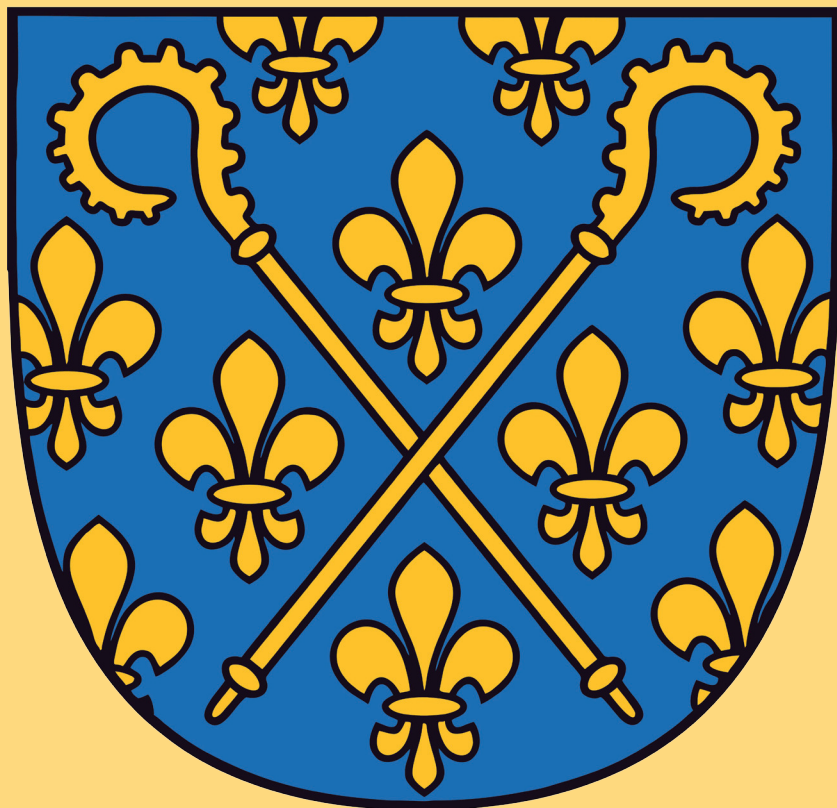


CULTURE OF PLACE:

AN INTELLECTUAL PROFILE OF THE PREMONSTRATENSIAN ORDER

Wolfgang Grassl



Part 1

Verlag Traugott Bautz

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WOLFGANG GRASSL

PART I

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VERBO ET EXEMPLO
AD OMNE OPUS BONUM
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Preface

The Order of the Canons Regular of Prémontré is an institution that is no longer widely known. There are now fewer than 1,300 Premonstratensians (or Norbertines) around the world, among whom about 900 priests, and their work often does not reach the critical mass necessary for public visibility on a global scale. Yet after the French Revolution, the Order had already been much smaller, and it has recovered. The Premonstratensians will soon be 900 years old, and their contribution to Western religion, thought, and culture has been substantial. No single member may have entered the intellectual pantheon of all ages. But numerous Premonstratensians have, in addition to being pastors and monks, also been remarkable scholars, artists, and intellectual leaders that merit being remembered. The cultural achievement of the Order as a whole deserves a critical appreciation in the context of the history of thought and of Catholic tradition. The 875th anniversary of the death of St Norbert of Xanten is an appropriate opportunity.

Most of the numerous studies on the Premonstratensian Order are devoted to historical and biographical details. Very few authors have even attempted to draw a big picture. In the present ‘post-modern’ era, this is in any case an unfashionable undertaking. Reflection on an intellectual style may easily be dismissed as ‘totalizing’ or ‘essentialist’ discourse. What is usually preferred is *bricolage* – the cobbling together of small-scale, partial, and perspectival vignettes without laying claim to revealing the truth or essence about a subject matter. However, the history of thought and culture has little to gain in understanding if it does not dare go beyond positivistic description of details or ideological positioning. It must place data into a framework that allows for generalisations while guarding itself against the pitfalls of inventing history.

A synthetic approach risks reducing the diversity of thought in a community. Yet beyond the diversity of individual religious, houses, and circaries, the Order of Prémontré also shows a considerable unity, as is evidenced by a historical tension between centralisation and autonomy. Diversity and unity must be brought into balance in presenting the profile of a community. This is what this book attempts to do. It sketches an intellectual profile of the Order without limiting itself to the specialist. It thereby adopts a matrix approach – an overview of the intellectual history of the Order by epochs and eminent representatives combined with the definition of general principles that together constitute an intellectual style. Such method by its nature runs the risk of neither satisfying the historian nor the philosopher or theologian. But it is the one that seems most appropriate for elucidating its object – the intellectual profile of the Premonstratensian Order and thus the essence of its tradition.

Most of the men discussed here – given the subject matter, there are very few women – are no longer remembered. With few exceptions, their works have not been reprinted since their first publication, and are not available in English. On the history of the Premonstratensian Order, much of the secondary literature, too, is dated and in many languages, for the intellectual centres of the Order have been outside the Anglophone world. All the more this study attempts to provide interpretation – by making personalities and their achievements more accessible but also by discussing their relevance for Western thought and culture. On some notable Premonstratensians little information is available. Many thinkers are here presented for the first time in English. But the intention of this book is not that of a *hagiologion* of cultural greats. It seeks to synthesize a common intellectual style underlying many individual achievements in theology, philosophy, science, and the arts. The characterisation of this intellectual style shall then facilitate an appreciation of the specifically Premonstratensian contribution to Western culture.

This book studies the history and morphology of thought. It is not a study in theology. It is selective in not developing every thread found in Premonstratensian writers or artists. But it is comprehensive in letting the essential traits of the thought and culture of the Order emerge. Despite the large number and great variety of sources consulted, this work does not lay claim to completeness. Its scope makes it likely that, despite considerable attention to accuracy, some details may be incorrect.

This study would not have been written had its author not joined the faculty of St Norbert College, which is sponsored by the Premonstratensian Fathers of De Pere, Wisconsin. It derives not least from intellectual curiosity about one's professional and religious environment. Yet the book represents an outsider's view in at least two senses – that of a layperson not associated with the Premonstratensian Order and that of a scholar from outside the fields of history or theology. It is to be hoped that such a bird's eye perspective may add to the perspicuity and impartiality of judgement.

Sincere recognition for his support is due to Dr William Hyland, Director of the Centre for Norbertine Studies at St Norbert College. Bill's vast knowledge of mediaeval monasticism is as impressive as is his love for the Church. Various pieces of information have come from Rt Rev Dr Joachim Angerer OPraem of Geras Abbey and the University of Vienna, from Rev Dr Ulrich G. Leinsle OPraem of Schlägl Abbey and the University of Regensburg, from Br Dr Terrence Lauerman OPraem of St Norbert Abbey in De Pere, and from Dr Edward Ridsen and Rosemary Sands of St Norbert College. Inspiration that motivated a deeper look into things Premonstratensian has been received, already years before the actual writing, from Rev Dr Andrew Ciferni

OPraem of Daylesford Abbey and Rev Dr Jay Fostner OPraem of St Norbert Abbey. Recognition is due to the Office of Faculty Development at St Norbert College for having provided a research grant to support this work. Many original sources were consulted at Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna and at Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich. The book could not have been written without the competent help of the staff at the Mulva Library of St Norbert College, particularly of Connie Meulemans, who found even the most obscure literature somehow and somewhere. Most of all I thank my wife Rebecca Proefrock, theologian and *pastor animarum*, for her loving support. All shortcomings are due to the author alone.

June 6, 2009
875th anniversary of the death of St Norbert

Wolfgang Grassl

Note on Textual Conventions

Following international and scholarly practice, and not least the official designation of the Order, the term ‘Premonstratensian’ (and not ‘Norbertine’) is employed. Although the term ‘canon’ is typically used for members of the Order of Prémontré and for other canons regular, the word ‘monk’ may apply, as a cover term, to persons with monastic vows regardless of their specific status. This follows not only from the practice of the Council of Trent, which adopted a very inclusive definition (Sessio XXV, Caput XXII), but also from recent scholarly work, which tends to bridge the much-canvassed distinctions between monks, canons, and friars (Brooke 2003: 162ff.; Beales 2003: 17ff.). The text largely follows the convention within the Order of designating independent canonries as ‘abbeys’ (and in Hungary as ‘provostries’) whereas dependent houses are ‘priors.’ However, usage has not been uniform across time and region. In French-, Spanish-, and German-speaking areas, ‘monastery’ has, even for independent Premonstratensian houses, always been used more or less interchangeably with ‘abbey’ (or *Stift*). It will occasionally be found in this book.

The Latin *propositus* (or German *Propst*) is rendered as ‘provost,’ to refer to the head of a dependent house, the elected head of a convent, or to the abbot-like leader of canonries in particular circaries (such as Hungary). In French, of course, all abbots are *abbés*, whereas bearers of the honorific title *abbé* need certainly not be abbots. Differences in legal status between abbeys and provostries are ignored (Rommens 1978: 174ff.).

Where applicable, the monastic names given to members of the Order are used, birth names being included in parentheses. Biographical dates and alternative names of persons and places are provided only at their first mention. Place names and names of abbeys have been chosen according to the most frequent usage in the academic literature, with current names typically added in parentheses. When reference to the Premonstratensians is made, the term ‘Order’ is capitalised. All other religious communities in the Catholic Church are referred to as ‘orders,’ even though they may be congregations or institutes.

Citation of easily available texts is often only by section without quoting a particular edition. References to Migne’s collection are provided where necessary so as to facilitate further scholarship.¹ All translations are the author’s own unless stated otherwise. For *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, the abbreviation ‘AP’ is used in the bibliography.

¹ PL = *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Latina. Ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1844-1865.

1. Identity

The Catholic intellectual tradition has always embraced a diversity of currents. Particular monastic communities have been associated not only with particular charisms, or styles of spirituality, but also, in a more general way, with particular styles of thought or worldviews. These emerged, of course, in the context of the development of the Church. Sometimes they were reflections of then contemporary debates in theology; but at a time when many popes and other members of the hierarchy also belonged to an order, and when orders were aligned with factions within the Church, the partial traditions of religious communities often influenced the *magisterium*. Some of the great orders of monks, canons, or clerics such as the Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, or Jesuits have developed, in conjunction with their own styles of community life, intellectual outlooks that are characteristic for them and set them apart from other orders. Over several centuries, for example, the Franciscans were particularly influenced by St Augustine, and through him they (or rather, one Franciscan sub-tradition) stood in a Platonist or Neo-Platonist lineage, whereas the Dominicans, and later the Jesuits, were particularly influenced by St Thomas Aquinas, and through him they stood in an Aristotelian tradition. The Augustinian friars long followed the teachings of Giles of Rome (Aegidius Romanus) and Gregory of Rimini and developed an Aegidian School or followed a *via Gregorii* that would remain influential up to the eighteenth century. Even for smaller orders such as the Camaldolese, who have grown out of the Benedictine family, the existence of a specific intellectual style derived from a particular spirituality has been claimed (Magheri Cataluccio and Fossa 1979; Lackner 2001). Similarly, the Piarists have focussed on education, have produced a number of outstanding scientists, and are credited with a particular intellectual outlook, as are the Minimi, a mendicant order founded by Francis of Paola in the fifteenth century (Favino 2005).

Although there have always been exceptions and crossovers, intellectual styles are understood as ideal types that can explain why members of a particular community have tended to embrace certain positions on issues of theology and philosophy. As a consequence, the existence of an Augustinian, Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit intellectual tradition has been asserted, as partial streams within the comprehensive Catholic intellectual tradition (Martin 2003; Kelley 2001; Osborne 2003; Murray 2006; Feld 2008; Ripplinger 2007; Kolvenbach 2002). A distinctive tradition serves to impart to a community an individual identity, and intellectual styles are here intertwined, in a complicated web of mutual dependency relations, with the charism of an order, which refers more to its specific calling and mission.

The Premonstratensian Order, which is an old community of regular canons, and indeed one of the oldest orders in the Church, has not been described as standing in a particular intellectual tradition or as having created one. Different from the Victorines or the Jesuits, learning has never been part of the mission of the Order as such but has been derivative of its pastoral and liturgical tasks. Different from the Dominicans, whose mission is primarily that of preaching, with learning being directly subsidiary to it, the goal of the Premonstratensians is pursuit of the *vita apostolica* in a broader sense. Different from the Franciscans, who were torn between their Platonist legacy, their commitment to the nominalist philosophy of the Middle Ages, and their promotion of the ideas of John Duns Scotus (Merino 1993), the Premonstratensians did not develop a philosophical tradition of their own. In the self-reflexion of the Order, it has never excelled in learning but ‘has at least always kept its intellectual level up to the culture of its time’ (Erens 1936: col. 22). In an outside perspective, on the other hand, ‘the Premonstratensians did not have any great intellectual ambitions’ (Burton 1994: 188).

St Norbert of Xanten (c.1080-1134) was neither a writer nor an organizer of his community; he was not at all out to create a new ‘identity.’ Upon foundation of the Order, there was little that was distinctive in its regulations and customs, which were largely modeled after the *Charta Caritatis* of the Cistercians, which had just been adopted when the Premonstratensians were founded. The abbot of Prémontré was equipped with a strict monarchical power, as the head of the whole Order, and within each house provosts or abbots would have full authority over spiritual and secular matters. The Order soon came to be organized by circaries, which were designed for effectiveness in the pastoral field, and this organisational principle is indeed one of the Premonstratensian innovations. But with this institution also came an increasing divergence of developments within the Order. In fact, all Premonstratensian specificities lie in their administrative structure but not in theology or spirituality. Its charism is counted towards the Augustinian family of those communities that follow the Rule of St Augustine, and this serves as a common bond. But it alone has not sufficed to give them a clear intellectual identity (Backmund 1972: xi). Whereas the presence of St Augustine in the thought and practice of the Premonstratensians has always been strong, the Order neglected to build an identity around it. In the fourteenth century, the Order of Hermits of St Augustine (*Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Augustini* – OESA), now simply called Order of St Augustine (*Ordo Sancti Augustini* – OSA), which received papal confirmation in 1256, long after the Premonstratensians’ confirmation in 1124, preempted claims to the heritage of St Augustine. Though the Augustinian identity they created may be mythical, they succeeded in establishing that they, and not even the Augus-

tinian Canons with their much older pedigree, were the only legitimate sons of St Augustine (Saak 2002: ch. 2).

Historians have judged that, in the Middle Ages, ‘the Augustinian canons indeed, as a whole, lacked every mark of greatness’ (Southern 1970: 248). One of the reasons was certainly that they neglected to adapt their greatest patrimony – to speak credibly for the most influential of the Church Fathers – to the new scholastic environment. Even more so, they often did not consciously draw on the intellectual and spiritual resources that St Augustine had left them. Many historians of thought now question whether there ever was an Augustinian ‘school’ at all (Saak 2002: ch. 4, 687ff.). If there was, the Premonstratensians may have been in it more by following the Rule of St Augustine than by any specific philosophical or theological commitments.

Some scholars deny even a specific Premonstratensian spirituality, tracing this lack to an enduring unclarity about St Norbert’s real goals (Schmidt 1993b: 57f.). That the Premonstratensians have, through phases of negligence and rediscovery, been guided by the charism of St Norbert cannot be doubted. But what exactly this charism was, and how it applied to the specific historical context, has been under discussion throughout the development of the Order (Valvekens 1981; Ardura 2005). Ambiguity has arisen from the simultaneous embrace of the strictly contemplative *ordo novus* of canons regular and of parish ministry. The Premonstratensians wanted both, and St Norbert tried to do just that by serving as the Archbishop of Magdeburg. However, all communities established by missionary preachers in the twelfth century – Robert d’Arbrissel, Vital de Mortain, Bernard de Tiron, Gilbert of Sempringham, or Norbert of Xanten – became monastic, and thus resembled the Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries. They all stressed the need for solitude and divorce from the world and worked at self-sanctification more than at ministry (Burton 1994: 132f.; McGinn 1998: 282). In fact, the *Constitutiones* of 1130 and 1150 explicitly excluded taking charge of parishes, which was not allowed until 1236/38 (after Clement III had given his approval in 1188). Having a strong orientation towards the ministry would also have meant weakening conventual life. Thus most Premonstratensian houses were nearly indistinguishable from Cistercian ones and remained so for a long time while paying lip service to *actio* (Machilek 1974: 67; Brooke 1999: 171). It certainly appears paradoxical that St Norbert, more dedicated than other founders to practical ends, should have founded an order that became enclosed, austere, and remote. The austerity practiced by Premonstratensians indeed exceeded that of the Augustinian Canons and was rivaled only by that of the Cistercians and Carthusians (Burton 1994: 56f.). This straddling of two very different forms of life – Anselm of Havelberg (c.1100-1158) referred to it as *vita mixta* (Vetri 1961) – did not sup-

port a clear intellectual positioning. Even the architecture of mediaeval Premonstratensian houses has been described as a sort of compromise between Cistercian austerity and Cluniac splendor (López de Guereño Sanz 1997: I, 141). At the time, only the monastic orders were committed to systematic and fruitful learning. This is what St Norbert's followers shared only to a smaller extent. They were not a particularly learned order and never claimed to be such (Colvin 1951: 315-326; Backmund 1986: 54; Gribbin 2001: 132). They neither engaged in the great debates over universals or free will (with Vivianus of Prémontré being an exception) nor produced famous scholars. Different from the later mendicant orders including the Augustinian friars, and even later the Capuchins and Jesuits, no constitution or general chapter committed canons to a particular philosophical or theological position. Neither did the Premonstratensians have a theological authority of their own of the rank of St Anselm of Canterbury, St Thomas Aquinas, Bl John Duns Scotus, or St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (Huber 1953a: 363; Haidacher 1955: 117ff.). No Doctor of the Church served as an intellectual rallying point – but saints and blessed of the Order did. Authorship among the Premonstratensians was comparatively rare (Backmund 1972). And where the Dominicans, soon after their foundation, had occupied chairs at the universities of Europe by storm, Premonstratensian professors were a great rarity. At the venerable University of Salamanca, which in the sixteenth century was the battlefield for theological debates of European importance, Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines, and later Jesuits came to 'own' chairs, but not Premonstratensians, who only occasionally saw one of their own become professor (Simon Rey 1981: 22).

The example of St Norbert's life could perhaps constitute a charism but not an identity. For though the specific events of the saint's life in combination were unique, their meaning was not. Other itinerant preachers also started religious communities, and from some we know much more of their actual thoughts than from St Norbert. The Order therefore lived with ambiguity about its real mission from its beginning. Though its declared intention was a reform of the canons in the sense of the *ordo novus*, in actual fact the Premonstratensians were largely monks.²

The assimilation to the monastic ideal did, however, create a strong sense of place that the friars would lack. By the Baroque period, and occasionally earlier, some of the grandest abbeys in Austria, Bohemia, Southern Germany, Lorraine and Brabant were those of Augustinian Canons and Premonstratensians, who wielded both political and cultural influence. Especially in

² The present Abbot General describes the lifestyle that was long practiced as 'canonical in style and monastic in spirituality' (Handgrätinger 2003: 194).

Swabia, Bavaria, Bohemia, Flanders, and Brabant, and up to a certain time also in France, Spain, Brandenburg, and Saxony, certain houses had a considerable impact on the intellectual, spiritual, and economic development of their areas.

But this impact was even then felt not to be supported by a clear mission that would have gone beyond that of simple ministry. This perceived discrepancy has, by the seventeenth century at the latest if not earlier, led to questions of identity within the Order. Such questions have remained. They must be considered a challenge, for a solid self-understanding cannot be built *ex negativo* – on the absence of distinguishing features. If nature abhors a vacuum, this is all the more true of ideological space. Where genuine and accepted mission and identity are missing, surrogates are likely to creep up; at best they lead to the distortion of the nature of an organisation and at worst to its destruction.³

Even if one substitutes the term ‘spirituality’ for that of ‘intellectual style,’ a specific Premonstratensian mission cannot easily be recognised. Since the beginning of the Order, its goal has been that of the *vita apostolica*. The ideal to be followed was the life of the Twelve Apostles. But the precise meaning of this term remained undefined (Petit 1947: 200). Abbot Servais de Lairuelz (1560-1631) of Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine, who was a great reformer of the Order, in his *Optica Regularium* (1603) laid down the ideal of St Norbert in twenty precepts, which were defined as rules for clerical life (Petit 1947: 269). Operational definitions, however, do not yet capture the essence of a concept. It was not before the mid-seventeenth century that a canon of St Nicholas of Veurne (Furnes) in Flanders, Peter de Waghenare (1599-1662), in his book *Sanctus Norbertus Canonorum Praemonstratensium Patriarcha* (1651), described the charism of the Order, based on St Norbert’s original intention, as the praise of God, devotion to the Eucharist, devotion to Mary, spirit of self-denial and penance, and apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls. But it was not until a century later, before Georg Lienhardt (1717-1783), the abbot of Roggenburg (Bavaria), published his *Exhortator Domesticus* (1754) and defined these same five objectives (*finis principales*) systematically with a view to being accepted throughout the Order: *laus Dei in choro* (the singing of the

³ Occasionally one hears of ‘radical hospitality’ as a central value of the Premonstratensians. This idea derives from the Rule of St Benedict: ‘All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ’ (*Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur*) (*Regula Sti. Benedicti*, LIII, 1). It is not contained in the Rule of St Augustine. In fact, both historically and theologically it fits the monastic life better than that of clerics, although both may have maintained *xenodochia*. The respective rule of the *Consuetudines* (‘We should show love of neighbour according to the mind of St. Norbert in being hospitable both to our guests and to the poor’) is, *mutatis mutandis*, found in the rules of most religious orders and thus not distinctive.

Divine Office); *zelus animarum* (zeal for the salvation of souls); *spiritus jugis pœnitentiæ* (the spirit of habitual penance); *cultus Eucharisticus* (a special devotion to the Holy Eucharist); *cultus Marianus* (a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, mostly to her Immaculate Conception). These ends define a mix between *contemplatio* and *actio*. The two first arise from the nature of a canonical order, which is both contemplative and active. The third is taken from monastic orders. But even *zelus animarum* could be understood as limited to or at least focussing on the *confrères* alone, in the sense of the monastic ideal, or as also involving teaching, preaching, and the parish ministry outside the abbey. The first statutes explicitly excluded Eucharistic service in churches that could not be transformed into an abbey (Petit 1947: 47-51). Lastly, the *Directorium Spirituale* of 1959, which had an aborted effect because of the changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council, was in keeping with tradition and yet introduced new accents when it defined the ‘fundamental basis of the ascetic life and of piety’ in the Order as follows: primacy of charity (according to St Augustine); personal devotion to Christ’s humanity; Eucharistic devotion; Marian devotion; and more recent ascetic practices (Ordo Praemonstratensis 1959: 16-19). Among the latter counted those that had developed since the sixteenth century, and special mention was made of Ignatian spiritual exercises.

Over much of their history, the Premonstratensians have indeed led a rather monastic life. The customaries, statutes and liturgical books in use give evidence of a monastic lifestyle except for canons of houses that were involved in outside education. Many canons have of course been both active and contemplative and have engaged in various apostolates. St Norbert envisaged the work of his canons to be missionary rather than “only” parochial. Nonetheless, by his bull *Oneroso sacri Apostolatus Ministerio* (1750), Pope Benedict XIV would later make Premonstratensian canons the only monastics who could be placed in charge of any parish. In some circaries and canonries they indeed were so placed. However, the undercurrent everywhere was for a long time more monastic than canonical although the exact mix has always depended on individual circumstances.⁴ In this sense, the present-day Abbot General interprets the Rule of St Augustine as being based on *communio* and *contemplatio* as the two necessary criteria; ‘canonical monastery life’ adds to these two precepts of the Rule a third goal in the spirit of St Norbert – ‘the building up of an ecclesial community *ad extra*’ (Handgräteringer 2003, 2007). Purely monastic communities could live by the Rule of St Augustine; *actio* was the characteristically Premonstratensian admixture, but it was an add-on to a proven form of

⁴ Some recent studies tend to blur the categorical distinction between monks and canons at least for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bynum 1979).

life. Reforms of Premonstratensian life have therefore always sought to refocus on contemplative life. In general, ‘the Premonstratensian canons, once committed to preaching, had become focussed inward almost exclusively on their own spiritual development’ (Logan 2002: 145). When the Order had veered from its way, it had to recalibrate itself from the centre of its identity, as monastics rather than as priests. It was in such cases that a new emphasis on *communio* was found, and the ideal of community life has always stood in some tension with the missionary objectives of the Order. In the case of the Spanish Congregation, this recalibration went as far as considering themselves, from 1601, as monks that were no longer allowed to engage in ministry and that gave up the white habit for a black one (Backmund 1952: III, 218ff.). Already earlier, St Bonaventure (1221-1274) had seen Cistercians, Carthusians, Premonstratensians, and other regular canons, as purely contemplative orders, which were, however, trumped by Franciscan and Dominican friars at a yet higher level of contemplation (*Apologia pauperum*, XII, 10; *Sermo 22, De statu ecclesiae militantis*, in Bonaventura 1867: 142).

In fact, until the late Middle Ages, the actual differences among the ‘old’ orders were small. All four ‘prelate orders’ were active in ministry outside their houses and thus lived the *vita apostolica* (Backmund 1980; Kroll 1980). The Benedictines were certainly not exclusively engaged in contemplation but played a leading role in the conversion of much of northern Europe. The Cistercians joined the Premonstratensians on their forays into Eastern Europe to convert the Slavs. And monasteries of all orders sought to acquire parishes, for beginning in the fourteenth century, parishes were less regarded as venues of ministry than as profit-bearing assets. If there were differences between orders of monks and canons, they were differences in goals and attitude: monks saw themselves essentially as learners, canons as teachers by word and by example (Bynum 1979: 1-5, 181-1970).

It should be noted, however, that none of the oldest orders – often referred to as ‘prelate orders’ – had (and maybe has) a strong intellectual identity of its own. Unlike the mendicants, the military orders, and the later ‘service’ orders, they were not founded for one particular purpose. Benedictines, Cistercians, Carthusians, and Augustinian Canons were distinct by their ways of living but hardly by espousing a particular philosophy. Even the identity imparted by a lifestyle under a rule would blur over time. At the beginning of the Premonstratensian Order, the life of its members was characterised by a strict asceticism, since the model St Norbert chose was that of the austere *ordo novus*. Canons had to live in strict poverty – in Anselm of Havelberg’s words, as *pauperes Christi* (PL 189: 1319f.). But already a few generations after its foundation, rules of fasting and poverty were relaxed, and standards of community life

had dropped to such an extent that, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) noted: ‘For the rest, this order [i.e., the Premonstratensians] has nothing special, for it is by its founding contemplative and does not profess a particular austerity but has constitutions that seem to be accommodated or similar to that of canons regular.’⁵ This claim about the Premonstratensians of ‘having nothing special’ in the context of a description of the characteristics of orders may have been based on nothing more than a fleeting acquaintance Suárez is likely to have had with the Colegio San Norberto in Salamanca. But it has had a deep impact on the Order (Backmund 1986: 36). At least in the seventeenth century, the lack of a clear identity was felt (Al 1969: 77). Premonstratensian apologetics started to portray St Norbert as the ‘defender of the Eucharist’ against Tanchelm, whose heresy was not the denial of the Real Presence but of the valid consecration by sinful priests. It also emphasized that *vita activa* was indeed just as much of the charism as was *vita contemplativa*, although most houses of the Order had since their foundation not been much different from monasteries. Several Premonstratensian authors felt obliged to propose in publications special traits of their Order (Huber 1953a: 377). Even the title *Proprium Praemonstratense* was used for an unpublished text, albeit about the privileges and exemptions of the Order rather than its intellectual style.⁶ Despite all such attempts, the present Abbot General states, with reference to this passage from Suárez, that the belief of ‘having nothing special’ has long dominated the self-image of the Order (Handgrätinger 2003: 199; Handgrätinger 2004). It is still being quoted and seems to be influential today (Angerer 2003: 269, 277). An eminent Premonstratensian historian confirmed this assessment but attached an important qualification: ‘Premonstratensian theology reflects the general trend. However, it shows a certain positive Augustinian tendency’ (Huber 1954a: 135). This tendency, then, must be investigated.

Occasionally the Premonstratensians must be defended against themselves. It is alleged that Voltaire, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, had gone as far as referring to the Premonstratensians as ‘an order of ignorant men’ (Ardura n.d.: 324). However, no such reference actually appears in the *Diction-*

⁵ ‘*In reliquis nihil habet speciale haec religio; nam ex instituto contemplativa est; nullam vero specialem austeritatem profitetur, sed constitutiones habere dicitur ordini Canonicorum regularium accommodatas, seu similes.*’ *De Varietate Religionum*, in: *Opera Omnia*. Paris: L. Vivés, 1860, Vol. XVI, tract. IX, lib. II, cap. V, 6, p. 516.

⁶ The canon of Tongerlo, Alipius van Veen (1627-1713), composed a manuscript under this title (Koyen 1956).

naire philosophique (and apparently not in any other of Voltaire's works).⁷ In his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), Voltaire did write about the Order: 'The Premonstratensians, who were founded by St Norbert (1120), did not make too much noise, and were the better for it' (Voltaire 1756: chap. CXXXIX).⁸ This does not mean that Enlightenment intellectuals had not much to criticize about religious orders. Denis Diderot (1713-1784) in his novel *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1773) did indeed draw a less than complimentary portrait of a Premonstratensian abbot. But still: that a necessity is perceived at all to defend the Order against contrived polemic may indeed indicate an *identité manquée* not so much with respect to historical achievements, which are beyond doubt, but to current self-positioning. The recent debate about the charisma of the Order was settled by a renewed mission-vision statement adopted at the General Chapter of 2006. The debate about its application is still on (Ciferni 2007). But this does little to settle the broader question – to be decided merely on historical evidence – about a distinctive intellectual style.

The scholarly literature in principle confirms the judgement about a lack of a definite intellectual identity. Already among the earliest followers of St Norbert, no particular intellectual 'trend' seems recognizable. The three most outstanding authors, Anselm of Havelberg, Philip of Harvengt (c.1100-1183), and Adam Scotus (1140-c.1212), much as they have made original contributions, do not seem to have a community of ideas or concerns. Nor 'has the ideology and spirituality of canons of their order [...] been set clearly apart in more than name from the thought and practice of other groups of contemporary Augustinians' (Neel 1993: 483f.). In their publications, up to the present day, Premonstratensian authors have cited *confrères* much more rarely than was the case in other orders; there was a common spirituality but not a strong *esprit de corps*. In particular, their intellectual achievements have rarely cross-pollinated.⁹ This absence has hampered recognizability on an emergent European

⁷ Somewhat earlier than Voltaire, Casimir (Rémi) Oudin (1638-1717), canon of Saint-Paul de Verdun, left the Abbey of Bucilly to migrate to the Netherlands and become a Protestant. He indeed did publish deprecatory opinions about his former order. In the polemical pamphlet *Le Prémontré défroqué* (1692), Oudin denigrated not only his former abbot general and the entire order but also the papacy and the Church. One of his charges was the absence of Premonstratensians from the ranks of writers.

⁸ 'Les prémontrés, que saint Norbert fonda (1120), ne faisaient pas beaucoup de bruit, et n'en valaient que mieux.'

⁹ A two-volume textbook on theology published in 1950 by Emmanuel Gisquière (1891-1980), abbot of Averbode, does not include a single reference to a Premonstratensian in its index of names comprising about seven hundred authors (Gisquière 1950).

market of ideas and intellectual styles. As a consequence, entries on Premonstratensians in encyclopaedias and historical overviews of theology, philosophy, science, or social and political thought are few, with the exception of two or three personalities from the founding generation. In fact, the Order is all too often simply overlooked.¹⁰ Exceptions are still rare.¹¹

But in intellectual historiography such judgements always depend on the level of granularity employed. In a close-up view, the assessment may well be tenable whereas in a bird's eye view it may not be. The first perspective looks microscopically at the contributions and impacts of individual persons where the second looks macroscopically at an order as a whole – at how many cultural assets it has generated and disseminated. From the vantage point of an ecological view of history, not only the original intellectual or artistic contributions of an institution count but also the influence this institution as a whole has exerted on the relevant niches in which it was active. In its history of just over a century, the New York Public Library may have made only modest direct contributions to intellectual life; but its indirect contributions, by giving people access to resources and stimulating learning, are colossal. After nearly nine hundred years of Premonstratensian history, too, the part of the iceberg above the water may appear small; but most of the work of a religious community remains invisible to the average observer. The *Constitutiones* of the Order currently in force declare that 'our communities ought to be centres which promote a synthesis of faith and culture' (§ 72), thereby emphasizing the role of being 'salt of the earth' (Mt 5:13). They do not specifically mention learning as a means towards the ultimate end of sanctification. Faith is clearly given priority – but in a synthesis with culture, i.e. as faith that works not only within individuals but also within their social environment. The collective contribution

This is all the more remarkable since – as the subtitle says – the book was written (in Latin) for use in the abbey seminary.

¹⁰ A recent publication, admittedly with a focus on Italy, where the Premonstratensians never played a major role, not only neglects to mention the Order but canons regular in general; it lets 'regular clerics' such as Barnabites, Theatines or Jesuits emerge in the sixteenth century but disregards the development of canons since the time of Charlemagne and of canons regular since the eleventh century (Rurale 2008: 38f.). In a three-volume encyclopedic overview under the title *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroads, 1985-1989), there is a one-sentence reference each to Philip of Harvengt and Adam Scotus. In a study of monastic schools and education in mediaeval England, seven orders are studied but not the Premonstratensians (Courtenay 1987).

¹¹ A widely known book by Henri Cardinal de Lubac referred to the following Premonstratensians (without, however, identifying them as such): Adam Scotus, Anselm of Havelberg, Hermann Joseph, Luke of Mont Cornillon, Philip of Harvengt, Zacharias Chrysopolitanus (de Lubac 1998).

of an institution, particularly its impact on communities in which it is embedded, goes far beyond the individual achievements of its members over time. This is particularly the case for a religious community that sees its task mainly in ministry. The challenge, then, is that of writing intellectual history on an institutional basis by taking individuals as exemplars and by inserting them into the broader context of developments in theology, politics, and society to which intellectual contributions often are responses. The history of ideas (or *Geistesgeschichte*) must therefore be embedded in a sociology of knowledge to do full justice to the Premonstratensian cultural legacy. The intellectual history of the Order must be considered as part of its cultural history.

Consider as an example the eventful history of the Abbey of Frigolet in Provence. Founded around 960 as a Benedictine monastery and later occupied by Augustinians, Saint-Michel-de-Frigolet was secularised during the French Revolution, until in 1858 the buildings were bought by Edmond Boulbon there to restore the Order of Prémontré, which had disappeared from France at the Revolution. After two further periods of exile that started in 1880 and 1903, regular religious life could only restart in 1922. But despite all disturbances brought about by politics, the abbey has played an amazing role in the cultural life of the area, particularly through its contribution to the rebirth of Provençal literature. The great protagonists of Provençal letters, Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914) and Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897), had strong ties with the abbey. Mistral devoted an entire chapter of his autobiography to the abbey (Mistral 1919: ch. 5). In a later generation, the writer Marie Mauron (1896-1986), whose entire literary career was devoted to the description and protection of her region, would have an equally strong attachment. Mauron made several of her stories and novels, for example *Frigolet, coeur de notre Palestine* (1956), revolve around the abbey. One of the most important poets in Provençal, Albert Joseph Rodolphe Rieux (with the pen name of Xavier de Fourvière) (1853-1913), was a canon of the abbey. He not only published poetry but also a Provençal grammar, a conversation book, and, together with a *confrère*, *Lou Pichot Tresor* (1902), which is still the only dictionary of the language. Other intellectuals and artists who were linked to Frigolet include the painter Auguste Chabaud (1882-1995), the composer Henri Tomasi (1901-1971), who has written a mass for the abbey (*Messe de Minuit à St-Michel de Frigolet*), the novelist and filmmaker Marcel Pagnol (1895-1974), the philosopher Jean Guilton (1901-1999), and the writer, journalist, and politician Maurice Druon (b.1918), who was prominent as the Permanent Secretary of the Académie Française. All of these personalities visited the abbey, were inspired by its spiritual life, and were friends with Abbot Norbert Calmels (1908-1985), who later served as Abbot General of the Order (1962-1982). Because of his friendship with the abbot,

Pagnol in 1954 used Saint-Michel-de-Frigolet as the location for his film *L'Élixir du Père Gaucher*, which is based on a novel by Daudet. The unique thyme-flavored liqueur produced at Frigolet Abbey plays a central role in the film. Under Pagnol's guidance, the Festival d'expression provençale has, for more than twenty years, annually been held at the abbey; it has developed into the paramount event for Provençal theatre and poetry. Abbot General Calmel's influence went far beyond his abbey or the Order – he published assiduously, played an important role in Vatican II, served as Apostolic Legate in Morocco, and cultivated friendships not only with personalities of the arts but also with Pope Paul VI, King Hassan II of Morocco, and Prince Rainier of Monaco. Thus Frigolet is an example of what rootedness in a region and its culture means and that it need not imply parochialism. Looking for literary output alone does not suffice for gauging cultural impact; members of Frigolet Abbey have been and still are culturally productive, but the full contribution of a monastic institution must be measured in more comprehensive terms – by the inspiration it provides, the example it sets, and the service it renders to God and His people.

The commitment of the Premonstratensians to a place can even be exemplified by the biography of a single person. Consider the case of the eminent philosopher and mathematician Bernard Bolzano (1781-1848), whose life in Prague was affected by Premonstratensians in many ways. Although Bolzano went to a school of the Piarists and would become a secular priest instead of a Premonstratensian, his closest childhood friend (Johann Baptist Stoppani) joined the Royal Premonstratensian Canonry of Strahov and would later discuss with Bolzano the perfectibility of Catholicism; two of the professors that left the deepest impression on him while a student at the University of Prague were members of the Order (Jan Marian Mika and Chrysostomus Pfrogner); a novice at Strahov became one of his colleagues and friends, and later competed successfully against him for a chair in mathematics (Josef Ladislav Jandera); he received a scholarship through the help of a Premonstratensian who had been Rector of the University and who was then director of the university library (Karel Rafael Ungar); a Premonstratensian professor encouraged him to apply for a newly created chair in religion (Mika); the abbot of Strahov, who was also director of philosophical studies at the University, allowed him to lecture from his own notes instead of the prescribed textbook (Milo Jan Nepomuk Grün); the same abbot defended him when his Catholic orthodoxy was questioned; another Premonstratensian, who was professor of theology at the University, was his main accuser in the long-winded ecclesiastical investigation of his teaching and writing (Adolf Koppmann); in his defence, he could rely on evidence provided by a former professor and director of studies who had been elected abbot of Tepl (Pfrogner); and a Premonstratensian theologian, who in the meantime

had become abbot of Strahov (Benedikt Johann Nepomuk Pfeiffer), was appointed to Bolzano's chair when Emperor Franz finally dismissed him for lack of orthodoxy (Winter 1933). Several members of the Order studied with Bolzano and came under his influence. That Bolzano's career was in many ways intertwined with the Premonstratensians, particularly those of Strahov, was no coincidence – Strahov was a cornerstone in the cultural life of the city, as it had already been for centuries. Already in mediaeval times, five canons of Strahov became bishops of Prague and another six of Olmütz (Olomouc) (Madeja 2009: 8, n. 9). In the seventeenth century, Premonstratensian monasteries supported the Catholic Reformation both through pastoral and intellectual work. Canons taught at seminaries and at the University, and served as its rectors and deans; they advised government; they sponsored and managed schools around Bohemia; and they were patrons of the arts. The same can be said of the Abbey of Tepl (Teplá) in Western Bohemia in the same period – it influenced economic and cultural life in and around Pilsen (Plzeň) for at least a century. Through its large landholdings and its investment into the budding spa resort of Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně) and into other businesses, it created employment. And through its own literary activity, but particularly also its sponsorship and management of a classical *Gymnasium* in Pilsen, it educated the academic youth of the area between 1804 and 1924 (Fitzthum 1956). Donations of books to the college and the city both by the abbey and by individual members enhanced its status as a patron of the arts.¹² In Bohemia at large, the Premonstratensians were at the forefront of the Counter-Reformation, of Baroque philosophy, of the Catholic Enlightenment, and of the Catholic Restoration, and they shaped culture by being among its most active protagonists. The cultural history of the Order must therefore go much beyond the history of ideas even though the latter will be at the centre of the former. It must include the culture of place that derives from the vow of *stabilitas loci* – the commitment to one particular church and therefore community within which the Order aspires to be, according to the parables of the gospels, leaven or a mustard seed (Mt 13:31-33; Mk 4:31; Lk 13:19).

In the world of art, the strong ties Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) enjoyed with the Abbey of St Michael in Antwerp, but also with that of Tongerlo, are another case in point. Not only did Rubens live for some time at St Michael's and celebrate his wedding there; he contributed to the abbey at least four of his major works including the *Adoration of the Magi* (c.1624). For Ab-

¹² Abbot Reitenberger donated books to the *Gymnasium* library (Fitzthum 1956: 165). The canon of Tepl and professor in Pilsen, Dr Basilius (Franz Xaver) Grassl, bought up a voluminous academic library and donated it to the city.

bot Joannes Chrysostomus van der Sterre (1591-1652) he made architectural designs, and for the Abbey of Tongerlo a precious crucifix. Rubens' favorite disciple, Antoon (Anthony) van Dyck (1599-1641), whose brother Theodore was a canon at St Michael's, continued this cooperation and contributed several paintings. Flemish artists such as Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) and Gaspar de Crayer (1582-1669) painted masterpieces for the abbeys of Grimbergen, Ninove, Averbode, and Dieleghem. Thus there has been a symbiotic relationship between painters of the Flemish school and Premonstratensian monasteries (though certainly not only these). Abbots and canons appreciated art, and they were willing to extend patronage; but demand for Flemish art already outstripped supply on a market that had become European. The Premonstratensians in Flanders and Brabant must therefore have offered more than just money to acquire so many works by their local artists – maybe a deep rootedness in the cities of the artists, for some of whom they also served as pastors.

The devotion to work at a particular location is at least a partial answer to our question of the distinctiveness of the Order. Throughout their history, the Premonstratensians have built a culture of place, in their own communities and, in concentric circles around these, in the wider society. This emphasis is not exclusive to the Order, for it is shared at least with other canons regular such as the Augustinian Canons and the Crosiers, and to a lesser extent with all old (or 'prelate') orders. But it reveals a distinction from many or most communities within the Church. The more challenging question is whether, in addition to particular local cultures, there has also evolved an intellectual style shared by the Order at large.

Although the mission of the Order is primarily that of pastoral ministry, and particularly the celebration of the Eucharist, the Premonstratensians have included notable theologians, philosophers, historians, scientists, artists, and other intellectuals. However, they have not become household names such as that of Gregor Mendel, abbot of the Augustinian friars in Brünn (Brno) and renowned father of scientific genetics. Much of their work has been directed *ad intram*, its influence hardly going beyond the walls of the cloister. And they have been few in comparison with other orders, as Premonstratensians themselves, at least after the era of triumphalism, have readily admitted (Jansen 1920: 377). A member summarised it by saying that 'the Order has not produced writers of genius' (*L'Ordre n'a point produit des écrivains de genie*) (Gonzague 1884: 8). The absence of 'front-rank scholars' in the history of the Premonstratensian Order has been explained by the commitment of its members to a broader type of education, in abbeys schools, parishes, and missions, instead of merely universities (Ciferni 2007). And the mission of a canonical order need not rank learning first among its priorities at all. In fact, the young reli-

gious that become novices and then declare their vows are not selected by a superior intellectual curiosity or capability or by artistic talent but rather by a vocation to serve God and others. That monasteries have been places of extraordinary cultural achievement throughout the history of Christianity and of other religions is due to what happens there but not to pre-existing genius. But because monasteries are meant to be ‘salt of the earth’ and give examples to the wider society, any lack of ‘front-rank’ and visible achievements is felt twice as strongly. This is why some leaders of the Order have regarded intellectual work, and particularly the study of exegesis and theology, as essential to its mission. Manuel Abad Illana (1713-1780) of San Norberto in Valladolid, who also served as professor at the University of Salamanca and would later serve as Bishop of Tucumán (Argentina) and Arequipa (Peru), did not mince his words when he wrote that ‘the study of theology is so indispensable for Premonstratensian religious that whoever ignores it voluntarily is but a bastard son and ought to be ejected as an illegitimate son of St Norbert’ (Abad 1755: lib. I, c. IV, 57). The abbot did not use such words without reason, for learning had receded in much of the Order. Canons of the mother abbey of Prémontré used the same lament about a lack of enduring achievements in the years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, when as part of a last ditch effort to save the *ancien régime*, the work of the religious orders was publicly reviewed. Their abbot at the time, Jean-Baptiste L’Écuy, derived from this review a plan for revitalizing the intellectual life of the Order so as better to withstand the challenges of Enlightenment criticism (Ardura n.d.: 352f.). But in a folly that seems to repeat itself in the Church every century, he decided to lower standards and to assimilate them to the demands of then contemporary culture. This plan comprised the abandonment of cultural traditions that have developed organically over centuries, such as the liturgical and musical styles of the Order, with a view to making canonical life more ‘learned’ and ‘useful.’ It was too ill-conceived an undertaking, and in any case too little and too late, to prevent the much larger deluge to come.

The question of commitment to learning, research, and teaching is of course independent of that of a common intellectual style. But given the number of contributions that Premonstratensians have made to the arts, humanities, and sciences, the issue still arises of whether this old Order may not be claimed to have its own tradition after all such that one intellectual attitude is characteristic of many if not all of its most notable members. It has been deplored that the interest of the Order for some of its greater lights (such as Vivianus of Pré-