dunstan, and thanks be to God, Br Samuel, a graduate of our school who made his solemn profession with us last October!

So what does God ask of us monks at St. Anselm’s Abbey? What does he ask of the faculty? What does he ask of our students? What is he asking of each of us here? In the book of Deuteronomy, again echoed in the New

Testament, we hear the words of the Lord: “Be holy as I am holy” (Deuteronomy 14:2, 1 Peter 1:16). But this does not mean separating ourselves from those who are not like us, but rather the opposite—“Be merciful as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). This is what it is to be holy—to be merciful, but you can’t give what you don’t have. If I need to forgive someone who has harmed me, I need to first ask God to forgive me for the times I have willfully chosen to separate myself from him. Those in my theology class might remember that peace is more than the absence of conflict; peace is one’s reconciliation with God. When I am reconciled with God, then my soul is at peace, and I am able to forgive as he forgives.

What, then, is vocation? It is our response to God’s call to be merciful—to receive and to extend his mercy. If I do that, I am living my vocation, because more important than what I do in the world is the answer to the question, “Who am I?” Can I be like King David as he is described in 1 Samuel 13:14—*The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart*? If I am a man seeking the heart of God, then I am living my vocation, and I can do that beginning right now.

In closing, I will share with you the lyrics of a favorite hymn of mine that speak to what I’ve been sharing with you this afternoon.<sup>1</sup> They are the words of Jesus to each one of us:

- Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
- Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?
- Will you let my love be shown?
- Will you let my name be known?
- Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?
  
- Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
- Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
- Will you risk the hostile stare?
- Should your life attract or scare?
- Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?
  
- Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
- Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
- Will you kiss the leper clean?
- And do such as this unseen?
- And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

<sup>1</sup> *The Summons*, John Bell & Graham Maule of the Iona Community in Scotland, first published in 1897, set to the traditional Scottish tune KELINGROVE, composer unknown. <http://www.godsongs.net/2016/10/the-summons-will-you-come-and-follow-me-if-i-but-call-your-name.html>

Will you love the “you” you hide if I but call  
your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the  
same?  
**Will you use the faith you’ve found?  
To reshape the world around?**  
Through my sight and touch and sound in you  
and you in me.

Please, God, give us the grace to say “yes” to your call  
in our lives. Amen.

IGNACIO GONZÁLEZ, OSB



## *From Argentina into the Americas: A Report from Our Guests*

We, Sebastián Schuff, Gustavo Mellado, and Santiago Santurio, are three Argentinian Catholic men who have been in the United States during the first three months of this year while collaborating with the diplomatic mission of the Holy See in the work that we do at the Organization of American States (OAS) to defend and promote fundamental human rights on both the national and international level. We were invited to this country by Archbishop Bernardito Auza of the Holy See’s Mission to the United Nations and have been residing at St Anselm’s Abbey while working during the day at the OAS headquarters in downtown Washington. Being able to stay at the abbey has been a beautiful experience for us, both for the mission that we are carrying out and for the warmth and the human quality of those who have so graciously received us. Day by day we have come to know the monks, who in their own way are working valiantly for the promotion of human dignity in our society.

The OAS is the main regional forum for dialogue, policy analysis, and decision-making in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere. The organization aims to promote development and peace in the Americas through various treaties, agreements, and commitments in order to help realize the common human good and to promote greater collaboration within the region as a whole. As one example, the American Convention on Human Rights declares the need to defend the right to life from the moment of conception and the right of men and women to marry and to raise a family.

Our work currently consists of participating in meetings that are held at the OAS on different issues pertaining to the Americas. At these meetings, we have established relations and connections with the diplomatic representatives of the many different states in the OAS. One of the most serious issues that all of us face is the widespread poverty experienced in many parts of

the Americas, which is, in terms of income distribution, one of the most inequitable regions in the world. Many people suffer from not having adequate food or decent housing, lack of access to clean drinking water, and few opportunities for good education and gainful employment. From what we learn at these OAS meetings, we send reports to the Permanent Mission of the Holy See as this exists within the OAS.

All three of us belong to a non-governmental organization (NGO) called *Frente Joven* (Youth Front), which we and three other young men founded in Argentina in 2010. This movement seeks to help build a better society by promoting the commitment and participation of young people in their society and by offering them new perspectives and solutions through novel programs that combine training, action, communication, and politics. Currently we work in Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, and Ecuador. One of us, Gustavo, has not only participated in the Youth Front from the very beginning but is also now starting a new project, *Fundación Ciudadanía* (Citizenship Foundation). This exists as an independent institution, dedicated to the research, analysis, and development of political ideas and policies focused on the need to work toward greater social equity in society. The foundation encourages young people to take a greater interest and participation in public life and thereby form a new generation of capable leaders who will be guided by an ethics that is committed to the dignity of the human person from the time of conception to the time of natural death.

Our native land, Argentina, has long suffered from a serious situation of poverty, with many people living in very precarious conditions. One of the most vulnerable groups consists of young children and low-income pregnant women. Nearly five million children live in poverty (about 40% of all Argentinian children) and 3,000 girls become mothers every year. This is why, within *Frente*

*Joven*, we have decided to defend human rights by going to the neediest neighborhoods, where we have implemented two new social projects dedicated to the care of young children and indigent young mothers.

The first of these is called *Crecer*, begun in 2013. It focuses on helping alleviate the situation of vulnerable children. On Saturdays throughout the year, we engage in activities in different neighborhoods that involve boys from four to twelve years of age. Every Saturday, we share a healthy breakfast with them, help them with their homework, and teach them to take care of themselves and to be good with their families and friends; we also organize special games in which we seek to convey distinct values, such as honesty, solidarity, and friendship. We understand that the most important thing that many children need is encouragement and support in order to motivate them in ways that will help them persevere in their studies and so be in a position of daily moving from strength to strength.



*Sebastián Schuff, Gustavo Mellado, and Santiago Santurio at the United Nations in New York*

In 2014 we began a second project, called *Defensores de Mamás* (Defenders of Mothers). In Argentina, we are troubled by how many pregnant women live in very precarious living conditions both during pregnancy and after the birth of their children. Many of them live in houses with a mud floor and a roof of sheet metal, bereft of running water and in such crowded circumstances that an entire family of five, six, or seven persons live in a single room. The mothers tend to lack a monthly income since the chances of finding a decent job are very poor, given their low level of education and their appalling living conditions. This is why, in *Defensores de Mamás*, we regularly engage in Saturday activities: offering prenatal counseling, medical and nutritional education, psychological assistance, and, above all, the security and affection that comes from the love and caring of the volunteers. Every Saturday, we accompany these women; we share in their challenges and, God willing, they begin to value themselves and begin to value and care for their children in a fuller way, perhaps in a way that they themselves had not known when they were children.

Since we know that there are many people who need help throughout the country and that we cannot reach

all of them personally, we are also committed to forming a new generation of political leaders on a large scale, leaders who will be close to the humble and lowly, supporting them and encouraging them in ways that point to the dignity of the human person and the value of the common good. For this reason we have developed another program, “Young Leaders,” which trains the youth to become social and political leaders.

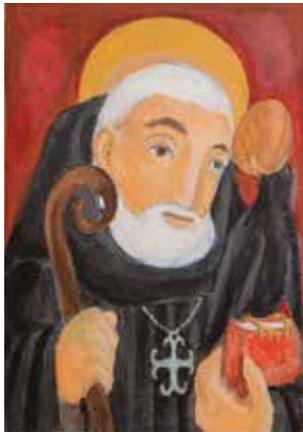
Little by little, our ideas and projects have been spreading among young people all over the South American continent. And since we encounter many persons who have the same concerns, and because it is good for us to unite and work together, for the last three years we have been participating in the Young Pan American Forum, an annual activity that convenes young representatives from civil organizations across the continent. The first fruit of these meetings emerged in the “Declaration of Buenos Aires,” a document that today supports young people from fifteen countries throughout the region, expressing the main challenges that we all face and proposing ways and means to move toward possible solutions. However, in order to move from mere expressions of desire toward concrete achievements, our objectives in this area have turned to the realization of concrete goals in terms of how people relate to each other and live with each other in civil society. We constantly participate in the work of international organizations (such as the OAS) in order to elicit the support of representatives who come from different countries, as well as the support of officials who work within these different organizations.

Finally, in our awareness of the need to find more humane ways of understanding and thinking about politics, economics, education, and all the realities of people in the world today, we also belong to and participate in the new movement mentioned above, *Fundación Ciudadanía*, which is dedicated to encouraging research and the development of ideas in politics and public discourse that can result in the enactment of public policies. In this way, we believe that we can contribute to the building up of today’s generation of young people by working for a renewal of current policies with the help of new ideas and projects to form a society that is more dignified for all to live in.

Perhaps one of the most endearing experiences that we have had here in Washington is to discover so many good and kind people: they have opened their doors to us and are themselves trying to improve the lives of everyone, whether in small details or by initiating larger, greater initiatives. More and more we find this here in the United States, including right here in St Anselm’s Abbey, where even those who work in the kitchen take care of us. We have also found this among the many lay friends of the abbey and in various institutions and initiatives that we are encountering and getting to know. This is why we give thanks to God for this blessed opportunity to strengthen ties, to build bridges, and to collaborate with others in building a more dignified and gentle society.

# Reflection on the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the School

The “then Priory School” was founded in 1942. Seventy-five years later, the “now St Anselm’s Abbey School” continues to flourish. As our founding headmaster, Fr Austin McNamee, OSB, wrote at the time: “Not in buildings and equipment alone do schools, as such, flourish; but rather in the happy realization of the sound philosophy and definite purpose formulated and enunciated by their founders.”



*St Benedict as portrayed by Fr Stephen*

What is a monastic school for today and for tomorrow? St Benedict, who was born in 480, is the founder of western monasticism; we have a 1,500-year-old tradition of prayer and work, Benedict’s *Ora et Labora*, that still guides us. The monks’ prayer consists of the daily divine office of matins, lauds, mass, noonday prayer, vespers, and compline. Our primary work in this monastery is to teach. Through and

throughout this prayer and work, the monks are continually seeking God.

As monks, faculty, and students in a monastic school, we do pray together, not as extensively as the communal prayer of the divine office, and yet the entire school day is a prayer in that we all are seeking truth, and truth leads to God. The happy realization that the human individual cannot perfect himself or fully exist except through the unification of all individual people in God—this is essential and fundamental to Christianity.

The primary work of a student is to study, to stay focused on learning, just as the monk’s primary work is to pray, to teach truth in the oneness of all truth as found in the multiplicity of its historical manifestations—the past, the present, and the future. The human person is created with a desire to know, and this desire is ultimately to know God.

Our patron saint, Anselm of Canterbury, died in 1109. Because of his great learning and thirst for knowledge, Anselm is known as the Father of Scholasticism, and he was named a Doctor of the Church in 1720 by Pope Clement XI. Students from all over Europe came to study under Anselm when he was abbot of Bec, a monastery in Normandy. Later, he was abbot of the monastery at Canterbury, and eventually became archbishop of

Canterbury, the Primate of All England, charged with protecting the Church’s lands and rights.

Anselm demanded hard work of his monks and students to attain excellence in education; he insisted that this excellence was not only a social obligation, but a moral obligation as well. When true excellence is achieved, then a student finds himself endowed not merely with his existing gifts but with a method that enables him to master all the intellectual forces surrounding him.

Simply put, both St Benedict and St Anselm give us well-tested models that we must try to emulate so that we can at all times seek truth, understanding that truth leads to God in his eternity. So a student’s time here in our monastic school, if he uses his God-given talents, will bring him to God, Eternal Truth. Eternity is not an unending continuation of time, but time fulfilled and made definitive and final. Whenever something is achieved with finality, there eternity comes to be. So as we continue down this road of learning for another seventy-five years, let us pray with St Anselm:

*God of love, whose compassion never fails; we bring before You the troubles and perils of peoples and nations, the sighing of prisoners and captives, the sorrows of the bereaved, the necessities of strangers, the helplessness of the weak and sick, the despondency of the weary, the stumbling of youth, the failing powers of the aged. O Lord, draw near to each; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.*

Interestingly, one can perhaps see the spirit of Anselm’s prayer echoed in *The Letter*, a secular verse written by Charles Eliot (president of Harvard 1869-1904). This verse appears on the outside of the former City Post Office in Washington, DC, adjacent to Union Station and now the home of the National Postal Museum. The text was altered slightly by President Woodrow Wilson before it was added to the façade of the building:

*Messenger of Sympathy and Love, Servant of Parted Friends, Consoler of the Lonely, Bond of the Scattered Family, Enlarger of the Common Life, Carrier of News and Knowledge, Instrument of Trade and Industry, Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance, of Peace and of Goodwill Among Men and Nations.*

With the Grace of God, let us continue to celebrate the founding of our school in this city called Washington, ever-mindful of our patron saints, our history, and our heritage.

PETER WEIGAND, OSB

# Review of a Book about Married Saints

While married persons have made up the vast majority of the faithful throughout the history of the Church, many of the most prominent saints have been celibate religious. As a result, married individuals can have trouble finding saints whose lives can speak to them in their married vocation. Seeking to address this problem, David and Mary Ford present the lives of 191 married saints in their book *Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints* (Waymart, PA: St. Tikhon's Monastery Press, 2nd ed., 2013). While the book is written from a specifically Orthodox perspective, it contains saints from the entire history of the Orthodox Church (and even a few Old Testament saints) and thus treats many saints from the first millennium who are equally honored in the Latin Church. I found the work's most notable strength to be the Introduction, in which the authors present a synthesis of Orthodox teachings on marriage derived from prolonged meditation not only on the saints themselves but also on the rites and patristic homilies about marriage and marital holiness. The result is an excellent synthesis which highlights the positive view of marriage in the Orthodox Church.

The remainder, and by far largest part, of the book is made up of the lives of the saints, arranged in order of their feast days in the Orthodox church calendar. While the number and therefore the variety of saints included is a strength of the volume because it demonstrates in a concrete way just how many married individuals have been canonized, this is also one of the weaknesses of the book, for many of the saints who are included are

ones about whom very little is actually known—in some cases just the date, place, and means of their martyrdom. As a result, these entries gave me the impression that the authors were simply recounting their numbers rather than presenting something that can really inform the reader about what it means to become a saint as a married individual. A simple table of “Additional Married Saints” with some basic information would serve the same purpose and be much more space efficient. However, the longer entries are definitely well worth reading. Written in the authors' own words (though with the occasional choice quotation from primary sources), these entries give you a feel for the life of the saint or saints (couples are presented together, even if both are saints). This is especially true for the more modern saints, for whom a larger variety of sources (such as personal letters or journals) is available. In my opinion, the book would be much improved if it were limited to these detailed entries (and perhaps a few more of them, if possible).

Finally, for those interested in learning more about the saints in this book, the authors do a good job of providing footnotes for each entry which point back to the sources they used. The book, however, lacks a bibliography, so you have to go to the entry for a particular saint to find these resources. While I would recommend the Introduction and most of the longer entries to everyone, the rest of the book simply adequately serves the purpose of introducing the novice to the married Orthodox saints.

SAMUEL SPRINGUEL, OSB

## The Message of Amos

One of my former students, in commenting on the current social situation in our country, has on her Facebook page a quotation from Amos: “Woe to those who turn justice into wormwood and cast justice to the ground” (Amos 5:7). I asked her which was her favorite prophet. She said, “Well, of course Isaiah is very important, but I really love Amos and Hosea.”

There are lots of reasons to like Amos, and I admit he is one of my favorites. It is his single-minded concern for the poor and downtrodden that makes him so attractive. His oracles have great power and even an austere beauty because of their literary quality and depth of religious perception.

Amos is the earliest of the so-called classical or canonical prophets,<sup>1</sup> but none of his followers have spoken

more eloquently on social justice. Although he was from Judah, the southern kingdom, his call was to preach to Israel, the northern kingdom. How Amos came to be a prophet he himself explains very simply: “I am not a prophet,<sup>2</sup> nor do I belong to a company of prophets. I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamores, but the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (7:14-15).

<sup>1</sup> As distinguished from the early prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, who have no books named for them in the OT canon.

<sup>2</sup> NABRE translation. The Hebrew has no verb, and it could be translated “I was no prophet,” but apparently Amos is rejecting the title *nabi* because of those by that title who divined for money. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel where this exchange takes place, had just urged him, “Off with you, seer, flee to the land of Judah and there earn your bread by prophesying” (7:12). The command, “Prophesy to my people Israel” certainly constitutes Amos a prophet; this is strengthened by his use of the formula, “Hear the word of the LORD” (and cf. 3:8).

The people to whom Amos was sent were a far cry from the egalitarian, largely agricultural and pastoral population of the time when Israel took possession of the land. The introduction of the monarchy, especially in the days of Solomon, brought new class consciousness to society. In addition, people began to exercise crafts and practice commerce and so were able to amass wealth. Thus was created a distinction between rich and poor. Because the rich were able to lend to the poor, they were also able to foreclose and rob them of land and even enslave them. It seems that this was common in Amos' day, with judicial bribery as well. No wonder that Amos reacted so strongly!

In the oracle that opens his book Amos condemns the surrounding nations (Syria, Edom, etc.) for cruelty, aggressive warfare, the slave trade, and breaking covenant; and he threatens punishment.<sup>3</sup> Since these were all enemies of Israel, the hearers no doubt enjoyed hearing them denounced.

### Amos Condemns Israel

But then Amos, using exactly the same formula used for the other nations, turns his fire on Israel:

For three crimes of Israel, and now four—  
 I will not take it<sup>4</sup> back—  
 Because they hand over the just for silver,  
 and the poor for a pair of sandals,  
 They trample the heads of the destitute  
 into the dust of the earth,  
 and force the lowly out of the way.  
 Son and father sleep with the same girl,  
 profaning my holy name.  
 Upon garments taken in pledge  
 they recline beside any altar. (2:6-8)

This opening oracle already contains a compendium of much of Amos' teaching. Here he condemns Israel not for breaking the Law of Moses, not for robbery or sexual crimes, but for oppression of the poor. Some of the phrases in this passage call for a little unpacking:

*"Hand over ... for a pair of sandals"*: that is, take into slavery, and that for a paltry debt. Notice that Amos equates the poor with the just, contrasted with the rich (and unjust) who oppress them.

*"Force the lowly out of the way"*: Amos here shows great sensitivity; no sin is cited, it's simply a matter of arrogance toward the weak.

*"Son and father sleep with the same girl"*: obviously a question of a maid or some other subordinate whom the men of the household use for their own purposes. Again, it's a question of oppression of the helpless.

*"Upon garments taken in pledge"*: If a poor man has to give his cloak as collateral for a loan, it is to be returned to him by sunset, when he will need it to sleep in (Exodus

22:24-26). Clearly, this has not been done. The fact that the holder reclines by an altar suggests a sacrificial feast. Amos paints a picture of religious hypocrisy in that the very act of worship is accompanied by mistreatment of the poor. Religious hypocrisy is a theme Amos returns to more than once.

Amos goes on to explain how, when Israel was weak and helpless, God's might delivered them from slavery in Egypt and, in giving them the land, overcame the Amorites, "who were tall as cedars, and as strong as oak trees." The Lord expects Israel, now in a position of power, to act for the weak as He had for Israel. He expects an *imitatio Dei*. Since they fail in this, He threatens defeat at the hands of an enemy (2:9-16).

In later chapters, Amos returns again and again to this theme of treatment of the poor:

*The women of Samaria*: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, / who live on the mount of Samaria: / Who oppress the destitute / and abuse the needy: / Who say to your husbands / Bring us a drink!" (4:1). By their demands on their husbands they are indirectly responsible. Amos, we see, is inclusive!

*Rich merchants defraud the poor*: "We will diminish the ephah, / add to the shekel, / and fix our scales for cheating / We will buy the destitute, / and the poor for a pair of sandals" (8:5).

*Those who should administer justice but don't*: "Woe to those who turn justice into wormwood / and cast righteousness to the ground, / They hate those who reprove at the gate<sup>5</sup> / and abhor those who speak with integrity" (5:7,10). "Yes, I know how many are your crimes, / how grievous your sins: / Oppressing the just, accepting bribes, / turning away the needy at the gate" (5:12).

*Those living in careless luxury*: Amos pictures the rich lying on beds decorated with ivory carvings, eating lambs from the flock, drinking wine from bowls, composing and improvising music, but careless that their nation was collapsing (6:4-6).

### Punishment to Come

The Lord sent a series of afflictions upon them as a warning to convert, but to no effect. After each affliction He laments, "Yet you did not return to me" (4:6-11). Therefore, in a series of three threatening visions Amos foresees the end; at each of the first two visions Amos intercedes for mercy and the Lord relents, but at the last one the response is, "I will forgive them no longer" (7:1-8). As a warning to those who think they can escape punishment for their crimes, Amos cuts off all sources of false confidence:

*False confidence in Israel's election*: Greater privilege calls for stricter judgment: "You alone have I known [i.e., favored], / among all the families of the earth; / Therefore I will punish you / for all your iniquities" (3:2). Those who are "Leaders of the first among nations" shall be "the first to go into exile" (6:1, 7).

<sup>3</sup> Each of these indictments features the phrase (in the NABRE translation), "I will not take it back," which probably refers to a decree of judgment.

<sup>4</sup> The antecedent for "it" would be "word of judgment" or something similar.

<sup>5</sup> The open space at the city gate was the place where justice was administered.

**False confidence in wealth:** “Though you have built houses of hewn stone,/ you shall not live in them;/ Though you have planted choice vineyards,/ you shall not drink their wine” (5:11).

**False confidence in the “day of the Lord”<sup>6</sup>:** “Woe to those who yearn/ for the day of the Lord!/ What will the day of the Lord mean for you?/ It will be darkness, not light” (5:18).

**False confidence in the cult:** “I hate, I despise your feasts,/ I take no pleasure in your solemnities” (5:21). The Lord first invites, “Seek me, that you may live,” but then warns them not to seek Bethel, Gilgal, or Beer-sheba (all famous cult centers) because of the fate that will overtake them (5:4-5).

Amos sees judgment beginning at the temple itself, as he pictures the Lord standing beside it and giving the command to “Break them off on the heads of them all!” As this vision continues the Lord pursues the survivors to wherever they would flee, with the word: “I will fix my gaze upon them/ for evil and not for good” (9:1-4).

### The Meaning of “Justice”

Is there any hope of escape? What can Israel do? There is only one thing the Lord desires: justice! As He rejects Israel’s liturgies, He says: “The melodies of your harps,/ I will not listen to them. / .../ Rather, let justice surge like waters,/ and righteousness like an unfailing stream” (5:23-24).

It is important that we understand what Amos means by justice, because it is not what we would mean by the term. For us, justice is a matter of rendering to each person his/her due. It is objective, impersonal, impartial; we use a blindfolded goddess holding scales to symbolize this. But the Hebrew word we render as justice, *sedaqah*, differs from this on almost every point. As one author has put it, “Righteousness does not imply neutral, unconditioned justice on all hands; the ethics of the Israelite acknowledged neither neutral or unconditioned acts.”<sup>7</sup> “Justice is more frequently a claim on the stronger, implying that he receives the weaker into his will.”<sup>8</sup> Thus it is a relational term. The *sedaqah* expected of a rich merchant toward a poor widow would be much different than that toward another rich merchant. Thus *sedaqah*, far from demanding its pound of flesh, is a quality that will often incline toward mercy and generosity. We might almost translate it as “compassion.” What Israel called the *sidqot YHWH*, the “righteous deeds of the Lord” (Judges 5:11; 1 Samuel 12:7; Micah 6:5), were precisely God’s acts of deliverance in Israel’s history. Katherine Sakenfeld has called *sedaqah* “a way of speaking of the entire fabric of the society itself, its warp and woof.”<sup>9</sup> If this is so, what happens to

a society when its fabric becomes rotten? What happened to Israel, we know.

### Is There Any Hope?

Amos is sometimes thought of as the prophet of God’s justice, but it would be more accurate to speak of him as prophet of God’s wrath—against Israel, for their lack of *sedaqah*.<sup>10</sup> In view of the judgment decreed in 9:1 (“Not one shall get away, / no survivor shall escape”), we can ask, “Does Amos hold out any hope?” Yes he does, but only a doubly conditional one:

“Seek good and not evil,/ that you may live;/ Then truly the LORD, the God of hosts,/ will be with you as you claim./ Hate evil and love good,/ and let justice prevail at the gate;/ Then it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,/ will have pity on the remnant of Joseph” (5:14-15).

The condition is the exercise of *sedaqah*, and even then only “it may be.” There is, indeed, a very optimistic, unconditional promise of restoration in 9:11-15, but this is almost universally regarded as a later addition, by a later hand, to raise spirits. It is impossible to believe that Amos, who had dedicated his prophetic career to warning Israel of downfall because of their sins, holding only modest hope conditioned on conversion, would have undone all this by enthusiastic, unconditional promises. There does seem to be a suggestion in 9:8-9 of a remnant to be saved in the promise not to destroy Israel completely, sifting them among the nations, but the text is obscure and suggests exile from their land.

### The Meaning of Amos for Today

What is the meaning of Amos for today? The Bible, beginning with the Old Testament, presents us with an “option for the poor,” i.e., a preferential treatment. Here are a couple examples from many: “He who oppresses the poor blasphemes his Maker/ but he who is kind to the needy glorifies him” (Proverbs 14:31). “Injure not the poor because they are poor, / nor crush the needy at the gate; For the Lord will defend their cause,/ and will plunder the lives of those who plunder them” (Proverbs 22:22-23). In Deuteronomy 15:11, the Lord *commands* you to “open your hand to the poor and needy.” Or again, “share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked when you see them” (Isaiah 58:7).

Actually this preferential treatment is for all who are vulnerable; listed regularly with the poor and needy are widows, orphans, and aliens. See, for example: “The Lord of lords ... executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19), and again, “You shall not

<sup>6</sup> Amos is the first to use this term, apparently a day expected to be a day of triumph; Amos has other ideas. This theme undergoes great development, generating ideas of “judgment day,” “last judgment,” “parousia,” “second coming,” etc.

<sup>7</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 336.

<sup>8</sup> Pedersen, 344-45.

<sup>9</sup> Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 119-20.

<sup>10</sup> This understanding of justice can help clarify St. Paul’s argument in Romans, if we remember that the contrast that he draws is not between God’s mercy and justice, but between God’s wrath (Rom 1:18), which inclines to judgment and punishment, and God’s justice/righteousness (in the sense just explained), which leads Him to send Jesus for our justification.

deprive the resident alien or the orphan of justice, nor take the clothing of a widow as pledge" (Deuteronomy 24:17). The alien is not to be molested, should be treated no differently than the native-born—we even read, "You shall love the alien as yourself" (Leviticus 19:33-34). There is, in fact, a curse for anyone "who violates the rights of the alien, the orphan, or the widow" (Deuteronomy 27:19). By *sedaqah* the stronger receives such as these into his will and self-maintenance. That is why Pedersen calls it "a kingly virtue."

The message of Amos does not require much "translation" to apply to our present social situation. As in the days of eighth-century Israel/Judah, much of what we deplore today relates not so much to the provisions of legal justice as to the crass indifference to the plight of the poor on the part of those well able to help them, not to mention those who grow rich by fattening on the poor. What choice words would Amos have had for those men who buy automobiles with a \$50,000-\$100,000 price tag and yachts and private jets costing several times that much, while a few miles away are people living in abject poverty. Or what would he say to the women who buy gowns (or even swimming suits!) which cost

in the thousands of dollars, while in another part of the same city mothers work at two jobs in order to feed their children—these even being the lucky ones, because still others go hungry, without medical aid, without shelter, without hope. An apartment owner charges whatever rent he can get, regardless of whether his/her tenants can afford it. A factory owner closes down his business in order to relocate to a place where he can pay the workers less, without concern for those he leaves unemployed in the first location. Rather than loving the alien as oneself, those who demonize and seek to expel them are lionized.

All such practices relate directly to the prophetic condemnations of the rich who acquire still greater riches at the expense of the poor—no violation of law, perhaps, but surely a violation of *sedaqah*, the "kingly virtue." Amos and the other prophets rarely rest their case upon legal prescriptions; they speak, rather, of how God has acted in Israel's history; and they take over the diction of the wisdom tradition, in which God is the vindicator of the poor and the judge of those who oppress them. If *sedaqah* is the warp and woof, the very fabric of a society, what happens to that society when its fabric becomes rotten?

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB

## Fr. Stephen Reid's *The Conversion of Saint Paul*

*The Conversion of Saint Paul*, like nearly all of Fr Stephen Reid's paintings, is neither dated nor precisely datable. Its figural background, a rhythmic march of simplified, patternlike forms, almost certainly locates the canvas in the late 1950s or early 1960s, for this compositional device connects *The Conversion* to other canvases of roughly the same period—*Psalms 126* is one—and it feels harmonious with modes of painting then current in American art. As a painter, Fr Stephen rarely lacked courage, but his boldness is striking here, for he could hardly have avoided placing himself in a direct relationship with his heritage as a religious artist—with, that is, canonical, widely reproduced versions of the subject by Michelangelo, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Caravaggio, and above all Tintoretto, whose frantic *Conversion* (c. 1545) was already in the collection of the National Gallery of Art while Fr Stephen resided at St. Anselm's Abbey. We can be sure that he gave much thought to this lineage. Evidence of a sensitivity to visual history is nearly pervasive in his work, and in the *Conversion*, as if to emphasize the point, the posture of the central figure echoes that of Tintoretto's Paul.

As Fr Stephen realized by this time, some imagery—Mary and Child, for instance—can seem always fresh. A robust visual past inflects and enriches such subjects, but it never becomes the measure of their success. Others—the Nativity is an example—have significant precedents



*Psalms 126: "sowing in tears and reaping with cries of joy"*

but manage to maintain relaxed relationships with their histories. The conversion of Saint Paul is different.

First, it is not a generic subject, common to religious art or to church decoration. An artist selects it consciously, and in Fr Stephen's case, the choice would also have been self-conscious. He clearly cherished the aesthetic heritage of Benedictine culture, but as an artist working in a small abbey in postwar America, he was well aware, of course, of his own removal from the conditions under which the most famous versions of the subject were made, a time when religious representation constituted the very mainstream of Western art. Secondly, Fr Stephen knew that his canvas would face at least passing comparison with its most familiar predecessors, a potentially dangerous situation for any artist. He must have wondered what he could do with the subject. How would his painting stand alongside such an illustrious ancestry? What could he hope to accomplish?

Another, more pressing question now comes into view. What is the relationship of a contemporary religious artist—a marginalized figure, at best—with celebrity works from his own tradition? Because Fr Stephen was always a Christian artist, he almost certainly came to his material with some personal spirit of unity with the artistic past, and with a desire to unite himself to it. So he begins by establishing a singularity of treatment based on his own familiarity with the subject, one that will separate him from his forebears even as it strives to carry the tradition forward. Michelangelo, Brueghel, and Tintoretto all portrayed Paul at large scale, in eventful compositions charged by the high drama of the scene itself. Further, Michelangelo and Tintoretto, reflecting Late Renaissance taste, depicted heaven and earth as interactive compositional fields, and both included Christ as a participant. Fr Stephen veers in the direction of Caravaggio's version, a spectacle of intense darkness and light in which the recumbent Paul is enclosed in a ring of shadowy, upright figures and a horse.

Fr Stephen's canvas is by comparison quite modest in size, but intimacy is another hallmark of his work, one that may reflect something of his religious feeling, the spiritual atmosphere he brings to the studio. Still, intimacy is also a virtue for modern viewers, who have learned that, in painting, less tends to be more. Thus Fr Stephen extricates Paul from the teeming landscape of salvation history, considering him as an individual for whom confrontation with the Risen One is indeed an eye-popping experience, an utterly personal conversion that only later would be borne into the world in apostolic love. The enclosing figures, radically flattened and rendered as pattern and non-descriptive color, do not participate, nor are they even witnesses, really, serving instead as formal elements that isolate and compress the central figure in its own space.

Did Fr Stephen, himself a convert, empathize with



*The Conversion of St. Paul*

Saint Paul? Certainly he places his distinctive signature on the figure, marking it with his full artistic identity as both painter and carver. His modeling techniques are sculptural—he wields his brush like a chisel, while the face is distinctly masklike in appearance. The left arm and curve of the torso recall Tintoretto, yes, but the allusion does not cling to the image. It is only the artist's declaration that he longs to claim a place in a genealogy he loves and treasures. The figure simply falls back into the breathless enclosure of the composition, and although we are not permitted to see what Paul sees—the event that provokes such an extreme response—of course we do not need to, as Fr Stephen knows. Far better to imagine it for ourselves.

Fr Stephen answers the past, therefore, in the most sensible possible way, and maybe the most realistic. He seems to have used narrative canvases such as this one to meditate upon Biblical narratives, as visualizations that enabled him to put himself in their midst, and in doing so, he cultivated the pictorial moments that continue to arouse our interest. He never denies his historical situation as an artist, and thus permits the entry of the cultural and religious tonality of his own time, secure in the knowledge that he can be nowhere other than the present, and no one but himself.

BRUCE NIXON

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wildlife and a colony of beehives.  
Lower left, St Fiacre in the cloister garden*

