



The 'Eclipse of God' and The Boldness of Saints

Autumn 2011

Dear Friend,

Today we are seeing a certain 'eclipse of God' taking place, a kind of amnesia which, albeit not an outright rejection of Christianity, is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity.

Such are the prophetic words that His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI uttered in his *Message for the 2011 World Youth Day* in Madrid. During one of his encounters with these enthusiastic young people in Spain, after repeating the words just quoted, he added this remark, referring to the religious life:

In a world of relativism and mediocrity, we need that radicalism to which your consecration, as a way of belonging to the God who is loved above all things, bears witness. — *Address given at the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial on Friday, 19 August 2011*

One need not be a prophet to see the truth of the Holy Father's words. It is not that God, who is Light itself, could suffer the least eclipse of His Divine Majesty, but rather that the individual hearts of men can fall under a shadow and lose the light. No doubt, the world now is suffering from an eclipse of Faith such as never occurred in past ages.

This eclipse is probably more evident in Europe than in America, more evident in America than in Africa and other less developed regions, but the darkness is immense and tragic. One might even be tempted to pronounce as 'moribund' the entire Christian Culture that was once the foundation



Spanning the waters of Clear Creek, this scenic stone bridge is one of the first things we built at our new home in Oklahoma.



The monastery residence building, gate house, cloister, and the new Abbatial Church, March 2011.

of Western society. The fundamental arguments of the ‘new atheists’ (as for example in Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, which was on the New York Times bestseller list for 51 weeks) are so specious as to merit little attention from more thoughtful minds, but do impress large numbers of our contemporaries — especially the young, who are often without strong philosophical formation or religious conviction. This darkness is increasing.

On the other hand, the current lack of spiritual orientation offers an unparalleled opportunity for preaching the Gospel. Many people — especially the young — are as open to truth as they are to error. The day has dawned for a new evangelization, a time for holiness! Only the boldness proper to the Saints can provide a response to the eclipse that continues to cover the earth with its spiritual pall.

Now among the many paths that the Church takes in her great effort to evangelize, there is what is known as the ‘contemplative life’. A monastery such as ours belongs properly to those Catholic institutions that are integrally ordered to contemplation and to Divine worship in the hidden life of solitude and silence. This is by no means the only way the Church bears witness to the truth of the Gospel, but it is a privileged path that has had a preponderant role in the work of evangelization of both the East and the West. Monks exist at the silent center, from which the Word flows out upon the comings and goings of human existence.

Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey begins with a story . . .

For God there could be no surprise about what happened: first at a very ordinary American university in the 1970s, and then at an ancient Abbey on the far side of the sea. But for the human beings involved, it was impossible to imagine, much less foresee.

It all started with a special liberal arts program for freshmen and sophomores at the University of Kansas, a new course meant to meet the requirements for studies in Western Civilization. The three professors who created this program dubbed it an “experiment in tradition.” This name did not overly surprise anyone, as everyone in those days (or so it seemed) was engaged in some experiment — in one revolution or another. Why not an experiment in the Great Books of Western Civilization?

Something unusual occurred, however, as the “experiment in tradition” — known as The Integrated Humanities Program — got under way. Although some of the students dropped out



The nave of the Abbatial Church, as viewed from the Great Portal, June 2011.

of the Program, finding the “experiment” unsettling, many others became strongly attached to the three professors and to their common vision of education. As the students read Homer’s *Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* of Virgil — not to mention such Christian classics as *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* — the characters seemed to step off the page and walk into their lives.

What really made the IHP controversial was the phenomenon of conversions, especially to the Catholic Church. The result of teaching the Great Books in a favorable light — without the withering effects of relativism and literary criticism so present in most universities — was to open minds to a certain unity, to an “integer,” that of an integrated view of human life. How exactly such a process of education could lead to religious conversions in a secular university is too long a story to be recounted here, but a great adventure had begun.

In 1972 a couple of these students decided to set out on a trip to Europe in search of a monastery, where they hoped to find the concrete realization of what they perceived as the central truth of the Great Books. The idea was to bring back to America the purely contemplative form of Benedictine monastic life they found to be missing in their homeland. The young men were also looking for a monastery that still used the ancient Latin liturgy.

As impossible as the endeavor may have seemed, it truly met with success when the two travelers arrived at Our Lady of Fontgombault Abbey in the heart of France. It was behind these ancient stone walls, and at Fontgombault’s “daughter houses” elsewhere in France, that over twenty-five Americans would eventually try the life of a monk, eight of them persevering under the monastic habit until the moment assigned by Divine Providence for their return to America.

The dream finally became a reality in 1999, over a quarter of a century after the initial contact with the French monks. On September 15th of that year a group of monks including not only the Americans — but also several French and Canadians — arrived at the airport of



The community on procession in the new cloister wing for Palm Sunday, April 2011.



The community standing in the newly built Great Portal (whose stones will be handcarved), September 2011.

spirit and in truth” (*Gospel according to Saint John 4:23-24*). The monks thank you in advance for your support, both spiritual and material, in helping us to build something beautiful for God. Soon the eclipse will give way to reveal the dawn . . .

Tulsa, Oklahoma to found Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery, under the patronage of the mystery of Mary’s Annunciation.

It truly is a wonderful thing to see how an “experiment in tradition” led us to new and undreamt of horizons and how this monastic adventure eventually led us back to the place where we began — in the American heartland. Sometimes a far-off calling can lead a man all the way home.

Over the course of the last decade, through the gentle guidance of Divine Providence and the countless friends of the Monastery, we have made great strides to build a Benedictine Abbey (to last a thousand years!) right here in the heart of America. I have filled this letter with many photographs of the Abbey’s progress, so that you can see the tremendous work of God that is taking shape.

Would you like to be part of this bold adventure? Please join our mailing list and — above all — join your prayers to ours for the restoration of a truly Christian civilization, based upon the worship of the Father “in

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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Our Special Gift To You

It is our honor and privilege to send to you with this letter a CD entitled *The Feast of the Immaculate Conception*, recorded at Our Lady of Fontgombault Abbey in France, our Mother house. May this divinely inspired music lift you up, beyond the horizon of the littleness and meanness of all too many things we encounter from day to day here below. We only ask that, in turn, you pray for the monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey, who live under the patronage of Our Lady’s Annunciation. You can certainly count on our own prayers and thankfulness for your prayers and generous help.