

Ascetical Practice in a Secular Culture:

A New Approach to Prayer and the Brain

Villa Palazzola | Rocca di Papa, Italy | 21, 22, & 23 September 2014

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ABOVE: Labyrinths have been used by a wide variety of cultures for some 4,000 years. Although many design variations have been employed in their construction, the so-called 'classical' seven-circuit style, found on fourth-century B.C. coins from Crete, was popular throughout the Roman Empire as a protective and decorative symbol on the mosaic floors of civic buildings and villas. During the medieval period, the classical labyrinth gave way to a more intricate design of eleven circuits in four quadrants, which is pictured here. Occurring first in manuscripts, it was subsequently laid in marble and tiles on the floors of churches and cathedrals, most famously at Chartres, where the early 13th century labyrinth has become an object of pilgrimage for modern visitors. In Christian tradition, the pavement labyrinth has been used on occasion as a part of worship, the perambulation of its path accompanied by prayers and devotions.

Contact: Mary Ann Meyers, Ph.D., *Senior Fellow*

Purpose



The starting point for this symposium is to consider the findings of neuroscience on brain laterality. The purpose is firstly to reflect on the implications of this research for sustained practices of prayer and meditation in a secular age as well as for the absence of such practices. The second point of reflection will involve an examination of what conclusions reached as the result of the first exercise may mean for rethinking monastic life and ascetical practices more broadly. The gathering of scholars and scientists will also focus on the means by which the latter, in particular practices associated with the deepest decentering or displacement of self, might be introduced to young people who are at once suspicious of and searching for a wider narrative that draws them beyond the circle of personal relationships. Attentiveness, as understood in the Christian contemplative tradition and from Buddhist epistemological and philosophy of mind perspectives, will be considered in relation to the modern scientific understanding of the structure and function of the human brain.

Among the questions participants intend to explore are:

How much can the best fMRI studies tell us about the neuro-physiological effects of long-term meditation?

To what extent can neuro-physiological findings on ‘lateral’ functioning reveal anything about the ‘soul’ (if it exists and whatever it means)?

What is one to make of the notion of right brain primacy from the point of view of Indian Buddhist theories of knowledge and ideas about the mind-brain relationship?

If contemporary Western society attended in a systematic way to what has been speculated about the importance of the right brain in terms of its facility for ‘seeing’ things in context, understanding implicit meanings, metaphor, and body language, grasping intrinsic and aesthetic worth, and considering several options at once, what would be the moral and spiritual effects?

Can embodied attention foster virtue in terms of providing positive social support for others and resisting negative forces? If ‘attention’ has a sustained character for humans under the conditions of musical response, ritual, and prayer, what does this mean for the personal assimilation of doctrine, especially doctrines which—under modern ‘secular’ conditions of philosophical assessment—appear paradoxical or even self-contradictory?

Why is the practice of silence both so countercultural and yet so potentially transformative of culture in the modern West?

Does the early monastic understanding of the plasticity of the passions under conditions of sustained prayer support or complicate new ideas about brain laterality?

What place might they have in the Rule of Benedict, which has little to say on ‘individual’ development or even on individual prayer, and what does the Rule have to say to contemporary ‘secular’ culture in light of contemporary understanding of the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain?

Eleven symposiasts come together to reflect on these and other questions at Villa Palazzola, a 13th-century Cistercian abbey set in a woodland high up on the eastern shore of Lake Albano in Rocca di Papa, a small town in the Lazio region south of Rome.

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"Many of the disputes about the nature of the human world can be illuminated by an understanding that there are two fundamentally different 'versions' delivered to us by the two hemispheres, . . . both of which are hugely valuable; but they stand in opposition to one another, and need to be kept apart from one another—hence the bihemispheric structure of the brain."

Iain McGilchrist

*The Master and his Emissary:
The Divided Brain and the
Making of the Western World*

Approach



The symposium is part of the John Templeton Foundation's Humble Approach Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to bring about the discovery of new spiritual information by furthering high-quality scientific research. The "humble approach" is inherently interdisciplinary, sensitive to nuance, and biased in favor of building linkages and connections. It assumes an openness to new ideas and a willingness to experiment. Placing high value upon patience and perseverance, it retains a sense of wondering expectation because it recognizes, in Loren Eiseley's haunting phrase, "a constant emergent novelty in nature that does not lie totally behind us, or we would not be where we are." A fundamental principle of the Foundation, in the words of its founder, is that "humility is a gateway to greater understanding and open[s] the doors to progress" in all endeavors. Sir John Templeton believed that in their quest to comprehend foundational realities, scientists, philosophers, and theologians have much to learn about and from one another. The humble approach is intended as a corrective to parochialism. It encourages discovery and seeks to accelerate its pace.

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"Listen carefully,
my child, to your
master's precepts,
and incline the ear
of your heart."

Benedict of Nursia
Prologue to *The Holy
Rule of Saint Benedict*
(transl. by Boniface
Verheyen, 1949 Edition)

Co-Chairs



The Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University and a fellow of Murray Edwards College (MEC), Sarah Coakley is a philosophical and systematic theologian with wide interdisciplinary interests, especially in relation to contemporary evolutionary biology and neuroscience. From 1995 to 2007, Dr. Coakley was Mallinckrodt

Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, and for three years during her tenure there, she co-directed (with Martin A. Nowak) a research project funded by the John Templeton Foundation, “Evolution and the Theology of Cooperation.” A book growing out of that collaboration, *Evolution, Games, and God: The Principle of Cooperation*, which she edited with Dr. Nowak, was published last year by Harvard University Press and formed the platform of her 2012 Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen: *Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation, and God* (available online and forthcoming from Oxford University Press/Wm. B. Eerdmans). Educated at the Blackheath High School in London, Dr. Coakley taught English and Latin to young Africans in Lesotho before going up to New Hall (now MEC), Cambridge, where she took first-class honors in theology. She went on to earn a master’s degree in theology at Harvard, as a Harkness Fellow of the Commonwealth, and returned to England for a doctorate at Cambridge, which was awarded in 1983. Appointed a junior lecturer in religious studies at the University of Lancaster, she was named senior lecturer at Lancaster in 1990, and, the next year, she was appointed tutorial fellow in theology at Oriel College, Oxford, and a university lecturer in theology and philosophy of religion. She joined the Harvard faculty as a tenured professor of Christian theology in 1993. The recipient of two Cambridge essay prizes—the Chadwick and the Hulsean, a Henry Luce III Fellowship, and a Lilly Foundation Fellowship, Dr. Coakley has been awarded honorary degrees by the University of Lund in Sweden, General Theological Seminary in New York, and the University of St. Andrews. She was elected deputy chair of Cambridge’s School of Arts and Humanities in 2011 and sits on the university’s General Board of the Faculties. Ordained in 2000, she also serves as an Anglican priest in the diocese of Ely and as an honorary canon of Ely Cathedral. In addition to *Evolution, Games, and God* and *Sacrifice Regained*, she is the author or editor of thirteen other books, including *Christ without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch* (1988 and 1994), *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (2002), (edited with Paul Gavrilyuk) *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (2012), (edited) *Faith, Rationality, and the Passions* (2012), and *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2013 as the first volume in a systematic theology in which an analysis of contemplative practice is a key constellating theme.

Christopher Jamison, OSB, is director of the National Office of Vocation (NOV) of the Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales. An author and frequent commentator on religion in the public media, he is the former abbot of Worth. Fr. Jamison was educated at Downside School and at Oxford University, where he studied modern languages at Oriel College, earning an undergraduate degree and then an M.A. in 1973. He went on to study philosophy and theology at Heythrop College, University of London, taking a B.A. in 1977, and became a member of the Benedictine community at Worth. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1978. Appointed housemaster of Worth School in 1979, he also served as head of theology for the next fourteen years. Fr. Jamison was named headmaster of Worth School in 1994, a post he held until 2002 when he was elected abbot. The same year, the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation appointed him president of the International Commission on Benedictine Education, a position in which he served until last year. As a member of the Academic Policy Committee of the international Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference, he chaired a working party on the uses of information technology in independent schools that published *Leading IT* in 1997. He was appointed director of the NOV in 2010. While he was abbot of Worth, the BBC approached him about filming a reality TV series at the abbey. He eventually welcomed five members of the public who attempted to follow the monastic life at Worth over a period of forty days and nights. The resulting documentaries, *The Monastery* (2005) and *The Monastery Revisited* (2006), attracted audiences of between two and three million viewers and were shown around the world. Fr. Jamison later led five other people with high-pressured jobs to explore the value and challenge of silent meditation in a documentary for BBC TWO, *The Big Silence* (2010). He is a founding board member of Catholic Voices, an international group that trains lay men and women to speak about the church in the media. In addition, he chairs the Catholic Vocations Project, a charity that supports a residential vocation discernment program. He is an active patron of the Cardinal Hume Centre, a London charity that works with homeless young people, and an honorary fellow of the Rank Foundation, which supports the flourishing of British youth. Ethical practice in business also has been an area in which he has been engaged for more than a decade. When the UK government’s Financial Services Authority found that increasing regulation was having little effect on the integrity of business practice, it approached him (and management ethicist Roger Steare) for help, and in 2003 they created *The Soul Gym*, a consultancy that runs seminars for business people throughout Britain that combine personal reflection and practical strategies for addressing difficult questions of moral conduct in business. Fr. Jamison has served as an advisor to the Future of Banking Commission, which was led by several members of Parliament, and earlier this year, he was appointed an advisor to New City Agenda, a “think tank” dedicated to improving ethical behavior in the financial services industry. In addition to

contributions to volumes of collected works, he is the author of two books that have been published in a dozen languages, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* (2006) and *Finding Happiness: Monastic Steps for a Fulfilling Life* (2008). His most recent book is an edited volume, *The Disciples' Call: Theologies of Vocation from Scripture to the Present Day*, which was published last year by Bloomsbury T&T Clark and traces the development of concepts of vocation (lay, priestly, monastic, and religious) from scriptural and patristic roots through Thomistic thought and the Reformation to engage with the modern vocational crisis.

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A scholar whose work focuses on Indian Buddhist philosophy, Daniel A. Arnold is an associate professor of the philosophy of religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School (UCDS). He aims to understand Indian Buddhist philosophy both as integral to the broader tradition of Indian philosophy and in conversation with contemporary philosophy. A magna cum laude graduate of Carleton College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Dr. Arnold holds a master's degree in Indic languages and cultural history from Columbia University and a master's degree in theology and the philosophy of religion from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. He earned a Ph.D. in the philosophy of religions at the University of Chicago in 2002. Dr. Arnold began his teaching career as an instructor at Loyola University in Chicago and at the University of Illinois, Chicago, as well as teaching in the undergraduate college of the University of Chicago as a Wilson Teaching Fellow. After lecturing for a year at the UCDS, he joined the McGill University faculty as an assistant professor of religious studies in 2003 and returned to the Divinity School the next year as an assistant professor. He was promoted to his present position in 2011 and currently chairs the University of Chicago Committee on Southern Asian Studies. A former editor of the *Journal of Religion*, he serves as book review editor of the academic listserv *H-Buddhism*. Dr. Arnold has published more than thirty papers in academic journals and is the author of two books. *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (2005) won the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion given by the American Academy of Religion. His most recent book, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind*, which was published by Columbia University Press in 2012 and received the Toshihide Numata Book Prize for Buddhism awarded by the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, shows that seemingly arcane arguments among first-millennium Indian thinkers can illuminate matters at the heart of contemporary philosophy.

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Luke Bretherton, an associate professor of theological ethics at the Duke Divinity School, focuses his research and teaching on Christian political thought, Christian ethics, and practices of social, political, and economic witness. Educated at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, he earned a Ph.D. in moral theology and philosophy at King's College London (KCL) in 2001. He went on to serve as director of studies at the South East Institute for Theological Education at the University of Kent and returned to King's in 2004, where he eventually became a reader in theology and politics. In 2012, he accepted his present position at Duke, where he is also a senior fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics and director of its Religions in Public Life Initiative. Dr. Bretherton serves as a visiting professor at St. Mellitus College in London and a visiting fellow at KCL. Formerly a research fellow at the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois in Chicago, he is presently a fellow of the Centre for Contextual Theology at the Royal Foundation of St. Katherine, a charitable institution in London's East End. Dr. Bretherton was the principal investigator for an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant on "Christian Urban Politics and the Pursuit of the Common Good through Broad-Based Coalitions: The Case of the Citizens UK." Last year he delivered the Thomas A. Langford Lecture at Duke. The former reviews editor of *Political Theology*, he is currently a member of the advisory board of the *Ecclesial Practices Journal*. In addition to a dozen papers published in academic journals, he is the editor (with Andrew Walker) of *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* (2007 and 2013) and the author of three other books: *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (2006 and 2010); *Moral Diversity* (2006 and 2010); *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (2010), a study showing how Christians can engage politically in a multi-faith, liberal democracy, which won the 2013 Michael Ramsey Prize for Theological Writing; and *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life*, a volume based on his AHRC grant

that is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.; Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness (2010), a study showing how Christians can engage politically in a multi-faith, liberal democracy, which won the 2013 Michael Ramsey Prize for Theological Writing; and Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life, a volume based on his AHRC grant that is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

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Professor of philosophy emeritus at the University of Reading, John Cottingham has written extensively on Descartes. He is the author of five books on the seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician, who is often regarded as the father of modern philosophy, and is co-editor and translator (with Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch) of the standard three-volume Cambridge University Press edition of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (1985-91). He has also published widely on moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion. Educated at Merchant Taylors' School in Northwood and at St John's College, Oxford, where he took double first-class honors in Latin and Greek languages and literature and in philosophy and ancient history, Dr. Cottingham received his D.Phil. in philosophy from Oxford University in 1973. He taught at the University of Washington in Seattle and at Exeter College, Oxford, before joining the Reading faculty as a lecturer in philosophy in 1971. He was appointed a reader in 1987 and named a full professor three years later. He held the chair in philosophy for fifteen years before his retirement in 2007. Dr. Cottingham is currently a professorial research fellow at Heythrop College, University of London. He has held a Fulbright Fellowship and a Radcliffe Research Fellowship in Philosophy and has been an Erskine Fellow and visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, a visiting scholar in residence and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Rhodes University, and Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge University. An elected honorary fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and a member of the Athenaeum, he has served as chairman of the British Society for the History of Philosophy, president of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion, the Aristotelian Society, and the Mind Association, and secretary of the organizing committee for the 1989 World Congress of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy as well as of the UK Association for Legal and Social Philosophy. Dr. Cottingham is a former editor of *Ratio* and is currently a member of the advisory board of the

British Journal for the History of Philosophy and of the advisory panel of the European Journal of Philosophy. In addition to more than a hundred papers on early modern philosophy, ethics, and the philosophy of religion published in academic journals or as chapters in volumes of collected works, he is the general editor of two series, Oxford Philosophical Texts and (with Daniel Garber) Cambridge Philosophical Texts in Context, and the editor of Western Philosophy: An Anthology (1997 and 2007), as well as the editor and translator of four additional volumes of Descartes' works in addition to the three-volume edition of The Philosophical Writings. He is the author of twelve books, including Rationalism (1984 and 1997), Descartes (1986), The Rationalists (1988 and 1997), A Descartes Dictionary (1993), Descartes: Descartes' Philosophy of Mind (1997), Philosophy and the Good Life: Reason and the Passions in Greek, Cartesian and Psychoanalytic Ethics (1998), On the Meaning of Life (2003), The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Values (2005), How to Read Descartes (2008), Cartesian Reflections: Essays on Descartes' Philosophy (2008), and, most recently, Why Believe?, a consideration of the human impulses and aspirations that the author argues can only be satisfied by religious belief, which was published by Continuum in 2009. His latest book, Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach, will be published by Cambridge University Press later this year.

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The director the British Museum (BM), Neil MacGregor, OM, AO, FSA, is an art historian who in his twelve years as head of the world's premier museum dedicated to human history and culture has devoted particular attention to developing regional and international partnerships. He has worked closely with BBC radio and television to bring the BM's collection, numbering some eight million works, to the widest possible public. Educated at the Glasgow Academy and New College, Oxford, where he read French and German, Mr. MacGregor went on to study philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. He took an L.L.B. at the University of Edinburgh, where he was awarded the Green Prize, and was called to the Scottish Bar in 1972. But he then turned to the study of 17th- and 18th-century art, entering the Courtauld Institute of Art in London and earning a master's degree in art history in 1975. For the next six years, he was a lecturer in the history of art and architecture at the University of Reading. In 1981, he assumed the editorship of The Burlington Magazine. Mr. MacGregor was named director of the National Gallery in London in 1987. During the next fifteen years, he presented three BBC series on art: Paintings in the World (1995), Making Masterpieces (1997), and Seeing Salvation (2000), which surveyed the historical representation of Jesus in Western art and sculpture and was based on an exhibition marking the millennium year that he curated at the National Gallery. Under his watch, the gallery's Sainsbury Wing was completed, other exhibition spaces refurbished, and the entire collection re-hung. He has been a leader in the effort to keep admission to British galleries and museums free to the public, and on the international stage, after the looting of the Baghdad Museum in 2003, he was at the forefront of a drive to destroy the market in looted antiquities. Since accepting the directorship of the British Museum in 2002, Mr. MacGregor has created and hosted a BBC Four program on the drawings of Michelangelo (2006) and two series for BBC Radio 4: The History of the World in 100 Objects (2010) and Shakespeare's Restless World: A Portrait of an Era in Twenty Objects (2012). He chairs the World Collections

Programme for training international curators at British museums and serves on the board of the National Theater and on the international advisory board of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. A fellow the Society of Antiquaries and of Birkbeck College, University of London, he has been awarded honorary degrees by the University of York, the University of Edinburgh, and Oxford University. He was appointed to the Order of Merit by Queen Elizabeth II in 2010 and appointed an honorary officer of the Order of Australia by the Governor General of Australia in 2013. Mr. MacGregor is the author of fourteen books, including, most recently, (with John Curtis and Irving Finkel) *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning for the Middle East*. The volume was published last year by the British Museum in connection with first ever loan of the iconic 2,600-year old object, which describes the repatriation of people who were displaced by an ancient war and appears to permit freedom of worship throughout the Persian empire, to an exhibition in Tehran and to five museums in the United States. In a forthcoming book, *Germany: The Memories of a Nation*, which will be published by Allen Lane, he tells the stories behind thirty objects that illumine the complex history and culture of Europe's dominant economic power.

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Philip J. McCosker is a research associate at Cambridge University in the Faculty of Divinity and at the Von Hügel Institute at St. Edmund's College. He also serves as editor of *Reviews in Religion and Theology*. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on models of paradoxicality in mystical Christologies, and other research interests include apophaticisms and intersections of theory and practice in Christian spiritualities. Educated at St. George's International School in Rome and Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, he went on to study at St. Benet's Hall, Oxford, where he took first-class honors in theology. He then earned a diploma in French at the University of Rouen, while working in the Diocese of Rouen as a lay Roman Catholic chaplain, and a master's degree in systematic theology at the Harvard Divinity School. Dr. McCosker was a visiting research assistant in the religious studies department at Yale University for two years while completing his Ph.D. in theology at Cambridge University in 2009. He returned to Oxford as deputy master of St. Benet's Hall and a lecturer in theology at Trinity College and at Jesus College before being appointed to his present position in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge in 2012 and, last year, at St. Edmund's. The editor of *What is it that Scripture Says? Essays on Biblical Interpretation, Translation, and Reception in Honour of Henry Wansbrough, OSB*, which was published by T&T Clark in 2006, he is the co-editor (with Denys Turner) of the *Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas*, forthcoming later this year from Cambridge University Press (CUP), and the author of *Christ the Paradox: Reconceiving Ressourcement Theology*, which will be published by CUP next year. He is currently working on a second monograph entitled *Mixture Matters: The Theological History of a Metaphor of Union*.

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Quindam Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, Iain McGilchrist, FRCP, FRSA, is a psychiatrist and a writer. The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World, his provocative and hugely ambitious book published by Yale University Press in 2009, overturns the commonly held view that the left hemisphere of the brain is dominant, presenting evidence that the right hemisphere, which he argues grounds the understanding of the left, is primary but that the two are meant to work together. Dr. McGilchrist then examines the cultural history of the West in terms of a shifting balance of power between the two hemispheres. His conclusion that we may be about to witness the final triumph of the left brain is meant to stand as a warning that we risk becoming a disembodied and disenchanted world where the virtual is more important than the real, information trumps knowledge that comes through experience, and religion is seen as fantasy. Educated at the Winchester School, Dr. McGilchrist read English language and literature New College, Oxford, and took a congratulated first-class honors degree. He was elected a Prize Fellow by All Souls College, Oxford, and went on to study and teach English literature and to pursue interests in philosophy and psychology. To learn more about the mind-body relationship, he decided to train to be a doctor, entered Southampton University Medical School while still a fellow of All Souls, and received a bachelor of medicine degree in 1987. After serving as a house physician at Southampton General Hospital and a house surgeon at Royal Hampshire County Hospital, he was appointed a registrar in psychiatry at Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospital in 1989. Awarded a research fellowship in psychiatry at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, he spent a year in the hospital's neuro-imaging department before returning to England as a senior registrar at Bethlem and Maudsley National Health Service (NHS) Trust. From 1995 to 1999, he served as a consultant psychiatrist and, for two years, was clinical director of the Bethlem and Maudsley NHS Trust's Southern Sector Mental Health Services. He then became a consultant psychiatrist at The Priory Hospital in Bromley, serving as medical

director for several years. In 2012 he retired from clinical practice to devote his time to writing and lecturing. A fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP) and the Royal Society of Arts, Dr. McGilchrist is also a fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies of Stellenbosch, South Africa. He delivered the Samuel Gee Lecture at the RCP earlier this year. In addition to *The Master and his Emissary*, he is the author of *Against Criticism* (1982), a book he wrote about the problems of explicitness in academic literary criticism before taking up the study of medicine, and two books forthcoming next year: *The Porcupine is a Monkey, or, Things Are Not What They Seem* (Penguin), an attempt to explore how the implications of *The Master and his Emissary* cast light on a range of problems in modern life, which otherwise appear paradoxical, and *A Life in Literature, Neurology and Psychiatry* (Oxford University Press), a personal view of the crisis in the humanities. He is contemplating a new work, which, if he writes it, he will call “A Short Book about God.”

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SUPPORTING SCIENCE-INVESTING IN THE BIG QUESTIONS

Ascetical Practice in a Secular Culture:

A New Approach to Prayer and the Brain

Villa Palazzola | Rocca di Papa, Italy | 21, 22, & 23 September 2014

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Participants

Michael L. Spezio, a social neuroscientist, is an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at Scripps College in Claremont, California, and a visiting associate scientist in social, cognitive, and affective neuroscience at the California Institute of Technology. He is also a visiting researcher in neuroscience at the Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf, the teaching hospital of the University of Hamburg in Germany. An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he formerly served as a chaplain at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, California. His research includes investigations of contemplative practice and moral action, using fMRI and other imaging techniques, as well as studies of the neuroscience of political decision-making, the neuroscience of virtue, and the neuroscience of autism. After spending the past year as a resident fellow at the Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, Dr. Spezio is completing work on a book manuscript entitled “Mindful-Emotional Persons: From Cognitive Science and Value Theory to Character in Loving Encounter.” A graduate of Case Western Reserve University, he received a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Cornell University in 1994, a M.Div. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1996, and a second Ph.D. in cognitive systems neuroscience from the University of Oregon in 2002. He held postdoctoral fellowships at the University of California, Davis, and at Caltech before being appointed an assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience at Scripps in 2007. He was promoted to his current position in 2013. Recipient of a science and religion course award given by the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, an affiliate of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and a national service research award from the National Institute of Mental Health, he is a former member of the board of advisors of the John Templeton Foundation. Dr. Spezio is the author of more than forty papers published in scientific and scholarly journals or as chapters in volumes of collected works.

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Professor of theology and executive director of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) at Saint John's University (SJU) in Collegeville, Minnesota, Columba Stewart, OSB, writes on early Christian monasticism and monastic spirituality. He is an ordained Roman Catholic priest and Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey. Fr. Stewart graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and earned a master's degree in religious studies from Yale University. After further graduate study in the School of Theology at SJU, he took a D.Phil. in theology at Oxford University in 1989. He returned to SJU as an assistant professor of theology and was appointed a full professor in 2001. As executive director of HMML since 2003, he has led a major initiative to digitize endangered Christian and Islamic manuscripts in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South India. Fr. Stewart has studied at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem as a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellow and was awarded a second NEH fellowship and a Dumbarton Oaks Research Library fellowship for a study of the origins and development of monastic culture in the Christian East. He has contributed numerous articles to scholarly journals or volumes of collected works on monastic history, theology, and mysticism. The author of a comparative study of Syriac and Greek Christian asceticism, *Working the Earth of the Heart: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to 431* (1991), he also has published a study of the life, writings, and spiritual theology of a founder of the Latin monastic movement, *Cassian the Monk* (1998), and an overview of Benedictine spirituality that focuses both on the Rule of Benedict and the lived experience of monastic communities during the ensuing centuries, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (1998). He is completing a new book, *Between Earth and Heaven: Interpreting the First 1000 Years of Christian Asceticism and Monasticism*, for Oxford University Press and working with colleagues on a new translation of the "Gnostic trilogy" of the fourth-century monastic theoretician Evagrius Ponticus.

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