

# The Human Person, Fully Alive:

## A Case Study of Identity and Purpose in Anglican Monasticism

Gabriel Z. E. McCreath

### Keywords & Definitions

#### Christian Monasticism:

- Yes, it's real! Yes, even today!
- Most commonly associated with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, although not exclusive to those traditions
- Characterized by asceticism (through vows), community life, and "seeking God"
- Stereotypes abound in popular culture

#### Anglicanism:

- Christian denominations originating from or related to the Church of England
  - This is called the Anglican Communion
- Includes the Episcopal Church, Anglican Church in North America, etc.
- Technically Protestant, though has a lot in common with Roman Catholicism
- Much diversity between Anglican traditions

#### Benedictine Monasticism:

- A particular tradition of Christian monasticism started by St. Benedict
- Characterized by focus on community life and particular vows
  - Stability
  - Conversion to the monastic life
  - Obedience

My case study was the Order of the Holy Cross, an Anglican Benedictine monastic community for men.



### My Project: RQ's, Literature, & Methods

#### Research Questions:

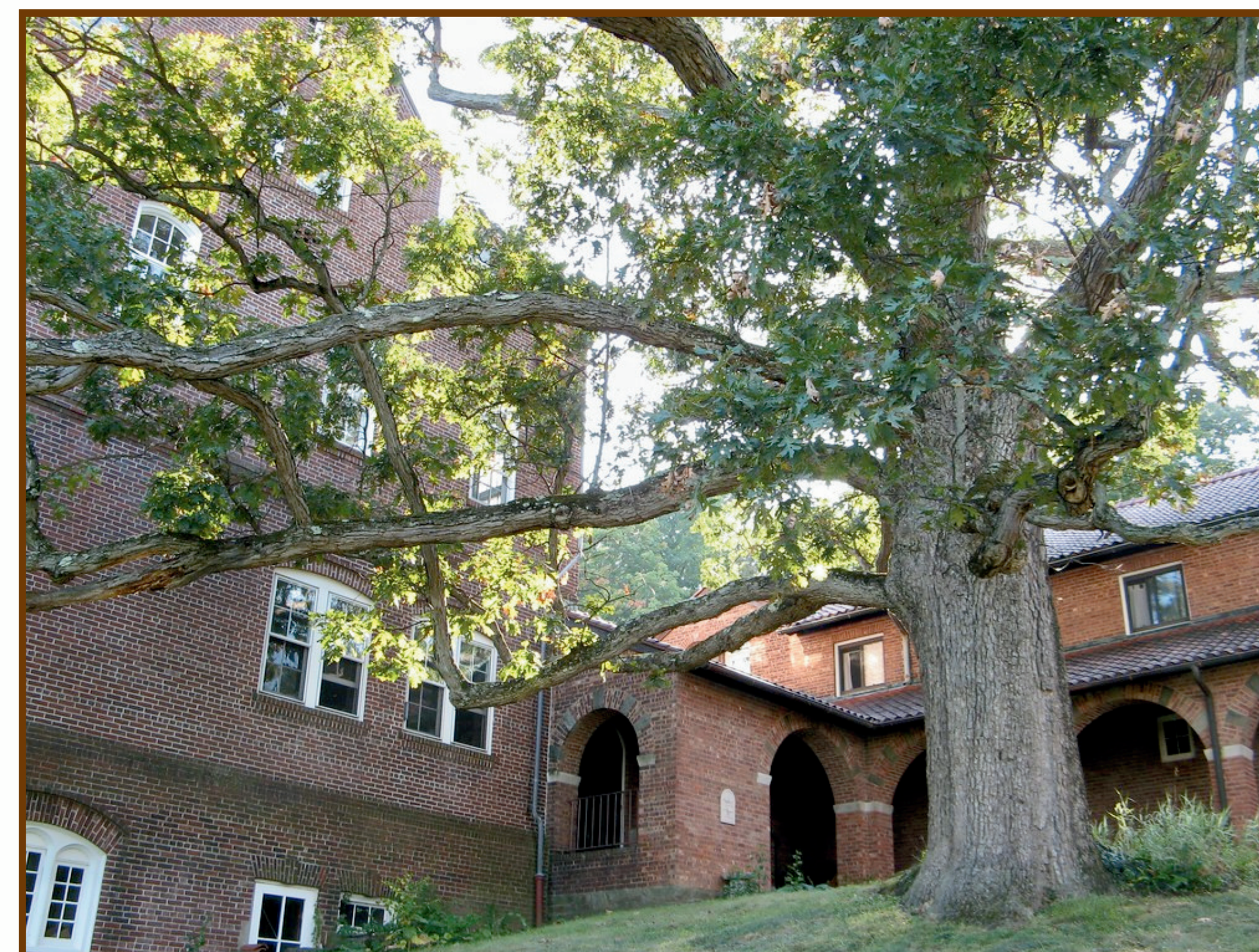
- How do contemporary Anglican monastic communities make sense of their identity and purpose?
  - How do *monks* make a *monastery*?
  - How does a *monastery* make *monks*?
- Why become a monk today?

#### Literature on Anglican Monasticism:

- There's not a lot of it...
- What *does* exist hardly focuses on identity and purpose
  - The most sources (and most *helpful* sources) come from the monastic communities themselves (e.g., SSJE, OHC)
- My project aims to address this gap in the literature

#### Methods:

- Created a list of deductive themes from literature
- Traveled to Holy Cross Monastery in New York, USA for three days
- Interviewed six monks about their vocations, identity, purpose, the monastery environment, and other topics
- Coded interviews for inductive and deductive themes
- Structure of the I.S. paper is based on these themes



All images Creative Commons license (except Wooster logo)

### Findings from my Research

#### Key Interview Themes:

- Prayer & the Daily Office
- Having an idealized, romanticized, or "fantasy" view of the monastery before entering
- Conversion
- Community
- Being oneself

#### Prayer & the Daily Office:

- "Mortar between the bricks"
- Stability is essential to monastic life, and daily prayer is essential to stability
- Importance of the Psalms
- Reminder of the importance of being over doing

#### Fantasies of the Monastery:

- Monks described having a romanticized idea of the monastery before entering
- Archetypes can point toward a deeper truth about what people seek in monastic life
- Necessary; part of the process

#### Conversion:

- "Continuous transformation into Christ"
- Trusting that one has what one needs in the monastic community and in God
- Letting go of ego and defense mechanisms

#### Community:

- Conversion happens because of community
- Learning how to let people love you

#### Being oneself:

- Personal growth and fulfillment is essential to the health of the community
- A calling to everybody, not just monks