

(Address delivered by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at Commencement Exercises, St. Benedict's College, Atchison, Kansas, Wednesday, May 28, 1958)

That God May Be Glorified In All Things
(Motto of the Order of St. Benedict)

The history of the Catholic Church and of Catholic education in America is a story of giants. Not giants in the fairy tale sense of the word, but giants who were men of great vision and extraordinary deeds that produced results such as we see all about us at St. Benedict's today. What has happened here has taken a hundred years, but, more importantly, it has reflected the flowering of a tradition that began more than one thousand four hundred years ago, in an Italian cave named Subiaco, and subsequently on a mountain top South of Rome called Cassino.

One cannot begin to understand the Catholic Church or Catholic education in America unless one looks at its European roots. And the history of the past century at St. Benedict's is equally meaningless without some comprehension of the Order of St. Benedict which is at the heart of all of this activity. No family fourteen hundred years old is easy to understand in summary fashion. Too much happens to every human institution in the course of the centuries. We do, however, have a key to the understanding of the Benedictine family. It was given to us by no less a scholar than John Henry Cardinal Newman. Ponder his words on the family

of St. Benedict, and you will begin to understand all that has happened during these past one hundred years in Kansas.

"Its spirit indeed is ever one, but not its outward circumstances. It is not an Order proceeding from one mind at a particular date, and appearing all at once in its full perfection, and in its extreme development, and in form one and the same everywhere and from first to last, as is the case with other great religious institutions; but it is an organization, diverse, complex, and irregular and variously ramified, rich rather than symmetrical, with many origins and centers and new beginnings and the action of local influences, like some great natural growth; with tokens, on the face of it, of its being a divine work, not the mere creation of human genius. Instead of progressing on plan and system and from the will of a superior, it has shot forth and run out as if spontaneously, and has shaped itself according to events, from an irrepressible fulness of life within, and from the energetic self-action of its parts.....whither the impulse of the spirit was to go. It has been poured out over the earth, rather than been sent, with a silent mysterious operation, while men slept, and through the romantic adventures of individuals, which are well nigh without record; and thus it has come down to us, not risen up among us, and is found rather than established. Its separate and scattered

monasteries occupy the land, each in its place these and the like attributes make them objects, at once of awe and of affection." (Historical Sketches, Vol. II, pp. 388-389)

These words of Cardinal Newman are almost a prophetic vision of St. Benedict's in Kansas, since they were written just a hundred years ago, the year that St. Benedict's Priory moved from Doniphan to Atchison, just prior to the time that the College was opened to its first fifteen students. How did the Spirit happen to bring it here? You will understand this, too, if you understand the Benedictine Spirit. We can see it in spanning the fourteen hundred years from Subiaco and Cassino to Atchison.

Monasticism began in the Eastern Deserts of the Mediterranean. St. Anthony, the Egyptian Hermit, has been called its Father. But monastic life in the West, as we have known it, looks to St. Benedict as its founder and author. His Rule was the central factor of all religious life in the West, from his death in 547 until the thirteenth century when the new preaching and teaching orders began. To a crude world of increasing barbarism, St. Benedict and his monks brought learning, civilization, and the constant leaven of the Gospel. The monks left the corrupt world, but in the monastery they provided great and shining

beacons of holiness for all the world to see. And as the times demanded it, they left their monastery cloisters to carry the word of God and the spirit of Christianity into the darkness beyond.

Who can tell the story of those centuries, name all the giants of those days. A Benedictine Pope sent another Benedictine, St. Augustine, with forty monks to christianize the pagan hordes of England, and in a hundred years the deed was done. Then the movement went back to the continent. St. Boniface brought the faith to Germany, St. Columban to France, St. Gall to Switzerland, St. Ansgar to Scandinavia, St. Willibrord to the Netherlands, and St. Adalbert to Bohemia. Benedictines all, and with them went the spirit that founded new monasteries, new lights in the darkness.

Again, Newman tells the story beautifully: "He (the Benedictine) found the world, physical and social, in ruins and his mission was to restore it in the way, not of science, but of nature, not as if setting about to do it, not professing to do it by any set time or by any rare specific or by any series of strokes, but so quietly, patiently, gradually, that often, till the work was done, it was not known to be doing. It was a restoration, rather than a visitation, correction, or conversion. The new world which he helped to create was a growth,

rather than a structure. Silent men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing, and building; and other silent men, not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister, tiring their eyes and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully deciphered and copied and recopied the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one that contended or cried out, or drew attention to what was going on, but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning and a city." (op.cit. p. 410)

In time, of course, all of Europe became civilized, and it was inevitable that with the development of the New World in America, the Benedictines would sense that what had been done in Europe, should also be continued here. They did come to St. Vincent's in Pennsylvania in 1846, and have continued to spread, as is their spirit, to all parts of America from this mother abbey, now the Archabbey of St. Vincent's in Latrobe. Abbot Boniface Wimmer of St. Vincent's, inspired by Father Henry Lemke, a Benedictine missionary in Doniphan, sent Father Augustine Wirth to be the first Prior. He has the honor of being the Father Founder of St. Benedict's in Kansas.

The early years of St. Benedict's read so much like our own history at

Notre Dame that one imagines that he is reading the same story. Life on the frontier was hardly conducive to scholarship. Scattered about were people without a pastor. Like all of the early settlers of Kansas, the monks knew their full measure of insecurity, biting poverty, suffering, pestilence, fear and doubt. While the school was started and running, it was hardly a college in the modern sense of the word. Missionary activity was the order of the day: long hours in the saddle making the rounds of the settlers, Masses, sermons, Confessions, baptisms, marriages and burials, building and rebuilding churches despite the constant worry of debts, bills and more bills. The great Benedictine Abbey of Metten, Beuron, Monte Cassino, Solemmes, Fulda, and Mount St. Cesar must have seemed like dream castles beyond the horizon during these early days in Kansas. The saddle became the monks cell, the open Kansas sky his monastery, and the struggling little school a far cry from the Cathedral schools of Alcuin, Lanfranc, Bede and Anselm, the early intellectual giants of the Benedictines.

But somehow, they kept going, and with their assistance civilization began to arrive on the Kansas frontier. Abbot Innocent Wolf was the hero of the day. It was a long day for him too, lasting from 1877 until his holy death in 1921. To his eternal credit it must be said that slowly, at times almost

imperceptibly, the dream of what was to come, began to take shape. While these years seem somehow to lack the traditional peace and security and scholarship of Benedictine monastic life, the regularity of rule and hourly prayer, there is in this period some of the thrilling and romantic sense of Benedictine adventure that one associates with Boniface's work with the pagan teutonic tribes. There is, for example, the story of the priest who had a general store across the street from his parish church. The men of the surrounding farms, having driven their families down the dusty roads to town, established the custom of going to the general store first to settle the dust with a drink or two. With nice timing, they could tarry over their drinks just long enough to miss the sermon and to arrive in time for the offertory, thus fulfilling, in minimal fashion, their Sunday Mass obligation. Like a modern Boniface, the Benedictine Father swept out the front door at the Asperges, walked across the street to the store, liberally doused the startled stags at the bar, and herded them into church for the beginning of Mass. However far this life of part time teacher, part time missionary might have been from the age-long Benedictine ideal of monasticism and scholarship, one seems to sense that Abbot Innocent was true to his name, guided the destiny of his monks as best one humanly could in those trying days, lived and died a saint.

His successor, Abbot Martin Veth, grew with a new era that extended from 1921 until his death in 1944. The College was now coming of age as an academic institution. One begins to hear the familiar preoccupation with accreditation, the reorganization of the curriculum, the beginnings of advanced study in famous universities for the monks on the faculty, the stirrings of student government, the modernization of disciplinary regulations, and even the building of a gymnasium and the pursuit of a Kansas pastime called basketball.

It was during this period of academic maturity that the spiritual ideal of the Benedictines, so difficult to realize in its perfection in earlier days, began to be felt in deeper measure as the traditionally vital element of Benedictine development. Just as the missionary activities of the middle ages were institutionalized in the great abbeys of Europe, so too the whole yearning of Abbot Martin during this period was for the full flowering of monastic life. Whatever else was accomplished, this must be the enduring effect of Benedictine effort: an abbey church where the liturgy of praise to God is celebrated with splendor in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where the voices of the monks daily chant the psalmody of adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and forgiveness. Benedictines have traditionally fostered the life of prayer, and scholarship as well, but never the one without the other.

This may at times be difficult to understand, especially for one who stands outside the monastery walls. But step inside for a moment and listen to Abbot Martin bidding farewell to his monks before he left for the hospital and his death. "Now I realize," he says, "that by taking this step, I am making myself a temporary exile from my monastery ... I shall miss the Divine Office and the Conventual Mass. It will be fifty years in July since I entered the Novitiate, began the Divine Office and the Religious Life; and I can say that they have been happy years. I thank God for them. The Divine Office has been a joy in my youth, and it is a greater joy and consolation in my old age ... May God protect and prosper the community and sanctify all its members; may He bless and assist my successor, so that he may accomplish much more for the good of the community than I have been able to do." (Kansas Monks, p. 308)

No one, I judge, who speaks thus to his spiritual family in farewell need apologize for the good he has done, and indeed still does by his memory and example. Our present Abbot Cuthbert McDonald has inherited a proud tradition and has pressed towards the goal that inspired his predecessors. Last year saw St. Benedict's reach the vision that has been a hundred years in coming, a magnificent new Abbey Church that will henceforth represent the pulsating spiritual heart of this whole undertaking.

And so here in Kansas, the wheel has come full round, as it has so often in the long and inspiring history of the Benedictine enterprises across the reach of centuries and all across the world. Can those who have studied here, who graduate today, take from their association with this dream come true, any comfort, any guidance, any inspiration for their lives in a world that has marched far, and not always upwards, in the long years since Subiaco and Monte Cassino?

There are some who would say that all of this has little to offer to a world of satellites and fission and fusion. You will note, however, that whatever has happened and is happening in this world, it is still a world of men. The education you have received here has not been tainted with the so-called timely elements of education that have so much less to offer men in their development than the timeless tradition of Benedictine learning and teaching. A recent editorial in LIFE had this to say about so-called progressive education: "The problem underlying all our confusion is - to use words long out of favor in pedagogical circles - a matter of tradition and philosophy. Only by grasping this can we figure out where and how our education went wrong. Until the arrival of Dewey and his disciples, American schools had the stated objective of educating individuals in an inherited and enlarging body of learning. Confident of their own established values in ethics,

law and culture, these old-fashioned teachers deliberately set out to pass down these values as a part of a living tradition. They held that it was all one cultural heritage, and the more of it you learned the wiser and more mentally alert you would be. Dewey and his disciples revolted against this certitude ... 'We agree,' Dewey once said, 'that we are uncertain as to where we are going, and where we want to go, and why we are doing what we do.' In a kind of country club existentialism, Dewey and his boys genially contended that the traditional ends of education--and indeed of human life--like God, virtue, and the idea of 'culture' were all debatable and hence not worth debating. In their place, enter life adjustment." (LIFE, March 31, 1958)

No one has explicitly educated you for life adjustment here at St. Benedict's, but all that you have learned has been within a tradition that has successfully been facing life for fourteen hundred years. This tradition has produced more than its share of scholars and saints, kings and generals, popes and bishops, fathers of families and men of affairs. All of this has been done, not in the name of adjustment, but in the instilling of wisdom. If there was ever an inditement of which the Benedictines are innocent, it is that of abandoning tradition with its eternal values and truths. And if St. Benedict's has been backward in neglecting to adopt the frills and fancies of progressive

education, you are the richer and the better prepared to face life for that happy neglect.

Your education has been explicitly and consciously liberal here at St. Benedict's. As liberal, it has striven to free you from the bondage of ignorance, prejudice, passion and sin. Your education has confronted you, not with the fears and foibles of our age, but with the all-important questions of all time: why you are here and where you are going. God has been at the center of this education, God to be known and loved and possessed. You have been challenged to decide what is important and unimportant in life, what is important for time and what is important for eternity. You have been given a taste of truth eternal, truth that is worth living for and worth dying for. All this, I trust, has given you the opportunity to formulate a philosophy of life which, if you live it with conviction, will provide you with the best means of adjustment in life.

Your liberal education at St. Benedict's has attempted to develop that which is most human in you too. Your minds have had the opportunity to experience the range of human aspiration and human emotion in literature; to relive man's great successes and failures in history; to sense some of the great issues of our day in sociology, economics, and political science. In science, you have learned

something of the marvelous world we live in, some of the great physical forces that are ours to understand, to master, and to use for the good of mankind.

Man, in our day, needs this liberalizing education, for without it, he will only be able to do something, without knowing what is most worth doing, and for what purposes. God gave us our minds to be used, and only liberal education accustoms the mind to think clearly and broadly, to make the intelligent and meaningful decisions that human life demands, to evaluate among the many good and less good things that clamor for our allegiance, to express ourselves with clarity and conviction, to know exactly where we stand and why. Liberal education alone can give us a sense of humanity, the deep knowledge of man's possible heights and depths, ^{an acquaintance} the heartwarming meaning of love and the deadening power of hate, compassion for the suffering, a capacity for dedication and sacrifice, a passion for justice, a deep respect for human dignity, and ultimately the character to make an intelligent use of our human freedom in the service of God and man.

Other kinds of education can teach many other things, but what else is important if these deep human values are not conveyed, to be known and loved and served. Indeed, St. Thomas well said that only three things are important in life: to know the right things to have faith in, to hope for and to love.

How many of these values of liberal education have become a reality in each of your lives, only each one of you can answer for yourself. What use you intend to make of your life thus formed at St. Benedict's, again only you and the grace of God will decide. But this much you will admit, I trust, that your years here have been happy and fruitful years, and they have been made possible only by the stalwart men and the great sacrifices to which we have already referred. Only God and eternity will know what the true cost of your education has been. Only God and eternity will also know what use you will make of it.

One cannot think of the things we have been thinking about without realizing what a great debt of gratitude all of you graduates have to your parents, the good Fathers and Brothers, the lay faculty who have made your education possible. I trust that your gratitude will take the most realistic form of appearing in your lives, in the convictions that lead you to continue to learn as you have now begun: To live the truth that is in you, to be conscious of the burning problems of our day and what contribution you can make to their solution, to stand firm in your faith, no matter what sacrifice it may entail, to educate your own children in the years to come according to these same ideals that have inspired you.

In doing this you will be joining in time and eventually in eternity with that vast choir of those who have, through their association with the sons of St. Benedict, learned to find in life a meaning that transcends the cares of time and vaults the ramparts of eternity. In the days to come, when the happy times of youth are passed and the responsibilities of mid-life are upon you, think back upon the life you lived here, of the values you learned to cherish, of the graces that you have received, that you might, in turn, transmit them to others. And in crisis, and weariness, in success and happiness, think back upon the Abbey Church here, where, please God, a new generation of monks will continue to live a life of prayer and service, and somehow trust that your life too is associated with theirs, that all of us together may so live that God may be glorified in all things.