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Ambulatory

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of Canon Law and still exists to this day.

With the election of Jerome Theisen as the eighth abbot of Saint John's Abbey in 1979, the newly elected abbot chose to evaluate the symbols of the abbatial office in regards to RB and the contemporary needs of the community.¹² At his abbatial blessing in 1980, Abbot Jerome deemed it appropriate to take the crozier, pectoral cross, and a copy of RB as the symbols of his office, but omitted the traditional miter and ring. This decision, while seemingly simple and unassuming, marked a distinct development in Saint John's understanding of the abbatial office. And while most Benedictine abbots have continued to use pontificalia in its entirety, the abbatial successors at Saint John's Abbey have followed Abbot Jerome's lead in leaving out the miter and ring as parts of their abbatial insignia. Surely, the renunciation of the miter and ring is not a throwaway act, but what does the absence of these symbols say about Saint John's theological and monastic commitments? In order to gain an insight into this meaning, it will be important to first gain a theological and cultural un-

¹² Seasoltz, "The Blessing of an Abbot," 196.

derstanding for why this particular vesture was taken up in the first place.

During the 9th and 10th centuries, Benedictine abbeys were becoming "nuclei of ecclesial energy."¹³ From their humble beginnings as coenobitic communities set apart from the hierarchical church, monasteries were quickly becoming better known for their administration of land, centers of education, and successful missions than they were for being counter-cultural religious communities. R. Kevin Seasoltz comments on this fact when he writes that during the late Middle Ages "[monastic life] tended to identify with the hierarchical rather than the charismatic dimension of the Church's life."¹⁴ This radical transformation in monastic life is most evident in the role of the abbot. In RB, Saint Benedict outlines the primary function of the abbot as the spiritual leader and teacher of the community.¹⁵ He is to be a model for how to live the monastic life for the community through his words, and

¹³ Abbot John Klassen, OSB, interview by Lewis Grobe, OSB, November 19, 2012.

¹⁴ Seasoltz, "The Blessing of an Abbot," 197.

¹⁵ See RB 2.