

**Proposal for a Paper
to the Macau Ricci Institute Symposium “*In actione contemplivus*”, October 2019**

Proposed Title: Contemplation in a world of action: the English Benedictine tradition of mental prayer and the changing nature of Christian witness

Proposed Abstract: Uniquely amongst the various congregations of Black Monks, the English Benedictine Congregation was (re)founded as both a missionary and a monastic enterprise. The first generation of English Benedictines established the congregation’s traditions of mental prayer within the context of the mission to an England where Catholicism was proscribed and priesthood a capital crime: a context of witness and martyrdom. With expulsion of the order from their houses in France after the Revolution, the context and shape of the mission changed and with it came a necessary adaptation of the tradition of mental prayer. A third phase in the life of English Benedictine monasticism came with the increasing secularisation of the twentieth century: once more the tradition of mental prayer changed in order to remain the same.

This paper will look at the development of the English Benedictine tradition of mental prayer in the works of Dom Augustine Baker OSB (1575-1641) and how that influenced the first generations of English Benedictine missionaries. It will consider the place of mental prayer in establishment of the stable monastic houses in England after the French Revolution and in the Benedictine missions of the nineteenth century to Australia and elsewhere. Finally, it will look at the work of Dom John Chapman OSB (1865-1933) and his work in bringing the English Benedictine tradition of mental prayer to a new, largely lay, audience, called to witness in the context of an increasingly complex setting of ecumenism, pluralism, indifference and hostility to Religion.