

*The Father and the Son*, by Matthew N. Murray, and *The View from a Monastery*, by Brother Benet Tvedten

reviewed by [Hal W. LeMert Jr.](#) in the [April 19, 2000](#) issue

When Matt Murray is 13 years old, his mother, a gifted writer and an unconventional Catholic, dies. His father, an official in the Washington, D.C., city government, suddenly changes jobs. He functions poorly as a single parent, and the family, a sister and two brothers, begins to drift apart. The unconventional Catholic faith of his father gives way to new religious behaviors that seemed bizarre, even embarrassing, to young Matt. His father joins a Benedictine community and eventually becomes a priest. Had God "stormed into his father's life" or had his father "gone crazy?," Matt wonders. Murray revisits this story through the eyes of other family members, and finally through his father's eyes.

Brother Benet Tvedten took a more traditional, less complicated route to his vocation. He has been a member of his Benedictine community for 40 years. Having renounced family ties and accepted Blue Cloud Monastery as home, he tells stories about his life there.

Matt Murray contemplates whether his father's decision held "a promise of joy greater than anything or anyone in his family ever offered him." Brother Benet's stories reveal much of the reality of monastic life. Both books raise very Protestant kinds of questions. Daily life at Blue Cloud, governed by rules and sanctions, offers the securities of a childhood home. Matt Murray's troubled father seems to be searching for a certainty that is more than faith. Is monasticism a purer search for God or only a way of life some people need?