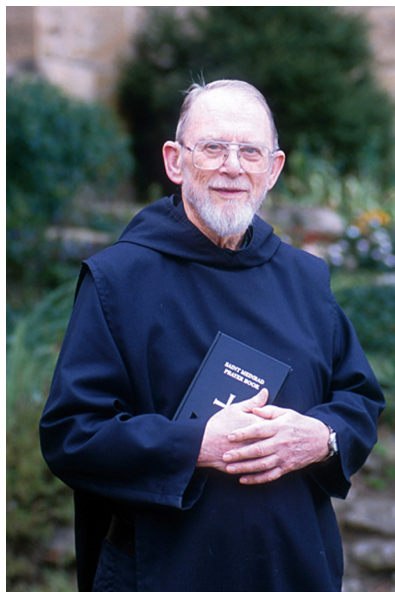


PROFILES: *Enthusiasm for the Word: Fr. Simeon Daly, OSB (1922-2012)*

by Melody Layton McMahon



Editor Note: The Profiles column for this issue of *Theological Librarianship* is an excerpt from Melody Layton McMahon's recently published monograph *Enthusiasm for the Word: The Life and Work of Fr. Simeon Daly, OSB* (Chicago: American Theological Library Association, 2016). The monograph is available as an open access e-book from the [ATLA Press](#).

Fr. Simeon Daly, OSB, was the assistant librarian of St Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary Library beginning in 1949, and in 1951 until 2000 he served as the Head Librarian. Fr. Simeon's tenure oversaw many changes in monastic life and librarianship, not the least of which was the use of technology in the library. He was the president of ATLA for two terms (1979-1981) and Executive Secretary from 1985-1990. Fr. Simeon was also an avid writer of stories and other genres which can be read in his book Finding Grace in the Moment: Stories and Other Musings of an Aged Monk.

Fr. Simeon was active in automation projects both locally and nationally at a very early period. The early 1970s were a very exciting time for librarians as true collaborative projects were beginning and the effects of library automation and computerized catalogs finally being realized. He said that participation was demanded "with such outside projects as a matter of course. They keep our institution in the stream of library activity as practiced in our time. It is not always cost productive, but it involves us in academic cooperation and prevents a parochial attitude toward our apostolate which is such a threat to an isolated academic institution."¹ In the summer of 1968, Fr. Simeon had already taken a course in computer use at Indiana University.² In the early 1970s, the period of automation expansion, he was a member of a special Advisory Board of the Cooperative Bibliographic Center for Indiana Libraries (COBICIL) which investigated the potential for Indiana libraries to cooperate in bibliographic systems. At the same time, he was also instrumental in the organization of InCoLSA, the Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority, which allowed cooperation across Indiana to use OCLC. In 1974, he reported that

At a broader level the library's participation in Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority (InCoLSA) has taken more of my time this year. . . I have stated elsewhere on many occasions my convictions on this, but for the record I wish to repeat that I consider it essential to the overall thrust of this institution to be involved right from the start in these cooperative programs. I believe it is one way of exercising a responsibility of sharing our "wealth"; it keeps us alive in a system that will be the key to many cooperative programs and should in time reap cost benefits without which we may eventually find it nearly impossible to operate.³

¹ Annual Report of the Librarian, 1975-76.

² Library Report, 1960-1970. Perhaps this report was for accreditation as he mentions the initial accreditation of 1960 in the report and in his 1970-71 Library Report he remarks that accreditation by North Central was renewed and a notation in the then-American Association of Theological Schools (AATS), now Association of Theological Schools (ATS), report was removed.

³ 1974-75, Annual Report of the Librarian.

Melody Layton McMahon is the Director of the Paul Bechtold Library at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL.

Of his own ability to lead these new ventures, Fr. Simeon said, “It wasn’t that I had any special qualifications, but I learned in the process. Being willing to say ‘yes’ frequently is the path to growth.”⁴

By the next year, the library had received an OCLC terminal, the sixteenth library in the state to receive one (the earliest library to do online cataloging in the world was in 1971).⁵ Despite “some misgivings about this program on the part of library staff and in the academic community,”⁶ Fr. Simeon remained adamant that this would be a good thing. Though he said he had “no crystal ball,” he clearly had read the signs of the times and made a bold move which moved the St. Meinrad Library ahead at a pace many libraries would come to envy. It is clear how far ahead he was when he reports that at the 1976 CLA meeting:

A great concern at this meeting was the fact that many of the Catholic libraries had been offered eight thousand dollars to get into the OCLC program by the Kellogg Foundation. Because most of them had not given any consideration to the idea they were at a loss to know what to do. Most of them became interested, but I’m sure some will have refused the grant because they were not in a position to weigh the pros and cons in the limited time period allowed for the decision.⁷

For a short time, subgroups of InCoLSA existed and Fr. Simeon was the first president and organizer of the Four Rivers Library Services Authority, but it was soon absorbed into InCoLSA. In his 1973-74 report, Fr. Simeon felt compelled to provide a brief rationale for why he was spending more time on such activities. He writes,

I see my role as librarian very much as a pivotal position. Besides the coordination of the staff which happily is very highly motivated, I relate the library to faculty and students, and try to reflect their interests in the library programs and to the library staff. Attending faculty meetings and serving on committees I consider an integral part of my task. Beyond that, however, I feel an increasing responsibility to keep informed of and involved in programs in the community, state, and country that affect our present or future library development. Because such activities are beginning to absorb more and more of my time, a brief explanation may be in order.

Institutional libraries are discovering that they are no longer able to go it alone. Costs have escalated to such an extent that the kind of full coverage and total service that once was considered ideal is no longer possible or even feasible. Library administrators are searching for ways to coordinate programs, cooperate in services and share technology. This is presently being done to such an extent that a small library can hardly afford not to get involved in such programs.⁸

In 1986, another news story described how St. Meinrad had received a \$35,000 Lilly grant to convert 86,000 catalog cards into machine-readable form. In it, Fr. Simeon reflects that some of their books were very scarce. It was in keeping with his philosophy that he said, “It’s very important for St. Meinrad to be part of this national trend. Not to be trendy but, to be open to projects and advancements.”⁹ This retro-conversion project would be a major step in becoming automated and was a part of a project supported by Lilly for retro-conversion of twenty-eight colleges and libraries in Indiana.¹⁰

In 1982-83, the Library subscribed to Bibliographic Retrieval Services (BRS) and the New York Times Information Services (NYTIS), two dial-up database services. This is fairly remarkable as BRS had only been made commercially available in 1977 with its premier database, Medline, and nineteen other databases.¹¹ Fr. Simeon contributed to a panel presentation for the Academic Library Section of the Indiana Library Association in 1982 on “Technology: the Dream and the Reality in Library Planning,” something that by now he had plenty of experience.¹²

⁴ Engs, *Conversations in the Abbey*, 135.

⁵ “OCLC,” *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OCLC>.

⁶ Annual Report of the Librarian, 1975-76.

⁷ Annual Report of the Librarian, 1975-76.

⁸ Library Annual Report, 1973-1974.

⁹ Tammy Presley, “Interlibrary Loan Moving More Books More Quickly,” *The Herald* (January 2, 1986): 3.

¹⁰ Library Annual Report, 1985/86.

¹¹ “BRS/Search,” *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BRS/Search>.

¹² Library Annual Report, 1982.

In 1987-88, Fr. Simeon reminded administration he was “involved in computer networking and conferencing on a regular basis,” all the while lamenting that reference service was weak, largely due to his lack of skill at subject searching on databases.¹³ In 1989-90, the library introduced CD-ROM for three services, *Reader’s Guide*, *Humanities Index*, and *Religion Indexes*, and received an updated computer after fifteen years to upgrade along with OCLC.¹⁴ In 1992, the library moved to an online catalog, and stopped ordering OCLC cards.¹⁵ It was 1993 when Fr. Simeon announced that the Archabbey Library had had a “landmark year” introducing online circulation which was the final aspect to becoming an automated library. The staff had barcoded all the 145,000 volumes in the library. In the same year, Fr. Simeon had attended a conference in Pittsburg on Internet use in academic institutions. He states, “I came away from there convinced that St. Meinrad should take the steps necessary to become fully operational on Internet.” He had an “address on Internet” and was discerning what its uses might be for librarianship.¹⁶ Like many librarians, Fr. Simeon thought that there would be a defining moment when computerization would have magically taken effect; however, in 1996, he capitulated, lamenting

I thought this would be a definitive year for the library with a local area network in place. Library CDs would be in a tower on the server; the public access catalog would be available on three levels; computers would be upgraded; the circulation system would be on the server and would provide a status report (whether the book was available or in circulation); a streamline [sic] method for taking inventory would be in place; dial-in access to the PAC would be in place.

Actually, many of those goals have been accomplished, but I recognize now, that there will be no defining year. Technology is beating a faster drum than we can march to. We will continue to go with the flow, but will never be exactly where we want and should be. We must keep looking ahead and be planning carefully for the shifts that are taking place in the way information is delivered and preserve the records of our civilization.¹⁷

The library had added *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index* on CD that year and made other improvements, but Fr. Simeon clearly saw the hard truth, that computers would be a constant matter of upkeep for librarians in the years to come. In 1997-98, the move to use of OCLC through the Internet rather than a dedicated phone line was effected, and a decision to make the huge migration from a local area network to the Private Academic Library Network of Indiana (PALNI) was made, which necessitated the migration from the relatively unsophisticated Bibliofile to DRA (Data Research Associates), an integrated library system. This would allow catalog records to be accessible from the library’s web page. Membership in PALNI also offered opportunities to offer access to other databases which the library would not otherwise be able to afford. With all this taking place, Fr. Simeon was planning computer labs, carrels that would be equipped for laptops in order to facilitate better service for users. Fr. Simeon’s concerns about technology, as he said, caused him to “temper enthusiasm...but do not suppress it.”¹⁸ And indeed, in the 1998-99 academic year, the Archabbey Library joined PALNI, and as Fr. Simeon said, “implemented the decision to join the world.”¹⁹ In his forty-eighth annual report, his final one, he reported that he believed more had been achieved than in previous years and many of these achievements were upgrades to hardware and software.

¹³ Library Annual Report, 1987-1988. For those not aware, database searching by dial-up was a highly technical skill and in large library staffs, only one or two librarians would be trained to do searching because the cost was so prohibitive. Librarians were taught to apply critical thinking skills to come up with the best Boolean logic; the thesaurus for the database was consulted for retrieving a very specialized set of results. Subject searching was not used for ordinary searches that could otherwise be found in a reference book. As a young reference librarian at the time, I was one of three in a staff of eighteen trained, and we were so fearful of wasting time that we seldom pursued searches which was, naturally, not helpful toward developing and maintaining searching skills.

¹⁴ Archabbey Library, Annual Report 1989-1990.

¹⁵ Library Annual Report, 1991-1992. (Fr. Simeon lauds this as “a rather historic moment.” All catalogers will understand the understated nature of this!)

¹⁶ Library Annual Report, 1992-93.

¹⁷ Library Annual Report, 1995-96.

¹⁸ Archabbey Library Annual Report, 1997-1998

¹⁹ Archabbey Library Annual Report, 1998-1999.

Occasionally one wonders if Fr. Simeon had the gift of prophecy. His letter to OCLC in 1984, which even he says seems melodramatic, could be written over and over again today. “When we first began automation in Indiana the push was on cooperation. Shared cataloging meant: reducing expenses; cooperative acquisition programs; shared resources. The tenor of the times was cooperation and sharing. We all knew these things cost, but automation would make it cost effective.” But in his prophet’s voice he goes on to say:

The gnawing fear I have is that we have created a modern marvel, but the heart of the matter, the stuff of the thing is our bibliographical records. If OCLC begins to turn on us, someone will find a way to pull the plug--no matter how big it is. A disillusioned [sic] constituency will gather in small groups to bemoan their situation, and then begin to pick up the pieces in order to try to develop a utility that will eliminate unnecessary duplication of labor, speed up operations, foster cooperation, and seek ways to cut costs in the interest of the group.²⁰

²⁰ Letter to Mr. Thomas Fanville, OCLC, November 30, 1984.