FOREWORD

On January 14, 1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a portentous letter to his brother, Karl-Friedrick. What Bonhoeffer, now famously, said in that letter was to prove both prophetic and affirming to that which it predicted. He wrote, "the restoration of the church will surely come only from a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ. I think it is time to gather people together to do this."

One can argue that the exquisite horror of burgeoning Nazism lent a singular clarity to Bonhoeffer's perceptions and, therefore, to the providential accuracy of his assessment. This does not account for the fact, however, that within thirty years of his letter to Karl-Friedrick, and within twenty-five years of his own martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis, a new monasticism was aborning all over western Christendom. Most frequently referred to now as "the new monasticism" or "neomonasticism," the vocation to intentional, communal life in radical pursuit of the way of Jesus of Nazareth had spread, by 1970, across two oceans and across dozens of geopolitical borders. Christians were hearing, for the first time in many centuries, the intonations of that for which Bonhoeffer's letter had been only the introit.

For over a millennium and a half, when a Christian said the word *monasticism*, it was understood that he or she was referring to a celibate, often sequestered form of communal life functioning under the imprimatur or privilege of Roman, Orthodox, or Anglican episcopacy. This mold, as Bonhoeffer had hoped, has been forever broken in our time. No longer limited to the unencumbered, almost all of the new intentional

communities have both married and/or familied members as well as celibate ones; the vows of all are identical, save that the single who wishes to may take the added vow of celibacy. Likewise, today's neo-monastic communities almost eschew sequestration. They see their call to be defined, in part, by the larger community in which they live. Their rejoicing before God and their thanksgiving before Christ are best realized for them in love-motivated service to immediate and present neighbors, especially to the destitute and rejected in whose urban despair many of the new monastics choose to live and be.

Most startling of all, of course, is the fact that the neo-monastic communities, by and large, are more often Protestant in heritage than Roman or Orthodox. As such, they often operate out of the principle of accountability to one another and their Lord, rather than to some overarching, ecclesial structure. And most tellingly, because most of them have come up out of Protestant formation, these new monastics are unencumbered by the hundreds of layers of rubrics, edicts, and traditions that have managed, over the centuries, to bury (not to mention embalm) much of historic Christian liturgy and discipline. Free of natal prejudices, they come rejoicing to the sacred meal as the central expression of oneness and to the keeping of sacred time as a blessed pacing for the soul's exercise. They fast, pray the offices, feed the poor, and tend those sick in spirit, mind, or body. They also do what every vowed community should do: They actively confess themselves to one another and work together for the perfection of call in each other.

Even when all this has been said, however, the pages that follow here may still come initially as a shock for some readers. The pages that follow here are the history—the story, really—of Holy Transfiguration Monastery (HTM), which is located in Breakwater, Australia. The surprise is that HTM is Baptist in origin and in province, the community being an active, subordinate, and tithing part of the Baptist Union of Victoria. Although there is no requirement at HTM that a postulant be Baptist either in heritage or present practice, or that there be re-baptism by immersion as a condition of acceptance, there is still a clear recognition of Baptist origin and Baptist polity. This last set of circumstances is, moreover, part of the fascination that Paul Dekar's history of HTM holds for me personally.

There are undoubtedly hundreds of neo-monastic communities in the United States alone. Indeed, so far as I know, there is nothing close to a

master list from which to begin to estimate their numbers. Some are near enough to one another geographically to achieve a kind of critical mass in public awareness. Church of the Apostles (COTA), Mustard Seed House, and Monkfish Abbey are all in Seattle, for instance; and The Simple Way and New Jerusalem are both in Philadelphia. Some, like Rutba House in Durham, are so often referenced by other, newer communities as to have achieved a form of general visibility. And some, like the Community of Jesus in Orleans, Massachusetts, have become so large and so actively present as Christ's laborers in the world at large as to be visible almost by default.

The Community of Jesus is my Holy Transfiguration Monastery. That is, like HTM, it has a strong heritage of Baptist, as well as Presbyterian and Episcopalian, roots; is richly observant of the traditional praxis of the Church; evangelizes by and through the arts; and succors those who come to it, even as it reaches out to those who need but cannot come.

When, in other words, Paul Dekar talks about his decade-plus of interest in and involvement with his fellow-Christians in HTM, I have to admit that were he to change the initials "HTM" to "C of J" and the locale from Breakwater, Australia, to Orleans, MA, he would be speaking my truth. Originally, in fact, it was my own decade-plus of involvement from afar with, and ever-increasing ties of godly affection for, the C of J that caused me to become interested in Dekar's work. Now, sometime later and with his history completed, it is Dekar's gifts that are equally compelling for me.

What Dekar has managed to do here is tell his own story, a monastery's story, and a movement's story in such a way as to make them all of one piece. Like layers of a well-rendered landscape, each gives depth and texture to the other, each lends grace to the other. Because Dekar is an academic by trade, there is here the academic's care for analysis and contextualization. Because he is an observant Christian, there is nuance and insight that a secular historian could never bring to the work. Because he is a storyteller at heart, there is a charm and delight here that neither the careful academic nor the devout believer alone could produce.

Finally, of course, as with any good story, be it history, account, or something of both, there is news here. In this case, the news is of other Christians and their ways of devotion, of other winds of the Spirit blowing across our times, and of other witnesses for whose encouragement we

can pray. May each of us find in all these things reason to rejoice, as well as a passion and devotion by which to measure and amend our own.

Phyllis Tickle
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