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John Gale

Lacan and the Benedictines

Summary:

In this paper the author considers, by a careful reading of the *Regula Benedicti* (RB) and its sources, the claim by Michel de Certeau that some of Lacan's ideas are based on Benedictine monasticism. As well as the four concepts that de Certeau identifies (analyst as monk; master; school; and work-as-speech) the author also considers whether four additional notions (desire; the uniqueness of the subject; nothingness; and empty speech)—the latter two of which may have been mediated to Lacan by Heidegger—which come from the *Regula Benedicti*.

It is well known that Jacques Lacan's brother, Marc-Marie (François in religion) [1908-1994], was a monk at the Benedictine abbey of Hautecombe. But were Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas in any way influenced by Benedictine monasticism? Michel de Certeau has suggested that they were (de Certeau 2006). De Certeau, one of three Jesuits[1] who together with Lacan founded in 1964 the *École Freudienne*, had an in-depth knowledge of Freud's works which he had read in the original German and remained an active member of the Lacanian circle throughout his life, often lecturing and writing on the intersecting discourses of mysticism and psychoanalysis[2] (Ahearne 1995). These credentials alone mean that de Certeau's suggestion is worth investigating and that is the aim of this paper.

Introduction: Lacan and Catholicism

According to Marc-Marie, although Lacan had stopped hearing mass when he started his medical studies, he continued to believe in God and to be deeply immersed in Catholic culture (Roazen 1996) This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in 1939 when he married Marie-Louise Blondin. The wedding took place in Paris at the church of S François de Sales, 17 rue Ampère, in the 17th arrondissement. Bernard Laure—the inspirational first abbot of the Solesmes community at Hautecombe—officiated at the ceremony. In due course Lacan had his children baptised. At Easter 1953, in the midst of the difficulties at the *Société psychanalytique de Paris* he wrote a letter to his brother in which he claimed that his teaching belonged to the Christian tradition.

He asserted that in this second half of the twentieth century everything would depend on how men dealt with one another, and this perhaps not only on the secular plane. Psychology, he added, occupied a “super-eminent” position, yet the one idea of all its practitioners was to fall away from that height and join in some great and general degradation. He himself was almost alone, he concluded, in propounding a doctrine that might at least enable the movement as a whole to preserve its roots in a great tradition, a tradition in which man could not be reduced to the status of a mere object.

In the following September Lacan wrote again to his brother ‘restating the importance he attached to religion’ (Roudinesco 1997: 205) and asking if he could arrange a private audience for him with Pius XII in order to talk to him about the future of psychoanalysis within the Church and ‘do homage to our common father’ while in Rome. In fact, so strong was his wish for a private audience that he also approached the French embassy to see if they could arrange it for him. Lacan was probably aware that his philosophically articulated work was likely to appeal to the growing number of priests who wanted to become analysts and to other Catholics who in general had difficulty accepting Freud (Roudinesco 1997). Shortly before this Pius XII had given three addresses in which he spelt out the Church’s view on psychoanalysis. The Vatican at that time was under the vehemently anti-psychoanalytic influence of Cardinal Ottaviani and Agostino Gemelli (Colombo 2003) yet taken together, we can see in these three papal addresses a tentative shift toward a more open attitude to psychoanalysis (Roudinesco 1994). The first address was delivered to surgeons on 14th September 1952 at the First International Congress on the Histopathology of the Nervous System; the second on 13th April 1953 at the Fifth International Congress on Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology; and the third two days later at the International Catholic Congress on Psychiatry, Analytic Psychotherapy and Child-Guidance. The latter event was one of a series—the first having been held in 1949 at the Benedictine abbey of Bec Hellouin in Normandy—established by Maryse Choisy, the founder of the journal *Psyché* (Vandermeersch 2000)[3]. In the end neither Marc-Marie nor the embassy were able to arrange a private audience with the Pope and the best Lacan could manage was to attend a public audience at Castel Gandolfo, the summer residence of the pope. He went there with Maryse Choisy and Serge Leclaire. Because Lacan was simultaneously wooing the Communist Party, Roudinesco concludes that Lacan’s approach to the Church was merely an opportunistic attempt to gain powerful supporters[4]. But his brother saw it differently and was convinced that Lacan had been re-converted to Christianity and embraced once again the values of Catholic spirituality. This view is given added credibility by two oral documents which were published for the first time in 2005—the *Discourse to Catholics* (9th and 10th March 1960) and *The Triumph of Religion* (29th October 1974). The latter comes from a press conference held in Rome at the French Cultural Centre. Here Lacan insists that ‘there is *one* true religion and that is the Christian religion’ and that ‘the true religion is the Roman one’ (Lacan 2013: 66, italics original)

Lacan’s monastic brotherhood

According to his biographer, Jacques Lacan and his brother were brought up in a family united by religion and steeped in clericalism (Roudinesco 1997). Their mother, Emilie Baudry-Lacan, was a devout Catholic and an important influence on both her children. They were educated at the fashionable Collège Stanislas on the rue Notre Dame des Champs, a private school founded in 1804 by Père Claude Liautard. It was a school run by the Jesuits and was in vogue with upper middle class Catholics[5]. Here Lacan is said to have excelled, among other things, in religious studies (Roudinesco 1997).

Marc-Marie had felt called to the priesthood from an early age and made the decision to become a monk in 1926 while reading the Rule of St Benedict (RB) but was dissuaded by his brother (Roudinesco 1997). His mother however supported his decision and Marc-Marie finally entered the monastery of Sainte Marie Madeleine, Hautecombe in 1929[6] (Roazen 1996). It seems likely that the edition of RB that Marc-Marie read—and that given their closeness Lacan himself may well have read—was one that had been published the year before by Librairie Dardel in Chambéry. It was the work of Bernard Laure and contained the Latin text of RB with a French translation by Prosper Guéranger, the founder of Solesmes, followed by Dom Laure’s commentary[7]. There were some photographs, including one of Hautecombe and additional information for oblates (Laure 1925). Marc-Marie was clothed on 14th January 1930. He made his solemn profession on the 8th September 1934, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, studied philosophy at the Institut Catholique in Paris and was ordained a priest four years later on 1st May 1935[8]. For the rest of his life Marc-Marie published articles and contributed to books on theology and sacred scripture[9].

Lacan and his brother were always very close, read everything the other wrote and were said to be ‘intimately acquainted with one another’s work’ (Roazen 1996: 326). Although their long correspondence remains unpublished (Roudinesco 2011), in an interview with Paul Roazen in 1994 Marc-Marie recalled that in 1922 when Jacques was 21 and he 14, they both decided that the aim of their life was to be the same (Roazen 1996). Namely, the search for truth (Sédat 2010). In 1932 Lacan dedicated his doctoral thesis to his brother. The dedication read ‘To the Reverend Father Marc-François Lacan, my brother in religion (*en religion*)’ and was published in the same year by Le François, Paris (de Certeau 2006: 59). While being sure that Lacan knew exactly what he was saying, de Certeau points out how strange it was to refer to Marc-Marie as his brother ‘*en religion*’, an expression usually only ever used by one religious of another and not of a sibling (de Certeau 1987: 188). Apparently everyone had been surprised by the dedication, especially the surrealists with whom Lacan had been involved and in the second edition of his thesis, published by Seuil in 1975, Lacan changed the dedication to read ‘To my brother, the Reverend Father Marc-François Lacan, Benedictine of the Congregation of France’ (de Certeau 2006: 242 n.47). De Certeau considered that the original dedication points to some kind of shared Benedictine brotherhood, a precise identification, which Lacan felt existed between him and his brother (de Certeau 2006)[10].

The desert, the monk and solitude

According to Roazen Lacan thought of the psychoanalyst as a ‘solitary being or a monk who in past times ventured into the desert’ (Roazen 1996: 328). De Certeau echoes this motif in relation to Lacan’s thought.

In Lacan’s circle, the “monk” (*monos*) and the ascetic of speech which he upholds (with humour, even with a ferocious irony found in monastic speech patterns)[11], the founder of a “congregation”[12] in a desert labelled as “worldly,” all gather together the practitioners of a desire whose truth can liberate those alienated from their identity. Even the militancy of the spiritual warriors of other times (at war with which demons?)[13] and even their rebellious freedom from public authorities are indices of the Freudian School of Paris.

De Certeau 2006: 59

In the Christian monasticism of Late Antiquity, which forms the backdrop for RB, the desert (*er?mos*) was already a literary representation, one informed with biblical resonances (*in cuius regni tabernaculo si volumus habitare*) (RB Prol. 22). That is to say, the desert was not so much a matter of geography but a trope for a certain kind of distancing and withdrawal from social relationships, particularly marriage (Goehring 1993). The political isolation of *anach?r?sis* (disengagement), specifically the bodily solitude of celibacy (Guillaumont 1972), is signified in the confusing array of Greek words used for monk—e.g. *monachos* and its Syriac equivalent *???d?y?* (Gribomont 1955), *apotaktikos*, *anach?r?t?s*, *koinobi?t?s* (Goehring 1992) and *monazontes* (Lambert 1924). This proliferation of terms has proved a minefield for scholars over the last fifty years. The arguments have been usefully summarised by Judge (1977) and Choat (2002). We find a parallel development of terminology in relation to *er?mos* (desert) in which political and theological agendas are apparent[14]. The ‘myth of the desert’, to use Goehring’s expression (2007:400) as a figurative description of monastic seclusion with its rupture of familial ties, was inspired, in part at least, by what was thought to be its proximity to the demonic (Guillaumont 1975). There are two closely related aspects of this association that have particular relevance for our inquiry. Firstly, the role and function of the imaginary father (*abba*; Coptic *apa*), idealised and politicised as a holy man and healer (Bieler 1967; and Brown 1971); and secondly, the re-introduction of unconscious elements that were excluded in the imaginary father. The demons function to generate compulsive thoughts (*logismoi*)[15], hallucinations[16] and other psychic material. Thus we find in Athanasius’s *Vita Antonii* (Bartelink 1994) Antony of Egypt, the idealised or imaginary first monk, ‘grappling with his own personality’ through a form of introspection that bears some resemblance to the inward turn of psychoanalysis (Brown 1978: 89). In fact, Anthony’s biographer sums up the saint’s conversion to monastic life simply by saying that he began to pay

attention to himself (*prosech?n heaut?*) (Bartelink 1994: 136). It was precisely this monastic attentiveness (*prosoch?*) that Foucault (2012), following Pierre Hadot (1987), identified as one of the psychoanalytic topographies in the tradition of spiritual exercises.[17]

The master and the authority of discourse

Most commentators suggest that Lacan's notion of the master (*maître*) comes from Alexandre Kojève's legendary lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* which he delivered at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études between 1933 and 1939. These lectures had a formative influence on a number of intellectuals including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Hyppolite and Georges Bataille as well as on Lacan[18]. However, de Certeau also sees in Lacan's concept of the master, 'according to the rules which characterize spiritual guidance', Benedictine features particularly in relation to the way in which 'the *abbas*...holds the authority of discourse' (de Certeau 2006: 59).

RB in explicitly contrasting the life styles of four different kinds of monks, refers to one kind as *sarabaites*. The term is found in Cassian (Conl. 18.7) and may correspond to Jerome's *remnuoth* (Ep. 22: 34; cf. Horn 1994)[19]. Both are pejorative terms and could derive from the Coptic but this is by no means certain[20]. *Sarabaitae* are described as *taeterrimum* (wretched) because they do not recognise the leadership and authority of the *seniores*, and have not learnt through the experience of living under a rule[21] (*experientia magistro*) (RB 1.6). The prologue to the RB begins with an instruction to listen to the *praecepta magistri*, the teachings of the master (RB Prol.1; cf. also 3.6; 5.9 and 6.6). This may be a reference to the earlier *Regula Magistri* as the majority of the prologue is taken from that source[22] and while *magister* (master) is an important term in the *Regula Magistri* where it is almost the equivalent of Christ or God—suggesting that the rule is the result of divine inspiration—it is not Benedict's preferred expression. Benedict is more subtle and suggests that the abbot holds a position somewhere between that of a master, whom he characterises as stern (*dirum magistri*) someone prone to scold his disciples (*corripiat*), and a tender and affectionate father (*pium patris*), though he seems reluctant to call the monks *fili*, sons (RB Prol.1; 2.24, 25). Certainly, the dialectic of master and disciple as we find it in the RB is one of teaching and listening. For Benedict, disciples keep silent (*tacere*) and listen (*audire*), while the master is expected to teach (*docere*) a doctrine characterised by a certain wisdom (*sapientiae doctrinam*) (RB 6.6; 2.4; 64.2). In this sense de Certeau is surely right that the abbot in the Benedictine tradition does indeed hold 'l'autorité du discours' (de Certeau 1987: 188). However, like the spiritual masters we read about in the numerous collections of *Apophthegmata*, Benedict's abbot does not just teach verbally. In fact, his doctrine must be conveyed more by what he does than by what he says (*factis amplius quam verbis*) (RB 2.12).

All the titles used to describe the abbatial metaphor in RB—*magister* (master RB 2: 24; 3: 6), *doctor* (teacher RB 5: 6), *pastor* (shepherd – RB 2: 7, 32, 39; 27: 8; 63: 2), *pater* (father RB 2:24; 33:5)—are also used by biblical authors to describe God or Christ. This suggests that the abbot does not merely perform a symbolic function—as he does, for example, in giving the monk a new name and inscribing him into the law (*lege divina* RB 64: 9), through his teaching (*doctrina* RB 2: 6)—but also an imaginary one. According to Saroglou (1997), that the spiritual father (*pater spiritualis* RB 49: 9) is a metaphor is made explicit in the way the abba, as we encounter him in the literature of primitive monasticism, always refers beyond himself to a divine paternity. This is made explicit in RB where we are told the abbot 'is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery' (*Christi enim agere vices in monasterio creditur* RB 2: 2). The abbot teaches not by repeating a set of abstract doctrines but by interpreting biblical texts, in the light of monastic tradition, adapting and varying his approach to each subject (RB 2.23). Indeed, the ability to understand 'the precise individual physiognomy' of the disciple is one of the characteristic qualities that RB inherits from the tradition of the desert *abbas* (Kardong 1996: 67).

Work, school and speech

De Certeau sees in the theme of the *opus Dei* (the work of God) as we find it in RB a concept of work as speech—‘*la définition d’un “travail” qui est essentiellement “parole”*’ (de Certeau 1987: 188)—which parallels some aspects of Lacan’s ideas on speech in psychoanalytic discourse. In Lacan’s lexicon, psychoanalysis represents an ‘ascetic of speech’ (Lacan 1988: 126) in its resistances as well as in its discourse in which listening and silence necessarily interact. For the analyst, this also amounts to a form of discipline in speech which is not without its parallels in Benedict (e.g. RB 7.56). De Certeau also sees this ascetic of speech mirrored in the notion that literature is an exercise (*lectio*). In Basil *opus Dei* refers simply to monastic life (Hausherr 1947) but Benedict only ever uses it to refer to the liturgy. However, although a large section of RB is devoted to liturgical arrangements (chapters 8 to 20), the only phrase in that section which suggests the motif of work-as-speech appears in the title of chapter 16 (*qualiter divina opera per diem agantur*). This may be because RB integrates early and later traditions in relation to the liturgy. Liturgical speech in RB amounts to a meditative recitation of the psalms and canticles, and listening to the bible and patristic commentaries being read aloud. Here Benedict repeats earlier monastic practice in which the repetition and committing of biblical texts to memory flowed over from formal psalmody to create a climate of continual, almost unconscious, reflection. The work (*opus*) is not what the monk does in the liturgy (reciting the psalms) but what is done in the monk by God as he opens his mind attentively to the text (RB 48.13). This is fundamentally a ‘work’ through which the monk passes. A process of which he is largely unaware because it is unconscious. This comes quite close to Freud’s notion of *Durcharbeiten*.

Meditation[23] is perhaps the key concept here for it links psalmody—*opus (Dei)* as speech—with private reading (*legere*) as opposed to liturgical reading of scripture (RB Prol. 9; 48.1). Meditation was equated with *gnosis* (Chadwick 1950) and was seen as the indispensable background to contemplation (*theoria*). This idea was inherited from Stoicism (Roques 1953) where the exercise of reading was seen to provide nourishment for meditation because of the unique change in perspective and transformation in thinking that reading can bring about (Hadot 1987). As forms of meditation, *opus Dei* and *lectio divina* could be seen to intersect with psychoanalysis, which Lacan described as ‘[a form of] contemplation...the ideal and unique subject of *theoria*’ (Lacan 1991: 222-3).

When he founded the École Freudienne de Paris (EFP) Lacan seems to have chosen the term *école* (school) rather than association or society for specific reasons. Evans says this was in order to emphasise the fact that EFP was a means of psychoanalytic training or formation ‘centred around a doctrine’ and that this would be very different from either the Société Française de Psychanalyse (SFP) from which he had resigned, or from the International Psycho-Analytical Association (IPA) which he considered had become like a church. Quite how Lacan thought the IPA had come to resemble a church is hard to know except that he thought it dominated by a hierarchy of important people (Evans 1996). According to de Certeau, the position that the student occupies in the psychoanalytic *école* demands a certain ‘ascetic of speech’ with its double connotation of withholding and training (de Certeau 2006: 59). It is a position characterised by what Lacan calls ‘a long subjective ascesis’ (Lacan 1984: 85). Presumably this simply refers to the student’s own analysis. Although of obscure origin the Greek word *ask?sis* (ascesis) by Plato’s time had come to mean training, particularly physical training that involved a struggle (Lampe 1961). But during the first centuries of our era the term came to be synonymous with the spiritual training of monastic life (Leipoldt 1961) and it is hard not to hear a monastic resonance in Lacan’s choice of words (Olphe-Galliard 1937). However, in RB although the monastery is described as a school (*schola*) this is not in contradistinction to the local church. On the contrary, the two figures, church and school, run parallel with one another specifically in relation to the master-disciple dialectic. For Benedict the abbot, as the bishop, is described as a shepherd (Latin, *pastor*). Both bring the institutions of church and monastery to life. Indeed, de Vogüé argues precisely that ‘*le monastère est une Église*’ (de Vogüé 1960: 75).

The sexual foundation of desire

The concept of desire is at the heart of Lacan's work[24]. He considers it to be of the essence of the subject and thus at the centre of psychoanalytic treatment. Here the analysand is brought to recognise and articulate his desire which is entirely sexual and distinct from his demands (Lacan 2006). Although desire is not identified by de Certeau as a point of connection between Lacan's thought and the teaching of RB, there does seem to be a certain correlation. In RB desire (*desiderium*) is situated at the core of the subject and thus it is considered key in monastic life which is seen as a turning (*conversatio*) of the passions towards the divine and the good of others. Here desire is also distinct from the subject's demands (*voluptatibus*) and fundamentally sexual in character (RB 7: 23; RB 5: 12). Yet this is not limited to specifically erotic desires (*desideria carnis*). In fact, in an interesting passage Benedict's redaction of RM serves precisely to bring out the sexual foundations of spiritual desire—*concupiscentia spiritali desiderare* (RB 4:46; cf. RB 49: 7). Kardong comments perceptively that 'the carnal thrust of *desiderium* should not be suppressed' for the longing of the whole self is intended (Kardong 1996: 89).

Heidegger's influence on Lacan: a monastic fugue

Benedictine influences on Lacan's work may also have come about indirectly through his absorption in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger[25]. Like Lacan, Heidegger was steeped in Catholicism from his youth. But more than that it was a Catholicism impregnated with Benedictine culture. The monks of the nearby Abbey of Beuron had helped build the temporary church of St Martin in Messkirch, where Heidegger was baptised. The quiet monastic world of Beuron 'with its large library, its cowsheds and barns' deeply attracted Heidegger (Safranski 1999: 4). His father was the sexton in Messkirch and the young Heidegger was an altar boy and bell ringer. The simple round of rural life, as his biographer vividly recounts, marked as it was by the seasons and ecclesiastical feasts, itself bares a strong resemblance to the closed monastic world with its repetitive, cyclical liturgical year and daily *horarium*.

The most beautiful time was Christmas. Towards half past three in the morning, the boy [bell] ringers would come to the sexton's house, where mother Heidegger had laid the table with cakes and milky coffee. After this breakfast, lanterns were lit in the front-door passage, and everyone went out through the snow and the winter's night to the church opposite and up into the dark bell tower to the frozen ropes and ice-covered clappers. "The mysterious fugue," Martin Heidegger wrote, "in which the church feasts, the days of vigil, and the passage of the seasons and the morning, midday, and evening hours of each day fitted into each other, so that a continual ringing went through the young hearts, dreams, prayers, and games—it is this, probably, that conceals one of the most magical, most complete, and most lasting secrets of the tower".

Safranski 1999: 7

As a child Heidegger was taught Latin, free of charge, by the parish priest of Messkirch and with the help of a grant he went to the junior seminary at Constance, then to the seminary in Freiburg and finally studied theology at Freiburg University. He became a Jesuit novice in 1909 at Tisis near Feldkirch in Austria but after a couple of years dropped out due to poor health (Safranski 1999). Later as a student the young Heidegger would sometimes spend a few weeks in a monastic cell at Beuron and after the war, between 1945 and 1949, when he was under a teaching ban, Beuron was the only place he could be seen in public.

Heidegger recalls how impressed he was in 1929 by the monastic liturgy of the hours at Beuron, specifically by compline, the last service of the day (Storck 1990). Compline, in the Benedictine rite, was composed of the recitation of psalms 4, 90 and 133 followed by a hymn—*Te lucis ante terminum*—a short reading (Jeremiah 14: 9), prayers and an antiphon to the Virgin. The psalmody was preceded by a blessing, the reading of 1 Peter 5: 8-9[26] and the *confiteor*. Compline, unlike the other liturgical hours, was the same every night and was sung by heart in the dark. It is easy to see why it would have made a profound impression on Heidegger. The monastic church, swathed in darkness with just a couple of candles burning

on the high altar at some distance from the choir, the sound of the monks singing to Gregorian chant the Latin verses. Heidegger described the experience as deeply moving (Schaber 2002). Indeed, he wrote to Elizabeth Blockmann that it would unfold into ‘something essential’ (Safranski 1998: 181)[27].

That man each day walks out into the night is a banality for present-day man... Compline still contains the mythical and metaphysical primeval power of night, which we have to pierce continually in order truly to exist.

Safranski 1989: 181

Heidegger’s comments on compline remind us of a Johannine metaphor found in the Prologue to RB (John 12: 35). The image here is one of running (*currere*) so as to avoid being enveloped by the darkness of death (*ne tenebrae mortis vos comprehendant*) (RB Prol. 13).

Compline, Heidegger wrote, had become a symbol of ‘existence being held out into the night’ (Safranski 1989: 181). It was an ‘immersion of existence into the night’ and according to Tønning (2009) the Benedictine life, ‘in its daily self-exposure to the darkness of night’, to vigils and prayer, was to remain for Heidegger—in contrast to contemporary Catholicism with its emphasis on dogma—a testimony to an earlier more authentic form of Christianity (Tønning 2009: 133). ‘Contemporary Catholicism and everything like it—Protestantism no less—must remain to us a horror. And yet “Beuron” [*und doch wid ‘Beuron’*], if I may use this shorthand, will unfold as the seed of something essential’ (Tønning 2009: 143-4[28]).

...the Christian eschatological tradition decisively shaped Heidegger’s developing thought about authenticity, culminating in his vision of Dasein’s perpetual, but ordinarily disregarded or forgotten, “immersion” in, or “face-to-faceness” with, “night” or “Nothing.”

Tønning 2009: 134

The theme of the immersion (*Hineingehaltensein*) of existence into the night was to recur several times in Heidegger’s work and became intimately linked to his concept of nothingness. An ‘elementally forceful *negative*: putting *nothing* in the way of the depth of existence’ (Tønning 2009: 144). The more being is experienced in its truth, he wrote in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, the deeper is the nothing (Heidegger 1999). He links this with the notions of reticence (a kind of silence) and lack, which he describes as a great stillness in which is found the possibility of experiencing the presence of the divine (Vallega-Nau 2001). With its clear resonance in the *noche oscura* of 17th century mystical literature, the image of immersion into the night formed the basis for Heidegger’s treatment of being-towards-death as we find it in *Sein und Zeit*. Safranski suggests that his 1929 metaphysics lecture ‘*Was ist Metaphysik?*’ is a paraphrase of the experience he had during compline, where it appears as ‘*Da-sein heißt: Hineingehaltenheit ins Nichts*’ (Being-there means: immersion into the Nothing) (Heidegger GA 9: 35)[29]. Lacan was to argue that during analysis the subject experiences a loss of being (*désêtre*) or lack of having (*manque à avoir*) precisely because this lack of being (*manque à être*) is at the heart of an analysis (Evans 1996). Lacan distinguished different forms of lack of object according the realms of the real, symbolic and imaginary. The most significant form corresponding to castration. Although the notion lack-of-being bears a resemblance to Sartre’s formula, it clearly also resonates with Heidegger’s lexis.

Full and empty speech

For Lacan the aim of psychoanalysis is to articulate true or full speech (*parole pleine*). Full speech is not saying the whole truth but it is saying as much as one knows of the truth of oneself at the time of speaking. There may at any time be as yet unknown truths lurking out of reach within oneself. The antithesis of full speech is empty speech (*parole vide*). This is not the same as lying but amounts to speech from the ego, where the subject is alienated from his desire. The concept of full and empty speech is generally thought to

be based on Heidegger's distinction between *Rede* (discourse) and *Gerede* (idle talk) and emphasises the fact that not all speech may be authentic or useful. This kind of reticence or moderation in speech is connected to authentic being. Heidegger's *Gerede* and thus the notion of *parole vide* that Lacan develops from it, may also have its source, at least partially, in RB.

Considerable emphasis is placed in RB on the dialectic of the word (*verbum, eloquium, sermo*) and silence (*taciturnitas, silentio*). Paradoxically, silence as a limiting of speech is orientated towards listening (*audire*) to the word spoken in scripture and in the teaching of the abbot. But *verbum* also recalls the identification of the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth (John 1: 1). Within speech (*eloquia, responsum*) RB distinguishes between the divine word and vain words (*verba vana*). Vacuous chatter (*murmurio*) is denounced in RB (cf. 4:39; 5:14, 17; 23:1; 34: 6; 35:13; 40: 8-9; 41: 5; 53:18; 65:2). But as part of the dialectic of speech and silence in RB, the condemnation of a lack of reticence in speech, is rooted in the pagan philosophical tradition. Ancient authors consistently condemn those with undisciplined speech (*adoleschia; lalia*) (Schnayder 1956). This was quickly absorbed into the lexicon of the early church. We find, for example, Ignatius of Antioch being praised for his ability to do more by silence than those who use vain babble (*mataia lalount?n*) (Maier 2004). Ignatius writes that 'it is better to be silent (*si?pan*) and be real (*einai*), than to babble (*lalounta*) and to be unreal (*m? einai*)' (Maier 2004: 512). RB echoes this by quoting a passage from the *Sentences of Sextus* (Chadwick 1959).

CONCLUSION

According to Paul Roazen, the Catholic background to Lacan's work as spelled out by his brother, 'gives one an invaluable insight into the nature of Lacan's teachings' (Roazen 1996: 335). But is it reasonable to see in Lacan's work a more specifically Benedictine influence? Michel de Certeau considered that there were parallels between Benedictine monasticism and Lacan's approach (de Certeau 2006). But the examples de Certeau gives of various key ideas in Lacan's *oeuvre* that have a Benedictine resonance, are only partially supported by a close reading of RB.

- The notion of the Christian monk as a solitary living in the desert was partly a matter of political and theological rhetoric. The historical characteristics of monastic withdrawal were far more complex. The one constant feature of the varied monastic lifestyles that took root in the third and fourth centuries was celibacy, not solitude or withdrawal to the desert.
- The RB describes the abbot as a teacher (*doctor*) and shepherd (*pastor*) to his monks but the image of the abbot as a master (*magister*) is not favoured by Benedict.
- The image of the monastery as a school (*schola*) is not a reaction against the Church but rather a description of itself as a local church. The monastery is thought of as a congregation in which the abbot and the seniors—those who have learned through the experience of living monastic life—teach a doctrine based on sacred scripture. Importantly, in his teaching the abbot must adapt himself to the singularity of each subject.
- The Benedictine approach to the liturgy (*opus Dei*) does not imply a notion that work is speech but rather that an inner process takes place, similar to Freud's notion of working through (*Durcharbeiten*), in attentiveness to the text. In this sense reading or listening to words of another may bring about a change in perspective and a transformation in thinking.
- In RB desire (*desiderium*) is understood to be constitutive of the subject, sexual in character and distinct from the subject's demands (*voluptatibus*).

In two of Heidegger's ideas we also seem to find a Benedictine influence. Firstly, the notion of nothingness, which he based on his experience attending compline at Beuron Abbey and which may have contributed to Lacan's notion of lack of being (*manque à être*). And secondly, his concept of inauthentic speech (*Gerede*) which informed Lacan's notion of empty speech (*parole vide*).

While Lacan repeats and re-phrases some of Freud's views on religion as a delusion, he also uses Christian metaphors continually and makes allusions to theological discourse. Referring, in his seminars, to Augustine, Jerome, Meister Eckhart, Anselm, Ambrose, Thomas Aquinas and the mystics—notably, Angelus Silesius, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Yet nowhere, according to Krutzen's (2009) *Index référentiel*, does he directly cite Benedict. However, perhaps most striking of all in his use of Christian lexis, is his adoption of the expression *Nom-du Père* (Name-of-the-Father) to denote a fundamental signifier, the foreclosure of which leads to psychosis.[30] It may be worth noting in this context, that in his commentary on RB Dom Laure had written that the '*nom de Père*' is the most beautiful title for the abbot (Laure 1925: 35).

6 November, 2016

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Notes:

[1] Roazen mentions that Marc-Marie thought Denis Vasse, a Jesuit, Lacan's pre-eminent follower.

[2] De Certeau's published works include (1970). *La possession du Ludun*. Paris: Gallimard; (1975). *L'Écriture et l'histoire*. Paris: Gallimard; (1980). *L'invention du quotidien* 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard; (1982). *La faible mystique I: XVIe-XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Gallimard; (1987). *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction* (ed.) L. Giard. Paris: Gallimard; and (1987) *La faiblesse de croire* (ed.) L. Giard. Paris: Seuil.

[3] Maryse Choisy [1903-1979] was a journalist who had been briefly treated by Freud and later analysed by René Laforgue. She converted to Catholicism following a meeting with Teilhard de Chardin in 1938. After her conversion she devoted herself to bringing about a rapprochement between Catholicism and psychoanalysis. *Psyché*, the journal she founded in 1946, was subtitled 'an international review of psychoanalysis and human sciences'. The first issue of this monthly review appeared in November 1946 and was followed by another 120 issues until 1963. The idea for the review took root among a circle of intellectuals, poets, writers, philosophers and theologians that she brought together in 1945. Contributors included Françoise Dolto, René Laforgue, André Maurois, Teilhard de Chardin, Georges Dumézil, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Marie Bonaparte.

[4] Rather paradoxically Roudinesco was later to suggest that Lacan would have wished for a Catholic funeral (*qu'il eût souhaité des funérailles catholiques*). Cf. Roudinesco (2011: 175) and an article published in the influential French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* for 17th November 2011 entitled Lacan, *L'Église et l'imparfait du subjunctif*.

[5] Other famous alumni of the Collège Stanislas included Anatole France, Jacques Cousteau and Charles de Gaulle.

[6] Hautecombe had been founded by the Cistercians at the beginning of the 12th century. It was suppressed in 1793 but re-opened in 1826. In 1922 the Cistercians left, handing the monastery over to a community of Benedictines of the Solesmes congregation who were then living in Marseille.

[7] Guéranger, a secular priest, had founded the Abbey of Saint Pierre de Solesmes in 1833 at Sablé par Sarthe. It became the mother house of the congregation of France and founded houses throughout the world. It excluded all external activities (e.g. running schools or parishes) and developed a compelling reputation for scholarship, particularly in the fields of musicology and liturgical history, in a self-conscious attempt to reproduce the spirit of the Congregation of Saint-Maur which had been founded in 1621. The congregation, of which S Germain des Prés in Paris had been the mother house, was suppressed by the revolutionary government in 1790 and finally dissolved by Pius VII in 1818. From 1672 onwards its monks devoted themselves largely to historical and literary works, many of which are monuments of scholarship and the congregation produced a long line of scholars of exceptional ability, notably Dom Luc D'Achery [1609-85], Dom Jean Mabillon [1632-1707], Dom René Massuet [1666-1716], Dom Charles de la Rue [1684-1740] and Dom Bernard de Montfaucon [1655-1741]. Cf. Knowles, D. (1969). *Christian Monasticism*. London: Weidenfeld and Chavin de Malan, E. (1843). *Histoire de D. Mabillon et de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur*. Paris: Debécourt.

[8] Roudinesco says that 11th September 1981 was Marc-Marie's fiftieth anniversary '*de son entree dans les ordres*' (Roudinesco 1993: 526). It is unclear what she means. According to Matthieu Vassal, the archivist at Ganagobie, Marc-Marie was clothed on 14th January 1930, made his solemn profession on 8th September 1934.

[9] Most of Marc-Marie Lacan's work was published in the *Bulletin de l'abbaye d'Hautecombe* to which, between 1942 and 1990, he was a regular contributor. But he also had a number of papers published in other journals including the *Revue grégorienne*, *Lumière et Vie* and *Recherches de Science religieuse*, and contributed to a number of collected works notably in 1962 to the widely translated *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (eds.) Xavier Léon-Dufour et al. Paris: Editions du Cerf. In 1992, towards the end of Marc-Marie Lacan's life, the community left Hautecombe. After spending some time in the Paris house of the Solesmes congregation—the L'Abbaye Sainte Marie, 3 rue de la Source (always known simply as La Source)—they moved to Notre Dame de Ganagobie in Peryuis near Marseilles.

[10] Marc-Marie was upset not to have been able to administer the last rites to Lacan when he died (Roudinesco 1997). However, once he heard the news of his brother's death he did manage to come to Paris and say mass for him, two days later, on 11th September 1981 in the church of S François de Sales. In his homily he said that while the Church and the gospel were not essential to Lacan's *oeuvre*, his entire work was steeped in Catholic culture (Roudinesco 1997).

[11] Benedict, in common with monastic tradition, is suspicious of humour and particularly laughter (*risus*; *scurrilitas*). It is a tradition largely inherited from Antiquity. See RB 4.54; 6.8; 7.59. 60; 43.2; 49.7. Cf. Geisel, S. (1991). Zum Verbot des Lachens in der Benediktusregel *Erbe und Auftrag* 67:28-34.

[12] De Certeau implies correctly that the monastery is described as a congregation rather than as a community (RB 2). The image of that of a sheepfold guided by a shepherd, rather than that of a community, the Latin *congregatio* coming from *congregare* 'to flock together' with its origins in *grex*, *gregis* (flock). Both *grex* (RB 2.8, 32; 27.9; 28.8; 63.2; 64.18) and *ovile* (Rb 1.8) and used by Benedict as metaphors for the monastery. Others include *acies* (battleline) RB 1.5; *corpus* (body) RB 61.6; *officina* (workshop) RB 4.78; *schola* (school) RB 1.8).

[13] On the military theme see Mohrmann, C. (1994). *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* 3. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.

[14] Cf. Griffith, S.H. (1993). 'Monks', 'Singles' and the 'Sons of the Covenant': Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology ???????: *Studies in Honor of Robert Taft S.J.* 141-60. (eds.) E. Carr, S. Parenti, A.-A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska. *Studia Anselmiana* 110. *Analecta Liturgica* 17. Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo. The first use of *monachos* for monk appears in the Gospel of Thomas (Judge 1977). On the Gospel of Thomas see Harl, M (1960). A Propos des *Logia* de Jésus: Le sens du mot MONA??? *Études Grecques* 73 (Fasc. 347-348): 464-74; on the changing use of the word *monachos* see Wilkinson, K.W. (2010). Some Neologisms in the Epigrams of Palladas *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50: 295-308.

[15] Cf. Perhaps the best known sources are the *Praktikos* and the *Peri Logism?n* of Evagrius Ponticus. The former work, which deals with the ascetic life in general has much to say about disordered emotions and compulsive thoughts cf. Guillaumont, A. and Guillaumont, C. (Eds.) (1971). *Évagre Le Pontique. Traité Pratique ou Le Moine*. Sources Chrétienne 170 and 171. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf. The latter demonstrates, probably more clearly than any other of the author's works, his deep psychological insight, something brought out by Géhin and Guillaumont in their introduction, cf. Géhin, P., Guillaumont, C. And Guillaumont, A. (Eds.) (1998). *Évagre Le Pontique. Sur Les Pensées*. Sources Chrétienne 438. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

[16] *Apophthegmata Patrum* Nicetas 312B; Poimen 114: 352 AB.

[17] It is worth pointing out here the small volume by Jean Allouch (2007). *La psychanalyse est-elle un exercice spirituel? Réponse à Michel Foucault*. Paris: EPEL. Allouch's work is greatly influenced by Lacan

whose seminar he attended.

[18] Kojève (Aleksandr Vladimirovich Kozhevnikov, to give him his original name) was a Russian émigré and a nephew of the painter Kandinsky who had fled to Germany in the 1920's. He studied under Jaspers at Heidelberg where he was awarded a doctorate. His interpretation of Hegel was much influenced by Heidegger. Hegel's philosophy was particularly important in Lacan's de-centering of the subject, defined in relation to the desire of the Other and in the formulation of the mirror stage, cf. Birksted-Breen, D., Flanders, S. and Gibeault, A. (2010). *Reading French Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge.

[19] Cf. Guillaumont, A. (1995). Les *remnuoth* de Saint Jérôme *Christianisme d'Égypte. Hommages à René-Georges Coquin*. Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte 9: 87-92. Paris, Louvain: Peeters. Also Blanchard, M.J. (2007). Sarabaitae and Remnuoth. Coptic Considerations *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity* 49-60. (eds.) J.E. Goehring and J.A. Timbie. Washington: Catholic University of America Press. Horn (1994) argues that Jerome's antipathy to the *remnuoth* sprung from a clash between city dwelling monks and the ecclesiastical authorities. The ensuing invective drove a perception that the 'true monk' only dwelt in the desert and was not to be associated with the apotactic movement (Lambert 1924). However, Choat (2002) is highly sceptical of this interpretation and calls for more plurality in understanding the development and transition in monastic terminology.

[20] Kardong (1996: 38) takes it for granted that the word comes from the Coptic *sar* (man of) and *auet* [sic] (he community). But a number of other Coptic derivations have been suggested man of the neighbourhood or man of the city-quarter. Cf Choat (2002); Horn (1994); Morard, F. (1973). Monachos, moine. Histoire du terme grec jusqu'au 4e siècle *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 20: 332-411.

[21] On the complex historiography of monastic rules, which were not originally written, and their relation to abbatial authority see de Vogüé, A. (1971). *Sub regula vel abbate: A Study of the Theological Significance of the Ancient Monastic Rules Rule and Life: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* (ed.) M.B. Pennington. Spencer, Mass: Cistercian Publications.

[22] On the background to *Regula Magistri* and its relation to RB see de Vogüé, A. (1960). *La communauté et l'abbé dans la règle de saint benoît*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer esp. 27-37 where the author summarises the various arguments concerning language and priority.

[23] In early monastic literature meditation (*meletan* in Coptic) meant the audible repetitive recitation of texts. See Bacht, H. (1955). 'Meditatio' in den ältesten Mönchsquellen *Geist und Leben Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik* 28: 360-73.

[24] The Standard Edition of Freud's works translates *Wunsch* as wish (*voeu* in French) whereas Freud's French translators use *désir* rather than *voeu*. In Lacan's lexicon the notion of desire comes closer to Hegel's *Begierde*—the relationship between consciousness and the self—than to Freud's *Wunsch*. On Lacan's appropriation of Hegel's *Begierde* as distinct from *Wunsch* or *Lust* see Roudinesco (1986).

[25] In 1956 Lacan translated the second, 1954 version, of Heidegger's essay 'Logos' which was a commentary on Fragment 50 of Heraclitus. The translation subsequently appeared in the review *La Psychanalyse* (Heidegger 1956). He also made a considerable effort to get to know Heidegger personally. Lacan's admiration was not entirely reciprocated as Heidegger did not appreciate Lacan's thought. A fact illustrated clearly when Lacan sent Heidegger a signed copy of his *Écrits*. In a letter to Medard Boss, Heidegger wrote: 'You too have no doubt received Lacan's large tome (*Ecrits*). Personally, I haven't so far been able to get anything at all out of this obviously outlandish text.' A few months later he wrote: 'I enclose a letter from Lacan. It seems to me that the psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist' (Roudinesco 1997: 227, 231). In 1955 Lacan went to Freiburg with to visit Heidegger with Jean Beaufret, a French philosopher who was analysed by Lacan and who had introduced him to Heidegger's work (Otto 1993). Later that year Heidegger and his wife came to stay with Lacan in France (Roudinesco 1997).

[26] Tønning suggests that the central text for compline was 1 Thess. 5: 1-5 (Tønning 2009: 142 n. 35). But this was not the case in the Benedictine liturgy at the time Heidegger visited Beuron

[27] It is probably fair to say that, after that with Hannah Arendt, Elisabeth Blochmann had one of the most important extramarital affairs with Heidegger. As we know Heidegger had an open marriage and his wife Elfriede both knew about his affairs and conducted her own. Elfriede Heidegger and Elisabeth Blochmann were friends and former class mates. The story is well documented in the 1989 edition of their letters, starting in 1918.

[28] Letter from 12th September 1929. Cf. Storck 1990: 33.

[29] When he read Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics* in 1952 the poet Paul Celan underlined 'How stands it with the Nothing?' Felstiner notes that he found the paradox of emptiness and pure Being in Jewish mysticism. 'The Righteous stands in the Nothing...The Nothing is the Nothing of God'. Felstiner, J. (1995) *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* 181. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; cf. Scholem, G. (1959). Die Lehre vom 'Gerechten' in der Jüdischen Mystik *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 27: 237-97.

[30] Roudinesco goes so far as to suggest that Lacan based his interpretation of Freud on the two of the great myths of mysticism and the Trinity (Roudinesco 1997).

Bio:

John Gale is a philosopher and psychoanalyst, the president of the International Network of Psychotherapeutic Practice (INPP), a director of ISPS (UK), and of The Consortium for Therapeutic Communities. He is also a member of the advisory panel of the Community of Communities programme at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Formerly a Benedictine monk he lectured in philosophy and patristics before leaving the priesthood. In 1993, with two colleagues, he founded Community Housing and Therapy (CHT), which developed a Lacanian treatment programme for psychosis. For a number of years he sat on the boards of The Homeless Fund and of the Association of Therapeutic Communities. He was Deputy Editor of the journal *Therapeutic Communities* for seven years, and is a member of its International Editorial Advisory Group. He is also a member of the scientific committee of the journal *Avances en Psicología Latinoamericana* and of the reviewing panel of the *British Journal of Psychotherapy*. He has edited a number of books and has published over 25 papers. John's interests span philosophy, psychoanalysis and spirituality, and the main references in his work include the notions of language, silence, tradition, absence, mysticism and madness. Foremost literary references in his work are Stoic and Neoplatonic writers, monastic texts from Late Antiquity, the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan.

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