

MICROPUBLISHING AND MONASTICISM

Dom Guy Marie Oury, *Light & Strength: Mother Cécile Bruyère, First Abbess of Sainte-Cécile of Solesmes*, tr. M. Cristina Borges. Hulbert: Abbey Editions, 2012.

The progress of technology often takes the curious form of retrograde motion: as advances are made in certain areas, technology paradoxically regresses in other respects. In the transition from manuscripts to printed books, for instance, the reduction of time needed to produce each individual volume caused an accompanying decline in the practice of the exquisite art of calligraphy and manuscript illumination. In the domain of liturgical books, it was not until the nineteenth century that printed Gregorian chant notation attained the elegance that had been achieved in the time before the printing press—indeed, it is likely that this is the reason why chant manuscripts continued to be produced by hand for several centuries after printed books had superseded manuscripts in most other domains. A similar apparent decline in the quality of book production occurred in many circles after the development of computer typesetting systems in the twentieth century, with the elegant type-setting of earlier decades at times giving way to blocky and unpolished information dumps.

In more recent years, the development of the Kindle and other ebook devices has brought a regression to 1990s-era Internet formatting conventions; at a moment when HTML5 has made logging into Gmail a sort of swashbuckling adventure in elegance, the Kindle has led its book developers to relearn their basic coding skills. In each of these cases, the advances made by each development seem to justify the accompanying frustrations, which are in turn lessened as the technology continues to develop—and

yet it is disconcerting to think how easily we are led to tolerate infelicities that would have grievously offended our sensibilities before the latest development made them necessary.

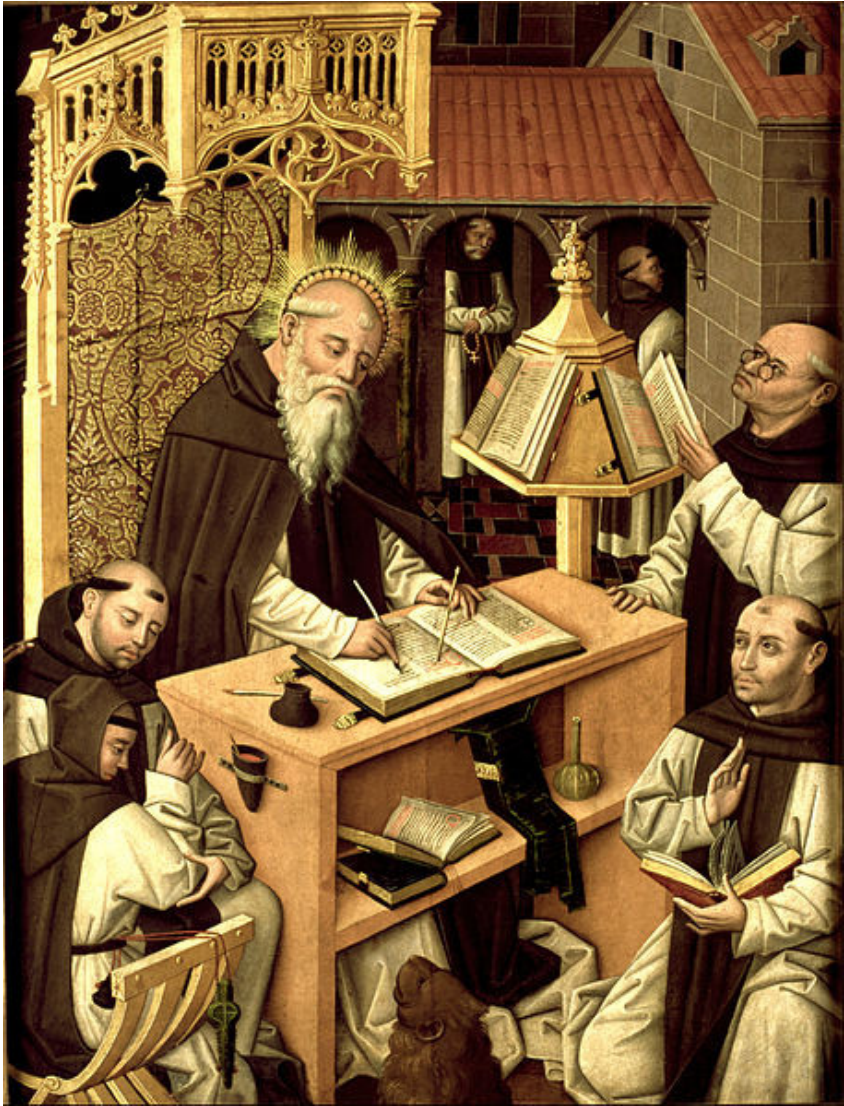
One recent development which has brought a sort of retrograde motion in both a positive and a negative sense is that of print-on-demand book publishing. Thanks to the development of Internet-based printing presses such as Lulu.com and CreateSpace, it is now possible to make books available that are individually printed and bound when they are purchased by a customer, allowing individuals or institutions to publish books without an initial expenditure of printing costs. The development of what has been called “micropublishing” has made it possible to acquire physical copies of books that, under previous production models, may have quickly gone out of print or might never have been produced except by means of a vanity press. At the same time, this development has flooded the online market with both cheap facsimiles of older books and poorly edited or ineptly typeset newer volumes. The reader, at times, might be faced with the situation not unlike that of a medieval reader trying to determine whether a particular manuscript is a reliable example of a particular text.

Amidst this orthographical distress, it may perhaps be comforting to learn that the Benedictines, the great copiers of manuscripts in the Middle Ages, editors of texts in the Enlightenment, and typesetters of plainchant in the Romantic period, have now begun to contribute to the great task of taming the wilderness of on-demand printing. Abbey Editions, the imprint of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey in Hulbert, Oklahoma, has entered the domain of on-demand printing with *Light & Strength* (2012), an English translation of Dom Guy Marie Oury’s life of Mother Cécile Bruyère (1845–1909). This volume, translated by M. Cristina Borges, with the assistance of the nuns of the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Westfield, Vermont, recounts the life of the foundress of the women’s Benedictine Monastery

of Sainte-Cécile of Solesmes, the sister-monastery to the famous male Benedictine monastery at Solesmes founded by Dom Prosper Guéranger.

Through a fortunate series of events, the young Jenny Bruyère had the opportunity to receive instruction for her First Communion from the famous abbot. In time, Guéranger became her spiritual director and eventually her formator as she embraced a vocation to monastic life and a charism to found a new monastery for Benedictine nuns. Brought up in an environment remarkably free from the prudishness common at the time, Bruyère was, from a young age, able to appreciate the full meaning of the vow of virginity, which she felt attracted to profess in imitation of Saint Cecilia, whose name she took at confirmation and later at religious profession. Enraptured by the liturgy of the Church and the splendor of the musical tradition that was then developing at Solesmes, Mother Bruyère was able to articulate her profound understanding of liturgical prayer in *The Spiritual Life and Prayer According to Holy Scripture and Monastic Tradition*. This book first appeared in French in 1886 and was translated into English, German, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In addition to her apostolate of spiritual writing, Bruyère also guided her monastic community through the difficult years following the death of Dom Guéranger in 1875. During this period, Mother Bruyère helped the men's monastery of Saint Pierre at Solesmes through the crisis of persecution at the hands of the secular government in the early 1880s, notably by making the chapel of the women's abbey available for performance of the Office in alternation between the monks and nuns during the times when the monks were unable to celebrate the liturgy in their own church. The influence of Mother Bruyère upon the monks of Solesmes led in turn to persecution by disgruntled former monks of Solesmes in the 1890s who accused Bruyère of being a sort of guru. This in turn



MASTER OF PARRAL - ST. JEROME IN THE SCRIPTORIUM

led to Bruyère and Abbot Delatte of Solesmes being temporarily suspended from their offices until the accusations were proved to be unfounded. Finally, due to further secularist persecutions (now

of both male and female religious in France), Bruyère led the nuns of her community into exile in England in 1901 where she died on the Isle of Wight in 1909.

Unlike many of the micropublished books now available, *Light & Strength* is competently typeset and well edited. The English edition includes helpful annotations by the translator which give further details about the various figures of 19th century French ecclesiastical and secular life who would otherwise be a mere litany of names to an English-speaking reader. The life and writings of Mother Cécile Bruyère deserve to be better known, and we may well hope that this new translation of her life will incite further interest in Bruyère and the Benedictines of Solesmes. Further, one hopes that just as the Benedictines of old passed down the heritage of the Patristic Church and paved the way for the re-articulation of the classical heritage by the scholastics of the 13th century, so too this publication will serve as a model for other religious in presenting aspects of their patrimony in the contemporary form of micropublishing. In the Order of Preachers, for instance, there are encouraging steps already being taken by imprints such as the New Priory Press of the Province of St. Albert the Great in Chicago and DNS Publications of the Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary in Summit, NJ. In 2012, DNS Publications published a translation of Blessed Raymond of Capua's *The Life of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano* by Sr. Mary Martin Jacobs, O.P., and in 2013 the New Priory Press published an English translation of Giacinto D'Urso's *Catherine of Siena: Doctor of the Church*, translated by Fr. Thomas McDermott, O.P.

In micropublished books, it is essential to devote time and careful attention to editing and type-setting so that the seriousness of the content may shine through undiminished by an unprofessional appearance or careless typographical errors that so often plague micropublishing projects which exploit the ease of contemporary printing technology. In all of these respects, Clear Creek

Monastery's new edition of *Light & Strength* can serve as a model for anyone striving to take advantage of contemporary technology to spread the Gospel and the charisms entrusted to their institutes by the Holy Spirit.

Innocent Smith entered the Order of Preachers in 2008.