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BENEDICTINE EDUCATION IN THE
GREAT PLAINS

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ANCIENT WAY IN A NEW LAND
BENEDICTINE EDUCATION IN THE GREAT PLAINS

MARIELLE FRIGGE, O.S.B.

In the first half of the sixth century, an Italian monk, Benedict of Nursia, provided a framework for Christian monastic life. In the last half of the nineteenth century, his descendants arrived in the Great Plains, part of the westward movement of Christian missionaries in North America. What could this ancient way of life offer to a new land of Native tribes and immigrant farmers, traders, and soldiers? And what might this new land contribute to the shaping of a uniquely American form of monastic life?

These Benedictine men and women brought with them centuries of experience as learners and teachers, and they shared their educative way of life, as well as their schools, with Native peoples and European immigrants alike. In turn, the land and peoples of the Great Plains have contributed to the evolution of Benedictine monastic life in North America to this day.

In the first part of this article I sketch three major characteristics of Benedictine education: an attitude of listening, a habit of discretion, and a holistic methodology. In the second section I explore the interaction of Benedictine education and its new prairie milieu. Here it becomes evident that, on the one hand, these monastic men and women brought their particular character to educational institutions on the Great Plains; on the other hand, the peoples and environment of this new land also promoted the shaping of a singular form of Benedictine life.
ORIGINS AND CHARACTER OF THE RULE OF BENEDICT

In order to understand the sort of education and educational institutions shaped by Benedictine monastics in the Great Plains, one must begin with the foundational document, the *Regula Benedicti*. The culture of Benedictine monasteries and schools in the new land was formed by this brief sixth-century monastic rule, but the word itself must be clarified, since for moderns the English translation of

Unfortunately, except for RB itself, only one source of information about Benedict exists, the *Historians* and Benedictine scholars have long recognized that Gregory’s work intends to teach and edify, and so cannot be naively considered an objective historical document. Still, basic facts of Benedict’s life in

However, since consensus on the question has not been reached, Gregory’s work serves here to sketch an outline of Benedict’s life and work.

Benedict of Nursia lived in an era similar in many ways to our own. Born around 480 A.D. of an aristocratic Italian family, Benedict lived at a time of major shifts in both empire and church. The Roman Empire was giving way to a new, yet unformed civilization brought by invading tribes; Christianity had struggled through several centuries of heresy and refinement of doctrine. By Benedict’s day, the Christian church had been transformed from a persecuted sect to the Roman state religion. Because of the latter development, many citi-

7 After he had lived the solitary life for some time, others sought to join him. Following several disheartening experiences with would-be monks who were apparently less committed to the discipline of monastic life than he, Benedict consented to become abbot, or “father,” of a small group of cenobitic monks, those who live communal life. The Rule he later wrote indicates that Benedict became familiar with both Eastern and Western monasticism and numerous other early monastic rules and Christian writings. Most important, however, for his masterful synthesis of earlier tradition was his own experience of both solitary and communal monastic life.

Such integration of intellectual knowledge and wisdom born of experience characterizes RB itself and any educational endeavor of Benedictine monastics to this day. As noted above, RB seeks to lay the foundation of a way of life. Monasticism was an educational program from its beginnings, patterned on the earliest forms of Christian education. The church itself was considered a “school of Christ” in which education implied experiential knowledge of revealed truth expressed in scripture and Christian dogma; thus, monasticism included personal formation coupled with acquisition of knowledge.

Benedictine monastic life, then, presents a program of studies that is organic, all-encompassing, and lifelong. It strives to teach knowledge integrated with wisdom. A monastery as “school” for those intending religious life must be distinguished from extern schools, designed for those who desired a Christian education but not a monastic life. However, the latter were from their earliest days patterned on the educational approaches of monastic life. To understand the philosophy and practice of education brought to the Great Plains by
Benedictine scholar Mark Sheridan points out that a monastic rule “provides a practical guide for living and for the cultivation of virtue.” As the work of a Christian monk, RB is rooted in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and strongly resembles the literature of those writings. Hence, “although it contains certain theological principles, it is derived primarily from, and reflects experience of, life. It is intended to be a guide to wise living in the practical situations of life.” Sheridan’s description suggests why the wisdom of RB appeals to people beyond Catholic and even Christian circles. It simply makes a great deal of lived sense.

That RB intends to offer guidance for wise living in daily life also accounts for its best-known qualities: adaptability and flexibility. Unlike the earlier 12 with which Benedict was clearly familiar, Benedict leaves many concrete, particular decisions to the discernment of abbot or community. The anonymous Master, writing perhaps twenty years before Benedict, attempts to legislate a precise course of action for innumerable specific situations. RB, on the other hand, allows and even encourages the abbot and community to learn sage decision-making through practice.13

**Benedictine Education**

The above characterization of RB’s educational program as schooling in and for wisdom already suggests several of its major principles. To illuminate the teaching and learning of Benedictine men and women in the Great Plains, I summarize three major characteristics of Benedictine education derived from RB: listening, discretion, holism. It should be emphasized that since RB proposes a way of life with educational purpose, these characteristics naturally interpenetrate and so lead to a certain unavoidable overlap and repetition.

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11To whom does the monastic listen? First of all, to Christ, who is “master” (teacher) and father. Benedict repeatedly insists that monastics are to prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ.15

But in order to learn wise living in a multitude of concrete situations, one must listen to virtually everything. According to RB, cenobites choose a life of listening to the Rule itself and to the leader chosen by the community; they are to listen to the word of God in scripture, encountered in daily communal prayer and individual prayerful reading. All members of the community, including the abbot, are to listen to one another, including the youngest. Internal and external circumstances also call for careful listening: interior thoughts and attitudes, local conditions, the spirit of the times, seasons of the year, changes of weather, work conditions, bodily infirmity, individual gifts and limitations, even critical guests—all are to be heard and met with carefully considered response. As is evident, the hospitality for which Benedictines are known is but another facet of the foundational habit of listening.16 By insisting that every member of the community bring a listening heart to all
In brief, monastic life as educative program intends to form monastics in the habit of discretion, an ability to discern the best course of action in a particular set of circumstances.

RB 2 and 64, which concern the abbot and foremost teacher in the monastery, offer much instruction on teaching. The abbot/teacher should possess knowledge of considerable breadth and depth, which above all must be integrated with experiential knowledge. As for didactic method, the abbot must “lead his disciples by a two-fold teaching of example, in word and deed.” The teacher who would exercise and so teach discretion must know each learner as an individual and adapt both content and method to each one’s background, character, intelligence, and readiness.

Clearly, the habit of

But to understand adequately, and thus live wisely, the meaning of these texts, one also needs to understand their literary types and conventions, their historical context and relation to Christian doctrine. Clearly, such modes of scriptural prayer depend upon knowledge of considerable content. Further, such knowledge deepens through the experiential learning of day-to-day communal life.

Daily immersion in scripture intends to shape the monastic’s awareness, understanding, desire, and moral behavior according to the word of God. No aspect of daily life is too mundane to accomplish such educational goals: receiving guests as Christ, cleaning clothing and garden tools carefully, treating kitchen utensils as sacred vessels, and cooking and serving meals are all intentional modes of teaching and learning what is contained in the scriptures.

It is evident from their sixth-century beginnings that Benedictine monasticism itself
In the middle of the nineteenth century, the first American Benedictine foundations

25 This represented major changes in lifestyle for European Benedictines, but the conditions of life in a new context seemed to demand such adaptation. Cenobitic life according to the Rule of Benedict would continue, but Benedictine listening and discretion would re-create it in new modes; in time, the “mission” model prevailed for American monasteries of both men and women.

With the westward movement of Benedictines to the Great Plains, still greater challenges awaited this new model of monastic life. The European monastics who arrived in American mission lands were German or Swiss, the one exception being French monks who settled in Indian Territory (Oklahoma). Most had lived in large, self-enclosed monasteries with well-established gardens, farms, and schools, and were accustomed to safe, secure living quarters and liturgically well-appointed chapels. For the most part, the works of these communities were carried out within the confines of monastery buildings and grounds. A distinction of choir and lay members was common; the better-educated choir monks and nuns carried out pastoral and teaching activity while lay members of the monastery cared for its gardens, fields, animals, and the like. A
In this vast swath of land already populated by numerous Native tribes, the Benedictine missionaries encountered even greater challenges and dangers than their East Coast predecessors. Their new tasks called for navigating the crossroads of European, Indian, and nascent American cultures. Monastic men and women from a relatively homogeneous and sheltered environment were called upon to minister to non-Christian Indians, soldiers, farmers, traders, land speculators, miners, horse thieves, and gunslingers. The missionaries might move into already existing buildings or begin with nothing, constructing their own monasteries and schools. In either case, such buildings were often sod houses, rude claim shanties, or log and mud structures. The existence of few cities or towns and the sheer expanse of the plains necessitated lengthy, arduous travel by foot, horseback, or horse-drawn wagon or sleigh; the same factors commonly brought months or even years of isolation from all but a few companions.

For example, when Abbot Martin Marty was consecrated bishop of Dakota Territory in 1880, his jurisdiction covered 150,000 square miles, stretching more than 400 miles from north to south. Like many of their fellow changes and concomitant extremes of weather exacerbated such already difficult conditions of life and ministry. An English monk visiting the Southern Plains described to his confreres at Ramsgate Abbey the fascinating terror of summer prairie fires and winter cold that left knives and forks frozen to plates on the monastic table. To his horror, when he dared look at the thermometer, it registered an astonishing (to him) 10 degrees below zero. He could not have dreamed of northern prairie blizzards and temperatures descending another 40 degrees. Still other dangers threatened the Benedictines in the form of animal life never before encountered, including snakes, packs of coyotes, and herds of massive buffalo. On the Northern Plains, two missionary women in their tiny claim shanty were puzzled and frightened at the disappearance of milk from a bowl left out overnight; could a thief be invading their home in darkness? The discovery that a bull snake was having a nocturnal meal at their expense provided little relief.

**Benedictine Teaching and Learning on the Great Plains**

Into this new land of disparate cultures, languages, occupations, physical conditions, and human needs came men and women who followed a monastic rule thirteen centuries old. The brevity and adaptability of this ancient document, more focused on regulating a way of life than on establishing ministries, proved to be their mainstay. RB’s educative vision of an integrated pattern of life characterized by careful listening and wise discernment left its mark on the peoples of the Great Plains; in turn, the Great Plains helped American Benedictines to shape a unique form of Christian monastic life.

It is abundantly clear that a religious, specifically Christian motivation impelled Bene-
32 Writing of the Benedictine Bishop Marty and his request for monastic women to assist with missionary activity on Standing Rock Indian Reservation, Claudia Duratschek likewise describes their work as that of founding not merely schools but an entire mode of life: “Unless the Bishop secured additional help, . . . he would be unable to bring the neglected children of the prairie to Christ, the Lover of little ones, and thus lay a firm foundation to Christian living among the Indians.”

The founding of both new monasteries and new extern schools in the Great Plains required the Benedictine habits of listening and discernment on a daily basis. In the dialectic
Exploring the important contributions of Catholic missionaries in Indian boarding schools of the Northern Great Plains, James Carroll writes that religious sisters in these schools, many of whom were Benedictines, were more successful than most in establishing a "middle ground" between Sioux culture and forces aimed at complete assimilation. Among other examples, he mentions "a bilingual school environment, the efforts to involve Indian adults in the life of the school, and the sincere attempts to blend Catholic beliefs with the Sioux culture."

Benedictine men and women, having been schooled in monastic culture, often drew upon their habits of listening and discretion. Soon after his initial contacts with Native peoples of Dakota Territory, Marty realized that effective teaching and preaching required him to learn their language. Having already become adept at English, the Swiss monk set about studying Lakota, though he never felt that he mastered it. He did, however, delight in mutual teaching and learning; the Benedictine bishop trained the Sioux to sing Latin Gregorian chant in exchange for lessons in Lakota. On discovering a Sioux grammar, Marty intensified his efforts at bilingualism on the reservation for both the missionaries and the Indian people. He promptly reprinted the grammar and soon added a catechism, dictionary, and several hymns.

Other Benedictine monks who came to assist Marty not only learned the Indians' language but immersed themselves in Native culture as well. A commemorative booklet celebrating the centennial of the Catholic Indian Mission on the Standing Rock reservation lavishes praise on three Benedictine priests who served there for decades: "[T]hey were so devoted and involved with their people in their missionary work with Native tribes in the Great Plains, the Benedictines' attitude of listening and discretion also led to cultural adaptations in Catholic liturgy. Describing worship services at Sacred Heart Mission in Indian Territory, one observer wrote that there was much singing and "a lot of musical instruments about. I am told of a recent festival with organ, piano & violin for High Mass and a concluding morceau in Pottawatomie by a choir of Indians."

Similar bicultural Catholic worship occurred elsewhere. In Dakota Territory, much singing and colorful processions appealed to the Sioux love for active participation. At times, their modes of participation did not strictly conform to prescribed rubrics but were accepted and incorporated into the Catholic liturgy. Duratschek states that "it was nothing unusual to have an Indian approach the altar" to light his pipe during mass. She quotes Weasel Bear's description of his people coming to mass as to "another council where we came to have a message for our benefit." As was their custom, the Indians sat on the floor of the church, lit a red stone pipe, and passed it around their circle. Weasel Bear adds that during the sermon, "[W]e listened carefully, and at each pause we voiced our approval in our usual way, 'Hau! Hau!'"

In a number of ways, the developing American frontier culture and Benedictine culture offered considerable mutual support. In the Great Plains, a monastery could be a most welcome sight to all types of weary travelers making long, arduous prairie treks. Murphy writes that not only soldiers, government officials, cattlemen, and traders but "numerous
The wide assortment of visitors who received food, overnight shelter, and no questions from the monks might have been unaware that they were being received as Christ himself. But they most likely thought that these fellows were fitting well into the landscape of the Great Plains.

While Benedictines were establishing their own educative way of life on the Great Plains, they also set about founding schools for both Indians and white settlers. Usually, a school opened soon after Benedictine monks or nuns arrived at a site. A community of monks still located at Atchison, Kansas, became a priory there in 1858 and began accepting students within a year. Benedictine women arrived at Atchison in November 1863, and since a convent had been prepared for them, they were able to open a school for young women the following month.41

President Ulysses Grant’s policy of allowing only one religious denomination on each Indian reservation facilitated both Catholic religious education and other schooling on a number of reservations, and so government Indian schools drew many monastic men and women. In these boarding schools, government rules intersected with the Benedictine belief that all aspects of life can educate. The government intended to Americanize Native tribes, and so schoolteachers were required to teach not only academic subjects but farming, dairying, stock-raising, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, and various trades.42 The Benedictines, also concerned with bringing a gospel based way of life to the Indians, taught Christian doctrine, prepared their charges for Christian sacraments, and sought to imbue daily life and work with Christian values.

Parish schools sprang up throughout the windswept prairies; in time, Benedictine schools of higher education were also established. Within fifty years of the arrival of monastic educators, the Great Plains was dotted with their elementary and secondary schools and academies.43

As Benedictine men and women assisted the Catholic missionary thrust on the prairie, they helped shape numerous parishes and schools into integrative programs of formation in listening and discretion. At the same time, their monastic way of life was being re-shaped by life experience on the Great Plains. Attending to new conditions of life, ministry, and physical environment, Benedictines adapted in various ways and further developed a unique form of monastic life that had begun with founding monks and nuns in Pennsylvania.

From their earliest days, American Benedictine women discovered that observance of enclosure, an assumed condition of life in Europe, would be difficult if not impossible for missionaries. While similar restrictions did not affect male Benedictines to the same degree, for centuries European monastic women had been enclosed or cloistered; they were not to travel beyond monastery grounds or walls except for strict necessity and with permission. Neither were outsiders allowed access to monastic quarters; the few who could enter, such as chaplains or physicians, were normally accompanied to restricted areas.

Beginning with Benedicta Riepp, Benedictine women in the new land discovered that walls were nearly nonexistent and dwellings so small that there were no sections of a building that could be set aside as cloister.44 When they moved westward to the Great Plains, it became even clearer that enclosure would prove impossible. In government boarding schools, the
Another condition of life common among European monastics proved less than amenable to the American situation. Benedictines in Europe were accustomed to a stratified society within the monastic community, which distinguished choir and lay members. Choir monks and nuns took solemn vows; they were well educated, recited the full round of communal prayers in Latin, carried out pastoral and educational works, were eligible to serve in leadership roles, and voted in community decisions. Lay monastics took simple vows; since they could not read Latin they substituted other, shorter prayers for the monastic office, performed manual labor, and could not carry out any supervisory roles or participate in decision-making. In addition, choir and lay members usually wore distinctive clothing and lived in separate living quarters.47

Realities of life on the Great Plains, however, rendered most of these distinctions meaningless. The demands of extensive travel by horse or mule through rough terrain, raising food and caring for animals, battling prairie fires, blizzards, and swift rivers, and building homes, churches, and schools did not allow for niceties that designated who carried out what task. Further, the American ideals of democracy and equality did not favor distinctions in status readily accepted in European culture.48 As in the case of enclosure, gradual

49 For prairie Benedictines, realities of daily life and the increasing influence of American ideals eventually brought an end to social stratification within the monastic community, and their ongoing education continued.

As has already been demonstrated, life on the Great Plains accelerated the process of adaptation that had begun with the first Benedictines in America. Perhaps the most striking innovation was the “branch house” or “mission” structure of monastic life. While European monks and nuns could hardly imagine living anywhere but the monastery, Wimmer’s missionary vision from the beginning allowed for, and even demanded, exactly such an arrangement. Numerous locales needed schools, hospitals, and orphanages, and new immigrants arrived daily. Increasing need and great distance meant that small groups of monastic men and women settled in their places of ministry. Members of these mission houses, which were considered extensions of the monastery, established a regular monastic horarium as they strove to establish and maintain the essentials of their way of life: prayer, work, and communal living.50

Once again, Benedictines were required to create a whole pattern of life as a school for the Lord’s service. Once again, listening to both their tradition and their current, concrete situation demanded discretion, deciding the most faithful course of action in particular circumstances. By the time these men and women reached the prairie, branch houses were well on the way to becoming a widely accepted form of monasticism in America. One monastic historian states that as early as 1880, this innovative form of
On the Great Plains, ever-expanding need, distance, and challenging physical conditions demanded continuance and expansion of this new model of monastic life. Even in the poverty and physical deprivation of prairie branch houses, every effort was made to retain the fundamental elements of Benedictine life. A tiny three-room house could be arranged for prayer, hospitality, and community living; if a kitchen table and bed sheet must serve as altar and altar cloth, so be it. Essentials must be preserved.

**CONCLUSION**

From their sixth-century beginnings, the essentials of Benedictine monasticism, grounded in the Christian gospel, were integrated into a way of life conceived as a school for the Lord’s service. Monasticism as an educative way of life endures to this day on the prairie; at present, there are Benedictine monasteries and/or branch houses in every Great Plains state and province. Extern schools of various kinds continue, albeit with reduced numbers of monastic teachers, administrators,

In addition, five Benedictine colleges and universities span the Great Plains from north to south: Saint Peter’s College, Muenster, Saskatchewan; University of Mary, Bismarck, North Dakota; Mount Marty College, Yankton, South Dakota; Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas; and Saint Gregory’s University, Shawnee, Oklahoma. Because monastic education stresses formation of whole persons, centers of spiritual growth merit mention among educational institutions. At present, eighteen Benedictine retreat houses and spirituality centers from Canada to Texas welcome to the Great Plains spiritual seekers of both Christian and non-Christian traditions.

In their encounter with this new land, prairie monastics listened to the people, time, and place of their new context, learning and teaching in both monastery and school. They shared their way of life with the peoples of the Great Plains in numerous educational institutions; at the same time, in new circumstances they adapted many externals of their ancient way
OTES

1. While it must be acknowledged, especially in hindsight, that there were some negative effects of Christian missionary schools, this article focuses on positive contributions.

2. Within the confines of a brief article, it would be impossible to explore fully the numerous Benedictine foundations on the Great Plains. I have chosen examples from the Northern, Central, and Southern Plains. Readers should also be aware that certain external modifications of Benedictine life had already begun east of the Great Plains. However, I demonstrate how the movement westward to the Great Plains hastened and enlarged upon such adaptation.

3. All quotations from the Rule of Benedict (RB) are taken from RB 1980: The Rule of Benedict in Latin and English with Notes, ed. Timothy Fry et al. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981). Since RB was originally written for men, masculine references will be retained in quotations. RB has, however, become the foundational document for both male and female Benedictines. Therefore, this article will use “monastic” as a noun referring to both monks and sisters; similarly, “monastery” will denote Benedictine foundations of both men and women. American Benedictine women are referred to as “sisters” rather than “nuns.”

4. According to the definition of one modern educator, it could be claimed that RB offers a “curriculum,” described by Eliot Eisner as “a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students” (The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs, 2d ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1985], p. 45, emphasis his).


9. Matsagouras states that some of these extern schools existed already at the end of the fourth century, and in some cases included both children and adults (ibid., pp. 96-97).

10. RB prologue 45.


13. RM, for example, finds it necessary to specify that monks five paces or more from the monastery need not return there for communal prayer. They may pray where they are, they should do so in groups of three, they are to bow their heads while praying the doxology, etc. (RM 55). On the same topic, Benedict simply says that the abbot determines how far monks at work should go in order to return to the monastery for prayer (RB 50:1-2). The Master even goes so far as to lay down particular regulations concerning the need to cough or spit during community prayer (RM 47-48).


15. RB 4:2, 5:2, 72:11.

16. Benedict’s teaching on the reception of guests also differs greatly from that of RM. While RM evinces suspicion and mistrust of visitors, even traveling monks, RB says with utter simplicity that all guests are to be received as Christ himself (RB 53:1). Benedict even calls for a bow or prostration...
to the guest, since it is actually Christ who is welcomed (RB 53:7).


18. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues II.3.*

19. Claude Peifer writes that the “entire purpose” of the abbot’s relation to the monks “is educative, in the sense of spiritual formation.” In Fry et al., *RB 1980* (note 3 above), pp. 355-56.

20. RB 64:9. The abbot ought to be “learned in divine law, so that he has a treasury of knowledge from which he can bring out what is new and what is old.”

21. RB 2:11-12.

22. The importance of knowing and adapting to each individual in his or her particular circumstances of age, ability, temperament, and readiness appears repeatedly in RB, most emphatically in 2:23-29. In 64:19, Benedict sums up the importance of discretion for the abbot/teacher: drawing upon “discretion, the mother of virtues, he must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak have nothing to run from.”

23. Requirements for daily communal prayer and sacred reading indicate that Benedict expected all monks to know “letters.” In addition, RB further states that during Lent “each one is to be given a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through” (RB 48:15). Those “unwilling or unable to study or read” are chided as “remiss and indolent” (RB 48:23).

24. See RB 53, 31-32, 35. Even such menial tasks as “kitchen service” are deemed opportunities to “serve one another in love” (RB 35:1-6).

25. Judith Sutera, *True Daughters: Monastic Identity and American Benedictine Women’s History* (Atchison, Kans.: Mount Saint Scholastica, 1987), pp. 27-28. The original intent was that these branch houses would eventually become new monasteries, but in fact this did not become the norm. Since canon law of the Catholic Church at the time placed restrictions on monastic women than men, particularly regarding enclosure, “missions” presented more difficult questions for Benedictine women in America. The intricacies of this matter, as well as the contentious relationship between Boniface Wimmer and Benedicta Riepp, are beyond the scope of this article. Sutera’s work deals with both issues, especially the former.


27. Since sources of this era refer to indigenous peoples of the Great Plains as “Indians,” I chose to use this term rather than “Native Americans” as is current today.


32. Murphy, *Tenacious Monks* (note 30 above), pp. 71-72. The author laconically adds that in practice, this ideal proved difficult to maintain. He then outlines the monastic horarium of 1877, which had the monks rising at 3:00 A.M. and retiring at 8:00 P.M.

33. Duratschek, *Under the Shadow* (note 31 above), p. 75. The author also mentions Marty’s wish to “wean the Sioux from the sun-dance and from the influence of their medicine men.” From today’s perspective, it might be said that this displays a European colonialist, superior attitude. However, the fundamental intent of inaugurating a new way of life believed to be for the people’s betterment is evident. As seen above, Marty soon learned to respect and incorporate elements of Native culture with Christian ritual.

34. In her excellent study *The Reshaping of a Tradition: American Benedictine Women, 1852-1881* (St. Joseph, Minn.: Sisters of the Order of Saint Bene-
dict, 1994), Ephrem Hollermann pinpoints six “Americanizing factors” that shaped Bavarian Benedictine women’s early tradition: “the frontier, the European immigrant population, the need for education, the missionary character of American Catholicism, pragmatism, and idealism” (p. 225). While Hollermann’s study focuses on Benedictine women, these same factors had considerable influence on Benedictine men in the new land as well. In her introduction, the author summarizes several challenges and difficulties specific to the women’s communities (pp. xvi-xvii); see also Sutera, True Daughters (note 25 above).


36. Kessler, Benedictine Men and Women (note 26 above), p. 358. There are three major dialects among the Sioux: Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. These languages are notoriously difficult, and Marty once lamented that mastering Lakota was nearly impossible for any European over the age of thirty.


38. Thomas Bergh, quoted in Murphy, Tenacious Monks (note 30 above), p. 114.

39. Duratschek, Under the Shadow (note 31 above), pp. 86-87. The author also illustrates the incorporation of traditional Indian culture into Catholic visual art; a photo shows the statue of “Our Lady of the Sioux” (Mary with the infant Jesus in Native garb) at Saint Joseph’s Indian School, Chamberlain, S.Dak. (p. 89). School, church, and statue remain to this day.

40. Murphy, Tenacious Monks (note 30 above), p. 73.


43. Hollermann, Reshaping of a Tradition (note 34 above), pp. 250-51. One of these councils, all held at Baltimore between 1852 and 1885, even declared that pastors who failed to provide parish schools were guilty of grave sin. However, Ahern observes that such an ideal was impractical, if not impossible, for many small prairie parishes. Sometimes arrangements were made for religious sisters to teach secular subjects in local public schools, paid by and subject to them; Catholic children remained for religious instruction after other classes. Such solutions met with varying levels of acceptance by Protestants and Catholics (pp. 161-62).

44. My own monastic community provides but one example of the widespread establishment of educational institutions on the Great Plains. Various documents in the archives of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, S.Dak., show that within fifty years of the arrival of a handful of founding women, this monastery had provided all or part of the staffing for thirty schools; some were short-lived, some endured for decades.


46. Hollermann, Reshaping of a Tradition (note 34 above), pp. 278-79; Duratschek, Under the Shadow (note 31 above), pp. 103-5.


48. The issue of distinctions between choir and lay members was often contentious and complicated, and it took decades to reach some level of resolution in practice. For Benedictine women, certain ambiguities and difficulties remain to this day in the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church. See Sutera, True Daughters (note 25 above), chap. 5, and Hollermann, Reshaping of a Tradition (note 34 above), chap. 5.

49. RB 3:1-3. It is worthy of note that in a time and place that accorded great status and privilege to age, Benedict stipulated that all, even the youngest, are to be called for counsel, because “the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger.”


51. Hollermann, ibid., p. 251.

52. Ibid., p. 271; Duratschek, Under the Shadow (note 31 above), pp. 104-5.

53. Two of these four schools are located at Atchison, Kans.; the others are at Elkhorn, Nebr., and Tulsa, Okla. International Commission on Benedictine Education, retrieved 5 September 2003, http://www.osb.org/ibe.
