Cotidie ante oculos: On the Cornerstones of Saint John’s Churches, Old and New

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Abstract

Drawing from the Bible and the Rule of Saint Benedict, campus inscriptions on the Saint John’s campus were set in place at times when all Roman Catholic worship and art was in Latin. Because we pass them every day often without appreciating their significance and potential inspiration, Cotidie ante oculos takes two of the most unseen articles of campus art—the cornerstones of the former and current abbey churches, unrejected by builders and set in place in 1879 and 1958—and places them in the cultures, societies, and beliefs of Christian and Benedictine life in those years. The essay aims to help us who see the cornerstones day by day appreciate their petrified significance.

Keywords

St. John’s University (Collegeville, MN) history, cornerstone laying, medal of Saint Benedict, Saint John the Baptist

Cotidie ante oculos means, “Before (ante) the eyes (oculos) every day (cotidie),” or, “In sight every day,” or, colloquially, “What you see so often that you don’t notice it.” This Latin phrase from The Rule of Benedict nudges us to consider more closely things we see all the time.

Latin is the tongue of many campus inscriptions because at the building of the old Abbey Church, now the Great Hall, Latin was the language of Roman Catholic and, derivatively, of Benedictine life and worship. Latin is not as boring as you might think, especially if you consider the inscriptions in the social context of rural, farming, central Minnesota into which the monks arrived. Mid-nineteenth-century Minnesota was an arena for competing church settlements and proselytizing. Both Catholics and Lutherans immigrated here a century and a half ago, and Lutherans,
mindful of the anti-Vatican diatribes of their sixteenth-century founder, Martin Luther, would have been frightened at the sight of anything, like Latin, associated with the pope and the Vatican.\(^3\) Consider that as monks from Saint Vincent’s Abbey in Pennsylvania moved to central Minnesota,\(^4\) an American famous for his social communications, Samuel Morse, as in the “Morse Code,” pseudonymously wrote a tract aimed at turning back the desperate and poor Catholics arriving at the nation’s shores; like the code of our nation’s president a century and a half later, Morse tried to send back those already here.

Samuel was the son of a Reformed preacher, Jedidiah Morse, who had rallied to maintain Puritan, biblical ideals in the United States. In true Nativist form, Jedidiah’s son fought to keep starved, uneducated Catholic immigrants from arriving on the continent’s shores and also to block those already here from running for political office. Samuel Morse’s *Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States* deserves attention for the communicator’s feelings toward his fellow Christians:

Poor Catholics ... are too ignorant to act at all for themselves, and expect to be guided wholly by others.\(^5\)

The food of Popery is ignorance. Ignorance is the mother of Papal devotion. Ignorance is the legitimate prey of Popery.\(^6\)

Popery is the natural enemy of general education. Do you ask for proof? It is overwhelming. Look at the intellectual condition of all the countries where Popery is dominant. If Popery is in favor of general education, why are the great mass of the people, in the papal countries I have named, the most ill-informed, mentally degraded beings of all the civilized world, arbitrarily shut out by law from all knowledge but that which makes them slaves to the tyranny of their oppressors?\(^7\)

Popery is a political system, despotic in its organization, anti-democratic and anti-republican, and cannot therefore co-exist with American republicanism.

The ratio of increase of Popery is the exact ratio of decrease of civil liberty.

The dominance of Popery in the United States is the certain destruction of our free institutions.

Popery, by its organization, is wholly under the control of a FOREIGN DESPOTIC SOVEREIGN.\(^8\)
Though a preacher’s son, Morse countered the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (25:35). He also countered Saint Benedict, whose Rule teaches that “All guests are to be welcomed as Christ himself” (53.1). And he would have rubbed against the verses of Jewish poet Emma Lazarus, which—at least so far—still grace the torch-bearing Lady Liberty, who greets immigrants at the harbor in New York City, our president’s home city:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.¹⁰

Fear of Catholics when Benedictine monks arrived in the predominantly Lutheran Minnesota territory was common, so, like the monks’ medieval habits at Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s, Latin inscriptions signaled pending disaster for some Protestants, a language link between the “despotic foreign sovereign” who was Pope and “the most ill-informed, mentally degraded beings of all the civilized world” who followed his teachings.¹¹ German Catholic monks started the monasteries and schools at Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s, and the monks founded the University and College, heeding Benedict’s Rule in establishing a “school of the Lord’s service.”¹² Toward understanding the time of the building of the two churches on the Saint John’s campus, this essay takes up three church cornerstones to give historical context for what they reveal to us today. By sight the cornerstones are as gray and benign in their placements as to be unseen, yet they are historically revelatory; two are on either side of the arched doorway into the Great Hall, the right cornerstone and the left cornerstone; and the third is still less noticeable day by day, the cornerstone of the Abbey Church.¹³
This simplest cornerstone tags the Abbey and University: *S. Joannis B.*\(^{14}\) The abbreviation “S.” is for *Sancti*, followed by the proper name *Joannis*, and the abbreviation “B.” for *Baptistae*.\(^{15}\) While the Saint John the stone points to is the Baptist, another Saint John is also featured in the Great Hall and in the cornerstone of the current Abbey Church, so I distinguish the three Saint Johns of first-century Christianity.

The earliest of the three Johns is the one on this stone, Saint John the Baptist, who in the Gospel of Luke is part of the nativity story, the cousin of Jesus, born six months before Jesus. Artwork of the Baptist generally features him in one of three scenes: first, with his mother, Elizabeth, and with Jesus and his mother, Mary (Luke 1:39-66); second, portrayed baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River in Galilee (Matthew 3:13-17 / Mark 1:9-11 / Luke 3:21-22); and the third, with his decapitated head on a platter, the gift requested by a young dancer to whom King Herod granted whatever she desired. She asked her mother, Herodias, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist on a platter” (Matthew 14:1-12 / Mark 6:14-29).

The second John of Jesus’ lifetime was his apostle, named as the third of the apostolic triplet “Peter, James, and John, the brother of James” (Mark 5:37, 9:2, 13:3).
The third Saint John is the gospel-writer. Christian tradition weds the second and third, the Apostle John and Evangelist John as the same character, but the Greek of the gospel marks it as written in the late first-century, so not likely from the hand of the John who followed Jesus over a half-century before.

Knowing the difference between John the Baptist and John the Evangelist helps in studying the theology of the former and current abbey churches because both Johns are featured in the cornerstones and John the Evangelist is featured in the mural of the most august figure of the campus’s art, the Jesus Christ in the apse of the Great Hall. That Jesus holds a book in his left hand, which contains these letters:

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| EGO  | VERI |
| SUM  | TAS et |
| VIA  | VITA |
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Like the cornerstone’s words, these are also Latin and they are to be read vertically to make the simple six-word phrase, *Ego sum via, veritas, et vita,* “I (ego) am (sum) the way (via), the truth (veritas), and the life (vita),” a verse (John 14:6) from the Catholic Latin Bible (the Vulgate). The author of this text in the hand of the Great Hall's Jesus, John the Evangelist, is the third Saint John above, to be distinguished here from the Saint John of the cornerstone, the Baptist.

The Latin inscription is also linkable to a common sight of American car culture, the Toyota 4Runner. This numeric tag is an abbreviated form of the word “fore-runner,” meaning “one who runs in front of” or runs “before.” The car-name comes from the words of the Baptist himself about Jesus, when the Baptist says, “One more powerful than I is coming after me,” which makes the Baptist the “fore-runner.” Ironic about the tag as an indication that the car is fast, that it will “run” ahead of other cars, is that right after these words in the Bible, John the Baptist says of Jesus, “I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals” (Mark 1:7). What the Baptist says of his inferior status is confirmed in
Benedict’s teachings on humility: “When the heart is humble, let God raise it up to heaven” (7.8),16 hardly the message Toyota-makers suggested in the branding.

A final note about the right cornerstone is the connection between the Abbey’s name after John the Baptist and the history of baptism in the former abbey church. The cornerstone is set into the red-brick wall, and the office space on the inside of that wall bears stained glass windows suggesting that it had originally been a place for baptism. But monks and non-monks who remember the former church when services were celebrated there recall that the baptismal font was not on that side of the entrance but on the opposite side, where one sees the store to the left after you enter the Great Hall.

By the time when Benedict wrote the Rule, two centuries after Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire and a few decades after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, in 476, adult baptism had started to be displaced by infant baptism. Yet the Rule’s teaching on humility is aptly considered for a theology of baptism, for in baptism the individual is incorporated into a living community, and in baptism, as in monastic profession, the person leaves the values of the sin of the world to enter the values of God’s life and love in the community: “A monk does nothing except what is encouraged by the common rule of the monastery and the example of the veteran members of the community,” the individual monks ceding their own desires in obedience to the prioress at Saint Benedict’s Monastery or the Abbot at Saint John’s Abbey, thereby toeing the line of the 4Running Baptist ceding to his cousin, the Savior of the world two millennia ago.
Teaching Theo 111 a decade ago, as fervor over Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code* was high, I asked for a show of hands about who had ever read the Bible. Of thirty, I got one hand up, and that one teetering back and forth. “Well, I read most of it,” she said. “How about *The Da Vinci Code*?” Three-quarters of the hands went up. While Dan Brown’s novel is a nail-biting thriller, what concerned me then, and still, about its popularity is the inaccessibility of God in the tale.

That Robert Langdon, *The Da Vinci Code* hero, is a teacher of religious symbols at Harvard warms my theologian’s heart, no doubt, but the God depicted is discovered only through secret cabals, intricate clues, a God revealed only in smoke and mirrors, mazes, secret handshakes, and insiders’ passwords. While for me, baptized at ten days old and practicing the faith ever since, the God of faith and experience is effusively loving, generous in revelation and incarnate love beyond human imagining. No smoke or mirrors necessary. I write that as I direct your attention to the left cornerstone on the Great Hall, for it captures a theology of the secret-code God of *The Da Vinci Code*’s fog much more than it does the beating-hearted God of my experience.

At first sight, the cornerstone to the left of the Great Hall’s cool, medieval-style doorway has just $18 + 79$ in the rectangular stone, the year
cleaved by the cross. But on tracing the cross element of the cornerstone using paper and charcoal for copying gravestone inscriptions, I discovered letters embedded in the cross. Into the vertical beam of the cross are inscribed C S S M L and into the horizontal beam N D S M D. The connection between the year 1879 and the acrostics etched into the stone points to the cult of the Saint Benedict Medal fervent in the years when the Great Hall was built.

### The Saint Benedict Medal

About five centuries before Benedictine monks came to central Minnesota and back in the region of their origins, in Bavaria, in southeastern Germany, and even before the invention of the printing press, a monk of the medieval Benedictine abbey of Metten copied out a Latin Book of the Gospels, called an *Evangeliarium*. In the Book, around the year 1415, he sketched out a pen-and-ink drawing of Saint Benedict. In the anonymous copyist’s depiction, Benedict’s right hand holds a staff with a banner waving from its
top, in which the monk wrote the two phrases now etched as acrostics in the left cornerstone of the Great Hall: C S S M L, Crux Sacra Sit Mihi Lux, and N D S M D, Non Draco Sit Mihi Dux.\textsuperscript{18} Though their earliest source is in that fifteenth-century manuscript by the monk of Metten Abbey, in the nineteenth century, when Saint John’s was founded, the two inscriptions were popularized on the Saint Benedict’s Medal, a devotion and cult that has lasted ever since.

Appreciating the sayings in the context of Catholicism in Europe and the United States in the year of its placement, 1879, the fourteenth-century celebration of the birth of Saint Benedict was immanent and the celebration was met with the popularization of an object of Catholic devotion, the Saint Benedict Medal.\textsuperscript{19} C S S M L was (and still is) inscribed on Saint Benedict medals; it means “May the Holy Cross Be My Light.” I like the verticality of the adage—on the Great Hall and the medal—because it points upward, heavenward, and for Christians the cross leads the way.

The saying on the horizontal beam intersects the vertical at the middle letter, the “S,” for Sit, or “may [it] be”: N-D-S-M-D, an acrostic of May the Dragon Not Be My Guide. I suggest that the horizontality of the beam captures that the “dragon,” “serpent” (another meaning), the devil, or Satan is the impediment to God. This too is struck on the Benedict Medal.

To add one more layer of Latin complexity to interpreting the stone, the eye-shaped spaces between the beams of the cross also have letters inscribed in them, “C” at northwest; “S” at northeast; “P” at southwest; and “B” at southeast, which is the acrostic for Crux Sancti Patris Benedicti, which means “The Cross of Father Saint Benedict.”\textsuperscript{20}

The arresting word of the medal’s and cornerstone’s acrostics is draco, “dragon.” Though not sure of the origins of the association in me, I imagine this dragon on the wooden footbridge between the campuses that I see when on I-94 going from one campus to the other. I picture its talons swooping down to snatch people from their cars as they innocently drive (at 75 mph), casting them into the way of sin. Closer to the tradition,
and not my sin-soaked imagination, the figure is linked literally to the ominous figure at the end of the Bible:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while (Revelation 20:1-3).21

Catholics in our day speak and hear little about sin, but the “ancient serpent,” “the devil and Satan” were integral to Catholic faith when the Great Hall was built. Devotions like the cult of the Saint Benedict Medal were meant to assist believers in times of temptation to sin.

The acrostics work in biblical cosmology if the believer takes up heaven as skyward, for “the Cross of Father Saint Benedict” and the Rule from his hand are the via, the “way,” between the degradation of human life apart from God and the life of God in heaven. The vertical cross beam, with its hope that the “dragon not be my guide” imagines Satan as the diversion from heaven into a life of sin and selfishness. Baptism and profession into Benedictine life are the remedies.
The cornerstone of the current Abbey Church, near the church entrance closest to the Great Hall, weds the outside to the inside of the Marcel Breuer structure. Walking from the Great Hall to the Abbey Church, just before the outside door, divert leftward along the cement wall, onto the grass, and make a right at the cornerstone. At calf-height you’ll see the cornerstone.

Like the left cornerstone of the Great Hall, the year is bisected by an equilateral cross. While on the older stone the inscribed cross is between “18” and “79,” on this stone the cross divides the rectangle into four equal quadrants. The upper characters are letters, I C and X C, while the lower characters are numbers, 1 9 and 5 8. First, the letters.

Although the letters look like English ABCs, they are capital letters of Greek, a language that does not use our script; the characters might be familiar from fraternity and sorority t- and sweat-shirts, or from math equations and physics, which are also Greek letters. The New Testament, as you who have done Theo 111 know, was written in Greek, the reason for the use of Greek in the cornerstone here, not the Latin of the Great Hall’s stones. The three letters look like the ninth, third, and twenty-fourth letters.
of English “I,” “C,” and “X,” but they are the ninth, eighteenth, and twenty-second letters of the 24-letter Greek alphabet: Iota, Sigma, and Chi.

They are significant because they are the first and last letters of the Greek spelling of the words “Jesus” and “Christ,” which in Greek capital letters are spelled like this: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ for the Greek “Jesus” and ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ for the Greek “Christ.” The abbreviations are made by uniting the first and last letters of the words together, as we do in English with “Dr.” for “Doctor” or “Jr.” for “Junior,” a kind of letter sandwich.

The choice of letters is significant because they connect the cornerstone to the looming portrait of Jesus Christ in the arched apse in the Great Hall. Standing in the Great Hall and looking up at the imperial Christ up front, you’ll see the same Greek letters to the left, I C, and to the right, X C, of the head of Jesus. The large Christ-figure in the Great Hall was not original to the church’s decoration. The building was consecrated in 1879, but its walls and decoration were very different from what we see today. In 1930 a monk from Austria, Clement Frischoff, OSB, immigrated to the United States and joined Saint John’s Abbey. Soon after his arrival he painted the murals, and the apse of the former church was done in 1931.

The year on the bottom half is significant in the history of the Roman Catholic Church in its life in Europe and its life in the United States, for the former was on the brink of descent and decrease, while the latter was on the brink of ascent and social acceptance. In Europe after the devastation of World War I and World War II, and after the attempt of Germany and countries that cooperated with it to slaughter Jews by genocide, all Christian churches of Europe were in crisis as they wondered, “Is this what a millennium and a half of Christian faith and worship has wrought?” Near the time when the cornerstone was set in the Abbey Church, Pope John XXIII (+1963, canonized 2014) called for an ecumenical council so that the church could reconsider its role in the world; the Second Vatican Council happened over four autumns after the Abbey Church was built, 1962-1965.
Yet Roman Catholicism in the U.S. was set in a very different relation to its world and societies than it had been in 1879 or than it was in Europe in 1958. Catholics who had fled to North America from Europe out of poverty, hunger, and fear had by then been more integrated into America. The Protestant xenophobia of Samuel Morse’s conspiracy theory had ebbed mostly, and the Democratic Party was about to choose its first Roman Catholic nominee for the presidency who would win the office, President John F. Kennedy. Though only eighty years apart in time, the years of the 1879 and 1958 cornerstones reflect a converted social life of Roman Catholics in America and central Minnesota. Although President Kennedy faced political scrutiny because of his faith, his deft response to Protestant fears of Vatican control of the country brought the feared faith into social and political light.25

The Cornerstone of the Abbey Church Inside

The inside façade of the Abbey Church’s cornerstone is not as easy to appreciate as the outside. To view it, go back to the Abbey Church’s doors facing the Great Hall; go through both sets of glass doors and immediately make a left turn and stay to the left side of the cement staircase as you move toward the
inside of the stone whose outside you had just seen. Duck rightward under the cement stairway and you'll see the foundation stone's inside aspect.

Like the letters of the outside façade of the stone, the letters of the inside are also Greek, but, unlike I C X C, some of these letters don’t have English alphabet links:

\[
\begin{align*}
\Phi \\
Z \Omega H \\
C
\end{align*}
\]

More than an abbreviated Greek phrase or puzzle, as on the outside cornerstone, these letters form two three-letter words, concise and simple in appearance, but expansive in theology. The horizontal word is Z Ω H—composed of the Greek letters Zeta Omega Eta, or Z-O-E in English, and the root of “zoo”—which means “life.” The vertical word is Φ Ω C—Phi Omega Sigma in Greek and Ph-O-S in English, as in “photo”—which means “light.”

Like the text in the hand of the Great Hall’s Christ, these words reflect the theology of the Gospel of John, for “light” and “life” appear in John’s gospel more than in the other three gospels combined. For believers, recognizable uses of the words in the Gospel are, for Z Ω H, “life,” verses like, “I am the resurrection and the life” (8:12) and “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). Recognizable verses with Φ Ω C, “light,” are “I am the light of the world” (9:6) and “Believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light” (12:36).

The letter of the words’ intersection is Ω, “Omega,” the last letter of the Greek alphabet and is often paired with A, or Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, as in “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13). The clever intersection of these Greek words engraved in the Abbey’s new church is similar to the intersected “S” in the middle of C S S M L and N D S M D. The Greek words, situated as they are under the Abbey stairs and near the baptismal pool at the very entrance of the Abbey Church, remind the baptized of the light and life
the monks hoped would come to pass when the church assembled its leaders the following year. Perhaps they were out of the way as a failsafe in case the monks’ hope had not been reflected back eastward across the Atlantic Ocean to the Vatican when its hierarchy assembled a few years later to reflect on its failures in preaching the Gospel in Europe, after the catastrophes of ruin and genocide and to re-orient its mission and message for the church of the future.

Though it seems like a benign change in retrospect, it’s worth putting the use of Greek in the context of the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible. A half-century before the monks built the new abbey church, Pope Pius X had commissioned Benedictine monks in Europe to produce a new version of the Latin Bible (the Vulgate), which would be the only version of the Bible used in Catholic worship. While the monks at Saint John’s were meeting with architect Marcel Breuer on the design of the new, modern church, that Latin Bible was still the only Bible permitted in Catholic worship. Not long after the new church was set in central Minnesotan cement, and the Greek of the cornerstone embedded into it, the church loosened the stronghold on its members and sanctioned new translations from the original Greek of the New Testament, but in 1958 this was far from a sure future. Many bishops, like Pope Pius X, held firmly to immobility on the exclusive primacy of Latin as the language of the Word of God. To us, one dead language might seem much like any other, but the monks took a risk in inscribing in stone the Greek that might have remained forbidden in worship. The monastery clearly hoped for a bright outcome for the council that was to take place in the years 1962-1965.

Conclusion

It’s ironic that the cornerstones of the two churches run against how the metaphor of the “cornerstone” was used by Jesus in the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. After telling his followers a parable, Jesus asks, “Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’” (Matthew 21:42 / Mark 12:10 / Luke 20:17). The evangelists wrote decades after the crucifixion of him, the cornerstone
rejected, who was their redeemer. They proclaimed his vindication as the faith was spreading to the cities and shores of the Mediterranean Sea, through the Middle East, North Africa, Greece, and Italy.

The station of monks coming to Minnesota from Pennsylvania in 1856 and the society of Minnesota as the 1879 cornerstone was set in place were much more like Jesus the rejected cornerstone than the station and society of Benedictines when the cornerstone of 1958 was set, a time when Catholicism was no longer so reviled. By then the rejected stone had been well integrated into society, politics, and, soon enough, the ecumenical movement that would find what Benedictine values and practices united Christians rather than divided them.

Viewing the cornerstones of the campus’s former and current churches reveals a span of change from a religious people rejected to a people accepted and contributing. But, if anything, Roman Catholicism today—in the U.S., in Minnesota, and on our campuses—now turns from increase to decrease. Like all Christian churches in America, the Catholic Church here shrinks by the day. While the quantitative decrease is alarming for believers, that the fewer people who attend the church’s rites do so not out of guilt, but out of love and devotion—to offer thanksgiving to the God who generously grants us life and love—is, I pray, a qualitative improvement.

With that future before us, the cornerstones call Catholics to re-imagine their church and even to revisit the theology of the devotion to the Saint Benedict Medal that is engraved on the 1879 cornerstone. The devotional manuals for the Medal, as one can see easily in any of the books or pamphlets listed above, were fervent in positing how many days in Purgatory a Catholic might work off by reciting the prayers on particular feast days, a kind of works-righteousness theology that was no healthier in nineteenth-century Minnesota than it was in the Wittenberg where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses Against Indulgences.

Better for believers and non-believers today is that the Medal turns our attention not to sin and release from Purgatory but to Saint Benedict’s example and to the Rule he, by God’s grace, passed on. The Medal, and with it the cornerstones of the Great Hall that reflect its prayer, can turn all of us
back to the Umbrian saint’s encouragement to lives shared in community, to liturgical prayer and work, to stability and conversion of life, to balanced eating and drinking, to caring for the sick and elderly, to restraint in speech and gossip, and to welcoming strangers, who are the face of Christ in the Rule.

Believers or not, we see in the cornerstones the move from aggressive, defensive, xenophobes like Samuel Morse to the monks of Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s who welcome students and immigrant strangers. We see churches feeding the poor, healing the sick, visiting prisoners, and advocating for universal health care, extending the healing ministry of its Savior in Palestine to all, regardless of faith, race, or poverty. (We could take a little of the Savior’s and Saint Benedict’s instantaneous wonder-working, I confess, but I will settle for universal access by a single-payer system.) We see the church’s blanket seamless pro-life posture, defending the life of the infants in utero, yes, but also supplying care of babies after birth, education of children for informed citizenship, and opposing the manic American fervor for guns and capital punishment.

At the fortieth anniversary of the church’s 1958 construction, Abbot John Klassen told those assembled that “we pray that we may have the courage and wisdom to take this spiritual legacy and move forward into the future with boldness and confidence.” The monasteries and campuses have survived a century and a half of monumental change in their societies. By the Benedictine values imprinted on CSB/SJU students educated in “light and life” of the saint’s Rule, they—believers or not, baptized or not, monks or not—take that light and life inscribed in the cornerstone and imprint it into the world they enter after graduation.

Notes

2. Liturgical Latin and New Testament Greek were required courses of degree in college. The older professors even spoke to one another in the hallway in Latin, as much, I suspect, to impress us late teens and early twenty-somethings as to chat with one another.


11. Nativist, anti-Catholic faith continued for nearly another century; see Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950); Paul Blanshard,

12. *Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici schola servitii* (Prologue 45); Benedict’s Rule, 2.

13. I devote two sections to the interpretation of this third cornerstone for its two sides are each revelatory about the values of the Abbey and University at the time of their installation.

14. I thank my husband, Greg Terhaar, who made the drawings above each section. Some readers will recognize his last name, for a long line of Terhaars have streamed through the University and College as staff members and students, a handful still here. My husband’s mom, Diana Nustad, was born in Saint Joseph, and his father, Richard Terhaar (+ September 19, 1999), was born in Cold Spring. Greg’s grandfather, Nicholas Terhaar (+1953), was a Johnnie, as were three of his father’s siblings—Fred, Jerry, and Jim—and thirteen (of fifty-one) cousins have graduated from Saint Ben’s or Saint John’s.

15. Only the second word, “John,” Joannis, reveals the Latin case of the name Joannes, and its inflected form, Joannis, means “of John,” which thereby shows that two words astride his name, those without endings, carry the same case, making the whole phrase read *Sancti Joannis Baptistae,* “of Saint John the Baptist,” with *Universitas* not included.

16. *Humiliato corde a Domino erigatur ad caelum* (7.8).


18. For Latin students: *Crux* (nominative feminine noun) =
“Cross”; *Sacra* (nominative feminine adjective) = “Holy”; *Sit* (third-person singular subjunctive) = “May [it] be”; *Mihi* (first-person singular, dative case) = “for me”; *Lux* (nominative feminine singular noun) = “Light.” For Latin students, the fourth and fifth letters (and words) are the same as in the vertical; the new words: *Non* = “Not”; *Draco* (nominative masculine noun) = “Dragon”; *Dux* (nominative masculine singular noun) = “Guide.”

19. The popularity of the Saint Benedict Medal is evident by the number of histories and devotional manuals written about it in German, French, Italian, and English at the time when the Great Hall was constructed. The earliest of these, Prosper Gueranger, *The Medal or Cross of St. Benedict: Its Origin, Meaning, the Privileges* (London: Burns and Oates, 1880), was published in more than ten editions between 1880 and 1890. The cult is reflected in books and pamphlets on the medal published by a handful of abbeys in the U.S.; see Martin Veth, *The Medal or Cross of St. Benedict* (Atchinson, Kansas: St. Benedict’s College, 1906); St. John’s Abbey, *The Medal or Cross of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Saint John’s Abbey, 1923); Adélard Bouvilliers, *The Medal-Cross of St. Benedict* (Belmont, North Carolina: Belmont Abbey, 1932). The American editions do little more than repeat the history of Abbot Prosper Gueranger’s 1880 French original, but the number of editions testifies to the popularity of the cult of the medal in the U.S. These books also reveal the works-righteousness theology that American Protestant preachers, like Samuel Morse’s father, found abhorrent in Roman Catholic theology. While the cult of the medal can still be a vibrant devotion for Catholic believers, particularly students on campuses like ours, a new devotional manual shorn of the magic in these nineteenth-century works would make the cult less foreign to American Christianity and more attractive to non-Catholic Christians learning of Benedict’s Rule and values.
20. For Latin students: Crux = “Cross,” as above; Sancti (genitive singular masculine adjective), “of [the] saint”; Patris (genitive singular masculine noun, Pater is the nominative case) = “of the father”; and Benedicti (genitive singular masculine name, Benedictus is the nominative case) = “of Benedict.”

21. Angelus adprehendit draconem serpentem antiquum qui est diabolum et Satanam et ligavit eum per annos mille (Vulgate, Revelation 20:2).

22. See Victoria M. Young, Saint John’s Abbey Church: Marcel Breuer and the Creation of a Modern Sacred Space (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

23. Think Seth Rogen, Rose Byrne, and Zach Efron in director Nicholas Stoller’s “Neighbors” (Universal City, California: Universal Pictures, 2014) and “Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising” (Universal City, California: Universal Pictures, 2016).

24. I might comment on the theology of the figure at another time, but for now I point to the Christ-figure of the Great Hall merely to link the figure to the letters of the top half of the outside cornerstone of the Abbey Church.

25. See his “Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association,” of September 12, 1960, two months before the election, for example; in American Speeches, Volume 2: Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton (Washington DC: Library of America, 2006): 525-528.

References


