Exordium

UNIT SEVEN

UNANIMITY

The Value of Unanimity

s unit discusses the question of whether the Founders envisaged uniform ervance throughout the Order and, if so, what did it mean in practice? What pose did it serve? How was it implemented? What role remains for temporary values as "pluralism" and "enculturation".

Objectives

a) To read the primitive documents and discover what they have to about unanimity/uniformity..

b) To read these statements in context and to compare them with the ness of second and third-generation Cistercians.

c) To reflect on the role of Cistercian "unanimity" in lay's multicultural world.

THE VALUE OF UNANIMITY

Those of us, in the Strict Observance, whose monastic formation took place before the 1969 promulgation of the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism* are familiar with the strong insistence on uniformity of observance that prevailed until that time. This inflexibility had increased substantially through the first half of the twentieth century. The far-flung foundations of the nineteenth-century monastic adventure were not long allowed to attempt a response to the conditions of local climate or culture. Beagle Bay (in northwestern Australia) was closed, Mariannhill (in South Africa) was expelled, and the monasteries of China and Japan were submitted to a process of systematic Europeanisation. In the context of our post-Conciliar appreciation of enculturation and pluriformity, let us try to establish the extent to which the first Cistercians insisted on rigorous uniformity of observance.

1. The Elements of the Discussion

Before examining the notion of "unanimity", it is worth reflecting on three related topics that have a bearing on some of the issues.

1) **Ordo**: Especially from the time of Augustine, the concept of "order" has been significant in the West. The word itself, however, was complex, having up to eight distinct meanings in medieval usage. In general, the theme of "order" reflects the belief that God has assigned a determinate state or level to all persons, and that the basic moral responsibility of each is to act in accordance with the obligations inherent in this assigned position. From the "order" of the universe to the "order" of psalmody (RB 18), all was regarded as ultimately derived from God's will. Such a perspective necessarily involves "subordination": to the order itself and to other persons who are placed in a higher location. "Disordinate" or "inordinate" behaviour has — beyond its intrinsic moral quality — the added note of rebellion, upsetting the whole order God has imposed on creation.

   This Cistercian "order" was understood firstly as the structured lifestyle of the monastery of Cîteaux. (We still use the term **Ordo** to denote the yearly booklet that gives detailed instructions for the daily liturgy.) Those who lived according to this lifestyle were assured of living an "ordered" life. As monasteries multiplied, the Cistercian "order" became widespread and a second usage of the term became appropriate — designating a federation of monasteries following the same way of life and subordinate to the same sources of authority. In this way, the "Order" came to signify a stream of life-ordering legislation parallel to

the Rule of Benedict. Thus the two terms were yoked together: Behaviour "contrary to the Rule and the Order" was automatically considered deviant or disordered and needed to be put right, corrected.

The use of the term "order" implies the existence of a regulated Cistercian lifestyle, in which all the elements form part of a whole that is not optional, and is regarded ultimately as the expression of the divine will.

2) **Disciplina**: This also is a complex word. (See Jean Leclercq's article in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 3, 1291-1302).It is well-attested in Benedict's Rule with 21 occurrences, often in the form "regular discipline". The word kept its broad range of meaning throughout the middle ages.

Disciplina in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*

1. PRIMARY USAGE

a **Basic Meaning** Teaching Greek: *Didaskalia*
From *discipulus* and hence from the verb *discere* (to teach).

b **Derived Meaning** Learning Greek: *Episteme* etc
= doctrine, art, science, (i.e. the effects of teaching)

2. SECONDARY USAGE

a **Basic Meaning** Training Greek: *Paideia*
Moral education with connotations of severity, correction
— used in military and monastic contexts

Derived Meaning Social Order — *ordo*
=. custom, social institution, the rule of law, a way of life and its specific demands, the totality of observances

The Cistercians understood "Cistercian discipline" as regular observances in their integrity — designed to prevent individual and social disorders and, therefore, often experienced as hard and difficult by the young and the restless. Although the exercises themselves were not distinctive, since Black Monks also followed them, a specific "Cistercian" spirit began to be recognised. It is for this reason that Clairvaux monks were sent to St Mary's Abbey in York at the time of its incorporation "to teach them the manner of living according to the discipline of the Cistercian Order". In the writings of St Bernard the words *ordo* and *disciplina* are closely linked. Furthermore,

in many of these early authors the term *disciplina* was used with educational connotations, following through the various images of the monastery as school. In this context we need to recall the harsher notion of education then current. Augustine defines *disciplina* as "learning through hardship" (*per molestias eruditio*). Furthermore, in specific contexts, the term retained its meaning of correction and punishment for infractions of the common rule.

> St Peter Damian (d. 1072), especially, recommended voluntary self-flagellation, accompanied by prayers and genuflections as an expression of discipline. The use of the word *disciplina* to designate the instrument of penal or devotional scourging is common in the twelfth century.

3) **Chapter**: Cistercian chapters were generally not places of community dialogue — just as the room designated *locutorium* (speaking-place or parlour) in Benedictine monasteries was called an *auditorium* (listening-place) by the Cistercians. Chapter meetings provided a platform for promulgation of official and binding teaching regarding the ordering of daily life. "Nobody is to presume to speak in this chapter ... unless he is ordered to do so or is questioned by the abbot — or if he has a question about observance (*ordo*)" (EO 70.62).

1. Conventual Chapter

The daily chapter provided the occasion for the exercise of both the legislative and judicial aspects of monastic authority. As Hugh of Barzelle remarked, "this is where the sons of God are corrected, instructed and educated as future heirs of God." Although not envisaged as such in the Rule, the chapter-meeting became the formal, institutionalised expression of the abbot's verbal ministry as envisaged in St Benedict's Rule.

RB 2.4:	**docere**:	to inculcate a climate of meaning by the teaching of monastic beliefs and values,
	constituere:	to establish a general policy in the house that accords with and expresses fundamental monastic principles,
	iubere:	to give specific instructions about particular matters.
RB 2.23ff	**arguere**:	to rebuke severely those who are without discipline and who upset the peace of the monastery,
	obsecrare:	to encourage the receptive and patient to continue making progress,

increpare: to reprimand and correct any who are negligent and reject community standards.

Each day in chapter the Rule was read and each day the presider gave a commentary on what was read — reinforcing the Cistercian interpretation of the text. After this presentation, the presider said: "Let us speak of our *ordo*".

> ***Ordo***
>
> The *ordo* is the Rule, it is the framework, it is the spirit of monastic observance. It is the totality of religious discipline and formation: humility, obedience, patience and the other exercises... The *ordo*, observance, discipline, the method for attaining God by means of the Rule: this is what the abbot expounded to his monks when he said: "Let us speak of our order".
>
> U. Berlière, *L'ascèse bénédictine*, p. 14

The "chapter of faults" followed. The terminology used in the documents is judicial. The procedure begins with voluntary confessions of infractions of the Rule in the spirit of RB 46.1-4. The purpose is to seek pardon for specific failures.(EO 70.43). Afterwards there is scope for the fraternal "proclamation" (*clamatio*) of transgressors. This is to be done directly and factually: "He did this." and not in a roundabout way (EO 70.45). If the accused brother is guilty he responds *mea culpa*. If he considers himself blameless, he remains silent and — in the absence of corroboration — he is presumed innocent. The presider responds by words and by assigning a penalty.

> From the safeguards provided in the customaries and from the testimony of Hugh of Barzelle (*De œohabitatione fratrum* p. 130-131), it seems that the practice of proclamation was not without its defects and abuses.

One of the options used for enforcing adherence to community norms was flogging. The *Ecclesiastica Officia* describes the scene thus.

> When the one proclaimed about something is sentenced to be flogged, the abbot is to take care that he is not flogged by the one who proclaimed him. On the abbot's command to undress, the one who is to be flogged sits in the same place as he was standing. Taking off his cowl he places it in front of him over his knees. He pushes his arms out through the head opening of the tunic and then uncovers his body as far as the belt. He stays thus, with his head bowed, saying nothing except to repeat often, "*Mea culpa*: I will amend my ways". Meanwhile no one speaks, except one of the seniors may humbly make intercession for him. The one who does the flogging stops only when

the abbot commands it. When he ceases, he helps the brother to get dressed again. When the brother has dressed and has stood up, he remains where he is until the abbot says, "Go and sit down".He then bows and returns to his place. It must be known that one in lower orders is not to flog a brother in higher orders, i.e. a deacon ought not to flog a priest, but an equal should flog an equal, or a superior an inferior. (EO 70.69-76).

2. General Chapter

The General Chapter began life as a simple return of the abbots of Cîteaux's foundations to participate in the chapter of the mother-house. Progressively the monks of Cîteaux were excluded and the General Chapter became a gathering of abbots. The purposes of the General Chapter included both legislation and correction; abbots could be proclaimed and assigned a penalty for lack of zeal in their ministry.

The General Chapter was an integral part of the Order's determination to maintain discipline. Like the regular visitation, it "sought to correct excesses and to preserve peace" (*De forma visitationis*). It was imaged on the conventual chapter and demanded of all an adherence to the totality of Cistercian principles and practices, and was empowered to punish those who were slack in enforcing its decrees. Standard penances included the abbot having to evacuate his stall and fasting on bread and water. The letters of Stephen of Lexington, appointed by the General Chapter to visit the monasteries of Ireland (Cistercian Fathers Series, #28), are a good example of energetic intervention to bring deviant houses back into line.

.The Functions of the General Chapter

	Summa Carta Caritatis		***Prior Charter of Charity***
1.	Tend the affairs of the Order, 4.2	1.	Discuss matters concerning the salvation of their own souls, 7.2
2.	Strengthen peace and preserve charity, 4.2	2.	Order what is to be corrected, 7.2
3.	Correct wrongs, 4.3	3.	Order what is to be added to the observance of RB and the Order, 7.2
4.	Relieve extreme poverty, 4.4	4.	Strengthen mutual peace and charity, 7.2
		5.	Punish negligent abbots,

7.3

6. Quickly relieve poverty, 7.4

The purpose of these initial reflections is to demonstrate something of the theory and practice of the first Cistercian generations with regard to uniformity of observance. There is no doubt that departures from the common norms were censured and recalcitrance punished severely. Similar views and regulations existed among others monastic groups of the period. The emphasis on "unanimity" is, perhaps, more distinctively Cistercian.

2. The Ideal of Unanimity

On Sunday 18 May 1113 a group of monks from the New Monastery began living the Cistercian life at La Ferté-sur-Grosne. The foundation charter describes the scene.

> As the number of brothers at Cîteaux has become very large, there was no longer the possibility of providing the things necessary for their subsistence, nor was there room for them to live in. It pleased the abbot of that place, Stephen by name, and the brothers, to seek another place in which part of them could serve God devoutly and according to rule — separate in body, but not in soul.

The phrase, reminiscent of classical literature on friendship, is echoed in the Prologue to the *Charter of Charity*.

> In this decree, then, the aforesaid brethren, taking precaution against future shipwreck of their mutual peace, elucidated and decreed and left for their posterity by what covenant, or in what manner, indeed with what charity their monks throughout abbeys in various parts of the world, though separated in body, could be indissolubly knit together in mind, *corporibus divisi, animis indissolubiliter conglutinarentur.* (CC1, Prologue 3)

The offshoot was intended to reproduce the pattern of living of the parent branch. Even though physical distance separated the two communities, no separate spiritual identity was envisaged. The monks of La Ferté lived the "Cistercian" life in a different place, but in the two communities there was a single soul. The *unanimitas* appropriate to a cenobitic community is now declared to be the determining factor in the relations between self-governing and financially independent communities. The constitutional process advanced a step further with the *Charter of Charity and Unanimity*, drawn up in 1114 on the occasion of the founding of Pontigny, which defined the relation between second-generation "Cistercian" abbeys and the New Monastery, and required that this agreement be ratified by the local bishop. This document required that a founding abbey was not to exact any material advantage from its foundation, that the Rule is to be understood and kept by all in one manner, and that all monasteries are to

have the same liturgical books and customs. "Charity" is practised by the mother-house in not deriving financial benefit from foundations, whereas "unanimity" is expressed by the foundations in accepting the "Cistercian" interpretation of the Rule of Benedict and in having the same usages and liturgical books.

Does this unanimity, by defining the details of regular observance, demand an absolute uniformity at the level of daily life, such as Benedict of Aniane seems to have attempted? The *Summa Carta Caritatis* interprets the phrase of CC 3.2 (*similibusque vivamus moribus*) in this strong sense:

> So that an indissoluble unity between the abbeys will last for ever, it is established first that the Rule of Blessed Benedict will be understood in a single [sense] without the slightest hint of deviation. Hence there will be exactly the same books used for the Divine Office, the same clothing, and finally, the same lifestyle (*mores*) and customs are to be found. (SCC 9.6-7)

A similarly strict interpretation, embodied in the adverb *uniformiter*, was adopted by Eugene III in his *Act of Confirmation* in 1152.

> The purpose of that decree was that the Rule of Blessed Benedict will, for all time, be observed in all the monasteries of your Order in the same manner as it is observed in the church of Cîteaux. Also, in the reading of this Rule, no member of your Order may bring any other meaning beyond the simple and common understanding [of the text]. Rather, just as those things that have been defined are recognised, let [the Rule] be understood by all, and inviolably observed in uniformity (*uniformiter*). You are entirely to maintain all the same observances (*easdemque penitus observantias*), the same chant and the same liturgical books in all the churches of your Order. No church or person of your Order may dare to ask from anyone a privilege against the common institutes of this Order or to retain one if acquired through any means whatever. (PL 180, col 1542ab).

It seems also to be reflected in many of the decisions of the General Chapter during the first century of the Order's existence. Such affirmations, taken at their face value, lead some to the conclusion that "Uniformity was an integral feature of the Cistercian programme itself" (W. E. Goodrich, p. 38).

- **To what extent is an ideal of uniformity reflective of the reality of Cistercian life in the twelfth century?**

To measure the extent of equivalence between "unanimity" and "uniformity" it is, perhaps, important to begin by seeing *unanimitas* as a spiritual rather than a juridical

concept: firstly it operates primarily in the interior sphere of interior attitude and affectivity more than in the arena of observable behaviour and, secondly, the rhetoric of unanimity represents an ideal maximum rather than an enforceable minimum..The theme of *unanimitas* was deliberately chosen to place the emphasis on personal dispositions and not on external observance. Let us look at the scriptural and patristic pedigree of the term.

3 The Prior History of *Unanimitas*

In the Vulgate Bible there are ten uses of the adjective *unanimis* and eight of the adverb *unanimiter*; the abstract noun does not appear. In four occurrences unanimity signifies agreement among many, including two instances of concerted hostility. In eight cases the term qualifies common prayer. Three times it indicates the closeness of friendship. Three times the Christian community is described as *unanimis.*

- Philippians 1:27 — You stand in one spirit, unanimous, working together in the faith of the Gospel.
- Philippians 2:2 — Fill up my joy by being concerned (*sapere*) for the same thing, having the same charity, unanimous, being of the same mind (*sentientes*).
- 1 Peter 3:8 — Finally let all be unanimous, compassionate, lovers of the brotherhood (*fraternitatis amatores*), merciful, modest, humble . . .

The key image around which the patristic usage of these texts revolves is that of the primitive Jerusalem community, as drawn by Luke in Acts 4:32 — the company of believers were of one heart and one soul. The first Christians were not only together (*pariter*: Acts 2: 43), uncontaminated by the divisive force of private ownership, but they were inwardly united: *cor unum et anima una*.

With **Augustine**, there was great reliance on the myth of the Jerusalem community and, consequently, more interest in the value of unanimity. The first injunction his Rule laid on the monastic community expressed this:

> First, because you have been gathered as one flock (*in unum estis congregati*), in order that you may live unanimously in the house, let there be one soul and one heart among you, [directed] towards God.

From his frequent addition of the phrase *in Deum*, we may conclude that it is from a common orientation towards God that unanimity derives. Augustine's commentary on Ps 132.1 dates from 407; its whole flavour is monastic. This is where he introduced his curious etymology of *monachus* as signifying that

> Monks are those who live together in such a way that they form a single person, so that what was written is true of them: "They have one soul and one heart". There are many bodies but not many souls. There are many bodies but not many hearts. Rightly is *monos* applied to them for they are "one alone".

For Augustine divine adoption was the basis of unity among human beings. So, in his letter to Laetus, he stated forthrightly the theological undergirding of religious community.

> Your soul is not yours alone; it belongs to all your brothers, just as their souls belong to you, or rather their souls and yours are not souls in the plural, but they are one soul, the single soul of Christ (Ep 243.4).

Unanimity for Augustine was not a canonical concept, it was Christological ("Unanimous means being one thing in Christ" — *In Ps* 142.4) and, therefore, ecclesiological.

Examining Augustine's usage with the help of a concordance, we find that his 57 instances of terms associated with *unanimitas* are often linked to biblical citations. Apart from the connection with Acts 4.32, we perceive a semantic field defined by such themes as fraternity, peace, concord, collaboration, having one spirit and the same charity, thinking the same, united in prayer, joined in firm and inseparable charity, consensual joining together in community. His exhortation to communities is simple and well summarises his thought: **"Let all live together in unanimity and concord."**

> The writings of **John Cassian** are said to mark an important stage in the process of seeing the primitive Jerusalem community as the model of monastic life. However the text of Acts 4:32 is quoted only three times in the *Conferences* and twice in the *Institutes*. When Philippians 2:2 is quoted in full with its use of *unanimes*, it is introduced to support an argument in favour not of affective community but of humility, based on non-assertion of self. Moreover, Psalm 132.1 about the *fratres in unum* is quoted only twice — to describe the state of perfect chastity, when the vices have been expelled and self-will neutralised. Unanimity among brothers is once said to incur the devil's displeasure, so it must be a good thing. The term is used once in parallel to *concordia*, and once in a citation of Psalm 54:14 with reference to Judas. In the entire *corpus* of Cassian there are only four occurrences, all of them in *Conference* 16. Despite this paucity of evidence, Abba Joseph appreciates the value of the unity that reigns between friends, where there is no attachment to material goods or to individual opinions. "Love can last without disruption only among those in whom there abides a single commitment (*propositum*) and a single will, who will one thing and reject one thing (*unum velle ac nolle*). "The grace of full and perfect friendship is not possible except for those who have the same will and a single commitment (*propositum*) and who never or rarely think (*sentire*) differently or are in disagreement in what pertains to spiritual progress." We have to conclude, however, that affective sense of community associated with the term "unanimity" was not a high priority in Cassian's thought.

The Augustinian emphasis was adopted and expanded by **Gregory the Great**, the pre-eminent mentor of primitive Cîteaux. .

> One is our Lord and Redeemer. Even here below he binds together the hearts of his chosen ones in unanimity, and by inward desires continually stimulates a heavenly love. (*Ezek* 2.9.)

Gregory recognised that because we are different persons involved in different tasks, we should try to ensure that our acts do not lead to discord, but keep intact a certain interior unity of mind with others, "so that we may, as far as is justly possible, preserve unanimity with those among whom we live, not by leaving aside the things we do, but by taking precautions to avoid the evil of discord that we fear" (*Ezek* 2.9.14)

> Even though what they do is dissimilar, nevertheless by having one and the same orientation (*sensus*) they associate themselves with the words and virtues of the saints. . . (Despite different vocations) they are joined to each other in unanimity by their confession of voice and virtue (*Moralia* 29.31.71).

By the grace of the Holy Spirit believers

> came together in such close concord of unanimity . . . that there was in them but one heart and one soul. . . Thus the Lord, preserving the sacrament of unity, combines in the Church faithful peoples who rightly have different ways of living (*mores*) and languages. . . Just as from one earth there are different and distinct forms of clod, so in one faith and one charity are manifested the different merits of those engaged in good works (*Moralia* 30.6.22).

Far from being a argument in favour of absolute uniformity, Gregory's teaching on unanimity is built upon his profound respect for diversity. We have only to recall the 36 admonitions in the *Pastoral Rule* prescribing different remedies for different characters. This was the Pope who recommended enculturation at the level of *consuetudo* to Augustine of Canterbury: "Things are not to be loved because of places, but places are to be loved for their good things" (Ep 11.64). When he preaches unanimity it is in full awareness that those whom he addresses express their common faith by a plurality of external forms.

Diversity within Unity

Whatever may have been the attitude of other popes, St Gregory the Great emerges from his writings as the one who, in a particular way, cherished the theme of "diversity within unity" in the Church. Diversity he believed to be present at all levels, not excluding that of liturgical ritual: what made this diversity into a unity was the bond of one Faith and one Charity.

Paul Meyvaert

4. The First Cistercian Generation

The context of Cistercian unanimity, as it emerged, was seen as the grace of communion among autonomous monasteries — separate in body, but not in soul. The incipient Order understood itself as a community of communities, transposing the same patterns and structures found in the governance of a local community onto the larger grouping. Just as in a single community unanimity occurs in some middle region between regimentation and fragmentation, so at the level of the Order. Just as a community that has "one heart and one soul" is able to contain a certain measure of adaptation "according to need", so it would be daft to assume that the early Cistercians were unaware that in somewhat different circumstances the same goal is achieved by using somewhat different means. There was nothing indefinite about Cistercian discipline and the Chapter of Faults was used to enforce it, both at the local level and at the General Chapter. This did not necessarily mean inflexibility or an incapacity for adaptation. Of course abuses — both real and symbolic — occurred that required intervention, but this did not amount to a program of total prescriptiveness. Over-regulation usually becomes rampant in times of backsliding or confusion. The first half-century of Cistercian existence was neither. Later, maybe, sclerosis sets in.

There is a strong desire for corporativeness apparent in many of the early texts. We note a proliferation of words with the prefix *con*, indicating joint action, and many instances where the brothers are described as arriving at consensus before intervening in a situation. This is not the regimented sameness of a military display, but a meeting of minds and hearts — mutually stimulating and discerning. That is why there are three "Holy Founders" and not one. Even in the admonitory letters of St Stephen there is a strong sense that his injunctions derive not from himself alone but from the entire community. Charity was not only the goal, but the means to it. No wonder that the next generation developed an ethos of the *schola caritatis.*

Further confirmation of a certain broadness can be found much later in the *Ecclesiastica Officia* when harvesting is discussed. The following qualification is

added to the standard regulations:

> For this and for all the other things appropriate to this time [of harvesting], each monastery [*ecclesia*] is to act according to its location and the arrangements made by the abbot and prior, since it is not possible to observe these things equally in all places. (EO 84.32)

5. St Bernard of Clairvaux

By way of verification we may examine the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, a key player for forty years in the affairs of the first Cistercian half-century. Bernard recognises that in minor matters one should simply go along with local usage: "I suggest that you follow the practice of the house in such matters. It is obvious that these things are done differently in different monasteries (*quae diversis modis diversis in monasteriis certum est observari*) (Pre 57). He comments elsewhere that "In every monastery can be verified those four kinds of monks which St Benedict described" (Sent 3.31). and even develops a commonsense spirituality to correspond with this reality. "We do not all run in the same way" (SC 22.9). His notion of unity, so extensively developed in *De Consideratione,* is not the reductionist elimination of multiplicity, but a comprehensive, proactive and all-inclusive reality. Unity is a force that seeks to include multiplicity in its embrace — like white light that combines all the colours of the spectrum. This is his description of the "claustral paradise" in Div 42.4.

> The monastery is truly a paradise, a region fortified with the rampart of discipline. It is a glorious thing to have men living together in the same house, **following the same way of life**. How good and pleasant it is when brothers live **in unity**.
>
> 1. You will see one of them weeping for his sins,
> 2. another rejoicing in the praise of God,
> 3. another tending the needs of all,
> 4. and another giving instruction to the rest.
> 5. Here is one who is at prayer,
> 6. another at reading.
> 7. Here is one who is compassionate
> 8. and another who inflicts penalties for sins.
> 9. This one is aflame with love
> 10. and that one is valiant in humility.
> 11. This one remains humble when everything goes well
> 12. and the other one does not lose his nerve in difficulties.
> 13. This one works very hard in active tasks

14. while the other finds quiet in the practice of contemplation

Fourteen styles of monastic living — some of them incompatible and even opposite! Most communities could recognise their own members in Bernard's list. What is unity? It is that which binds together what is different and unique. Its opposites are envy, competitiveness, petty-mindedness, intolerance, self-justification, and that refusal to be included in community that Bernard terms *singularitas* or individualism.

Bernard quotes Acts 4:32 eighteen times and there are 52 instances of *unanimitas* words. Not a single example refers to uniformity of observance. All occur within the line of Augustine and Gregory described above. This "joyful and social unanimity" (Dom VI pP 1.4) is a matter of peace, concord and mutual charity which is often described in the context of the prayer of the Apostolic Church. Christ is its source (SC 54.8, cf. Mich 2.1). Unanimity is an appropriate object of striving, especially at the time of elections, for the devil and other troublemakers have in mind to destroy it. This moral aspect of unanimity is close to Merton's interpretation of *voluntas communis* as distinct from *voluntas propria* — a willingness to accept community decisions (the common will) as the concrete manifestation of divine providence..

Perhaps the clearest text, for our purposes, comes from the second sermon for Septuagesima. The allusion to animals and birds refers to Genesis 15:9-10 where Abraham divided the sacrificial animals, but left the birds whole.:

> Meanwhile the Spirit of wisdom
> is not only single
> but also manifold
> compacting **interior** realities into unity,
> but in judgement making distinction among **exterior** things.
>
> Both are recommended to you in the primitive Church
> when "the multitude of believers had one heart and one soul"
> (that is the birds were not divided) and
> "distribution was made to everyone according as each had need"
> (the animals were divided).
>
> So should there be a unity of souls among us, beloved.
> Hearts should be united
> by loving one thing,
> seeking one thing,
> adhering to one thing,

and among ourselves being of the same mind.
Thus external division
will involve no danger
and produce no scandal.
Each will have his own field of tolerance
and sometimes his own opinion
about what is to be done in earthly matters.

Furthermore there will even be different gifts of grace,
and not all members
will appear to follow the same course of action.
Nevertheless interior unity
and unanimity
will gather and bind together this very multiplicity
with the glue of charity
and the bond of peace. (Sept 2.3)

Bernard was a compulsive and compelling advocate of principles and practices in which he believed, but he was realist enough to recognise that others might sometimes see things differently and act accordingly. His vision of monastic life was broad enough to see the possibility of an honest realisation of its goals without absolute identity of means. For him the main concern was that charity grow.

6. Gilbert of Swineshead

Perhaps because he was addressing a newly-incorporated, former Savigniac community, Gilbert emphasises the role of discipline The common Cistercian *ordo* is seen as containing/protecting the members of the community so that within that context they may attain concord, unanimity and charity, the sole purpose for living together.

> From multiplicity comes disturbance. Only one thing, however, is necessary and indeed pleasant. How good and pleasant it is for those who love to live in unity. There is no living in unity unless it be in love, because it is love that makes those who live together in a house to follow a single way of life (*unius moris*). What is it to follow a single way of life? It is to commit oneself in love to sharing a common form (*foedere conformes amoris* — SC 11.2).

Gilbert's notion of "unanimity under the rule" (*regularis unanimitas*: SC 36.2) is perhaps a reflection of RB 3.7: "All are to follow the Rule as master", but it goes

further. Gilbert sees the common acceptance of discipline or order as a unifying force which provides the infrastructure on which charity is built and provides the context for the flowering of the specific graces of each. This is true both in the local community and at the level of the Order.

Unanimity

The union of a monastic community is not a matter of simple juxtaposition but a real compenetration of spirit. However this does not prejudice the spontaneity of each member. All maintain their own spiritual physiognomy according to the graces they have received from God. This is what Gilbert teaches in another picturesque image:

> In this crowded gathering, are there not as many gardens as there are spirits? Through unanimity there is one garden; through different graces there are many gardens. (SC 37.3)

Translated from M. Jean Vuong-Dinh-Lam, p. 15

Gilbert illustrates his vision of community by referring to the pomegranate with its multiplicity of seeds within a single rind.

> The parable of the pomegranates regards ourselves, for by rule we live together in communities and are united in one *ordo*, like seeds beneath one rind. Yes, may we imitate these seeds, resembling them not only by unanimity in union of heart but also by being enclosed, as it were by order. Practically indistinguishable in appearance, the seeds of the pomegranate cling together; they are distinguishable rather by numerical individuation than by appearance. Let us also learn to differ from one another in number, not in spirit. Seeds neither quarrel with one another, nor grumble about the rind nor try to break through it. They patiently permit themselves, as it were, to be shut up in its core, that somehow they may seem to say, "How good and how pleasant it s when brothers dwell in unity".
>
> In this Order of ours, brothers, as if in the rind of a pomegranate, does not the colour of Christ's passion glow red by our imitation?. Yes, like the seeds of this fruit are they who consider it second nature to be united under the rind of regular discipline and regard themselves not as constrained but as protected. Let there be no love of *proprietas*, no love of private power and then you will appear as a seed of this fruit.
>
> Allured by our example, let others learn how good and how pleasant it is to dwell in close communion beneath the defence of a rind. Let charity unite and the rind defend. However many ordered communities you see, regard all as so many pomegranates which have issued from the fountain of baptism. Yes, as we read, "the believers had one heart and one soul". From

> believers as from the seeds of so many communities living in an ordered way and in unanimity, pomegranates have grown. (SC 35.7).

For Gilbert observances were subordinated to fostering interpersonal union among "those who have been called to the simplicity of silence, to the activity of love, to the quiet of leisure, to the school of humility, to the vow of subjection and to the bond of love" (SC 20.7), i.e. called to the integrity of the Cistercian grace.

7 Concluding Reflections

If we read our tradition carefully we will probably become aware of two divergent interpretations of "unanimity". The **hard** interpretation begins with the appreciation of the role of ***external*** *communitas* (living the common life) in overcoming *proprietas* (self-centeredness) and thus facilitating the growth of solidarity, companionship and love. The **soft** interpretation emphasises the primacy of ***interior*** dispositions, recognising that merely external conformity can be alienating and destructive in certain circumstances.

We too are confronted by a similar tug of war. We are called simultaneously to profit from a significant spiritual tradition and, at the same time, to respond to the exigencies of time and place. Whatever our personal preference and whatever the predominant needs of our particular community, it is vital for us to recognise the importance of the opposite tendency. There is scope here for an Aelredian *alternatio* — an even-handed application of both principles as required, rather than exclusive concentration on one — and polarisation into opposite extremes.

In an era of pluriformity and enculturation it is important to us to recognise the force of the Founders' argument. A certain uniformity of practice — both as symbol and as organisational structure can be the expression and the reinforcing of a corresponding unity of heart and mind. It is hard to generate an *esprit du corps* in a group that is not **together** — in every sense of the word. In this context, insistence on order and discipline is a element in building up a sense of morale. Every time the community asserts itself to correct and call back those who go beyond its boundaries, the communal sense of identity is strengthened, just as it is eroded when everything is *laissez-faire*. Expressions of individualism are dangerous not because there is anything intrinsically wrong with the behaviour, but because they constitute a more or less conscious rejection of the community and the tradition of life it represents.

If this is true at a community level, it holds also at the level of the Order. There is strength and solidarity in common adherence not only to basic principles of monastic living but also to the wide range of quaint peculiarities that constitute the Cistercian

embodiment of those principles. A green cowl is not incompatible with monastic principles *per se*, but its use would indicate a certain desire to separate from the commonality of the Cistercian herd. Multiply such minor aberrations by a hundred, and no one would be surprised to find that such a community had begun to feel that they did not belong — alienated, misunderstood and unwanted.

To insist on a certain corporate lifestyle that is common to all Cistercian monasteries does not necessarily entail uniformity in all details — but it does demand a substantial acceptance of even accidental elements of tradition if there is no reason to change them. On the other hand, honest adaptation to local needs is not the death of the tradition but the possibility of its finding new forms of expression. **The means of discerning the authenticity of such adaptation are at hand**: community dialogue, together with the pastoral oversight of the Father Immediate, the Regional Conference and the General Chapter.

The first Cistercians, despite their protestations to the contrary, were eclectic in their fidelity to the Rule of Benedict. They were unlikely to have abandoned common sense through enslavement to an abstract concept of uniformity. Like St Benedict they were aware that part of the reality of community life is the diversity that comes from different characters (*multorum servire moribus* — RB 2:31), different situations (*secundum locorum qualitatem ubi habitant* — RB 55.1) and different graces (*alius sic, alius vero sic* — RB 40.1). As at the level of community, so at the level of the Order. Unity of persons was an incontestable ideal. On the other hand, although disunity at the level of practice was to be minimised, absolute uniformity was, within the limits of order and good discipline, neither sought nor achieved.

Exordium

Unit 7:
Questions for Individual and Group Reflection

1 Choose a text. from tradition which best summarises your present attitude to "unanimity" — share it with the group.

2. The ideal of unity at the level of mind and heart is attractive to every one. What measure of uniformity is required in a monastic community/Order to promote such unanimity.

3. Is there scope for more uniformity within the community? What criteria can be

used to distinguish a genuine “community spirit” from an alienating disregard of individuals?

4. Is there scope for more pluriformity within the community? What criteria can be used to distinguish genuine personal need or grace from a (partly unconscious) tendency to dissociate oneself from the community?

5.Is there scope fro pluriformity among the different communities of the Order. Give some example of what seem to you appropriate or inappropriate pluriformity and explain the reasons for your judgement.

6. How successfully is Cistercian life enculturated in your country? Is there too much/too little attention to local factors? What principles of discernment operate?

7. In your heart do you own “Cistercian discipline”? Do you have confidence that it is an appropriate expression of Christian life for these times? Are you and your community “proud” (in the good sense) to be Cistercian, or is it a mater of practical indifference?

8. Write down **three points** you would like to carry away from this Unit for ongoing reflection.

Exordium

Unit 7:
Unanimity Transparency 1

- 1113 Foundation Charter of La Ferté: "Separate in body, but not in soul."
- 1114 "Charter of Charity and Unanimity"

The mother-house may not tax daughter.

The daughter follows same Rule & usages.

- 1119 Charter of Charity 3:2

"*similibusque vivamus moribus*"

=	•	identical	**?**
=	•	same	**?**
=	•	similar	**?**
=	•	comparable	**?**
=	•	like	**?**

Exordium

Unit 7:
Unanimity Transparency 2

WHY "UNANIMITY" WAS NOT "UNIFORMITY"

- The topographical, archeological, architectural and anecdotal evidence reveals variety.

- The "unanimous" community is the model for a "unanimous" order — charting a course between regimentation and fragmentation.

- The key image of *unanimity* is the "one heart and one soul" of the community in Acts 4.32.

- This "unanimity" was a spiritual concept rather than a juridical or organisational principle.

- This is revealed especially in the writings of Augustine and Gregory the Great with which the Founders were familiar. Bernard and others continued the tradition.

- The collegial structures of early Cîteaux evolved to meet new circumstances — uniformity does not usually coexist with constant adaptation.

- Unity was viewed as inclusive — not in the exclusive, reductionist sense of eliminating multiplicity.

- Rhetoric and reality do not necessarily coincide. Nor are laws always (meant to be) kept.

Exordium

Unit 7:
Extra Reading

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A Strict View of Unanimity

For the early Cistercians, the quality of *unanimitas* was understood in terms of objective conformity with what was handed down from the Founders and/or re-interpreted by subsequent General Chapters. Unanimity is the result of being formed under authentic Cistercian *disciplina*, of living in accordance with right order, and accepting those structures of the Order intended to safeguard both unity and some measure of uniformity. *Unanimitas* involves a single vision of monastic life and clear agreement about the means by which its objectives are best realised. This was enforced at the local level by the conventual chapter, and for the Order as a whole by the General Chapter.