

undo the relative neglect of these latter parts of the NT, and in his final chapter on the development of the canon he notes that in Athanasius's canon Hebrews is, as it were, promoted up in the Pauline corpus, and the Catholic Epistles follow Acts. This has the effect of shifting the centre of the canon both textually and theologically, and he suggests perhaps also geographically eastwards, if some at least of the Catholic Epistles are, as Richard Bauckham has recently proposed, directed to Jewish Christians of the eastern diaspora.

These two volumes are outstanding examples of clear, interesting and fresh writing which could provide the foundations of an exciting and thoroughly twenty-first-century course on the NT for beginners; but they deserve a readership far beyond their target audience.

RICHARD J. OUNSWORTH OP

MONK HABITS FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE: BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY FOR PROTESTANTS by Dennis Okholm, *Grand Rapids*, 2007, pp. 144, US\$12.99

This attractively produced, slim volume comes well-recommended by Kathleen Norris, author of the bestselling *The Cloister Walk*, who has also written the Foreword. It is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Benedictine spirituality. While many such books have similarly catchy titles, this one distinguishes itself by its subtitle. It is very much written with the Protestant reader in mind, who will almost certainly have inherited some Protestant prejudices regarding monastic life and, by extension, monastic spirituality*.

Monk Habits for Ordinary People can be read on a number of levels. At its most basic level it is an introduction to Benedictine spirituality that can be read with profit by both Protestants and Catholics. It can also be read as a contribution to the re-appropriation of the catholic tradition by Protestants, what some are calling the 'Evangelical *ressourcement*'. But perhaps without realising it, Okholm has written a Catholic and monastic critique of evangelical Protestantism. While the author does not question Protestant doctrine — he quotes with approval the opinions of Luther, Calvin, and Knox throughout the book — he does continually criticise Protestant practises and the Evangelical mentality more generally. He offers Benedictine spirituality as a corrective to much of the consumerism and superficiality that mark evangelical Christianity in America. As Okholm honestly admits, 'We have become consumers of religion rather than cultivators of a spiritual life; we have spawned an entire industry of Christian kitsch and bookstores full of spiritual junk food that leaves us sated and flabby' (p. 35). Sadly, this is becoming increasingly true of our Benedictine monasteries as well.

Dennis Okholm, the author, is both a theologian and pastor. In addition to completing three Master of Arts degrees, Okholm established his Reformed credentials with a doctoral dissertation on *Petitionary Prayer and Providence in Two Contemporary Theological Perspectives: Karl Barth and Norman Pittenger* at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1986. A further glimpse of Okholm's wide-ranging theological interests can be gained from his impressive publishing record. He is co-author of *A Family of Faith: An Introduction to Evangelical Christianity*

* It may be useful for the reader to know that the present reviewer is a former Protestant, whose pedigree, like that of the author, 'includes Baptist and conservative evangelical strains' (p. 20). Moreover, the reviewer grew up in southern California, where the author now resides.

(2nd ed., 2001) and *Invitation to Philosophy: Issues and Options* (10th ed, 2005), editor of *The Gospel in Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation* (1998), co-editor of *Christian Apologetics in a Postmodern World* (1995), *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (1996), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (new ed., 1996), and *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (2004). The present book is not Okholm's only contribution to Benedictine spirituality; he has also written an article entitled 'Gluttony: Thought for Food' for the *American Benedictine Review* 49:1 (1998) 33–59.

Okholm's academic and pastoral career has taken him all the way across America. He has taught at Jamestown College in North Dakota, Wheaton College in Illinois, and currently teaches at Azusa Pacific University in California. He is an ordained minister in the mainline Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) not to be confused with its more conservative offspring the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). Okholm is currently part-time co-pastor of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California. He relates the story of his acquaintance with Benedictine monasticism in the first chapter, colourfully entitled 'What's a Good (Protestant Evangelical) Boy Doin' in a Monastery?' While it is evident that Okholm has visited numerous American monasteries, his primary reference is to Blue Cloud Abbey in North Dakota, where he became an oblate in 1989. His monastic credentials also include four years (2000–04) as a board member of the American Benedictine Academy: he is proud to have been the first non-monastic and non-Catholic on the board.

Monk Habits for Ordinary People has had a long gestation period. Some, if not most, of the book derives from Okholm's lectures on Benedictine monasticism give to his Protestant students during the last two decades. The material, therefore, has been well-tested against its target audience. It is evident that Okholm has a thorough knowledge of his subject. While the book makes constant reference to his academic environment, it is not an academic book. Many technical monastic terms are explained for the reader; and in keeping with the book's target audience, there are numerous parenthetical asides to the Protestant reader. Some of these asides are merely explanatory; for example, one learns on page 29 that the Catholic term 'apostolic life' is equivalent to what Protestants call pastoral or missionary work. Some are descriptive or illustrative, so that of a certain Benedictine Abbey considered to be quiet Okholm writes, 'And this wasn't even a Trappist monastery, such as the Cistercian abbey in Gethsemane, Kentucky, of which Thomas Merton was a member. *That* is quiet!' (p. 39). Or they can be polemical; of a certain notion he writes that it 'is a point that Calvinistic-leaning Protestants have pushed, though sometimes extending it a bit too far, out Calvinizing Calvin' (p. 75). Each of these asides reinforces the conversational style of the book, whilst making it more accessible to Protestants.

After the introductory chapter telling how the author became acquainted with monasticism, there follows a brief historical introduction to Benedictine monasticism and an argument why Protestants can benefit from Benedictine spirituality. One of the many interesting comparisons that Okholm draws throughout the book is between the way that Benedictines interpret the Rule of St Benedict *vis-à-vis* the Gospel and the way that Presbyterian clergy interpret the Westminster Confession *vis-à-vis* the Bible. He correctly describes the Rule as functioning as 'a kind of flexible hermeneutical device to translate the gospel into daily communal Christian living' (p. 26). He gives six reasons why Protestants can benefit from Benedictine spirituality: 1) Benedictine spirituality provides a contemplative balance to a typically activist Evangelical piety; 2) a healthy ecclesiology demands that Protestants learn from other Christian traditions; 3) while Protestants are proficient at formulating doctrine they are less proficient at performing doctrine and could benefit from the lived theology of Benedictine monks and nuns;

4) Protestants and ‘monastics’ share a profoundly biblical spirituality; 5) Protestants have many misconceptions about what monasticism is; and 6) monastic *askesis* is an effective counter-balance to the ‘consumer-driven, efficiency minded, results-oriented culture’ of Evangelical Christianity (p. 33). Protestants can benefit, as I have, from the variety of forms of the religious life within the Catholic Church, of which monastic life is perhaps the most important. There really is no equivalent to the religious life among Protestants.

Though the first two chapters, a sort of *apologia* for the book and the author, are amongst the most interesting chapters of the book, its core is composed of seven topical chapters describing the fundamental characteristics of Benedictine life. Taking his cue from the opening words of the Rule, Okholm begins with the need and importance of silence as an aid to listening to God and other people. Further chapters cover poverty, obedience, humility, hospitality, stability, and balance, i.e. the balance between prayer, work, and reading (*lectio divina*) described in chapter 48 of the Rule. Finally, the book includes an historical afterword addressing why the Protestant reformers attacked monasticism and concludes with suggestions for further reading and for practising Benedictine spirituality.

Much of what Okholm relates about his experience of monastic life is consonant with my own, such as the abbot being the first to begin clearing up after meals (p. 63). There are numerous interesting and relevant personal anecdotes in the book. I offer the following as an example: ‘Several years ago I delivered the annual dean’s convocation at an Anabaptist college in the Midwest at the request of my friend the dean. We dressed in full academic regalia so that when the fuzzy black-and-white photograph of me appeared in the local town newspaper I indeed looked like a monk dressed in his habit; and the photo fit the headline: “Monk Addresses College.” I was a true monk for one day and didn’t even realize it’ (p. 36). Other anecdotes illustrate the author’s quirky sense of humour, as when his spell checker wants to rewrite “retreatants” as “retreat ants”, which he takes as a hint ‘that they may have been more attracted to the donuts than to the speaker’ (p. 12).

Though Okholm knows the monastic tradition well he is not immune from error. Trappists do not pray eight times a day (p. 102): since Vatican II only seven of the original eight Benedictine offices remain (prime is gone). Gregory the Great was not a Benedictine (p. 47) though he was certainly a monk. Other errors seem to derive from difficulty with ancient languages. *Anchoresis* (p. 24) should read *anachoresis*. *Ad usus* (p. 47) should be *ad usum*. The word ‘gyrovague’ does not derive from the Latin for ‘circle’ and the Greek for ‘wander’ (pp. 91–92) but rather the converse. A more obvious and persistent error is the phrase *conversatio moralis* (pp. 55, 77, 89, 92–93) which should be *conversatio morum*. The author seems somewhat confused as to what this means; it is not a ‘daily turning to God’ (p. 77) or ‘conversion of life’ (p. 92) but is ‘the monastic way of life’ (p. 93). A further slip is that South Dakota (p. 127) should read North Dakota.

Monk Habits for Ordinary People is an enjoyable and readable book, written by a sympathetic and knowledgeable observer of Benedictine life. The Protestant reader will learn much from this book, both about Benedictine spirituality and about his/her own Protestant history and theology. Moreover, the Protestant reader will certainly be challenged to examine his/her own life and encouraged to live in closer conformity to the Gospel. I would certainly recommend this book to all evangelical Protestant readers, whether they are interested in Benedictine spirituality or not.

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